

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE BODY IN PIECES: REPRESENTATIONS  
OF ORGAN TRAFFICKING IN THE  
LITERATURES AND FILM OF THE  
AMERICAS

Jennifer Ann Dix, Ph.D, 2007

Directed By: Dr. Phyllis Peres, School of Languages,  
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This dissertation explores the use of the trope of organ trafficking to critique neoliberal globalization in the Americas. Each chapter addresses a different genre and analyzes texts articulated in response to conditions grounded in different locations. The texts studied include print media from Guatemala and Brazil, Mexican popular film and detective fiction from the U.S. (Tony Chiu's *Positive Match* and Linda Howard's *Cry No More*) and Mexico (Miriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo*, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz's *Loverboy*, and Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *La bicicleta de Leonardo*). Comparative analyses also address Francisco Goldman's *The Long Night of White Chickens*, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*.

These analyses are linked by their critique of neoliberal globalization and their representation of the human body's commodification. Together, they outline the contradictions of a mobility-dependent regime and establish the inescapable scope of

economic changes that alter the relationship between the nation-state and its inhabitants. Neoliberalism also causes changes in the representation of the body. Bodies are represented outside the social structures and institutions that previously gave them meaning. The body's economic value replaces socially ascribed identities. Representations of the commodified body in these texts selectively erase gender and race. This dissertation also explores the construction of a new set of identities grounded in the body. These competing identities of medical and corporeal citizenship demonstrate the problems of establishing identities in market-driven terms of production and consumption.

This dissertation also engages in a investigation of the relation of literary genre to content. As my discussion of popular culture demonstrates, generic form partially constrains or shapes the content of these works. In contrast, when literary works are positioned outside of genre constraints, the scope of the meanings attributed to organ trafficking expands, accompanied by formal innovations. My dissertation produces an interrogation of American cultural spaces—understood in the broadest sense—that acknowledges the work of both spatial and cultural forces in the construction of this hemispheric imaginary.

THE BODY IN PIECES: REPRESENTATIONS OF ORGAN TRAFFICKING IN  
THE LITERATURES AND FILMS OF THE AMERICAS

By

Jennifer Ann Dix

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Advisory Committee:  
Professor Phyllis Peres, Chair  
Professor Regina Harrison  
Associate Professor Ana Patricia Rodríguez  
Associate Professor Zita Nunes  
Professor Judith Freidenberg

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## Dedication

For my parents, Jodi and Stuart Dix, who taught me that every day offers another opportunity to learn something new, and another reason to laugh.

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## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Rumors and Realities: Organ Trafficking in the Brazilian and Guatemalan Print Media .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Introduction.....	23
Transplant Discourse: At Home and Abroad.....	25
Guatemala.....	34
Brazil.....	49
Comparative Analysis: Guatemala and Brazil.....	69
U.S. Print Media .....	71
Notes.....	81
<b>Chapter 2: Black Market Body Parts: Organ Trafficking in U.S and Mexican Detective Fiction .....</b>	<b>87</b>
Introduction.....	87
<i>Positive Match</i> and <i>Cry No More</i> .....	99
The Detective Novel in Mexico.....	106
<i>Morena en rojo</i> and <i>Loverboy</i> .....	108
<i>La bicicleta de Leonardo</i> .....	119
Justice in the Absence of Civil and Human Rights.....	126
Notes.....	132
<b>Chapter 3: Organ Trafficking in Mexican Popular Film.....</b>	<b>136</b>
Introduction.....	136
<i>Santo en la frontera del terror</i> .....	139
Organ Trafficking in Contemporary Thrillers .....	150
Families that Must Save Themselves: <i>Comerciantes de niños</i> and <i>Transplantes ilegales</i> .....	156
The State Saves the Day: <i>Secuestro Salvaje</i> and <i>Traficantes de muerte</i> .....	160
Context and Subtext in NAFTA-era Films.....	163
Transnational Films for Transnational Audiences.....	171
Popular Film Production: A Model of Globalization .....	172
Notes.....	177
<b>Chapter 4: Body Parts in the Narrative and Economic Systems of the Americas.....</b>	<b>179</b>
Introduction.....	179
<i>The Long Night of White Chickens</i> .....	188

<i>Tropic of Orange</i> .....	196
<i>Almanac of the Dead</i> .....	208
Narrative Systems .....	221
Notes .....	236
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	238
Notes .....	253
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	254



## Introduction

"And often people, particularly here in Guatemala," he went on, "just like to talk. Rumors here carry substantial weight; they are like another kind of media that everyone finds themselves plugged into [...]"

"What were those rumors?" I asked. [...]"

That issued in a pretty extraordinary litany, one it obviously pained the consul to deliver: telling us how not only Guatemalans but Americans too were rumored to have been going up into the war-torn highlands to buy hungry and endangered infants from families in dire conditions; and that others were said to have been paying juvenile delinquents to snatch healthy, lighter-skinned, and thus much more valuable babies from their mothers' arms on the streets of Guatemala City.

"I'm afraid to say there actually has been a rash of that kind of thing here." said the consul. "Those children are being sold to *somebody*. So you can see how someone like Flor might have been vulnerable to certain kinds of rumors?"

"My God," he went on, "there's even been one going around, not only about Flor but about *anyone* doing adoptions to the States, that children are actually being sold to hospitals there so that their organs can be used in medical transplants [...]"  
--Francisco Goldman, *The Long Night of White Chickens* (60)

Manzanar opened the cooler, pulled a drawstring bag from the melted ice and opened it. Inside there was a Tupperware filled with solution, another bag, and a Ziploc filled with more liquid. "Saline, potassium," he muttered. "Twenty CC dextrose," he added and squinted at something floating in the liquid. It was a tiny purple slimy thing padded tenderly by what was now tepid refrigeration. "Newborn," he said without battin' an eye. "Human heart's consistently the size of your fist. In this case, a newborn's fist."  
--Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (216)

These two scenes outline a broad spectrum of organ trafficking representations: One end is characterized by rumors of organs stolen from infants. The other features graphic images of the organs themselves. Consider the differences between the excerpts above: Goldman's text alludes to children's bodies robbed of their organs, while Yamashita's presents an infant heart without a body. *The Long Night of White Chickens* presents the "hungry and endangered" infants from the Guatemalan highlands as bodies-at-risk; that is, these children are subject to a process of commodification (Goldman 60). In contrast, *Tropic of Orange* depicts the end result of that process: a "tiny purple slimy thing" quarantined in an igloo cooler (Yamashita 216). The processes by which this commodification occurs are only

hinted at in these representations: Goldman's identification of the different meanings ascribed to children's bodies demonstrates how commodification begins, when economic values replace socially-inscribed values. The complete elimination of social value is evident in Yamashita's depiction of a newborn heart.

These two representations delineate the edges of a set of trafficking representations in the Americas. The space in between is filled with depictions that offer varying levels of detail and refer to a variety of different scenarios: organ theft, organ sales, and the procurement of children specifically for their organs. In these trafficking representations, organs are sometimes willingly provided; in most, they are violently harvested from unwilling donors. These scenarios, however, all highlight the economic exchange through which body parts are assigned a purely economic value and circulated as part of an illicit and illegal economy. This explicit commodification distinguishes trafficking representations from other depictions of organ transplantation that avoid the economic aspects of organ donation and procurement.

Furthermore, the two texts cited above demonstrate a curious set of slippages that characterize the majority of organ trafficking representations. The first slippage occurs when texts translate images of adopted children into rumors of trafficked body parts. The second occurs as body parts are separated from the categories of identity inscribed upon their former bodies: The malnourished highland babies are first contrasted with lighter-skinned *ladino* infants but are then transformed into a source of organs that no longer possess racial, cultural, or gender identities. The heart that

Yamashita depicts is an object that is completely disconnected from a body defined in terms of race, ethnicity, class or any other category used to identify the body.

These images also raise important questions about mobility, capitalism, and the body. These are organs that are trafficked, generally following routes northward along trajectories that simultaneously echo the past and accentuate a moment that seems altogether new. Human bodies have been assigned an economic value before; the most obvious example can be seen in the enslavement of Africans and the growth of an economy literally built through the commodification of human bodies and their labor. Yet the consul's shock and the image of a medically-packaged newborn heart point to a new type of corporeal economy: I explore the representation of these new economic dynamics and their transformation of depictions of the body in the chapters that follow. The print media texts, novels and films discussed in this dissertation portray organ trafficking as result of economic and social changes that associated with globalization.

This dissertation focuses on the use of this trope in the cultural production of the Americas. Throughout, I use the terms trope and metaphor frequently. By defining both terms in the broadest sense, in the context of this dissertation, they become nearly interchangeable.<sup>1</sup> I use trope to refer to the use of organ trafficking as a “figure of speech;” that is, as a trope, organ trafficking is used as a rhetorical device that calls attention to a symbolic relationship between an illicit economy and the existing economic regimes that connect the Americas (Harmon and Homan 528). In the chapters that follow, I use the term metaphor to refer to a comparison of two unlike situations, organ trafficking and neoliberal globalization. Organ trafficking

metaphors, then, rely upon the reader's initial recognition of the two economies as dissimilar; the texts that use organ trafficking metaphors then create arguments that demonstrate their similarities.

By asserting these similarities, the texts that I discuss in my dissertation critique the systems of economic and cultural production that have bound the region together for more than five hundred years. The colonization of the Americas is generally recognized as the beginning of the modern world economy: I investigate the use of the trope of organ trafficking to critique the latest phase in that economy's consolidation. This trope is nearly ubiquitous in American film and literary texts. Its appearance in texts from different locations in the Americas indicates that the metaphor is particularly well-suited for critiquing neoliberal modes of globalization: The trope of organ trafficking poses an alternate reading of the heightened mobility and advanced technologies that many once thought would transform the world into a benevolent global village. Instead, this metaphor calls attention to the structures of inequality and domination that continue to connect the Americas.

The logic of the metaphor itself produces a rhetoric of victimization that largely obscures the process that it seeks to represent. That is, the scenario of victimization produced by this metaphor does not require an explicit or extended discussion of why particular bodies are targeted, nor is it necessary to identify the forces responsible for their persecution. Furthermore, the focus on organ procurement is unaccompanied by a corresponding representation of the implantation of the harvested organ into a recipient body. The figure of the surgeon who removes organs from donor bodies disappears: Instead, the texts that I analyze imply that

globalization itself is the agent responsible for organ trafficking. The trope of organ trafficking also produces other strategic absences: As the excerpts from Goldman and Yamashita's novels demonstrate, organ trafficking representations erase the body and its identities. Thus race and gender are often most notable in their absence in the texts that I discuss. Through these strategic erasures, the texts discussed in this dissertation show how bodies are easily written into and out of different narratives that create connections to particular locations.

This dissertation presents a comparative analysis of the trope of organ trafficking in the literatures and films of the Americas. My investigation of this metaphor seeks to answer several important questions: How has globalization changed the ways in which human bodies are represented, and through those representations, defined, ascribed value, and discussed? How are these rhetorical and conceptual shifts made visible through cultural production? How do representations of organ trafficking comment upon the scalar, or differential, effects of globalization on different local sites? This dissertation responds to these questions by analyzing Guatemalan and Brazilian print media representations of organ trafficking rumors and realities, U.S. and Mexican borderlands detective fiction, Mexican popular films, and narrative fiction from the U.S.

These texts use representations of organ trafficking to create arguments about the economic and social changes that characterize globalization. In the majority of the novels and films analyzed in this dissertation, organ trafficking represents the ceaseless commodification that these texts link to globalization. The trope of organ trafficking, however, does more than simply sensationalize the evils of

globalization—although it does serve this purpose. It also calls attention to the transformation of meanings ascribed to the body and its parts throughout the Americas. Organ trafficking representations provide insight into location-specific responses to the impact of neoliberal globalization on the conception of the body, on the construction of spaces, and on the production of narratives.

This dissertation traces the emergence and transformation of a discourse of organ trafficking in the Americas, and it also questions the scope of the economic and social transformations associated with globalization. It also alters the familiar North/South and global/local oppositions associated with discussions of globalization. Although my investigation stages comparisons across the North/South divide, my dissertation also places texts from the South into comparison with one another. More significantly, my work challenges the global/local divide by producing an analysis of cultural production within a series of scalar relations. The analyses produced in this dissertation challenge the dominance of the nation-state as a unit of scale and argue instead for multiple scalar units that coexist simultaneously outside of a rigid hierarchy ordered by size.

This approach to scale derives from recent work in the field of human geography. This field has challenged the long-held belief that scale is simply “a neutral metric of physical space,” that allows for the differentiation of physical spaces at varying levels of detail (Smith, “Remaking Scale” 228). As human geographers argue, scale is constructed and contested, rendering its neutrality an illusion. Although theorists continue to debate the processes through which scale is constructed, this dissertation takes as a point of departure the argument that scale is

largely constructed through political and economic processes (McMaster and Sheppard 16). The naturalization of the nation-state as a unit of scale is therefore “from the start entangled with questions of capital accumulation” (Smith, “Scale Bending” 201). Historically, the scale of the nation-state has performed an epistemological role, for example, shaping the questions that can be asked about the global economy and forestalling investigations configured upon different notions of scale (Jones 28). The transformation of the global economy during the late twentieth century under globalization called attention to the weaknesses of scale as conceived at the national level, as individuals (George Soros, Bill Gates) and transnational corporations intervened in the global economy at the scale formerly reserved for the state (Smith, “Scale Bending” 193). In response, new scales were proposed that identified levels of analysis above and below the nation-state. I refer to the destabilization of the nation-state as the most applicable unit of measurement for assessing the effects of global economic change as the “problem of scale.”

Early analyses of globalization theorized the difference between local sites and global forces. Arif Dirlik’s theorization of the local as both a site of promise and predicament argues that local sites must always be understood as spaces constructed within a larger framework of global capitalism (28). In the dissertation that follows, I expand Dirlik’s argument and assess these texts as situated, local responses positioned within a series of scalar relationships. My investigation begins at the level of the body, assessing the relationship of the body’s organs to the human body itself. Subsequent chapters expand in scale to examine the body and its parts in relation to the body politic of the nation, regional economic bodies and the global economy

itself. Each chapter examines how these scalar relationships affect the meanings ascribed to organ trafficking and shape each text's response to the trafficking scenarios that it represents. At each of these scalar levels, the trope of organ trafficking destabilizes previously naturalized relationships.

My analyses address cultural production during the late-1980s and through the first decade of the new millennium. This historical context marks a moment of considerable transformation in the Americas. Viewed from the perspective of the U.S. as well as that of Latin America, the decade of the 1980s possesses contradictory meanings. In the U.S., the decade was an era of increased prosperity for the rich and was largely defined by President Ronald Reagan's economic policies. While a neoliberal agenda was being formed to the North, Latin America suffered from economic depression and debt crises that characterized its "lost decade."

Furthermore, the 1980s were also a decade defined by considerable (and often violent) national and regional transformations throughout Latin America. The decade was marked by the beginning of *abertura* policies in Brazil and the struggle for the nation's re-democratization. As Brazil's period of military dictatorships waned, however, the U.S. and Soviet Union continued to wage the Cold War by proxy in Central America. A decade of civil strife fueled in large part by U.S. military and economic aid ravaged the isthmus even as the U.S., Mexico, and Canada began negotiating the terms of the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As the 1990s began, Brazil entered the global economy under conditions of "savage capitalism" in which President Fernando Collor de Mello removed trade protections, aggressively pursued market deregulation, and privatized state-owned



industries (Amman 111-112). At the same time, North America moved toward unprecedented regional economic integration. Following NAFTA's implementation in 1994, the "de-bordering" of the Americas was widely proclaimed, and the treaty itself served as proof of globalization's existence.

Globalization remains a difficult term to define: It is regularly employed to refer to a wide spectrum of technological advances and economic practices as well as new patterns of media and migratory flows. The alternately celebratory and demonizing tones used in popular and academic discussions of globalization add to the difficulty of using the term neutrally. In this dissertation, I define globalization in the broadest sense, using the term to refer to a series of transformations generally associated with late-twentieth century and early twenty-first century capitalism. These changes include the transnationalization of production (facilitated by new technologies), the growth of transnational corporations, and the formation of new, regional centers of capitalism (Dirlik 28-29). As Saskia Sassen explains, these changes created new international divisions of labor while privileging cities as new sites of regional economic command and control. Global cities (such as New York, London, and Tokyo) form the centers of subnational units that reveal the weakened hegemony of the nation-state. The existence of financial, migration and cultural networks and survival circuits that link global cities further accentuates the necessity of looking beyond the nation-state as a primary unit of analysis within a globalized economy (Sassen 254-255).

Globalization is undoubtedly a paradigm that privileges mobility, and it is this aspect that initially attracted attention from cultural theorists. Where Sassen draws

attention to the locations in which global economies are grounded, proponents of “strong globalization” such as Arjun Appadurai argue that globalization has largely erased the significance of place. For Appadurai, new flows of media and people compose the primary characteristics of globalization and work together to undermine the nation-state’s cultural and physical borders (Appadurai 4). This celebratory depiction of the mobility of goods, ideas and peoples has recently been critiqued by Crystal Bartolovich and Simon Gikandi, who argue against the uncritical embrace of metaphors of mobility and the apparent dismissal of the nation-state both as an institution and as a primary source of identity for citizens.<sup>2</sup> According to Bartolovich, Appadurai’s arguments “naturalize and render seemingly inevitable a process that can only be (partially) effected with considerable struggle” (134). I refer to this unanticipated persistence of place as a significant category in the face of global capital flows as the “problem of place.”

My dissertation examines how the problem of place is confronted by texts that focus on the continuing significance of the nation-state and its complicity or resistance to the encroachment of capitalism into all aspects of life. This commodification is represented in its most extreme form by organ trafficking. This illicit economy functions only because wealthy patients believe that their individual right to purchase a human organ trumps ethical concerns about the social good. This emphasis on globalization’s elevation of the rights of consumers over the rights and social concerns of citizens derives from the conflation of globalization with neoliberalism. Where globalization refers to a series of technological advances and the concomitant collapsing of distance and increasing number of connections between

many parts of the globe, neoliberalism is the economic doctrine that has propelled most of the economic changes that have accompanied and facilitated globalization.

In its most simple form, neoliberal doctrine “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 2). Neoliberal regimes thus mandate a minimal role for the state: Its primary role is to guarantee “those military, defense, police, and legal structures” that protect property rights and allow markets to function freely (2). Market forces can best regulate areas previously associated with state control, including environmental protection, education, and health care. Legal frameworks are also structured to protect the free movement of capital, even at the expense of individual citizens (66). First implemented in Chile in 1975, by U.S.-trained economists working under dictator Augusto Pinochet, neoliberal economic restructuring became a dominant economic regime in the U.S. under Reagan and in Britain under Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s. Neoliberal “reforms,” known as structural adjustment, were later exported to other sites in Latin America during the same decade through the actions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. For much of Latin America, neoliberalism has been the de facto face of globalization.

Indeed, nearly all of the texts discussed in this dissertation equate globalization with neoliberalism. While I do not necessarily believe that globalization must adopt the form of neoliberal policies, it would be inaccurate to deny that neoliberal precepts have shaped most Latin American nations’ entrances into the

global economy. Neoliberalism has also provided the U.S. with an economic doctrine through which it has dominated the global economy. Thus, the use of the trope of organ trafficking to identify, if not always criticize, neoliberalism as the dominant face of globalization is particularly striking precisely because these texts are produced in locations that have both lost and gained under neoliberal economic regimes.

Yet the trope of organ trafficking refers to more than neoliberalism. It is also a trope that calls attention to the transformation of representations of the body and its parts. This too, results from a change that occurred in the mid-1980s. As I explain in Chapter One, the discovery of immunosuppressant drugs and the growth of medical technologies that facilitated organ transplantation altered perceptions of the human body. More than just a simple source of labor, the body is also a source of parts: organs that can be taken from one body and placed into another. The inevitable commodification of those body parts accompanied advances in transplant technologies. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes remarks in “Commodity Fetishism in Organs Trafficking,” definitions of the body were irretrievably altered the first time that “a frail and ailing human looks at another living person and realizes that *inside* that other body is something that can prolong his or her life” (“Commodity Fetishism” 50). Thus people began to recognize one another not as human beings, but as repositories of spare parts.

In the dissertation that follows, I trace the use of the trope of organ trafficking to open a discursive space in which this new understanding of the body is discussed and in which responses to the excesses of globalization are imagined. These texts almost uniformly imagine globalization as a nefarious neoliberal force yet offer

responses that highlight different (and often incomplete) forms of resistance. In other words, much of the discussion of organ trafficking in these texts tells us very little about organ theft and/or organ sales: Instead, these representations provide insight into location-specific concerns about the transformation of local perceptions of human bodies, the national body politic, and regional economic bodies. Each chapter assesses a different genre and traces the adoption of new discourses, and new forms of cultural production, in order to investigate these transformations.

Chapter One examines print media coverage of organ trafficking scandals in Guatemala and Brazil. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, allegations of infant organ sales dominated the Guatemalan press. More recently, in late 2003 and early 2004, Brazilian journalists covered the exposure of an organ trafficking ring linking Brazil, Israel and South Africa. Critical readings of articles published by the Guatemalan and Brazilian print media reveal significant changes in discourses of bodily commodification. This chapter documents the shift from sensationalist images of slaughtered babies to a more focused coverage of the neoliberal ideologies used to justify contemporary kidney sales. This chapter further assesses the U.S. media's use of similar rhetoric in its coverage of Guatemalan rumors and Brazilian realities. Chapter One provides a grounding in the most common discourses surrounding organ trafficking and offers a basis for further explorations of fictional film and literary representations.

In Chapter Two, my focus moves from global circuits to the specificity of place in the globalized economy. Where Chapter One addresses the representation of alleged and real movement of organs throughout the Americas, my second chapter

focuses on the significance of the U.S.-Mexico border and its contradictory effects on the movement of goods and people through both nations' *frontera* regions. In both the U.S. and Mexico, writers of popular detective fiction expose organ trafficking as a symptom of larger criminal processes of globalization. This chapter presents a comparative analysis of two mass-market paperbacks from the U.S., Tony Chiu's *Positive Match* (1998) and Linda Howard's *Cry No More* (2003), and three works of Mexican detective fiction, Miriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo* (1994), Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz's *Loverboy* (2004), and Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *La bicicleta de Leonardo* (1993). The novels from the U.S. reinforce national borders while questioning internal boundaries of race and gender. The Mexican texts, however, lament an imperialist U.S. presence and highlight the ambiguous border between truth and fiction. The scenarios of detection posited by these novels present different strategies for combating the borderless states envisioned by celebrants of globalization.

Chapter Three focuses even more narrowly on popular audiences through an examination of Mexican popular film. The changing representations of organ trafficking in the Mexican wrestling films of the late 1970s to the thrillers of the mid-1990s reveal the anxieties of the popular class as they were defined by filmmakers competing for this audience. On the one hand, these films dismiss the nation state as an institution incapable of protecting its citizens. On the other, they celebrate a paternal nation whose criminal justice system defends the country from globalization's worst excesses. These contradictory responses highlight the difficulty with which complex phenomena are represented in films destined for an audience that lacks formal education but in many cases possesses first-hand knowledge of

globalization's impact on the Americas. The use of the family to represent the nation connects these films to Mexico's larger cinematic history, while the development of a new genre influenced by Mexican and U.S. models marks a transformation of the Mexican film industry. This transformation is further demonstrated by the globalized model of production and consumption associated with these popular films.

My final chapter, "Body Parts in the Narrative and Economic Systems of the Americas" considers Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Francisco Goldman's *The Long Night of the White Chickens* (1992), and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997). Assessed as a group, these novels provide an expansive and nuanced discussion of representations of organ trafficking in the context of several economic systems. Where the print media, popular films, and detective novels discussed earlier present organ trafficking as a literal commodification of the human body, Goldman, Yamashita, and Silko's novels use the trope of organ trafficking to open a discursive space in which the body, used as a metaphor on multiple levels, and its relation to various world systems can be debated. That is to say, by expanding the metaphorical meanings attributed to organ trafficking, these novels interrogate the significance of the individual human body and its attendant human and civil rights (or lack thereof), the body of the family as a social institution, the body politic that composes the nation, and the regional economic bodies that compose the increasingly globalized Americas. In addition, the body of each text—its narrative form—is also regenerated and changed through its discussion of organ trafficking.

As these chapter descriptions show, my dissertation gathers together a particularly diverse set of texts, representing a wide range of genres: print journalism, detective fiction, multiple forms of popular film, and works of narrative fiction that combine literary forms and traditions gathered from multiple locations in the Americas. My comparative analysis is enriched by this work across genres. At the most basic level, my approach allows for the investigation of specific arguments about globalization that are created for different audiences. It also provides an opportunity to trace how generic forms that emphasize plot—that is, genres in which the story itself receives the most emphasis—are altered by their content or act in other ways to constrain the possible representations of organ trafficking. Although the relationship between form and content may not be clearly causal, the popular texts that I address in Chapters Two and Three suggest that generic formulas perform an epistemological function that limits the types of questions that texts can pose through representations based in realism.

From a disciplinary standpoint, working in multiple genres also introduces an under-explored humanities-based approach to organ trafficking. Most work on this topic to date has been concentrated in the social sciences, with Nancy Scheper-Hughes' considerable body of work setting a high standard for an expanding area of medical anthropology.<sup>3</sup> Only minimal discussion of organ trafficking has taken place in the humanities.<sup>4</sup> My dissertation offers what appears to be the first extended analysis of this trope.

My dissertation unites and builds upon existing research into organ trafficking representations. Although Abigail Adams offered an initial analysis of the



Guatemalan print media's treatment of organ trafficking, my assessment here is both wider in scope and more explicitly comparative in nature. In addition, my dissertation offers a more extensive analysis of the trope in literary and film forms. Previous explorations of organ trafficking in literature have focused solely on its use in Mexican detective fiction: I build here upon Claire Fox and Jennifer Insley's initial explorations of the trope in their discussions of Paco Ignacio Tabio II and Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz. I have expanded their analyses by considering similar representations in U.S. detective fiction. My assessment of popular film broadens previous Mexican film studies, which have not yet addressed representations of organ trafficking. The comparative analysis that I offer of U.S. narrative fiction also presents a new reading of texts generally read in isolation from one another or, more typically, in relation to U.S. ethnic literatures.

My dissertation contributes to an interdisciplinary field identified by various names: Literatures of the Americas, Comparative American Studies, inter-American Studies, or Hemispheric Studies. As Claire Fox notes, the multiple ways of identifying this field indicate its status as a multidisciplinary area in formation, "rather than a coalescing disciplinary movement" (Fox, "Commentary" 645). The hemispheric perspective that this dissertation adopts argues "[...] the U.S. and its place in the world can be understood more fully through an appreciation of inter-American dynamics which, until recently, have been under-attended in the field" (639). By tracing a "traveling trope" as it appears at different American sites, my dissertation draws attention to evolving economic dynamics and through their representation critiques their effects.

Because it centralizes the travels of a trope, my dissertation differs from other works in the Literature of the Americas field. As Fox notes, the first publications to adopt a hemispheric perspective in the 1980s and 1990s often addressed “texts that were in themselves transnational” (641). This tendency remains a significant source of scholarly work: In their evaluation of the hemispheric turn in American Literary and Cultural Studies, Carol Levander and Robert Levine explain that “Travel as a trope and practice, then, helps to reveal geopolitical activity in the Americas as a series of interlocking hemispheric encounters” (403). Yet as many of my texts demonstrate, the restrictions that limit travel in the Americas must also be taken into account in order to explore the full range of these encounters. By organizing my dissertation around a traveling trope, my analyses are able to address texts with transnational content as well as those that restrict their representations to the space of the nation-state.

My entry into the field of inter-American Studies is guided by my grounding in Comparative Literature and American Literary/Cultural Studies. My dissertation responds to current debates central to both disciplines. Each field is in flux, destabilized by globalization and troubled by the problems of space and scale outlined above. In response, Americanists and Comparatists have interrogated the foundations of their respective fields’ intellectual projects.

Recent assessments of American Literary/Cultural Studies demonstrate that the nation-state can no longer serve as an unquestioned category of analysis. In “Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational,” Wai Chee Dimock clearly establishes the limitations of this category. Paraphrasing arguments made by

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Director of the National Humanities Center, Dimock reminds Americanists that their discipline has “[...] internalized the form of the nation and reproduced it in the very form of our expertise. Humanistic fields are divided by nations: the contours of our knowledge are never the contours of humanity; they follow the borders of a territorial regime” (223). The challenge of producing knowledge that extends beyond the singular nation-state has in the past led Americanists to rather problematically propose that their field incorporate the nations to its south (McClennen 402). This move, widely critiqued as imperialist, attempts to resolve the problem of scale through simple expansion (402).

The destabilization of the nation as a category of analysis had a similar affect upon Comparative Literature. As Natalie Melas relates, however, the gradual loss of the nation-state as a category of analysis also called into question the field’s inherited methodology. When first established in the United States in the late-nineteenth-century, Comparative Literature problematically assessed cultural production (generally, European), comparing national literatures along a temporal scale that highlighted a teleological process of development (Melas 22).<sup>5</sup> The contemporary recognition of the limited nature of comparisons structured around the nation-state required a shift in disciplinary methodologies. The question of *how*, or upon what basis, comparisons can be made remains unsettled.

By the early 1990s, not only had the grounds of comparison (the nation-state) shifted, but so had its content: In his “Report on Standards,” Charles Bernheimer announces that the field now takes as its area of study

[...] comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures, between the pre-and postcontact productions of colonized peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analyses of production and circulation and much more. (41-42)

This apparently endless growth of comparative projects, as Melas notes, expands until Comparative Literature's scope includes the entire globe, with a new grounds of comparison situated in spatial terms (Melas 2).

This turn towards spatiality resembles the attempt to expand the field of American Literary/Cultural studies. Yet as Melas notes, establishing the spatiality of comparison was not without its own set of disciplinary problems: The “[...] impulse not to discriminate easily verges into the indiscriminate and the spatial scope of comparison can open on a limitless horizon of interchangeable objects” (41). The question of what texts to compare, and how to compare them is a debate that remains unresolved in the discipline. Melas argues that this predicament arises from the expanded spatial horizon against which comparisons are staged, making space itself an ontological given and naturalizing it much as nation-states once were.

Working within the framework of inter-American Studies, my dissertation intervenes in this spatial dilemma as well as that of American Literary/Cultural

Studies. My analyses rely on spatiality as a grounds of comparison, but they do so by addressing the construction of the space of the Americas through an economic regime at a particular moment in time. My comparisons are not grounded in an ontologically given sense of space but rather trace its construction and contestation in particular texts. By looking at spaces at varying levels of scale, my work avoids naturalizing the nation-state while remaining attentive to the ways that these texts are positioned in relation to the nation-state as well as to other regional structures.

This dissertation is my contribution to the on-going creation of a trans-American or hemispheric imaginary. As Pat Moya and Ramón Saldivar explain, the trans-American imaginary “figures a very real but fundamentally different syntax of codes, images, and icons, as well as the tacit assumptions, convictions, and beliefs that seek to bind together the varieties of American national discourses” (2). The dissertation that follows outlines an imaginary of the Americas that is built upon a series of representations of the illicit economies that link the hemisphere. The comparative analysis in the chapters that follow will, I hope, serve as point of departure for further investigations into other “traveling tropes” that are mobilized throughout the Americas.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The broad definitions of trope and metaphor that I offer here allow me to focus on the representations of organ trafficking in selected texts. In the context of this dissertation, I do not engage the question of how meanings are transferred between the two economies under comparison. The questions of signification and signs that Roland Barthes explores in his theorization of metaphors lie outside the scope of this project. Similarly, I do not include Hayden White's discussion of the use of tropes to organize and create historical narratives. However, both the fields of semiotics and historiography hold the potential to enrich my arguments, and in future versions of this project, I plan to explore the theories of tropes and metaphors that are central to both areas.

<sup>2</sup> See Crystal Bartolovich's "Global Capital and Transnationalism," (in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Ed. Henry Schwartz and Sangeeta Ray. Blackwell Publishers, 2000. 126-161), and Simon Gikandi's "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality." (in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 627-658).

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes, however, is not the only medical anthropologist exploring issues related to organ transplantation. There is a larger body of critical thought on transplantation within this field that I do not engage in this dissertation, but future versions of this project will discuss in more specific terms the contributions of medical anthropologists throughout the Americas to the study of organ transplantation.

<sup>4</sup> In its March 23, 2007 edition, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* addresses the recent proliferation of scholarly publications addressing organ trafficking and transplantation: Of the ten new publications cited, only one, Veronique Campión-Vincent's *Organ Theft Legends* (2005) approaches the topic from the humanities.

<sup>5</sup> This disciplinary history of Comparative Literature offers a broad generalization in regard to the field's changing methodology and scope. For additional details, see Natalie Melas' *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007), especially Chapter One, "Grounds for Comparison."

## **Chapter 1: Rumors and Realities: Organ Trafficking in the Brazilian and Guatemalan Print Media**

### *Introduction*

In the late summer of 1993, as I was preparing to leave home to begin my first year of college, my older sister approached me. “Jen,” she said. “If you’re ever out, and a guy offers to buy you a drink, don’t take it.” As she paused for dramatic effect, I tried not to roll my eyes, expecting yet another warning about rohypnol, the so-called date rape drug used by assailants to render their victims unconscious. “It could be laced with something to make you pass out, and then you’d wake up the next morning, in a bathtub full of ice.” I snapped back to attention; this wasn’t the advice I was expecting. “To make extra money, med students drug people and steal their kidneys to sell on the black market. They chill your body and leave a note telling you to call an ambulance as soon as you wake up.”

Though she denies this conversation now, my sister provided me with my first exposure to a popular urban legend that was widely circulated in the early 1990s, before widespread access to the internet made it nearly ubiquitous.<sup>1</sup> What is most incredible about this urban legend, however, is how quickly I believed it. A few months before, Pennsylvania Governor Robert Casey had received a heart and lung transplant days after his illness was publicly announced. Jokes and nervous comments about the dangers of being an organ donor were common, with most focusing on the risk of being in a car accident when the governor needed a transplant. With your donor status clearly marked on your driver’s license, you would be easy prey for hospital staff desperate for additional state funding. If hospitals were

involved in organ theft, it didn't seem unreasonable to think that medical students might be as well.

More importantly, I was already aware of the organ shortage in the United States. When I registered for my driver's license, I received a pamphlet urging me to become an organ donor. The material stressed the plight of those dying while waiting for new kidneys, hearts, and livers. Give life, the pamphlet urged. And this plea was repeated by the Department of Motor Vehicles employee who asked if I wanted my license to indicate my willingness to donate my organs and give the gift of life if I were ever declared to be brain dead. In the face of this rhetoric of altruism, I agreed. Who could argue against saving another person's life?

Silly and reductive as they are, I include these anecdotes because they clearly demonstrate the dominant discourses surrounding organ transplantation. On the one hand, there is a definite fear that life itself has become a commodity that can be stolen from the healthy and transplanted into the bodies of the suffering and ill. On the other, there is a clear call to altruism, a view of life that portrays it as a gift that can be shared even after an individual's death. The global span of these opposing discourses is impressive and reflects clearly diverging ways of thinking and speaking about the body, its uses, and its abuses. These discourses emerged in the mid-1980s, following the 1983 U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of cyclosporine, a powerful immunosuppressant drug that made organ transplantation possible between non-related organ donors and recipients.



Transplant Discourse: At Home and Abroad

As medical anthropologist Leonard Cohen discusses in his article “The Other Kidney: Biopolitics Beyond Recognition,” the introduction of cyclosporine revolutionized the field of transplant surgery. By suppressing the donor and recipient differences that cause organ rejection, cyclosporine effectively transformed entire populations into potential organ donors: Previously, the success of an organ transplant depended upon large-scale screenings of specific donor populations, narrowing an already small pool of candidates to a scarce few. In contrast, cyclosporine made it possible to choose a donor who was “same enough” to contribute an organ (Cohen 12). As Cohen explains, “cyclosporine *globalizes*,” and incorporates increasing numbers of people into the pool of potential organ donors (11). The widespread use of this medication and the growth of related transplant technologies were accompanied by related discourses that affirmed the virtues of saving a life (11).

The idea of a “gift of life” appears to have been first popularized by the American Red Cross, through its World War II blood donation campaigns. As the frequency of transplant surgeries grew in the United States, this rhetoric was quickly adopted by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the non-profit organization that coordinates and oversees organ procurement and transplantation practices in the U.S. In 1992, this informal use was formalized with the creation of the Coalition on Donation, a UNOS sponsored foundation whose multimedia campaigns urge viewers and listeners to “Donate Life.” At first associated with raising awareness regarding cadaveric donations—donation of organs retrieved from

the body following documented brain death—the Coalition has since widened the scope of its campaign to reflect the increased frequency of organ donation by living donors. In either case, the Coalition actively promotes a view of organ donation as a gift, a freely given present from the donor to the recipient, offered in the spirit of altruism.

This rhetoric is not unique to the United States; it, too, has been globalized. In 2005, the Brazilian *Ministério de Saúde* (Ministry of Health) launched a national campaign entitled “*Doe Vida, Doe Órgãos*” (“Give Life, Donate Organs”).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in 2005 the Guatemalan non-profit *Donaré* began publicizing the need for organ donors to declare their status. Using the slogan “*Daré vida después de mi vida,*” the group seeks to persuade Guatemalans to complete an identification card authorizing organ donation (Andrés Davila). Both *Donaré* and Brazil’s campaign refer only to cadaveric donation and draw on the same rhetoric of altruism that characterizes UNOS’ materials.

Multiple researchers have criticized this gift-giving rhetoric for the many realities that it avoids—perhaps most obviously, the simple fact that the gift-giver, as originally conceived of in the first campaigns to raise awareness of cadaver donation, is dead in clinical and social terms (Siminoff and Chillag 35). Once diagnosed as brain-dead, donors enter into a limbo where their consciousness is gone, leaving them bereft of the qualities that characterized them while alive even as machines assist their lungs to breath and their hearts to beat. The donation is authorized not only by the deceased but must also be reaffirmed by his/her family, who may be placed under significant pressure (to the point of coercion) to consent to the donation (35).

Simultaneously, basic realities of the “gift” of the organ to the recipient are erased; namely, the simple fact that this “gift” carries with it significant costs due to hospitalization and medication for years to come (40). As Michele Goodwin argues, the plea to give or donate life seriously “undervalues the importance of information” to both donors and recipients (33).

Undeniably, the discourse that reframes organ donation as a gift of life is problematic in many other ways. Although the goal of increasing the supply of transplantable organs is admirable, this rhetoric goes beyond merely undervaluing information. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes argues, this rhetoric transfers the audience’s attention to the organ recipient: “Transplant stories are generally told from the patient-recipient’s point of view and in a deeply affecting, emotional, rhetorical, even ideological language of gift-giving, altruism, reciprocity, life-saving and heroism” (Scheper-Hughes, “Parts Unknown” 59). More importantly, by relying on emotional appeals, despite their validity, the “gift of life” discourse conceals an underlying rhetoric of commodification. By focusing on the abstract notion of life, this discourse suppresses the materiality of the transaction that it advocates. Donors provide hearts, lungs, and kidneys, actual organs whose commodified status is not acknowledged even as economic discourses are routinely employed to describe their acquisition and distribution. Organs are harvested like crops by procurement teams who treat them as the scarce commodity that they are.

When an organ is no longer perceived to be an integral part of a living (or deceased) body, it becomes a commodity to be distributed according to a “simple calculus of ‘supply and demand’” (Scheper-Hughes, “Commodity Fetishism” 49).

The focus on the scarce supply and ever-increasing demand for organs that fuels appeals to “Donate Life” relies on economic discourses that overlook the relatively recent creation of a demand for organs: Prior to the marketing of cyclosporine, organs were rarely, if ever, treated as commodities. Enhanced medical technology has created what Scheper-Hughes, relying on Ivan Illich’s terminology, labels an “artificially created need” that has resulted in the creation of licit and illicit markets in organs (49). The commodified organ thus takes on new significance: As the Coalition on Donation asserts, the organ does indeed represent life for the recipient, but for the donor, the commodified organ possesses different meanings. To brain-dead or cadaveric donors (assuming they expressed a desire to become organ donors) and their families, the donated organ often represents a hope that the very act of donation can ascribe meaning to the donor’s death (Siminoff and Chillag 36). For the living donor, the organ’s commodification leads it to become “the poor person’s ultimate collateral against hunger, debt, and penury” (Scheper-Hughes, “Keeping an Eye” 1645). Particularly in the case of kidneys, the commodified organ ceases to be an integral part of a healthy functioning body and becomes instead another asset to be sold as circumstances dictate.

Commodities demand markets, and a variety of discourses that seek to describe these markets have emerged. One such set of these narratives circulate globally and are generally labeled urban legends. They call attention to alleged illicit markets for eyes, hearts, and, most of all, kidneys. In her detailed study of what she terms “organ theft legends,” folklorist Véronique Campion-Vincent refers to three categories of narratives of organ theft and/or trafficking: baby parts stories,

kidnapping and mutilation tales, and the kidney heist legend (4). The kidney heist is perhaps the variant that will be most familiar to U.S. readers; it presents the general scenario that my sister described, in which the victims are drugged and awaken in pain, only to find that one of their kidneys has been stolen.

In Latin America, however, Campion-Vincent asserts, the baby parts story and allegations of kidnapping and mutilation are far more common (24). Assertions that children were being adopted by U.S. citizens (later Western Europeans and Israelis) and killed for their organs began to appear in the Latin American press as early as 1985 (1). The children in these narratives disappear, and their organs are harvested and sold to wealthy foreigners. The reappearance of their organ-less cadavers plays a key role in kidnapping and mutilation stories. In these narratives, the victims (either children or adults), are kidnapped by foreigners. Days later, their corpses appear, missing organs or eyes, often bearing thank-you notes or stuffed with token amounts of cash.

There are several key distinctions between these narratives. Those most common in Latin America, variations on the baby parts story, target the marginalized and disenfranchised. In contrast, in the kidney heist legend, the narrative most common in the United States, the victim is usually a wealthy traveler or businessman. Moreover, in U.S. versions of the narrative, the victims of kidney theft are provided with a chance (however slim) of survival: They are instructed to call the hospital or have the means to seek medical care. In Latin American renditions of the baby parts story, the infants trafficked for their organs and the victims of kidnappings are

mercilessly killed, their lives deemed less important than the profit that their organs can provide in an international marketplace.

More importantly, the context of the Latin American legends is far more violent than that of the U.S. variations. As both Scheper-Hughes and Campion-Vincent discuss, rumors of organ theft and trafficking emerged in Latin America following periods of extreme violence and political instability.<sup>3</sup> In Central America, where variations of the baby parts story and kidnapping and mutilation narratives first appeared in the mid- to late-1980s, rumors about organ trafficking formed part of a political context already defined by military regimes, disappearances, torture and brutal attacks on civilian populations (Scheper-Hughes, “Theft” 8). As Scheper-Hughes notes, allegations of infant organ trafficking in Brazil (as well as other countries emerging from dictatorships) accompanied processes of re-democratization and appeared at moments “[...] when ordinary people finally became aware of the magnitude of the atrocities practiced by the state and its henchmen against the bodies of the poor and vulnerable” (Scheper-Hughes, “Theft” 9).

While these narratives have attracted a great deal of attention from the popular press, most scholarly approaches to the topic attempt to either verify or discredit these persistent allegations. Todd Leventhal, former member of the United States Information Agency, has dedicated considerable resources and energy to discrediting the baby parts rumor. His efforts have resulted in several papers that outline the contradictions of these narratives and dispute the evidence upon which they are built.<sup>4</sup> Campion-Vincent’s book-length analysis, *Organ Theft Legends* (2005), follows much the same pattern, although she does present limited analyses of the significance of all

three variations of the trafficking urban legend.<sup>5</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes' first publications on organ trafficking rumors offer an important divergence from this pattern. She focuses upon the lives and beliefs of those who repeat these trafficking tales, paying much greater attention to the significance of allegations of these "legends" in the daily experiences of those who repeat them.<sup>6</sup>

Despite their divergent approaches, each of these analyses addresses the role of the popular press. Both Leventhal and Campion-Vincent condemn the sensationalist reporting produced in the U.S. and abroad. Scheper-Hughes documents the multiple classified advertisements placed by poor, would-be organ sellers in Brazil ("Theft" 7). In what follows, I present an analysis of print journalism coverage of organ trafficking allegations in Guatemala and Brazil. Unlike Leventhal and Campion-Vincent, my investigation resists the temptation to present a final statement regarding the "truth" underlying the reports published in each country's popular press. Where Scheper-Hughes uses ethnographic fieldwork to assess the impact of trafficking allegations on her subjects' lived experiences, I investigate how and when Guatemalan and Brazilian newspapers discussed trafficking rumors and realities. This approach allows me to critically assess the response of hegemonic society (as reflected in the national press) to organ trafficking and the reactions of the marginalized as they view themselves (or acknowledge being identified by traffickers as) sources of commodified organs.

My analysis identifies how print media coverage reveals and creates discourses of bodily commodification that are linked to transformations in the global economy. By looking at the overall coverage of key events and through close

readings of individual stories from Guatemala and Brazil, I am able to investigate discourses of trafficking produced at key historical moments in the economic history of the Americas. Guatemalan publications from the late 1980s offer insight into the impact of the end of the Cold War, long fought by proxy in Central America. I consider later reports from the early- to mid-1990s in the general context of the NAFTA, a benchmark for attempted economic integration in the Americas. While neither Guatemala nor Brazil was a signatory to NAFTA, the free trade agreement remains a significant moment in the Americas, both in terms of institutionalizing, to a large extent, neo-colonial trade patterns and in terms of erasing borders.

By critically reading Guatemalan and Brazilian print media reports, I am able to follow the transformation of discourses of bodily commodification. I document the shift from sensationalist, near-hysterical allegations of slaughtered babies to a less emotional reportage that reflects the neoliberal ideologies presumed to underlie globalization. This chapter offers grounding in purportedly “non-fictional” writing on organ trafficking against which fictional film and literary representations can be compared. Finally, my comparative analysis exposes a shift in global market routes that in many ways echoes the slave trade but highlights the flexibility facilitated by globalization.

My analysis of Guatemalan print media will focus primarily on two periods in which allegations of infant organ trafficking were prominently featured in daily newspapers and weekly news magazines. The first allegations that I consider originate from 1987-1989, and the second series were published in 1994. During the first period, a series of articles reported on the discoveries of multiple *casas cuna*



*clandestinas* (clandestine orphanages), also referred to as *casas de engorde* (fattening houses). Articles from this era focus on the theft of children for sale abroad through illicit adoptions while editorials immediately proclaim the existence of infant organ trafficking rings. The print coverage of the early 1990s that I assess focuses on attacks on one U.S. woman accused of stealing Guatemalan children. Both sets of allegations, I argue, must be analyzed in the context of a long-running and exceptionally violent civil war that disproportionately victimized the nation's indigenous population.

While allegations of organ theft in Guatemala were never substantiated, print journalists in Brazil documented the existence of a trafficking ring that operated on three continents. In 2004, journalists provided accounts of Israeli surgeons, working in South Africa, who transplanted kidneys from poor organ sellers from Pernambuco into the bodies of buyers from Israel and the United States. Focusing on Brazilian press coverage at the national level, I examine the extent to which questions of nationality and individual rights dominate coverage of the ring. Three of the nation's daily newspapers (generally those with the widest national circulation) provided extensive coverage of the trafficking ring. *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro), *O Estado de São Paulo*, and the *Folha de São Paulo* provide coverage from the nation's cultural and financial capitals in the southeastern part of the country.<sup>7</sup> Their privileged location is thus far removed (physically, socially, and economically) from that of the organ sellers whose lives they detailed in their daily reports. I also compare the representation of the organ sellers and brokers while noting the relative absence of any reference to the transplant recipients.

Finally, I offer an overview of U.S. coverage of these events in Guatemala and Brazil. Viewed from an outsider's perspective, these events become even more sensationalized, and the participants' motivations and actions are oversimplified. Guatemalan fears of modernity are overstated, and journalists depict the attacks on tourists as the primitive response of an ahistorical indigenous population. The U.S. press' treatment of the Brazilian ring, on the other hand, shares a neoliberal perspective that portrays organ trafficking as a simple matter of competing rights: the right to purchase medical treatment, and the right to free and unfettered access to an international marketplace.

### Guatemala

The ghastly fate of kidnapped infants sacrificed to meet an international demand for human organs has long preoccupied the Guatemalan press. Given the Guatemalan daily print media's *amarillista* tendencies—that is, their tendency to sensationalize their coverage of events and their frequent use of tabloid-style headlines and graphic images—it is not altogether surprising that organ trafficking rumors found widespread coverage in the press. Although some sources document press coverage of the baby parts legend in Central America as early as 1986, the first print coverage in Guatemala appears in 1987 (Adams 112). In a pattern sustained over at least seven years of reporting on infant organ trafficking, the nation's largest and most widely distributed daily papers, *Prensa Libre* and *El Gráfico*, presented a series of articles detailing the kidnapping of children across Guatemala alongside accounts of parents selling their children. Front-page coverage documented the

discovery of *casas cuna clandestinas* in various parts of the capital city. Outraged editorials accompanied these news reports.

I trace the beginning of this pattern to 1987. At this time, Guatemala still endured considerable unrest as its civil war continued. Beginning in 1962, the country's armed forces and guerrilla organizations engaged in a violent civil war that disproportionately targeted the country's indigenous communities. In 1987, Guatemala was still reeling from a particularly violent phase of the military government's counterinsurgency campaign in rural, indigenous areas: "Estimates of the rural counterinsurgency's death toll range up to 150,000 persons between 1982 and 1985 [...] The counterinsurgency war made at least 500,000 persons, mostly Indians, into internal or external refugees" (Booth and Walker 123). Although the worst of the atrocities committed under the dictatorship of General Efraín Ríos Montt (1982-1983) had passed, the country still suffered from high rates of human rights violations, a stagnant economy, and decreasing levels of popular support for military rule. The 1983 ouster of Ríos Montt was followed by the 1985 election of Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo in a "clean" election that signaled the beginning of a democratic transition (124). Under Cerezo, however, the transition to democracy stalled: By 1987, Cerezo's attempts to stimulate peace talks failed, and the guerrilla war began to intensify once more (124).

In 1987, then, it comes as little surprise that a "surplus" population of orphaned or abandoned children, predominantly of indigenous descent, existed in Guatemala. Increasingly, these children were commodified and trafficked to the U.S. through illicit international adoptions. As the adoption market grew, the Guatemalan

print media highlighted allegations of kidnapping and instances of parents selling their children. Generally, the press framed these illicit adoptions as a Guatemalan problem; that is, when child trafficking was at all contextualized, it was addressed as a symptom of a larger problem of specifically Guatemalan corruption. Thus the children of a larger, disenfranchised indigenous population were selectively included into the nation for the sake of critiquing a specifically national problem.

The press's initial reluctance to sensationalize allegations of organ trafficking related to kidnappings and illicit adoptions is particularly remarkable. For example, in its report "*Casa cuna clandestina*," *El Gráfico* noted the rescue of two children and the capture of three traffickers (6). Notable pieces of information are missing in this article: There is no discussion of how the children came to be held in the clandestine orphanage, no coverage of how the traffickers came to possess false documentation for the children, nor any information about to whom the traffickers intended to sell the children. The article does, however, note the alleged involvement of Ofelia Rosal, the sister-in-law of former President General Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores. Despite this insinuation of governmental involvement, the article does not explicitly allege that members of the government were complicit in the child trafficking ring. It does note, however, that the paper is investigating claims that more than two hundred children had been distributed through illicit adoptions coordinated by the group's members. No further coverage of the ring appears in the press, and the issue of Rosal's participation remains untouched by a subsequent feature-length article in *Crónica* one month later.

*Crónica*, a less sensationalist weekly newsmagazine, took a somewhat different approach to organ trafficking rumors. The article, “*Cuando los niños están en venta*,” merits further discussion because of its unambiguous identification of child trafficking as an organized business. However, it does not focus solely on kidnapping or the sale of children by impoverished parents. Instead, the article identifies Guatemalan children as “*una nueva fuente no tradicional de divisas*” (17). This “*nueva fuente*,” however, is not connected to the civil conflict that produced so many orphans. Instead, the article represents the baby trafficking industry as a symptom of widespread governmental corruption and evidence of a lack of proper regulation and oversight of international adoptions. By addressing the increased number of trafficked children as a problem caused by the incomplete rule of law in the country, this article maintains a domestic focus that allows it to deliberately avoid sensationalist claims alleging infant organ sales. Trafficking children may be a business, but addressing only its domestic aspects allows the press to sidestep an investigation that would identify the children’s origins, their purchasers and their motives. Indeed, the highlands or Maya roots of these children is not addressed by this initial cycle of coverage.

This cycle repeats in 1989, when the highly publicized case of a trafficked child discovered in New Jersey dominated the press throughout the month of June. In this case, U.S. authorities asked for assistance in locating the unidentified child’s parents in Guatemala. *Prensa Libre* obliged, running pictures of the child and publishing several articles updating his situation. The paper also ran several articles detailing attempts to pass a new *ley de adopción* that would prevent corrupt officials

from profiting from child trafficking. Again, coverage of the efforts to enact the law focused on governmental complicity in the trade, with one article citing *diputado* Mario Taracena's claims that a former government official controlled a *casa cuna clandestina* in Guatemala City ("*Un ex-ministro*" 4).

This article, however, was accompanied by another citing a former judge's assertion of organ trafficking: According to Olga Lucy Rodríguez Fernández, "...esos niños son vendidos para otros fines, como para utilizarlos para bancos de órganos" ("*Consulados*" 4). By including this testimony, *Prensa Libre* begins to reframe the trafficking of children as part of an international attempt to victimize a country that has already suffered from years of violence. Significantly, Rodríguez Fernández's comments were included as part of a quasi-editorial feature which asked "*diputados y profesionales*" to present their opinions on the problem of illicit international adoptions. In spite of the lack of any evidence that would substantiate the existence of an international demand for the organs of Guatemalan children, and despite the overwhelming evidence of governmental complicity in child trafficking, *Prensa Libre* incorporated the former judge's remarks and began a process of shifting the discourses surrounding illicit adoptions.

By 1994, allegations of infant organ trafficking were completely reframed in the popular press. The year opened with *El Gráfico*'s prominent coverage of the rescue of ten children from yet another *casa cuna clandestina* located in Guatemala City. Unlike previous coverage, however, this article hinted at the existence of a sophisticated, transnational kidnapping ring: "*Fuentes policíacas indicaron que se continúa con una amplia investigación pues se cree que estas 'casas cuna' forman*

*parte de una gran red que opera en el país y en el que podrían estar involucrados extranjeros en este tráfico de niños*” (“*Cae otra...*” 51). For the first time, the press began to substitute allegations of an international mafia for previously ubiquitous condemnations of Guatemalan corruption. While rescued children lingered in the government’s custody, *El Gráfico* produced new accusations of parental complicity in the international organs trade. First noting that “[L]o lamentable es que a nivel internacional, Guatemala encabeza el listado de países que ‘exporta’ niños para ser utilizados en laboratorios de experimentación o para extracción de órganos,” the article concludes, “¿SON COMPLICES LOS PADRES DE ESTA MALDITA TRATA DE NIÑOS?” (“*El negocio con los niños*” 4). Although the editorial acknowledges, in passing, the culpability of medical and legal professionals, the authors successfully reframe the discussion of the trafficking in children by implying parental complicity in organ sales and human experimentation. The problem is no longer a consequence of governmental corruption or incompetence; the issue is redefined as the result of an international plot facilitated by parental culpability. A steady stream of articles featuring articles on rescued children, details of kidnappings throughout the country and accounts of parents selling their children allowed the press to promote an image of a nation in which the theft of children, labeled “*el mayor tesoro de nuestra patria*,” was endemic (“*Editorial: Las adopciones ilegales...*” 6). Parental loss was thus equated to national loss, and the nation appeared to be under siege.

In this atmosphere of heightened media attention to rumors and realities of child trafficking, one attack on a U.S. tourist gained immediate attention. On March 8, 1994, U.S. citizen Melissa Larson was detained in Santa Lucía de Cotzumalguapa,

Escuintla. This highland town's largely indigenous population is not explicitly identified as such in the press coverage that followed the incident that began when a distraught mother reported her son missing. Amid allegations that Larson had kidnapped the child, the police took her into custody. A mob surrounded the station and demanded Larson's release, determined to lynch her. In the face of this popular pressure, the police were forced to call upon the military. The resulting conflict between the *pobladores*, the police and the military's *anitmotines* was widely reported and framed both as a war pitting the government against its irrational and uneducated—read, indigenous—population and as an international conflict in which the impunity of rich, Northern nations surpassed even that of Guatemala.

*Prensa Libre's* immediate coverage of the events in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa demonstrates this dual tendency. On the one hand, it published an article offering a blow-by-blow account of the embattled police and the heroic arrival of the military (“*Ejército ocupa Santa Lucía...*” 2). In this recounting, the Santa Lucianos' attack acquires near-epic proportions, and the plight of the police is dramatized: “*Varios agentes fueron copados por la turba enardecida y otros lograron ponerse a salvo en las terrazas de algunas casas, ante el acoso de los habitantes del sector*” (“*Ejército ocupa...*” 2). The military forces, on the other hand, are depicted in a quasi-paternalistic light: “*Los elementos castrenses comenzaron a evacuar a las personas y pedir a las amas de casa que cerraran las puertas, pues tomarían el mando de la población y no querían más disturbios*” (2). The allegations of organ trafficking that motivated the attack on the police station, however, are not mentioned until the end of the article and receive little commentary. The article simply notes



that the child's disappearance was believed to be linked the previous week's allegations of organ theft: "*El cuatro de marzo fue presentada otra denuncia, referente a la desaparición de otra niña, y ese mismo día los pobladores denunciaron que que en la morgue había diez niños secuestrados, los cuales no tenían sus órganos*" (2). The matter-of-fact tone and lack of further commentary give the impression that compared to a military occupation, the disappearance and mutilation of ten children was an everyday occurrence in Santa Lucía.

Within a few days, however, a secondary discourse of Guatemalan victimization dominated *Prensa Libre's* coverage of the incident. The March 13th article, "*Florece el mercado negro de órganos humanos*" led with a pull quote that clearly positioned Guatemala as the victim of richer, more developed nations: "*Los países desarrollados, que hablan todos los días 'de derechos humanos, democracia, moralidad pública y legalidad' son los principales encubridores de este sanguinario y despiadado comercio internacional*" (8). After noting that "*América Latina entera padece este nuevo tipo de saqueo,*" the article continues on to claim that "*[d]ecenas de extranjeros, europeos, norteamericanos y canadienses....han sido detectados en actividades que podrían estar vinculadas al mercado negro de órganos humanos y que van desde la compra de niños hasta el rapto*" (8). In sharp terms, the article continues, "*Este tipo despreciable de mercaderos, venidos de Europea o América del Norte, actúa con una increíble impunidad...*" (8). The choice of words here is worth noting: By denouncing the impunity with which foreigners exploit a Guatemalan "resource," the article reverses common U.S. critiques of Guatemalan impunity with a rhetorical flourish. This same discourse dominates the article's introductory quote;

both depict Guatemala as the hapless victim of hypocritical nations whose own disregard for human rights enables their exploitation of the Central American country with a viciousness that exceeds even the worst of Guatemala's attacks on its own citizens. Once again, indigenous bodies are selectively incorporated into the nation-state in order to justify accusations of northern imperialism.

Accompanied by a chart, complete with images of organs with tags showing prices in U.S. dollars, the article clearly encourages organ trafficking rumors while carefully sidestepping any direct validation of these claims. As noted above, the article alleges that tourists *could be* connected to the black market. It continues in a similar manner by first stating as fact the existence of "*laboratorios, casas cunas, personal médico y paramédico, buscadores y transportadores, abogados y administradores*" that actively participate in an international black market trade in human organs (8). Then, it notes, "...*la dimensión del tráfico de órganos humanos en Guatemala podría pertenecer a esa dimensión, siendo la impunidad, falta de legalidad y corrupción las mejores garantías...*" of this market's success (8). Once again, strategic use of the conditional tense allows the paper to reinforce rumors without actually verifying their claims.

The repetition of charges of impunity, this time leveled against the Guatemalan government, also serves to highlight the nation's double victimization: Rich countries target Guatemala as a source of spare parts for their own citizens, while its own leaders consent to this mistreatment of its populace. These two claims employ somewhat contradictory discourses. On the one hand, the protests against imperialist incursions into a sovereign nation implies support for an embattled

government that must act to protect its own citizens. On the other, allegations of complicity undermine any implied support for the Guatemalan government. Holding one party or another accountable for a black market organs trade, however, is largely irrelevant here: The article and its accompanying graphics simply serve to reinforce the belief that such a market does exist.

By shifting to a discourse of victimization and positing the existence of a flourishing market in black market organs, *Prensa Libre* supplies easy answers to some of the larger questions left unanswered by its previous heroic depiction of the military. The traffickers are identified along with their targets, and their modes of operation are clearly set forth. Any lack of evidence is thus attributed to governmental complicity as well as the power wielded by a mafia that can conceal its actions and prevent the press from issuing reports.

In the more sophisticated newsmagazine, *Crónica*, however, the attack on Larson is discussed in far different terms than those employed by *Prensa Libre*. Eschewing both the rhetoric of victimization and of heroism, *Crónica* contextualized the uprising in Santa Lucía as one of many “*minigolpes de estado*” that had occurred throughout the nation. In “*La batalla de Santa Lucía*,” the importance of the actual allegations of organ trafficking is immediately diminished. In his introduction, Haroldo Shetemul states that

“*[L]os rumores acerca del secuestro de niños y el tráfico de órganos de éstos hicieron que los pobladores de Santa Lucía pasaran del terror a la acción. Quizá pudo ser otro el pretexto, lo cierto es que la escena de los lucianos ha*

*sideo representada decenas de veces en otras partes del país, ante la desconfianza en las autoridades.” (23)*

The rumors themselves are dismissed, and Shetemul continues on to highlight examples of the local government’s refusal to respond to the plight of its citizens. He incorporates the testimony of a father whose five children were kidnapped. As Shetemul reports, the police ignored the father’s pleas for their help in locating his children (23). Later, he includes details overlooked in *Prensa Libre*, noting that the police supposedly mocked the crowd that gathered and that only the police station itself suffered damages while the businesses alongside were spared (24). Shetemul identifies the government and its policies of intentional neglect as the legitimate targets of the Santa Lucianos’ rage.

Shetemul’s development of a discourse of governmental negligence of criminal proportions relies on a depiction of the Santa Lucianos as justified in their anger, although misguided by a childlike belief in rumors. After offering examples of official misconduct, Shetemul engages in a brief discussion of the Santa Lucianos’ reliance on “*pensamiento mágico*” (24). Although he never fully defines this term, Shetemul’s condescending tone does imply that the Santa Lucianos’ rely on another mode of understanding that makes their interpretation of events fundamentally different from his. *Pensamiento mágico* thus becomes a loaded term that appears to refer specifically to an indigenous population. Shetemul uses it to explain not only the popular belief in the child organ trafficking rumors but also to describe popular oral versions of the attack in which Larson appears not as a woman but as a “*hombre disfrazado*” (24). This rather glib explanation fails to take into account how Larson’s

purported actions violated local gender norms and also dismisses local beliefs without determining why they might be deemed credible.<sup>8</sup> It also fails to take into account any culturally-specific significance that kidnapping might have within a Mayan context. Shetemul's reliance on "*pensamiento mágico*" as an explanation displaces a discussion of the Santa Lucianos as rational actors who may have been reacting to a perceived pattern of violent repression by the authorities. Instead, adherents of "*pensamiento mágico*" are unable to distinguish between rumors and realities yet nonetheless correctly target the culpable parties, if for the wrong reasons.

By merging a discussion of the Santa Lucianos' misguided if correctly targeted aggression with accounts of governmental negligence, *Crónica* offers yet another contextualization and explanation of the attack on Larson. The newsmagazine's assessment, which is presented as being more sophisticated than that of the Santa Lucianos' themselves, represents the event as one of many uprisings against a corrupt national government. This depiction is reinforced by the brief article, "*Los 25 minigolpes de estado*," which ran alongside Shetemul's report. Although *Crónica* alludes to "*25 de estas minirrebeliones ante al autoridad*," the magazine only offers details on five others. In almost every case, governmental corruption or misconduct is linked to the suffering of Guatemalan citizens. In only one other instance are rumors of child organ trafficking and kidnapping mentioned, and as is the case in its longer article, *Crónica* disregards them in favor of its own argument that an oppressed population will seize on any pretext to rebel: Quoting the Executive Secretary of the National Association of Mayors, the article concludes, "*No*

*importa quién sea el Alcade, cualquier cosa es suficiente para que la población proteste en contra de un sistema que sólo favorece a la minoría” (24).*

Clearly, *Prensa Libre* and *Crónica* offer distinct coverage of the Santa Lucia incident. When the multiple discourses employed by *Prensa Libre* are examined as a group, they point towards a superficial support of the government. As noted above, that support breaks down upon close reading, but the paper in general appears to support a government plagued both by a restless and child-like population as well as imperialist invasions from its northern neighbors. While *Crónica*'s reports reinforce this image of the Guatemalan public, their coverage holds the government responsible for creating the conditions which led the Santa Lucianos, like so many others, to rebel. The people's violence is excused on the condition that it offers their only means of protest against a government that is indifferent (if not hostile) to their needs.

To a large extent, these divergences are due to *Prensa Libre* and *Crónica*'s different formats and political allegiances. Modeled largely after *Time* or Mexico's *Proceso*, *Crónica* possessed at the time a reputation for investigative reporting (Rockwell and Janus, *Media Power* 102). As a weekly publication with limited circulation (estimated at 10,000 in 1995), *Crónica* pursued a well-educated audience and maintained a “critical distance from the powerful groups in Guatemalan society” (Vanden Heuvel and Dennis 55). Its longer, tightly focused investigative reports often criticized the military, the economic elite and the Church, and the magazine became known as one of two “independent and critical voices in the Guatemalan system” (Rockwell and Janus, “Stifling Dissent” 508). Although these editorial policies would lead the magazine into near-bankruptcy, *Crónica* opened an

intellectual space in which the root causes of organ trafficking allegations and popular violence could be explored.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, as one of the nation's most widely distributed newspapers, *Prensa Libre* sought a much larger audience than *Crónica*. With an estimated distribution between 50,000 and 120,000, this often tabloid-esque paper reaches far more readers than the weekly newsmagazine.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, daily publication led the newspaper to place greater emphasis on advertising profits. With the government providing most of the advertising revenue for the country, the paper could ill afford to alienate its largest source of advertising income (Rockwell and Janus, "Stifling Dissent" 507). Previously, *Prensa Libre* had demonstrated its willingness to capitulate to governmental interests; in 1993 when other prominent media outlets (including *Crónica* and *El Gráfico*) resisted President Serrano's attempts to censor the press, *Prensa Libre* alone acquiesced to censorship (Rockwell and Janus, *Media Power* 98-99). Both the paper's documented support of government interests and the necessity of maintaining daily sales figures likely reinforced the paper's initial sensationalist discussion of the attack on Larson in Santa Lucía.

Despite notable differences in the coverage offered by individual media sources, however, the discussion of organ trafficking in Guatemala generally is portrayed as a national crisis. Children, loosely defined as a national resource, are presented as a surplus population that is exploited to meet the demands of an international market. The identities of individual children are unimportant within the framework constructed by the press; instead, a strict focus on the abstract problem of disappearing Guatemalan children highlights national debates about corruption and

governmental complicity in a profitable business. As a result, the representation of organ trafficking by the Guatemalan press is marked by a series of absences.

Those absences take the form of unasked, and hence, unanswered questions: What is the larger racial dynamic at work in these trafficking metaphors? Why were so many children being trafficked internationally, through licit or illicit adoptions? The background of a protracted civil war and its effects on the nation's indigenous populations and their children is erased in both newspaper and newsmagazine coverage of child and organ trafficking allegations. The families of the missing children are also omitted from articles; it is as though the children appeared from nowhere only to vanish into thin air. Without a detailed discussion of the fate of the children (and, allegedly, their organs), the identities of the traffickers and the purchasers of children that created an international market cannot be revealed. Nor can the dimensions of demand be drawn in detail: Instead, a fuzzy picture of a mercantile economy emerges, with Guatemala producing a raw product shipped northward to more industrialized nations.

By depicting the trafficking allegations (organs) and realities (children) as a symptom of a national crisis of governmental corruption, the print media sidesteps a discussion of why so many children are available for trafficking: The existence of both commodities is naturalized in a way that precludes a discussion of the increase of displaced and orphaned populations and of poverty due to the long-running civil war. It also prevents an examination of governmental decisions that prioritized military escalation over public health or social welfare. Finally, this focus on governmental corruption also thwarts an investigation of long-standing social



divisions that maintain large sectors of the population in a state of poverty in which selling a child (or kidnapping and selling others' children) provides a strategy for day-to-day survival or a means of consolidating one's status among the elite.

### Brazil

In contrast, a much sharper image of international organ trafficking emerges from the Brazilian press coverage of a kidney selling ring in 2004. Much like Guatemala, however, the Brazilian case is also tied to a long history of rumors and allegations of organ trafficking. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Scheper-Hughes began hearing accounts of U.S. and Japanese kidnapers abducting favela children in order to steal their organs; she also frequently encountered rumors of illegal organ sales in Brazilian hospitals and medical centers (Scheper-Hughes, *Death* 233). These rumors were popularly accepted and freely circulated by the poor and marginalized in the state of Pernambuco where Scheper-Hughes conducted her ethnographic research; she notes that her research assistant insisted that organ trafficking was a reality, arguing "You may think that this is nonsense, but we have seen things with our own eyes in the hospitals and in the public morgues, and we know better" (233). In other parts of the country, too, similar rumors were deemed credible, often with dramatic results: When it was discovered that Edison Isidoro, a nurse's assistant in a Rio de Janeiro hospital, had allegedly murdered over 150 patients, the mere suspicion that he was involved in organ trafficking led fearful patients and their families to refuse requests for cadaveric donation, causing a shortage in corneas that nearly caused the city's Eye Bank to close (Ferreira).<sup>11</sup>

Fears of organ trafficking, particularly those held by poor Brazilians, are not completely baseless. Certainly, many marginalized Brazilians' life experiences provide motives for accepting the veracity of organ trafficking rumors. Scheper-Hughes argues persuasively that the effects of the "everyday violence" encountered by the marginalized are manifested in part "...in a free-floating anxiety and in rumors (that are never publicly squelched or denied) about the disposability, anonymity and interchangeability of their bodies and body parts" (*Death* 233). That is, the literal "disappearance" of the poor through state-sponsored violence and their figurative disappearance through state neglect is transformed into a belief that those in power view their bodies as little more than "reservoir[s] of 'spare parts'" (233).

This is not to say that organ trafficking rumors are not grounded in other Brazilian realities. The history of transplant medicine in Brazil can easily be read in a way that lends credence to these rumors. Despite the formation, in 1988, of the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS), a new national health care system intended to "*alterar a situação de desigualdade na assistência à Saúde da população, tornando obrigatório o atendimento público a qualquer cidadão, sendo proibidas cobranças de dinheiro sob qualquer pretexto,*" drastic inequalities remain in the quality of health care services provided to the nation's poor (SUS)<sup>12</sup>. In this context, the passage of Lei 9.434 in 1997 acquired ominous overtones. Often referred to as "*a lei de doação presumida,*" (literally, "the law of presumed donation") this law established a precedent of presumed consent for all Brazilian citizens. Unless citizens officially registered as non-donors, their organs would be harvested for organ transplantation following the verification of brain death, despite any family objections. Doctors who

failed to conform to this legally mandated, compulsory donation would be subject to lawsuits by any patients harmed by the physician's failure to obtain a viable organ from a brain-dead donor ("*Doação presumida*" 5). Given that brain death often results from traumatic injury, and that rates of injury are higher among the urban poor, impoverished Brazilians rightly suspected that their organs would be among those most frequently harvested and that discrepancies in access to health care would reduce (if not eliminate) their chances of receiving a transplanted organ should one be required.<sup>13</sup> Almost certainly, the establishment of a private wing (with rooms equipped with air conditioning, television and minibars) within a public hospital specializing in complex transplant procedures did little to convince the poor that their fears were misguided (Werneck).

Thus, when an actual trafficking ring was uncovered early in December 2003, its existence lent credence to earlier allegations of an international trade in human organs. The first articles on the trafficking ring appeared in two of the nation's largest daily newspapers, *O Globo* and *O Estado de São Paulo* on December 4, 2003. These initial articles were brief, but telling, and framed the incident in terms that would be repeated in later coverage. *O Globo*'s brief (153 word) article "*Crime hediondo*" linked the ring to previous trafficking allegations, offering only a few key details of the ring and focusing on its international connections and the amount of money involved. This brief item merits reproduction in full here:

*Depois de enfrentar a fila, foi aprovada ontem a instalação da CPI de Órgãos Humanos, requerido pelo deputado Neucimar Frago (PL-ES), com base em dezenas de ocorrências suspeitas que abalaram a confiança da população nos*

*procedimentos adotados e nos indícios da existência de tráfico e roubo de órgãos. Há pouco anos, em Brasília, um idoso foi seqüestrado e sedado, tendo os dois olhos arrancados. Esta semana, em Recife, a Polícia Federal prendeu 11 pessoas, entre elas dois israelenses, acusadas de integrarem uma quadrilha que pagava US\$ 11 mil por um rim. Diante da oferta, o preço caiu para US \$6 mil. (“Crime Hediondo” 2)*<sup>14</sup>

The article’s sensationalist tone results from the decontextualized reference to the theft of Olívio Corrêa’s eyes, a crime that was never resolved. Though horrific, the assault on Corrêa differs greatly from the trafficking ring that the article announces.<sup>15</sup> Corrêa’s eyes were removed in November, 1995, in Rio Grande do Sul, and neither his attackers nor their motives were ever identified. The trafficking ring, on the other hand, is organized, international, and above all, profitable. Once the specter of the attack on Corrêa is invoked, the article finds interest largely in the nationalities of the group’s leaders and the decreasing amounts paid to organ sellers.

This focus on the trafficking ring’s international connections and the funds that it controlled is also present in *O Estado de São Paulo*’s first article detailing the discovery of the ring. Much like *O Globo*, however, *O Estado de São Paulo* chose to open its report, entitled “*Pessoas que venderam rins serão indiciadas*” with a startling announcement: “*Segundo a PF [Federal Police], eles não são vítimas, pois negociaram seus órgãos por dinheiro*” (“*Pessoas*”).<sup>16</sup> In its first article on the ring, *O Folha de São Paulo* pursued a similar tactic, leading with the headline “*Quem vendeu rim pode ser punido*” (“Kidney Sellers Could Be Punished”) (“*Quem vendeu*”). By leading with this announcement, both articles frame the kidney sellers as criminals,

guilty of violating Brazilian laws forbidding the trafficking of human organs. Neither report provides further details regarding the ring; only the number of sellers imprisoned in the initial raid on the traffickers (eleven) and the locations in which they are being held (prisons in and around the Northeastern city of Recife) are noted.

Although the location of the raid, Recife, is only briefly mentioned in these two initial articles, the site is significant. Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, is a city long connected to the trafficking of women for prostitution and children for adoption.<sup>17</sup> By establishing Recife as the ring's base of operations, these articles indirectly refer to a history of human smuggling that allows them to concentrate solely on the details that make this crime different from others common to Recife. The lack of details about the sellers and their motivations is tied to the invocation of Recife: Although home to some spectacularly wealthy residents, the city is also part of a larger region, the Northeast, which is defined by its extreme poverty and cyclical droughts that force small landholders off of their land and into nomadic voyages to the nation's urban centers. In the absence of arable land, Northeasterners encounter few other employment options, adding to the region's high rates of unemployment. In a region distinguished by the country's lowest per capital GNP, highest infant mortality rates, and life expectancy rates among the lowest in the country, many struggle to survive (Arons 34). In light of these circumstances, perhaps little needed to be said about the sellers: Their identities and motivations could be easily surmised by the papers' readers.<sup>18</sup>

While existence of "*doadores*" ("donors") willing to sell their kidneys may not have been a surprise to Brazilian readers, the ring's international connections

certainly were. This aspect of the ring received the most attention in the press coverage that followed. Details about the trafficking ring emerged slowly, with articles published each time new information was revealed. This was a slow process, and information was only made available after being leaked from the ongoing federal *Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito* (CPI; Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry) that was hearing confidential testimony *sob sigilio de Justiça* from the ring's members. Reports generally repeated the same information, reiterating previous articles as each new detail was revealed. Each paper tended to follow the same general pattern in its coverage of the ring: First new Brazilian suspects were identified, followed by articles detailing their lawyers' protests. Subsequent articles focused on the activities of the CPI and the organ sellers' testimony, with increasing attention paid to Israeli involvement in heading and funding the ring. Indeed, this aspect of the ring drew the most press attention: Of the fifty-two articles that covering the ring, at least thirty mentioned the group's Israeli connections. Admittedly, the group was headed up by Israeli Gadalya "Gaddy" Tauber (often misidentified as Gedalya Tauber, Gady Tauber Gedalya, Gelálya Tamber, or Gady Tamber Gedalya), an ex-military member, and another shadowy figure known only as "Ilan."<sup>19</sup> To a certain extent, a discussion of the Israeli role in the ring was justified. However, the prominent role played by two retired members of Brazil's Military Police is minimized despite the fact that their actions were equally integral to the group's success. Silvio Boudoux da Silva, a retired colonel, preformed blood tests and allegedly screened all of the kidney sellers prior to their departure from Brazil while *Capitão da Reserva* Ivan Bonifácio da Silva played an equal role with Tauber in heading the ring. These Brazilian actors, and the

corruption to which their actions attest, would appear to merit as much press attention as the Israelis.

In particular, the possible involvement of the Israeli government received special emphasis. This tendency was most evident in *O Estado de São Paulo*, where a series of articles by Ângela Lacerda draw particular attention to Israel's national medical insurance and its payment policies for transplant operations conducted abroad. In her first exposé on the exploitation of the Israeli insurance policy, Lacerda presents Tauber's testimony without qualification: "*Segundo Gedalya, os trasplantes são proibidos em Israel por questões religiosas, por isso, o sistema de saúde cuestais de quem quer fazer em outro país*" ("*Rins—Israelense usava...*").<sup>20</sup> While this may have been an accurate representation of Tauber's testimony, it does not reflect the actual policies of the Israeli national health care nor of Israeli law. Transplants are not prohibited but are indeed rare given religious beliefs that mandate bodily integrity.<sup>21</sup> In this report, Lacerda also accuses the Israeli government of conspiring with the ring, citing Tauber's testimony regarding "*um funcionário do governo chamado Ilan*" ("a government worker named Ilan") ("*Rins—Israelense usava...*"). The next day, Lacerda reports on the Israeli government's denial of participation, but she fails to contextualize its insurance policies and offers no explanation for changing "Ilan's" relationship to the government, identifying him now only as "*dono de uma agência de seguros em Israel*" ("owner of an insurance agency in Israel") ("*Governo do Israel nega*"). This inaccurate and decontextualized account makes the Israeli government appear responsible for the ring's actions: While the ring certainly benefited from Israel's reluctance to thoroughly investigate transplants outside of its

borders, these articles imply that the group's actions were authorized by the Israeli government, which is simply inaccurate. Although Lacerda is never explicitly anti-Semitic, her articles assume a sensationalist tone that marks many conspiracy theories.

In addition, by choosing not to explore or expose other connections, Lacerda centralizes Israeli involvement and as a result underplays the role of Brazil and Brazilians in the ring. Although she does present Nancy Scheper-Hughes as an expert who documents an extensive history of Israeli surgeons complicit in “transplant tourism,” Lacerda does not discuss equally well-publicized accusations of government complicity in kidney trafficking in India and China. Indeed, Lacerda discusses the “*verniz legal*” (literally, a “legal veneer”) under which traffickers like Tauber operate, but she does not fully address the ambiguous and highly questionable attitude of the Israeli government regarding kidney transplants conducted abroad (“*Rede internacional*”). My point here is not to acquit Israel (or individual Israelis) of complicity in the international black market in organs; certainly the problematic nature of Israel's official policies are well-documented.<sup>22</sup> My desire is simply to point out how Lacerda's articles indict Israel and allege official governmental support where none formally exists. As a result, her coverage follows the familiar patterns associated with any number of conspiracy theories that situate Israel (or the Mossad) at the center of multiple global machinations.

Only the coverage in *O Globo* departs from this pattern; in general it was the only paper to minimize or avoid sensationalizing Israeli involvement in the ring. (Interestingly, it is also the paper that devoted the fewest articles—eleven—to the



story). *O Globo* is the only paper that quotes Tauber directly, and it published the sole article that included Tauber's claim to have survived a concentration camp in the Ukraine. The article "*Traficantes de órgãos agiam em oito países*" ("Organ Traffickers Active in Eight Countries") presents the only extended coverage of the traffickers' rationalizations for their actions. This article includes Tauber's testimony that he did not begin the ring solely for monetary gain; as Tauber explains, his Israeli pension/retirement account (*aposentadoria*) and "*uma indenização do governo alemão*" resulting from "*...sua passagem, ainda criança, por um campo de concentração na Ucrânia*" provided him with sufficient funds before the ring began operating ("*oito países 9*").<sup>23</sup> However, his experiences in the concentration camp allow Tauber to justify his participation in the ring: "*Foram 25 mil crianças judias e apenas duas se salvaram. Quem passou pelo que passei não se nega a ajudar alguém*" ("*oito países 9*").<sup>24</sup> The veracity of this assertion is unquestioned in the article, despite its significant distinction from the motives offered by Silva, who claimed he was simply helping the poor who sold their organs to fend off starvation ("*oito países 9*"). There is a notable difference in rhetoric between Tauber's claims of victimization and Silva's discourse of solidarity. Neither defense provided a successful justification for their actions, despite Silva's attempts to echo the discourses of the national donation campaign sponsored by the *Ministério da Saúde*.

Despite its own sensationalist tendencies, the press was ironically quick to condemn politicians' attempts to sensationalize the ring and gain political capital from the discovery of the traffickers' schemes. Again, *O Estado de São Paulo's* coverage distinguished itself through its coverage of criticism of formal government

inquiries into the ring. Shortly after Deputado Neucimar Fraga was appointed the head of the CPI on December 3, 2003, *O Estado* ran a series of four articles, each of which criticized the CPI's formation as well as Fraga's actions. In the first article published on December 6, 2003, "*Tráfico de rins afeta campanha por transplante*" ("Kidney Trafficking Affects Transplant Campaign") authors Sandra Sato and Ruth Helena Bellinghini present declarations made by José Osmar Medina Pestana, president of the *Associação Brasileira de Transplante de Órgãos* (Brazilian Association for Organ Transplantation). Citing the very small number of "irregular" surgeries that could cause suspicion of widespread trafficking, Medina Pastana argued that the creation of the CPI would diminish an already low level of organ donation by reducing public confidence in the national transplant system (Sato and Bellinghini). The article also features his pronouncement that "*...a CPI é desnecessária, até porque a maioria das denúncias que serão levadas aos deputados são de casos ocorridos antes de 1997, quando passou a vigorar a lei brasileira para o setor*" (Sato and Bellinghini).<sup>25</sup> Sato and Bellinghini also present the fears of the medical establishment, which was anxious that "*...os casos apresentados na CPI ganhem contornos sensacionalistas, como se não fossem a exceção, mas a regra*" (Sato and Bellinghini).<sup>26</sup> In this brief (332 word) article, Sato and Bellinghini offer contradictory arguments, all of which add up to the claim that the CPI wasn't necessary and would sensationalize a crime that almost never occurs, but even if the CPI were needed, its actions wouldn't matter because any activities that it would uncover wouldn't technically be crimes because they were committed before trafficking became illegal.

The next article confirmed fears of sensationalism, arguing that Fraga “...fez declarações bombásticas, levantou dúvidas sobre os transplantes realizados no País e a sobrevivência dos pacientes, martelou a tecla das crianças levadas para o exterior para ter seus órgãos arrancados e reuniu todos os ingredientes básicos de um enredo sensacionalista” (Lacerda “CPI põe sob suspeita”).<sup>27</sup> Two final articles, appearing on the same day, presented the condemnation of doctors and waiting list patients (Miranda, “Pacientes e médicos criticam CPI dos Órgãos”), and complaints made about Fraga by the head of the *Ministério de Saúde* (Sato, “Ministério contesta declarações de deputado sobre transplantes”). Both articles present statistics and expert testimony demonstrating that the Brazilian transplant system functions properly. Miranda offers the example of a patient whose donated organs helped at least five people, and Sato asserts that “O Brasil é o segunda maior transplantador do mundo, atrás apenas dos Estados Unidos” (Sato).<sup>28</sup>

These articles collectively minimize the significance of the trafficking ring and attempt to discredit attempts to uncover its activities. On the one hand, the ring’s actions are presented as irrelevant in the context of a transplant system that works, and on the other, calling attention to the ring threatens to place that system in danger of failing. Investigating the ring is equated to sensationalizing it, and Fraga helpfully supplies bombastic rhetoric to support this claim. The multiple articles do beg the question: If the ring fails to merit governmental attention, why is *O Estado de São Paulo* dedicating so much attention to it? By calling attention to activities that it deems un-newsworthy, the paper sensationalizes its own coverage and obscures a discussion of the ring’s significance.

In comparison, the ring received objective and relatively dry coverage in the other Brazilian daily newspapers with national circulation. With the exception of *O Estado de São Paulo*, the other major papers offered minimal coverage of the ring. As noted above, most articles briefly presented additional details on the ring's activities. Few were signed, with most simply attributed to each paper's press agency. Where *O Estado de São Paulo* ran twenty-three articles between Dec. 4, 2003 and Feb. 18, 2004, the *Folha de São Paulo* ran eleven and *O Globo* ten. The remaining major daily, *Jornal do Brasil*, provided no coverage of the ring, despite having published articles dealing with organ trafficking in the past.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps most striking is simple fact that most coverage of the kidney trafficking ring discusses it as though it were an ordinary business venture that did not merit further investigation. In many ways, the actions of the ring are treated as though they were part of a transnational business like any other: The published articles emphasize the company's "leadership" and "management" practices and its ability to move a "product" internationally to meet "clients'" needs. For example, a typical report presents the following bland statement:

*Os três coordenavam o trabalho de aliciamento de pessoas dispostas a vender um rim, depois as encaminhavam para os exames médicos necessários para atestar boa condição de saúde, ajudavam-nas a tirar passaporte e compravam suas passagens para Durban. Lá, eram submetidas à cirurgia para a retirada do órgão. ("Traficantes...presos em Durban")<sup>30</sup>*

This information is presented without elaboration, as though identifying potential kidney sellers and then coordinating their surgery abroad were the type of business

activity encountered in the day-to-day activities of any company operating (literally) internationally. None of the papers attempted to further investigate or illuminate some of the more unorthodox activities that the ring engaged in, such as identifying South African surgeons willing to compromise their professional ethics by transplanting purchased organs. Instead, readers learn that the ring was well organized, that it used former sellers to recruit new participants, and that everything functioned smoothly in a system purportedly free of coercion. As if to emphasize this fact, the *O Globo* article “*Traficantes de rim exploram pobreza de doadores*” (“Kidney Traffickers Exploit Donor Poverty”) includes the testimony of José Paulo Marques de Lima, who decided not to sell his kidney after traveling to Durban and learning that the surgery would require the removal of one of his ribs. He notes, “*Ela disse que eu embarcaria de volta no dia seguinte. Mas só consegui passagem de volta para 12 dias depois*” (“*exploram pobreza*” 10).<sup>31</sup> Marques de Lima’s statement provides evidence of the lack of coercion: Not only was he not forced to sell his kidney, but his greatest misfortune was a delay in his return to Brazil. These details add to the illusion that the trafficking ring functioned like any other business dependent only on willing participation of buyers and sellers alike.

Brazilian press coverage also assesses the impact of market demand and overhead costs on the ring. *O Globo*’s “*Traficantes de órgãos agiam em oito países*” includes Tauber’s testimony that “*a oferta cresceu tanto que o preço do rim no mercado externo chegou a ficar mais baixo: entre US \$3 mil (R\$ 9 mil) e US \$5 mil (R\$15 mil)*” (“*oito países*” 9).<sup>32</sup> The emphasis here is not on how little value was

ascribed to these kidneys at the beginning and end of the ring's existence, but on how the oversupply of willing sellers depressed market prices.

Economic and business discourses dominate other aspects of the print media's discussion of the ring. The press demonstrates that, like any other business, the kidney trafficking ring sought to increase its profits. Even in light of the drop in kidney prices, the group still needed to lower the costs associated with the organ sales. The same article reports that Silva attempted to "*cooptar médicos e hospitais particulares para retirar os rins dos vendedores em Pernambuco, no Ceará e na Paraíba*" in order to reduce "overhead expenses" (my term, not theirs) because "*o recrutamento, os exames médicos, a documentação, as passagens aéreas e o hospedagem na África do Sul implicavam investimentos superiores a US \$8 mil por doador*" ("*oito países*" 9).<sup>33</sup> Like any other business, the kidney trafficking ring sought to raise its profits by minimizing expenses.

Despite these attempts to cover the ring by dealing mainly with its "corporate" aspects, these articles neglect one element of a normal business. The ring's "clients," the organ buyers, are only referred to in an abstract sense. Only two, both Israeli citizens, are named, and readers are presented only with minimal information about them. Obvious logistical questions are left unasked: How did the buyers become involved with the ring? How much did they pay? Why did they resort to buying organs from living donors? The ethical ramifications of their part in the ring also remain unaddressed, but this is hardly surprising, given the market discourse that dominates in these articles. The existence of a market of international buyers willing

to buy what the sellers had to offer is what merits attention, not the questionable ethics that underlie the ring's business practices.

When *O Globo*'s article "*Venda de rim teria atraído 50 pessoas*" ("Kidney Sales May Have Attracted 50 People") mentions that "[a] maioria dos receptores era doente renal crônica de Israel," ("the majority of the kidney recipients were Israelis suffering from chronic kidney disease") the lack of specificity makes it clear that the internal demographics of this clientele are generally irrelevant ("*Venda*" 5). Other allegations, reported in the *Folha de São Paulo*, that kidney purchasers included U.S. citizens as well as Iranians are left unexplored ("*Israel pagou*"). The business discourse used to frame the ring renders those details unnecessary to understanding its actions. This method of framing the illicit sales requires only the verification of a market demand, not an in-depth analysis of buyers' identities and motivations.

In contrast, several articles discussed the motives of the organ sellers, usually identified by first name and age only. (Though a few sellers were fully identified, it is impossible to know whether they consented to having their full names appear.) Overall, the sellers are sympathetically depicted, with one article, "*Traficantes de rim exploram pobreza de doadores*" even presenting the kidney sellers as victims of an organized attempt to exploit the poor. Although no general profile of the sellers emerges, those quoted in the papers fall between the ages of twenty-two and fifty, and they generally explain their decision to sell their kidneys as the result of unemployment or debt. Overwhelmingly, the press includes sellers' statements that emphasize their willing participation in the ring: "*Estava desemprego, sem dinheiro. Faria tudo de novo,*" ("I was unemployed, without money. I'd do it all over again")

states one seller in the *Folha de São Paulo* (“*Tráfico de Órgãos*” 11 Dec 2003). The same phrase, “*faria tudo de novo,*” appears again in the *Folha*’s coverage two days later (“*Tráfico de Órgãos*” 13 Dec 2003). “*Realizei o sonho de comprar uma casa*” (“I realized my dream of buying a house”) announced another seller, quoted in *O Estado de São Paulo* (Lacerda, “*Policia esperava...*”). These satisfied kidney sellers succeed in portraying the decision to sell a kidney as though it were a choice that was free of outside coercion: None describes his decision in relation to the structural policies that lead to widespread poverty in the Northeast and contribute to unemployment rates among the highest in the nation. There is no discussion, by the sellers themselves or the journalists presenting their testimony, of the larger economic conditions that present the sellers with few other options than to literally sell their bodies, rather than continue to attempt to sell their labor in a market in which it is undervalued.

Only two people are depicted as dissatisfied, and remarkably, neither criticizes the illegal nature of the ring. Rogério Bezerra da Silva, whose profits were seized by the South African police, testifies that he does not regret selling his kidney but rather “*lamentou ter tido recorrer a essa medida para realizar o sonho de montar uma oficina de automóveis*” (Lacerda, “*Tráfico de rim – encerrado inquérito*”).<sup>34</sup> His protests are directed at Brazil’s bureaucracy and its exclusionary policies, not the lack of other options that led him to sell his kidney: “*Tentei três vezes um empréstimo de R\$ 5 mil com esse objetivo, disseram que era fácil, mas o banco exigia conta bancária e carteira assinada*” (Lacerda “*Tráfico de rim – encerrado inquérito*”).<sup>35</sup> In contrast, the father of a kidney seller discovered by the South African police before



his surgery could occur, was incapable of understanding his son's decision to participate in the ring: As Lacerda reports, “[e]xaltado, ele frisava que o filho não era marginal e sim uma vítima. ‘Ele não precisava disso. Tem pai, tem mãe e é de boa indole’” (Lacerda “Justiça decreta”).<sup>36</sup> Unlike da Silva, this father is unable to connect his son's actions to a larger structure of exclusion that might have influenced his decision. Significantly, the father insists that his son has a family and is not *marginal*—in other words, he is not one of the many urban poor who might reasonably be expected to sell a kidney in order to survive.

Despite the overall portrayal of the kidney sellers as unremorseful and unapologetic, these articles do contain a contradictory discourse that appears to mock their subjects. By focusing on the ways that the sellers spent their profits, the press makes them appear foolish, at best poor businessmen and at worst victims who could not advocate well for themselves in the transaction in which they participated. For example, despite having previously reported on a seller who purchased a house and another who hoped to procure a working-class enterprise (car mechanic), Lacerda groups all the Brazilian sellers together with an undifferentiated group of kidney sellers originating in Moldova, Romania and the Philippines who “vendeu o órgão para comprar apetrechos de cozinha, ventilador, TV, aparelho de karaoke ou comida” (Lacerda “Rede internacional” 18 Feb. 2004).<sup>37</sup> The contrast here is striking in a Brazilian context: While purchasing a house or pursuing a higher status job would link the sellers to the middle class, the list of objects cited by Lacerda would be considered wasteful purchases typical of the poor choices made by members of the lower class.<sup>38</sup>

In another striking example, the same article that sympathized with the exploitation of the poor includes a detailed list of the purchases made by one seller: “*Silva disse que recebeu US \$6 mil, gastou US \$1 mil lá mesmo na África do Sul, pagou parte das dívidas e comprou um carro ano 97. Mostrou o sapato novo que usava, comprador com o dinheiro do rim*” (“*exploram pobreza*” 10).<sup>39</sup> Given the importance that the middle class places on purchasing “*o carro do ano*,” (literally, “the car of the year,” or the most recent model) Silva’s six-year-old car is a worthless purchase, and the shoes seem a frivolous purchase (O’Dougherty 45).

Furthermore, the emphasis on Silva’s poor use of his money lends a double meaning to the verb *explorar*, used in the article’s title. While alleging that the traffickers exploited the sellers, the focus on the sellers’ apparent misuse of their gains invites middle-class readers to explore the world of the poor. This double discourse of sympathy and disdain contradicts the testimony of the sellers who declare their willingness to sell their kidneys again, without hesitation. Despite their own assertions to the contrary, the sellers are depicted as misguided and exploited, not active agents who could choose what to do with their bodies. “*Achava que era dono do meu corpo*,” (“I thought I was the owner/master of my own body”) states one would-be seller, asserting ownership of his own body (“*exploram pobreza*” 10). This sentiment is undermined by the articles’ tendency to simultaneously reduce the sellers to victimhood or represent their choices as foolish.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, the Brazilian judicial system came to a similar understanding of the organ sellers and their motivations. Despite first presenting the sellers as criminals whose actions were as grievous as those committed by the head traffickers,

charges against the sellers were dismissed. Certainly, the action of selling an organ was still deemed illegal, but the socioeconomic status of the sellers and their presumed ignorance made their prosecution unreasonable. Federal Judge Amanda Lucena agreed with the Ministério Público Federal that the sellers could not be held accountable for their actions due to “*à falta de condição dos acusados de entenderem a dimensão do fato e por terem vendido o rim devido à má situação econômica*” (“the inability of the accused to understand the dimensions of the fact [their choice] and for having sold their kidneys as a result of their poor economic situation”) (Lacerda “*Justiça absolve*”). This may perhaps be the first time that being poor and uneducated benefited those accused of violating Brazilian laws.

Although this logic may have prevented the kidney sellers from prosecution, its paternalistic overtones are troubling. By reducing the sellers from active agents to childlike fools, the judge’s decision depicts poverty as an absolute condition that is naturally inhabited by the ignorant. This rhetoric parallels the print media’s tendency to both sympathize with and ridicule the kidney sellers. This discourse depends upon the strategic absence of any in-depth discussion of the material conditions that constrain the options open to the kidney-sellers. While it may be demanding too much to ask the press to discuss the root causes of poverty in the Northeast, the print media’s coverage takes the exploitation of the poor as a given, an assumption that is problematic. As Bezerra da Silva’s discussion of the barriers that prevented him from opening his own business demonstrates, the government’s policies and bureaucratic obstacles act to prevent class mobility. Poverty is naturalized rather than discussed as a status that is created by governmental policies and maintained by institutional

policies followed by banks, etc. In the absence of any discussion of the material conditions that limit the options open to the kidney sellers, their decision to work with the ring is also problematically depicted as a free choice.

It is perhaps this absence that best characterizes the representation of organ trafficking in Brazil. The apparent lack of outrage, even among the kidney sellers themselves, over the material conditions that led people to commodify their own bodies is striking. There is simply no discussion of the ethics of a transaction that forces participants to weigh short-term profits against long-term medical consequences that reduce the sellers' ability to participate in either the formal (legitimate) or parallel economies of Brazil.

The parallel economy casts an unacknowledged shadow over the print media's discussion of the kidney trafficking ring. Shut out of the "licit" national economy by deliberate policies enacted following the abolition of slavery, former slaves created a parallel economy that permitted their survival, but at great expense.<sup>41</sup> Situating the kidney trafficking ring in the context of the parallel economy raises the obvious question: Is there any difference between selling one's labor at a pittance under harmful conditions and selling one's body? If neither survival strategy offers a means by which the enormous gap between rich and poor can be narrowed, is there a clear difference between them? This logic supports the neoliberal precept that the poor are responsible for creating and ameliorating their own condition, so the government's attempt to regulate even this aspect of the parallel economy can be transformed from an attempt to preserve the altruism of organ donation into a malicious attempt to hinder the ability of the poor to help themselves.

*Comparative Analysis: Guatemala and Brazil*

Print media coverage of organ trafficking rumors and realities differs greatly in Guatemala and Brazil. Perhaps most striking is the disappearance of the nationalism and outrage that characterized press reports from Guatemala. Of course, a nationalist perspective in the Guatemala press during the 1980s and 1990s can easily be attributed to the country's attempt to reestablish hegemony after decades of interference by U.S. and Soviet interests during the Cold War. The lack of nationalist discourses in the Brazilian press may result from the lack of similar tensions between Brazil, South Africa and Israel, or it may be part of a larger tendency of the Brazilian Southeast to distance itself from the Northeast.

For the purposes of my analysis, however, it is far more intriguing to investigate the disappearance of both nationalism and outrage as a reflection of changes in the global economy. From this perspective, the nationalist focus of the Guatemalan press results from the capitalist framework in which the trafficking in children and organs is conceptualized. The movement of a new resource, children and their bodies, from Guatemala to the U.S. echoes the mercantile economy under which the country was colonized by Spain and the imposition of a neocolonial status following the pronouncement of the Roosevelt Corollary. The same dynamic underlies the dependency models of capitalism that gained currency in the 1970s. This model emphasizes the purposeful underdevelopment of de facto colonies which are used to provide raw goods for consumption and transformation in the colonizing states.

In contrast, the disappearance of a nationalist focus and the absence of outrage situate kidney trafficking in Brazil in a different historic context. The kidney sales are depicted as an outgrowth of globalization, in which trafficking in human kidneys is simply an extension of an already flourishing international traffic in women and children in the sex trade. Where the Guatemalan print media's discussion of child and organ trafficking echoes an earlier state of capitalism, in Brazil, the representation of the kidney trafficking ring reflects globalization's tendency to collapse geographical distances and increase the mobility of goods and capital. Implicit in the discussion of the ring is a simultaneous easing of borders, as buyers, sellers and traffickers from (at least) two continents were brought together on a third.

Unsurprisingly, given the widespread equation of globalization with neoliberalism in Latin America, the Brazilian coverage of the ring is dominated by a focus on individual rights. This libertarian ethos shares a neoliberal concern with reducing governmental regulations and of increasing individual profits even at the risk of undermining long-held social concerns. The solidarity implied by the mission of the SUS is undermined by a belief that advanced medical procedures should be available to those who are able to purchase them. This attitude is so pervasive that it is held even by those who sold their kidneys under the assumption that their inherent right to as the *donor de corpo* would allow them to commodify their bodies in ways inherently counterproductive to their long-term survival. Perhaps the most significant difference is the way in which the commodification of the body has become so explicit during the decades separating the original Guatemalan allegations and the discovery of the Brazilian kidney trafficking ring. Organ trafficking representations

no longer simply present the U.S. as stealing yet another resource from the poor third world. Instead, the third world subjects willingly sell themselves.

### U.S. Print Media

In the U.S., the major national papers paid far more attention to allegations of organ trafficking in Guatemala than to the documented kidney trafficking ring operating out of Brazil. While this may be due to heightened U.S. interest in Central America at the time of the attack on Larson, it also demonstrates the shift from outrage to neoliberal acceptance that differentiates the news coverage in Guatemala and Brazil.

Interestingly, in the U.S., the print media focused not on the attack on Larson but on a subsequent assault on another U.S. tourist a few weeks later in San Cristobal, Verapaz. An environmental writer from Alaska, June Weinstock was exploring the rural highland community on March 29, 1994 when another child was reported missing. As was the case in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, a mob of *campesinos* soon formed and turned violent when Weinstock was accused of trafficking in children's organs. Despite attempts of U.S. missionaries to intervene, Weinstock was beaten and sexually assaulted, lapsing into a coma from which she eventually recovered. However, she sustained irreversible brain damage that limited most of her mental and physical capacities. The entire attack was filmed and broadcast on TV channel *Notisiete* (Kadetsky 25). Despite the violence of the attack, the Guatemalan print media (in particular, *Crónica*) appeared to pay little attention to the incident.<sup>42</sup>

Three major U.S. papers, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* ran articles following the attack on Weinstock. Each attempted to

identify the motive behind the *campesino*'s belief in trafficking in child organs. *USA Today* offered the most succinct and superficial discussion of organ trafficking rumors in Guatemala, relying on Leventhal's assertion that the popularity of the baby selling myth resulted from Soviet disinformation campaigns during the late 1980s (Powers). *The New York Times* referenced the nation's civil war and argued that the attack was part of a "...campaign to destabilize the administration of President Ramiro de Leon Carpio by weakening the influence of the United States Government, which has been an important source of support for the embattled Guatemalan leader" ("Foreigners Attacked"). A longer article in *The Washington Post* weighed both possibilities, without representing either as the dominant source of the popular unrest behind the attacks.

Both of the explanations presented by the U.S. print media portray Guatemalans as easily manipulated by outside forces. These explanations make sense only if Guatemalan *campesinos* are irrational enough to accept rumors of organ trafficking at face value, rendering them subject to manipulation by either pro-Soviet or anti-U.S. factions in Guatemala. The discourses used by *The Washington Post* reinforce this image by establishing Guatemala as an ahistorical and utterly foreign country that is impenetrable by Westerners. On the one hand, Guatemala is comprised of "...highland villages where the descendants of the Mayas grow moon lilies on the sides of dead volcanoes and time in the dusty town squares seems expanded and almost still" (Booth). On the other, the article describes "...the other Guatemala, the one travel guides do not speak of, the violent, unknowable Guatemala, where rumors have been circulating for months that there are gringos—evil,



longhaired hippies, their dusty backpacks filled with surgical gear—who roam the countryside, hunting” (Booth). Impressively, Guatemalans inhabit a timeless paradise where rural violence results from U.S. backpackers, not the military forces supported by U.S. aid.

The only extended discussion of the Weinstock attack appeared in *The Village Voice*. Elizabeth Kadetsky’s article, “Guatemala Inflamed,” presents a much clearer picture of the civil war’s impact on rural Guatemala, noting that in San Cristobal Verapaz “bodies used to turn up on the sidewalks by the half dozen” and that a military massacre in a nearby village killed at least sixty inhabitants (27). Despite its attempt to present a more in-depth contextualization of the attack, this alternative weekly also fell prey to the tendency to oversimplify the Guatemalan acceptance of organ trafficking rumors. Elizabeth Kadetsky does identify cultural factors that may have predisposed the *campesinos* to accept the veracity of the rumors: a sustained oral tradition that privileges local knowledge (26) and widespread familiarity with the myth of *la llorona* (27). Unfortunately, her rhetoric in depicting these cultural factors tends to again replicate the vision of irrational and childlike Guatemalans: As she notes, “San Cristobal is a small town tied together with rumors, the cables that wire a collective unconscious” (26). This “collective unconscious” appears to unite the *campesinos* in acceptance of the *llorona* myth, which like the organ trafficking rumors, Guatemalans accept as real. This rhetoric does not allow the *campesinos* the possibility of viewing the rumors (or the *llorona* myth) as a metaphor for five centuries of violence in which their bodies and labor were exploited by colonial and national elites. Instead, the *campesinos* depicted in *The Village Voice* are as

oversimplified as those in *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

In contrast, the Brazilian kidney trafficking ring received almost no press attention in the United States. A single in-depth article published in *The New York Times*, entitled “Tracking the Sale of a Kidney on a Path of Poverty and Hope,” intersperses details of the ring’s growth and logistical operations with Albery José da Silva’s decision to sell his kidney and an anonymous U.S. woman’s decision to purchase an organ on the black market. While this article is also characterized by the same lack of outrage that typifies coverage in Brazil, reporter Larry Rohter does a far better job of illustrating the economic conditions under which Da Silva came to view selling his kidney as a viable survival strategy. His choice is compared to that of his mother, “a woman who ‘sold her flesh’ to survive” (Rohter). The implicit negative connotations of comparing prostitution to selling one’s organs are also reinforced later in the article through a lengthy discussion of the negative health consequences faced by other kidney sellers after their return to Brazil.

This article, however, differs strikingly from its Brazilian counterparts due to its inclusion of the story of the woman who bought Da Silva’s kidney. Where the organ buyers remain unidentified by the Brazilian press, the anonymous woman’s story is explored in detail, and her testimony is incorporated so that her motives might be clearly understood. The forty-eight-year old woman decided to purchase a kidney after fifteen years of dialysis and seven years of waiting on transplant lists (Rohter). After heart and lung problems due to dialysis worsened, she heeded the advice of doctors to “get a kidney any way I could” (Rohter). According to the article’s

narrative, following a difficult decision to purchase an organ, her husband found a broker in Israel (Rohter).

Rohter frames this anonymous woman's health problems and decision to travel to South Africa within the context of donated organ shortages in the United States. He presents statistics that demonstrate the life and death nature of her decision: "More than 3,300 Americans died last year awaiting kidney transplants, and the Brooklyn woman was among 85,000 people on waiting lists, 60,000 of them in need of kidneys" (Rohter). As a result, the article extends its discourse of victimization to include the anonymous buyer as well as the named seller. Where Da Silva is a victim of poverty, the unnamed woman is a victim of both poor health and a system of voluntary donation that will not save her from a preventable death.

This discourse of victimization is problematic because it collapses the very real differences between Da Silva and the woman who purchased his kidney. While both are undoubtedly victims, their socioeconomic statuses and prognoses are very different. It does not minimize the suffering of the anonymous woman to point out that she had sufficient funds to purchase an organ and travel to South Africa to undergo the transplant, as well as access to follow-up care to prevent organ rejection. Although she suffered from illness that made death imminent, she still occupied a position of privilege not shared by Da Silva. While it is incredibly difficult to criticize a person for pursuing any opportunity to live, it is inaccurate to equate the buyer and seller as this article does. Unfortunately, Rohter never identifies the power relations that make the purported friendship between the buyer and Da Silva troubling.

By granting the woman and Da Silva equal status as victims, Rohter advances the neoliberal discourse that characterizes Brazilian coverage of the trafficking ring. The right of one woman to purchase an organ becomes equivalent to Da Silva's right to control his body and sell his "excess" kidney. The underlying ethical questions concerning organ sales are irrelevant to this neoliberal discourse: Ethics are irrelevant in this phase of capitalism, and the article largely sidesteps the ethical debate surrounding the commercialization of body parts. The incommensurability between the market price and the kidney remains unexplored.

In comparison, then, the dominant discourses mobilized by the U.S. print media in its coverage of Guatemala and Brazil vary little from those offered by both nations' major newspapers. Although the events selected for extended coverage may differ, the U.S. print media ultimately produce discourses remarkably similar to those of the Guatemalan and Brazilian press. Much like their Guatemalan counterparts, U.S. journalists oversimplify the motivations of the angry *campesinos* that attacked U.S. tourists. More importantly, the U.S. coverage followed a Guatemalan pattern of depicting indigenous Guatemalans as both ahistorical and forever trapped in a pre-historical past. This seemingly contradictory feat is accomplished by failing to comment on the context of the attacks, Guatemala's civil war, and by conjuring up an image of cultural "otherness" unintelligible to the U.S.' thoroughly modernized citizens. As a result, neither the Guatemalan nor the U.S. print media paid much attention to the significance of the explicit commodification of children and their bodies. Instead, the journalists involved focused on shoring up or discrediting these popular beliefs.

In its coverage of Brazil's organ trafficking ring, the U.S. print media once again reinforced the discourses originating in Brazilian newspapers. By accepting, without question, the idea that the market could determine a fair market price for a human organ, the U.S. press articulated the same neoliberal concept of the body that provided a framework for Brazilian coverage of the kidney sales. According to the perspective enunciated by the U.S. print media, the model of neoliberalism associated with Brazil's savage capitalism is unproblematic. The trafficking ring is simply a new capitalist venture offering equal opportunities for buyers and sellers alike to profit from new medical technologies and improved global transportation.

In all three nations, the discussion of organ trafficking is far removed from the direct rhetoric employed by altruistic calls to "give the gift of life" or warnings about bathtubs full of ice. Although the allegations of an illicit trade in infant organs form the basis for the "baby parts" urban legend, the discussion of this traffic in both the U.S. and Guatemala has little to do with the children themselves. Instead, allegations of organ trafficking opened a discursive space for competing narratives of nationalism, poverty, and victimization. Discussions of the Brazilian organ trafficking ring ultimately proved to be a conversation about the international business model that the ring represented; the commercialization of the kidneys themselves was accepted as a given by both the U.S. and Brazilian press rather than as a reality made possible only through the dominance of neoliberal perceptions of the global economy.

Neither the Guatemalan, Brazilian, nor U.S. press commented upon the global economic contexts in which rumors and realities made headlines. It is, however,

tempting to see both the Guatemalan allegations and the actual trafficking in Brazil as repetitions of earlier phases of global capitalism. As mentioned above, the depiction of Guatemalan children as a national resource exploited by the U.S. certainly echoes both the history of Central America's colonization, and it is hard to read Guatemalan allegations of infant organ trafficking without remembering the U.S.' exploitation of Guatemala through covert and overt actions, including the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and the financial and military aid it provided to the dictators who followed. And the trade in Brazilian kidneys offers the most explicit commodification of the body since the abolition of the slave trade in the Americas in 1888. It is hard to escape the irony of the first major organ trafficking ring in the Americas emerging in the last nation to abolish slavery. The ring's location in northeast Brazil, the site of plantation agriculture that could only function because of the use of enslaved Africans' labor, only extends this painful irony.

To focus only on the repetition of economic patterns in the history of the Americas, however, would overlook the novelty of the new routes linking North, South, and Central America. The de-bordering of the Americas that began with NAFTA now allows for the reversal of the trade route that brought enslaved Africans to Brazil. The collapsing of the world due to technological advances permits the critically ill to travel enormous distances in order to benefit from the poverty of others. The widespread adoption of a neoliberal framework allows the ethics of this new traffic to remain largely unquestioned by the popular media. Instead, the print media advocates the commodification of the human body through the use of buyers' and sellers' testimonies.

The increased use of personal testimony is perhaps the most significant change in the discourses surrounding organ trafficking in the Americas. The Guatemalan print media's discussion of infant organ trafficking allegations depended largely on unsubstantiated claims; those complicit in illicit adoptions were never quoted in the press in part because of governmental corruption as well as the Guatemalan press' self-censorship. The voices of the U.S. women attacked in Guatemala were never featured in either nation's press; Melissa Larson left the country almost immediately upon her release, and June Weinstock never recovered the capacity to discuss her assault. The trafficked children themselves are always voiceless.

In contrast, the neoliberal rhetoric of organ trafficking employed by major newspapers in both Brazil and U.S. depends upon the strategic use of the testimony offered by the ring members, its clients, and the organ sellers themselves. By incorporating the voices of the kidney sellers, the Brazilian press legitimizes the commodification of human organs. The U.S. print media accomplishes the same goal by introducing the voice of a kidney buyer. The selective use of these testimonies transforms the victims of poverty and illness into agents seeking to better their material conditions or their health. Much like the speakers and authors presented through the Latin American genre of *testimonio*, the purported beneficiaries of the organ trafficking ring acquire—or are granted—agency by having their narratives brought to the attention of the public. In the case of the Brazilian organ sellers, however, that agency is fleeting, diminished not only by the tone used by the journalists presenting their histories but also by the very fact that the sellers are

complicit in their own exploitation. Rather than expose their exploitation at the hands of others, the kidney sellers clearly document their willing participation in the sale of their own bodies. The new set of globally-circulating narratives of organ trafficking are best defined by this shift from victimization to active participation; the “urban legends” of neoliberal globalization are now told, at least in part, by those complicit in their own exploitation.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The popular urban legend and folklore database at snopes.com contains information on this version of the kidney theft story as well as others.

<sup>2</sup> All translations that follow are mine. Where possible, I've included short parenthetical translations; longer translations appear in the footnotes. A poster and short online video from the "*Doe Vida, Doe Órgãos*" campaign can be viewed online at [http://portal.saude.gov.br/portal/saude/visualizar\\_texto.cfm?idtxt=23626](http://portal.saude.gov.br/portal/saude/visualizar_texto.cfm?idtxt=23626).

<sup>3</sup> See Scheper-Hughes, "Theft of Life," pages 8-9 and Campion-Vincent, pages 4-24.

<sup>4</sup> Todd Leventhal's report discrediting allegations of organ trafficking, "The Baby Parts Myth: Anatomy of a Rumor," is available on the U.S. State Department International Information Program's website at [http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive\\_Index/The\\_Baby\\_Parts\\_Myth.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive_Index/The_Baby_Parts_Myth.html). Scheper-Hughes provides a thorough critique of Leventhal's claims and methodology (in particular, his use of "official narratives" to counter those provided by marginalized "informants") in her article, "Theft of Life: The Globalization of Organ Theft Narratives" (5).

<sup>5</sup> Campion-Vincent's *Organ Theft Narratives* (2005) expands upon her earlier folklore-based study of organ trafficking, *La greffe, la rumeur et les media. Les récits de vols d'organes* (Paris, April 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Scheper-Hughes later became a founding member of Organs Watch, a non-profit organization dedicated to documenting and analyzing global sales of human organs. She discusses a shift in her investigative focus, noting, "...it is the *bodies* of 'donors'—living and dead—rather than the *rumors* that I have been following" ("Reply" 556). Scheper-Hughes' later publications derive from an ongoing, multi-sited ethnographic study focusing on organ sellers, brokers, and buyers.

<sup>7</sup> In their 2001 "*Diagnóstico de la comunicación en América Latina: Informe nacional de Brasil*," Di Franco, Campos and Ornellas provide the following assessments of national circulation: *O Globo*, 350,000 copies daily, 555,000 Sunday editions, 130,000 subscribers; *Estado do São Paulo*, 390,000 copies daily, 520,000 Sunday editions, approximately 320,000 subscribers; and *Folha de São Paulo*, 450,000 copies daily, 600,000 Sunday editions, number of subscriptions unknown (Di Franco, Campos and Ornellas).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of how *gringa* figures like Larson disrupted Mayan gender norms, see Abigail E. Adams' "*Gringas, Ghouls and Guatemala: The 1994 Attacks on North American Women Accused of Body Organ Trafficking*." While Adams

provides a particularly thorough explanation of the multiple and contradictory discourses surrounding U.S. women in Guatemala at the time of the attacks, she does not fully explore the reasons why rumors of organ trafficking were deemed credible.

<sup>9</sup> Due to its critique of President Alvaro Arzú Irigoyen during his candidacy, the government imposed an advertising boycott that forced the company to sell to pro-Arzú sympathizers in 1998, diminishing the magazine's reputation for unbiased and insightful investigative reporting (Rockwell and Janus, "Stifling Dissent" 507).

<sup>10</sup> As Vanden Heuvel and Dennis explain, the lack of "an independent system of auditing" makes estimating circulation figures in Guatemala difficult (53). In 1995, Vanden Heuvel and Dennis estimated *Prensa Libre*'s circulation at 50,000 (53). In 2003, Rockwell and Janus provided a figure of 120,000 (*Media Power* 100). While these estimates vary greatly, they do provide evidence of *Prensa Libre*'s ability to reach a larger audience than *Crónica*.

<sup>11</sup> As Ferreira notes, no connection to organ trafficking was ever discovered in the Isidoro case; however, he was found to be receiving large payments from local funeral homes in return for the corpses that his killings produced (Ferreira).

<sup>12</sup> Despite the formation, in 1988, of the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS), a new national health care system intended to "improve the inequalities in access to healthcare services, requiring public medical care for all citizens, and prohibiting the charging of fees under any pretext," drastic inequalities remain in the quality of health care services provided to the nation's poor (SUS).

<sup>13</sup> Again, it's worth noting that these fears are not groundless: Nancy Scheper-Hughes documents the countless failed attempts of a poor Brazilian woman from Pernambuco to obtain a corneal transplant for her son (*Death* 235-236).

<sup>14</sup> Following a hearing, the installation of a Parliamentary Enquiry Commission on Human Organs was approved yesterday, called for by Deputado Neucimar Frago (PL-ES), on the grounds that public confidence in the adopted proceedings [for organ transplantation] has been shaken by dozens of suspicious cases along with indications of organ trafficking and theft. A few years ago, in Brasília, an elderly man was kidnapped and sedated, and both of his eyes plucked out. This week, in Recife, the Federal Police arrested eleven people, among them two Israelis, accused of forming a gang that paid US\$11,000 for a kidney. In the face of the supply [of kidneys], the price fell to US\$6000. ("Ghastly Crime" 2)

<sup>15</sup> Although it was determined that Correa's eyes were removed using a scalpel or other surgical device, the crime was never prosecuted. Instead, Correa successfully sued the State of Rio Grande do Sul for the equivalent of 300 minimum salaries on the basis that the state failed to meet its obligation of providing adequate security for its citizens ("Sem olhos").

<sup>16</sup> Much like *O Globo*, however, *O Estado de São Paulo* chose to open its report, entitled “Kidney Sellers to Be Indicted” with a startling announcement: “According to the Federal Police, they are not victims because they sold their organs for money” (“*Pessoas*”).

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting that *O Estado de São Paulo* did not mention this fact in its initial coverage of the ring, particularly in light of an article entitled “*Governo investiga adoção de crianças para tráfico de órgãos*” (“Government Investigates Adoptions of Children for Organ Trafficking”) which it featured only one year before (Luiz). This article discusses the attempts of the Brazilian government (in conjunction with Interpol) to halt the trafficking in children and women from the Northeast to Spain, Holland, Germany, Italy and Israel.

<sup>18</sup> As the case in the previous analysis of Guatemalan print media coverage of trafficking allegations, the racial identities of the kidney sellers are referred to only obliquely, through coded terms and references to social class.

<sup>19</sup> Although the Brazilian press offered many different spellings of Tauber’s name, it is clear that these articles all refer to the same person. I use the spelling provided by Nancy Scheper-Hughes in “Portrait of Gaddy Tauber: Organs Trafficker, Holocaust Survivor,” an account of her July 2006 interview Tauber while imprisoned in Brazil.

<sup>20</sup> In her first exposé on the exploitation of the Israeli insurance policy, Lacerda presents Tauber’s testimony without qualification: “According to Gedalya, transplants are banned in Israel on religious grounds, and as a result, the national healthcare system covers/reimburses those who prefer to have transplant surgeries in other countries” (“Kidneys—Israel uses...”).

<sup>21</sup> In fact, *O Globo* published an article detailing Reform, Orthodox and Hasid perspectives on donation in 1998 when the *lei de donação presumida* was enacted (“Rabino...”) As the article makes clear, there is no single monolithic perspective on living or cadaveric donation among Jews; however, popular religious perspectives on bodily integrity do lead to particularly low donation rates in Israel, similar to those among conservative Muslim populations in neighboring states which conform to similar religious mandates.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes presents a thorough analysis of Israeli health insurance and its impact on the global organs transplant community in “Commodity Fetishism in Organs Trafficking.” *Body & Society* 7.2-3 (2001): 31-62.

<sup>23</sup> This article includes Tauber’s testimony that he did not begin the ring solely for monetary gain; as Tauber explains, his Israeli pension/retirement account (*aposentadoria*) and “compensation from the German government” resulting from “...his passage [journey], while still a child, through a concentration camp in the

Ukraine” provided him with sufficient funds before the ring began operating (“*oito países 9*”).

<sup>24</sup> However, his experiences in the concentration camp provide Tauber with a justification for his participation in the ring: “There were twenty-five thousand Jewish children and only two were saved. Anyone who went through what I went through would never refuse to help anyone” (“*oito países 9*”).

<sup>25</sup> The article also features his pronouncement that “the CPI is unnecessary because the majority of the accusations that will be brought before the members are cases that occurred before 1997, when Brazilian laws [on transplantation] entered into effect” (Sato and Bellinghini).

<sup>26</sup> Sato and Bellinghini also present the fears of the medical establishment, which was anxious that “...the cases presented to the CPI would acquire sensationalist overtones, as if they weren’t the exception but instead the rule” (Sato and Bellinghini).

<sup>27</sup> The next article confirmed fears of sensationalism, arguing that Fraga “...made bombastic declarations, raised doubts about the transplants performed in Brazil and the survival of patients, struck the key [raises the specter] of infants carried abroad to have their organs ripped out, and brought together all of the basic ingredients for a sensationalist plot” (Lacerda “CPI Calls Into Question...”).

<sup>28</sup> Miranda offers the example of a patient whose donated organs helped at least five people, and Sato asserts that “Brazil performs the second greatest number of transplants in the world, behind only the United States” (Sato).

<sup>29</sup> “Doação de órgãos: Uma polêmica além da vida”, 20 Feb 1997; “Doentes renais / Transplante” by Laura Greenhalgh, 21 Jan 1998; and “Órgãos / Tráfico / Denúncia” by Luciana Cabral Eluís and Edmundo Araújo Rio, 13 May 1999.

<sup>30</sup> The three coordinated the work of recruiting potential kidney sellers, whom they later guided through the medical examinations needed to attest to their good state of health, and they helped them to obtain a passport and buy their tickets to Durban. There, the sellers underwent surgery to remove their organs. (“Traffickers...Prisoners in Durban”)

<sup>31</sup> He notes, “She said that I would fly back the next day. But I only received a return ticket twelve days later” (“*exploram pobreza*” 10).

<sup>32</sup> *O Globo*’s “Organ Traffickers Active in Eight Countries” includes Tauber’s testimony that “the supply grew so much that the price of a kidney on the international market fell even further: between US \$3,000 (\$9000 reais) and US \$5,000 (\$15,000 reais)” (“*oito países*” 9).

<sup>33</sup> The same article reports that Silva attempted to “co-opt doctors and private hospitals to remove kidneys from sellers in Pernambuco, Ceará and Paraíba” in order to reduce “overhead expenses” (my term, not theirs) because “recruitment, medical exams, documents, airfare and accommodations in South Africa required investments greater than US\$8,000 per donor” (“*oito países*” 9).

<sup>34</sup> Rogério Bezerra da Silva, whose profits were seized by the South African police, testifies that he does not regret selling his kidney but rather “regretted having to resort to this in order to realize my dream of opening a car repair shop” (Lacerda, “*Tráfico de rim – encerrado inquérito*”).

<sup>35</sup> His protests are directed at Brazil’s bureaucracy and its exclusionary policies, not the lack of other options that led him to sell his kidney: “I tried three times to get a loan of \$5,000 reais in order to do this [open a garage], they said it was easy, but the bank required an account and a signed document [contract]” (Lacerda “*Tráfico de rim – encerrado inquérito*”).

<sup>36</sup> As Lacerda reports, “irritated, he exclaimed that his son wasn’t ‘marginal,’ nor was he a victim. ‘He didn’t have to do this. He has a father, a mother and he’s good natured.’” (Lacerda “*Justiça decretada*”). In insisting that his son is not *marginal*, this father attempts to disassociate him from poorer Brazilians deemed to be more criminally inclined.

<sup>37</sup> For example, despite having previously reported on a seller who purchased a house and another who hoped to procure a working-class enterprise (car mechanic), Lacerda groups all the Brazilian sellers together with an undifferentiated group of kidney sellers originating in Moldova, Romania and the Philippines who “sold their organs in order to buy cooking appliances [of low quality], fans, TVs, karaoke machines or food” (Lacerda “*Rede internacional*” 18 Feb. 2004).

<sup>38</sup> In *Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-Class Daily Life in Brazil*, Maureen O’Dougherty provides ethnographic research that demonstrates how the Brazilian middle-class defines itself largely through the goods that it consumes. See Chapter 1, “The Dream Class Is Over: Home Ownership, Consumption, and (Re)definitions of Middle-Class Identity,” for a thorough discussion of how home and car ownership come to define the middle-class.

<sup>39</sup> In another striking example, the same article that sympathized with the exploitation of the poor includes a detailed list of the purchases made by one seller: “Silva said he received US\$6,000, he spent US\$1,000 right there in South Africa, paid part of debts and bought a ’97 car. He showed off the new shoes he was wearing, bought with the money from his kidney” (“*exploram pobreza*” 10).

<sup>40</sup> This depiction of the poor is not new in Brazil; Robert Levine’s discussion of the reception of Carolina Maria de Jesús’ testimonio *Quarto de despejo* offers another insightful analysis of middle-class perceptions of self-representations by members of

lower classes. See Levine, "The Cautionary Tale of Carolina Maria de Jesús." *Latin American Research Review* 29.1 (1994): 55-83.

<sup>41</sup> See Robert M. Levine, *Brazilian Legacies* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), especially Chapter 5: "Tools for Survival."

<sup>42</sup> I must acknowledge here that U.S. collections of Guatemala print media dating from the time period of the assault on Weinstock are fragmentary. However, my assertion that the Weinstock attack attracted little press attention is sustained by Abigail Adams' article, whose bibliography also reflects the Guatemalan media's focus on the Larson attack but scarce commentary on the subsequent assault on Weinstock.

## Chapter 2: Black Market Body Parts: Organ Trafficking in U.S. and Mexican Detective Fiction

### Introduction

Un árbol borroso. Una carretera inclinada. Un cerco blanco. Una *pick-up* zigzagueando entre una nube de polvo. Un sol que ciega con sus últimos rayos. Un cascarón de camioneta entre las sombras. Pinos salados meciéndose alocadamente. Los instrumentos de un auto con sus lucecitas verdes y rojas. Un cerro pelón. Un caos. Una *pick-up* roja o guinda, que apenas se alcanza a ver. Una mancha verde. Luces blancas a lo lejos. Tal vez un poblado. Un terregal. Y la noche que va llegando. Y un claxon que toca dos, tres veces. El sonido de un auto que frena. La cámara golpea el espejo retrovisor. De nuevo imágenes borrosas. Y por vez primera el que va manejando intenta filmar lo que ve logra—quién sabe cómo—decir algo a su futuro auditorio. Y allí está la voz del videoasta, un fantasma inyectado de adrenalina.

“Ya llegaron a su destino... Desde aquí los veo... Están como a doscientos metros... Estoy protegido por unos árboles... Están bajando, creo, de la Cheyenne... Allí deben traer a los niños... Es un rancho... Pero no sé cuál... con tantas vueltas ya ni sé dónde ando... Si no me equivoco estoy cerca de la carretera de San Felipe... Pero no sé si al este o al oeste... veo luces de linternas...voy a ver qué pasa...”

El vídeo prosigue: oscuridad, agitación. Una ventana iluminada y una figura de espaldas. La voz del fantasma-videoasta-cámara escondida es ahora una murmullo.

“Voy a dejar aquí la cámara y voy a entrar a ver qué...”

Un ruido. Pasos cercanos. Una lámpara balanceándose. Una huida. Imágenes sin ton ni son. El sonido seco de una voz ronca. El sonido definitivo de uno, dos disparos. La cámara se desenfoca; sus últimos segundos son una parábola de sombras, golpes y silencio.  
--Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, *Loverboy* (219-220).

In the passage cited above, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz sketches an outline of the *frontera norte*, the northern Mexican territory that stretches toward the U.S.-Mexico border. As the opening scene to his 2004 novella *Loverboy*, this depiction of the borderlands serves several immediate purposes: The aura of palpable danger, the suspicion that children are being mistreated, the videographer’s incomplete narration, and finally, the sound-recording of an off-screen murder all draw the audience into an unfolding mystery. By generating immediate suspense, this introduction hooks readers and prepares them for the investigation that will follow. A terse and dramatic

narrative voice establishes the novella's tone and also employs selective images to invoke a particular representation of the borderlands: Trees swaying crazily in the night, a dirt road, a cloud of dust, and nebulous figures, barely visible. This is a landscape that is depicted as untamed, defined largely by images of nature that reinforce the lack of organizing economic or societal institutions that could render the land productive.<sup>1</sup> As such, it appears to be empty, awaiting the arrival of an as-yet-unknown criminal business.

Throughout *Loverboy*, this untamed landscape will be populated by organ traffickers, kidnapped children, and a truth-seeking lawyer. Other settings will be introduced: Readers will learn about Mexicali, a bustling border city that is revealed through narrative tourism in the city morgue, a small hospital, and a busy bargain shopping center. Each of these spaces, however, is a crime scene, leading the novella to suggest that the transnational crime of organ trafficking defines the borderlands.<sup>2</sup> Nor is *Loverboy* alone in this representation: The mystery novels that I consider in this chapter use the trope of organ trafficking to construct the borderlands as the site of criminal acts of globalization.

In this chapter, I address the construction of the space of the borderlands in works of U.S. and Mexican detective fiction. These novels actively construct the borderlands as a crime scene, an area in which the transformations wrought by globalization lead to significant changes in the ways that human bodies are understood and valued. The shared emphasis on late-twentieth-century capitalism in these works of detective fiction produces constructions of the borderlands as according to the logic of neoliberalism. Using geographers Edward W. Soja and



David Harvey's critical readings of spatiality as a point of departure, I first address two works from the United States, Tony Chiu's *Positive Match* (1997) and Linda Howard's *Cry No More* (2004). A close reading of the scenarios of detection that unfold in each novel and their narrative conclusions allows me to analyze each work as a response to a contest between national and market forces that struggle to control the borderlands. These two novels mobilize "outsider" detectives whose presence provokes discussions of race- and gender-based difference that lead each novel to propose different national configurations as a defense against organ traffickers and the tainted globalization that they represent. In the following section, I employ a similar strategy in reading three works of Mexican detective fiction: *Morena en rojo* (Miriam Laurini, 1994), *Loverboy* (Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, 2004), and *La bicicleta de Leonardo* (Paco Ignacio Taibo II, 1993). These works also depict a national failure to stop trafficking but are far more pessimistic than those from the U.S., arguing that the Mexican nation-state is beyond rehabilitation in the face of U.S. imperialism that is linked to transnational crime.

Next, I address the implications of the incomplete investigations in each of these novels—incomplete in the sense that even as they resolve individual crimes, the detectives in each novel point to larger systemic problems that they propose are intractable. These texts all demonstrate the impossibility of creating a different, more equitable construction of the borderlands region. As a result, they represent neoliberal globalization as an inescapable economic regime that has vacated civil rights guarantees and prevented the creation of a transnational framework of human rights that could supersede issues of national difference. In the absence of a feasible

rights-based regime, these four novels articulate competing notions of citizenship that are grounded in the body. I read these incipient discourses of medical and corporeal citizenship as attempts to reorient, at the level of the body, a construction of borderlands space that has already been worked over by market forces.

Detective fiction from the U.S. and Mexico provides an opportunity to track responses to globalization. Although the genre has been part of a long history of social critique in the U.S., in Latin America, detective fiction has been dismissed in particularly scathing terms. In 1973, Carlos Monsiváis denounced detective fiction as an imported literary form incapable of offering credible depictions of Latin American realities, arguing that “...una policía juzgada corrupta de modo unánime no es susceptible de crédito alguno: si esta literatura aspirase al realismo, el personaje acusado casi nunca sería el criminal verdadero y, a menos que fuese pobre, jamás recibirá castigo” (“Ustedes” 2). “Por lo demás,” he continues, “a] los crímenes de o entre pobres no le interesan el género....b] el crimen, además, no posee una connotación expropiable: lo excepcional, lo desusado, no es que un latinoamericano resulte víctima, sino que pueda dejar de serlo” (2-3). Yet even in this rejection, Monsiváis identifies a genre characteristic that makes it a particularly useful site for investigating representations of global economic change. In spite of all the formulaic conventions that Monsiváis criticizes, detective fiction’s general adherence to the constraints of realism allows for critical readings of representations of crimes that occur in purportedly “realistically” depicted settings. Given that crime is socially defined, its investigation reveals the motives for criminal behavior provoked by that social environment (Giardinelli xi). As a result, detective fiction presents an

intriguing opportunity to investigate the impact of the economic and social changes that have accompanied globalization in the Americas.

Furthermore, the genre expectations associated with detective fiction have important implications for my analysis. In texts where aesthetics are often underemphasized in favor of the creation of elaborate scenarios of detection, the plot itself becomes the most significant aspect of the text.<sup>3</sup> The narratives of crime and resolution produced in the novels that I discuss call attention to the detectives' (in)ability to construct strategies to resist the forces of global change that they investigate. But those strategies, flawed as they may be, merit consideration because of their selective erasure and fortification of difference, conceived of in terms of nation, gender, race, and class. As John G. Cawelti explains, "Increasingly the detective story is a genre in which writers explore new social values and definitions and push against the traditional boundaries of gender and race to play imaginatively with new kinds of social character and human relations" (281). The extent to which such imaginative play can occur, however, is limited by the constraints of detective fiction, which demand a "realistic"—or at least a credible—resolution to the crime depicted.

The desire to maintain a certain degree of realism—even while narrating investigations into highly improbable organ trafficking scenarios—and the need to provide some degree of resolution make these mystery novels particularly susceptible to what Edward W. Soja terms the "illusion of transparency" (63). Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre, Soja explains that the illusion of transparency "...makes space appear 'luminous,' completely intelligible, open to the free play of human agency,

willfulness, and imagination. It also appears innocent, free of traps or secret places...” (63). In other words, the illusion of transparency results from detective fiction’s claim to accurately represent the daily lived experiences that occur within social spaces. This illusion, as Soja explains, obscures the forces that construct the very social spaces being represented. The conclusions that result from generic demands for resolution are equally vulnerable to producing an illusion of transparency. The extent to which spatiality constrains and defines the possible resolutions to each novel’s mystery obscures each text’s transparent representation of the borderlands.

Looking back at the opening scene from *Loverboy*, it is easy to see how this illusion of transparency can convince passive readers that the space that is narrated in the scene is “really real,” a setting for a murder and nothing more. The illusion of transparency works to convince readers that the isolated site is a value-free backdrop for the novel’s real action. As Mary Pat Brady observes, this conflation of space with setting conceals temporality (Brady 8). Any spatial construction is tied to a specific moment in time; in this case, the border scene being depicted is linked to a specific moment of economic transformation in the late-twentieth century. More significantly, the illusion of transparency leads readers away from actively questioning the economic, social, and cultural forces that have created the space described in the narrative: What is the significance of the dirt road? Why might roads in this remote setting remain unpaved? Are *ranchos* in this area customarily isolated? Where does the *carretera de San Felipe* lead, and what might it mean to live to the east or the west of this road? Mundane questions, perhaps, in light of the

larger question looming over this scene—who is being killed, and why?—but significant nonetheless. The desolation of this *rancho* is not simply a given fact, nor is the depiction of this deserted borderlands scene value-free.

Literary critics know that no representation, faithful to reality or not, is value-free. Representations of space, such as the scene read above, are mediated and constructed, laden with arguments and ideologies. As the previous analysis demonstrates, the material world in which we live—the world of tactile objects and landscapes that can be mapped—is similarly constructed, often along ideological lines (Soja 10). Both Edward W. Soja and David Harvey have provided insight into how real and imagined spaces are constructed and ascribed value. In the case of detective fiction, real and imagined spaces are conflated: That is, these novels claim to faithfully portray the real, material spaces of the border, but the inclusion of these representations in larger narratives of investigation also invokes the border as an imagined space. As Brady argues, narrative—in this case, literature—is also one of the cultural forces that affects the construction of real and imagined spaces: “It also shapes the way spaces are perceived, understood, and ultimately produced. Thus literature illustrates and enlarges the shaping force of narrative in the production of space, highlighting the discursiveness of space, its dependence on cultural mediation” (8).

Cultural forces are not alone, however, in their shaping of spatiality. Harvey argues that material space today is largely constructed through capitalism. Claiming that daily life and lived experiences cannot be viewed as “something ‘outside of’ the circulation of capital,” he explains that

we have to concede that everything that now occurs in the workplace and in the production-consumption process is somehow caught up within capital circulation and accumulation. Almost everything we now eat and drink, wear and use, listen to and hear, watch and learn comes to us in commodity form and is shaped by divisions of labor, the pursuit of product niches and the general evolution of discourses and ideologies that embody precepts of capitalism. (“Notes” 82)

The infiltration of capitalism into all aspects of material lived experiences has a direct impact on the construction of social spaces: As Harvey explains, “Capitalist activity is always grounded somewhere” (78). That grounding becomes visible through development: For example, the *carretera de San Felipe* mentioned in the opening passage is a physical manifestation of capitalism’s need to create new markets and facilitate the circulation of capital and goods.

Harvey further contends that the workings of capitalist expansion create uneven geographical development (93). That is to say, on a basic level, the extent and impact (positive and negative) of capitalist development are unevenly distributed. Looking at the organ trafficking scenario hinted at in the excerpt from Trujillo Muñoz’s text, readers can sense that the illicit trade is purposefully taking place in an isolated region. The harvesting of children’s organs that is insinuated in this passage is one exaggerated example of an underdeveloped region bearing the brunt of the negative effects of a trade that purportedly benefits organ recipients located elsewhere. It is from this point of departure that I begin to analyze *Positive Match*, *Cry No More*, *Morena en rojo*, *Loverboy* and *La bicicleta de Leonardo*. All five

novels construct the borderlands as a capitalist space defined by uneven geographical development. Through their representations, they create arguments about the effects of this uneven development, beginning with their shared assertion that the region's inhabitants have been divided into groups of unwilling donors and well-heeled organ recipients, linked by a group of transnational criminals.

As Harvey explains, the effects of uneven geographical development can be felt on a number of scales—at the level of the body, regional economic markets, the nation and the global system itself (104). In the novels that I discuss, the impact of uneven development under capitalism is visible at almost every one of these levels. I'll begin first by looking at the body within a particular transnational region: the free-trade market created by NAFTA. Under NAFTA, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have functioned as a test-site where the effects of economic globalization can be traced, with most critical attention directed at the simultaneous and contradictory strengthening and weakening of national borders: As Claudia Sadowski-Smith explains, NAFTA has created a “territory where goods and services can move freely but where borders continue to intrude on the everyday lives of various groups of people” (Introduction 1). For *Positive Match*, *Cry No More*, *Loverboy*, *Morena en rojo*, and *La bicicleta de Leonardo*, this contradiction is made literal: In each novel, national borders can be crossed by commodified body parts, but not by laboring bodies.

Chiu, Howard, Laurini, Trujillo-Muñoz, and Taibo use the U.S.-Mexico border to structure their narratives: That is, the interrogation of the national border and its significance to empowered and disenfranchised subjects on both of its sides is

a central concern in each work. In general terms, the vision of the border that emerges from these texts is bifurcated, with each group of authors presenting a vision of the border as it affects either the U.S. or Mexico. Although Chiu and Howard do occasionally incorporate scenes in which U.S. characters venture southward, they maintain a focus on the U.S. territory north of the border. In turn, Laurini and Trujillo-Muñoz situate their texts solely within Mexico while only Taibo attempts narrative border-crossing into the U.S. To a large extent, this emphasis on the nation is itself a result of the inconsistencies of the U.S.-Mexico border under NAFTA that limit human movement in favor of expanded capital mobility.

The emphasis on the contradictions of a border open to commodified body parts, but not laboring bodies, makes the U.S.-Mexico border such an integral part of these mystery novels that their arguments about bodies and borders cannot be situated elsewhere. As a result, these works are intimately connected to the borderlands to such a degree that they “cannot be easily moved to another place without distortion or loss of identity,” a claim that critics such as Sadowski-Smith have made on behalf of key works of Chicana/o literature (“Twenty-First-Century” 718). In arguing for the spatial specificity of these novels by white and Asian American authors from the U.S., and Mexican authors associated with the Distrito Federal and Baja California as well as an Argentine expatriate, I recognize that my claim may appear problematic in the context of similar arguments that have historically been articulated by Chicano/a authors and critics who have centralized the importance of the borderlands in their cultural and theoretical production. The significance of the border in the detective novels that I consider, however, varies greatly from its association with the “symbolic



questions of ethnic identity” that have been powerfully voiced within Chicano/a border studies (“Twenty-First” 723).

In the theorizations of the border associated with this field, the *frontera* acts as both a material and metaphoric referent for the spaces in which Chicana/o subjectivities have been articulated.<sup>4</sup> Sadowski-Smith observes that Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) was one of the first texts to link the material space of the *frontera* to “her own divided identity as a Chicana” (“Twenty-First” 722). This focus on identity construction continued in José David Saldívar’s *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997). Broadly speaking, for both Anzaldúa and Saldívar, the borderlands are characterized by the creation of new hybrid subjectivities which do not correspond to (indeed, supercede) national boundaries.<sup>5</sup> The rejection of the singular nation in favor of plurality as a primary determinant of cultural identities, let alone material experiences, renders this branch of border theory unable to easily accommodate the detective fiction that I discuss in this chapter. In these novels, transnational identity formation is almost never accomplished.

Nor are these texts easily accommodated by more recent theories addressing the borderlands from the perspective of Mexican cultural production. In their analysis of Mexican border writing, Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba establish that works by border authors—*literatura de la frontera norte*—must be separated from *literatura fronteriza*—texts written about the border by non-*fronteriza* subjects (Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba 27). Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba insist on this delineation in order to avoid erasing the texts of border writers

(such as Trujillo Muñoz) in favor of more widely-distributed writers associated with the Distrito Federal and its cultural capital (for example, Taibo) (28). Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba associate *la literatura de la frontera norte* with an emphasis on “the border’s geographic realities” along with its social and linguistic characteristics (24). In the texts that I discuss, only *Loverboy* functions within this paradigm; attempting to discuss the others as *literatura de la frontera norte* would be tantamount to the “intellectual colonialism” that Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba associate with writers such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña (27). Even assessing these texts as works of *literatura fronteriza* poses the risk of similar accusations; the dominance of the U.S. mass market for widely distributed paperbacks such as Howard’s *Cry No More* makes a comparison of her text and Trujillo Muñoz’s within this category problematic. Assess both as *literature fronteriza* assumes equitable models of distribution and readership that allow the texts to participate equally in the construction of borderlands space and narratives.

In grouping *Positive Match*, *Cry No More*, *Morena en rojo*, *Loverboy*, and *La bicicleta de Leonardo* in order to analyze their construction of the borderlands, I’m conflating several categories of literature. These texts represent different sections of the borderlands and are created by authors situated in different canons. Yet this comparative analysis is useful because it allows me to identify a strikingly cohesive response to global economic and social change that spans the many categories to which these texts can be assigned: Rather than embrace non-nationally based community formations, these novels collectively re-inscribe national boundaries, verifying Neil Larsen’s observation that “...national space reemerges in the very

figure that is supposed to signify its absence, the border” (qtd. in Fox, *Fence* 11).<sup>6</sup>

Addressed as a group, these very different novels are unified both by their mobilization of the trope of organ trafficking and by their elaboration of a “collective antagonist,” which is globalization itself, in the form of political and economic changes that demonstrate how global forces motivate the South-to-North traffic in body parts (Fox “Left” 192).

### *Positive Match and Cry No More*

Both Tony Chiu’s *Positive Match* and Linda Howard’s *Cry No More* posit the existence of trafficking rings responsible for harvesting organs along the border. In each case, the traffickers rely on contacts in the U.S. to transport organs from Mexico back to urban centers in the U.S., where they are transplanted into the bodies of the wealthy. For both writers, the setting and subject of their novels marks a departure from their previous works. Chiu, a journalist and author of thrillers and nonfiction works, has written three other novels, but none touch on issues related to organ trafficking (“Tony Chiu”). Howard, a prolific author of at least thirty-five historical and contemporary romances, has often set her novels within the world of the nineteenth-century southwest U.S., but her focus on contemporary border issues (as well as organ trafficking) is unique within the larger body of her work (“Linda Howard”). *Positive Match* and *Cry No More* share another key characteristic: Both feature outsider detectives who are unaffiliated with the nation’s criminal justice system. Instead of police detectives or federal agents, investigations in both novels are carried out by a cast of characters marked by differences that remove or distance them from the nation’s body politic. Despite these similarities, *Positive Match* and

*Cry No More* offer very different scenarios of detection and seek to reconceptualize the U.S. in very distinct manners.

*Positive Match* mobilizes a multicultural detective team comprised of Nguyen-Anh Dupree, a half-Vietnamese doctor working in Chiapas under the auspices of Doctors Without Borders; Ignacio Tejada, a Latino college student; Phillipa Walker, an African American computer graphics specialist; and Maggie Sepulveda, a white female investment banker. The voice of the omniscient narrator grants readers access into the thoughts of all the novel's characters, crossing gender and racial lines with no apparent hesitation. This blurring of racial lines creates an alliance among the members of the detective squad, who recognize in one another their shared marginalization, forming a partnership that is not destabilized by class differences or the legacies of cross-cultural tensions between Asian Americans, African Americans and Latinos in the U.S. in general and in Los Angeles in particular.<sup>7</sup>

This detective team is isolated from hegemonic U.S. society, which the novel argues privileges and empowers only white subject positions. The novel's narrator indicts "a culture so tilted towards whiteness" that its minority characters must constantly struggle to empower themselves (Chiu 410). White women, on the other hand, do not benefit from the same white privilege as men: Maggie, an investment banker, is defined as a victim of sexual harassment who is afforded less respect than her male colleagues. *Positive Match* equates this gender-based discrimination with the racism confronted by its minority characters, positioning all of its characters as equally disenfranchised and equally distanced from hegemonic society. This move is

problematic, but it allows the novel to seamlessly unite the detective team into a racial democracy that easily transcends individual differences. Throughout the novel, this racial democracy functions as a model for a reconfigured nation, standing in opposition to the racist and sexist discrimination with which *Positive Match* characterizes the dominant U.S. society.

Moreover, *Positive Match* contends that the collective and undifferentiated marginalization of the group of detectives provides them with the resources necessary to resolve the mystery of the organ traffickers. By using the detectives to represent the populations that are most victimized by the U.S. criminal justice system, *Positive Match* argues that the search for justice can only be achieved by working outside of its purview. On the one hand, this means mobilizing the students of Ignacio and Walker's computer skills training class, Boot up the 'Hood, whose hacking skills provide the team with important confidential documents.<sup>8</sup> The detectives also rely upon an extensive gang network who act as couriers, bodyguards, and financial backers. Resisting dominant society's criminalization of gang members, *Positive Match* transforms them into heroes whose organization provides a social safety net for the disenfranchised.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, *Positive Match*'s detectives uncover evidence that MedEx, a supposedly legitimate transnational business that ships organs worldwide on demand, is involved in a black market trade in human organs. The novel's ultimate symbol of globalization's excesses, MedEx employs former CIA agents and collaborates with corrupt governments in order to target the world's poor for involuntary organ donations. MedEx's CEO, Century Bengstrom, becomes the novel's arch-villain:

Bengstrom not only runs a company that allows the North to sustain and profit from the suffering of the South, but as the recipient of at least two hearts, a liver and two kidneys, he has extended his life far beyond average expectations by arranging the deaths of others.

In the novel's conclusion, the detectives are able to achieve only partial justice. Bringing down MedEx is easy; they publicize evidence of the company's involvement with black market organs on the internet. Perceiving that Bengstrom will never be held accountable for his crimes, however, pushes the detectives to ensure that his next organs will be procured from his beloved several-times-great-granddaughter, Elspeth. By murdering an innocent, the detectives achieve poetic justice only by committing the same crime that they have condemned. Moreover, their actions undermine the novel's assertion that the racial democracy that the detectives represent provides a model for a more just and equitable society than the current national formation that excludes them.

In murdering Elspeth, the detectives undermine all that they symbolize. The narrator lingers over a description of Elspeth, establishing her as a quintessential representative of Brazilian *mestiçagem*: "She was an exemplar of Brazil's interracial heritage, the genes of her Caucasian, African, mestizo, and Asian forebears having combined to create an arresting face dominated by eyes the color of jade" (426).<sup>10</sup> Elspeth functions in the novel as a living representative of the type of multiculturalism endorsed by the formation of the detective team: She represents the possibility that the lines of racial difference that separate the detectives from dominant society can and will be erased through intermarriage.<sup>11</sup> Her death also

erases the possibility that transnational alliances can provide a means for combating the exploitative model of globalization that MedEx and Bengstrom represent.

Where *Positive Match* emphasizes issues of race, *Cry No More*, on the other hand, centralizes gender difference while off-handedly conflating race and nationality. In this text, two detectives simultaneously investigate different mysteries: Milla Edge searches for her son, Justin, kidnapped as an infant in Mexico, and Díaz hunts outlaws along the border, focusing on rumors of organ trafficking. These two mysteries converge when Milla mistakenly identifies Díaz as one of her son's kidnappers; they subsequently work together to find Justin, now living with adoptive parents. Even as the novel temporarily abandons the hunt for organ traffickers, it creates a detective and romantic partnership that depends upon heavily-stereotyped gender constructions. Where Milla is quintessentially feminine, Díaz is masculine. Only together, the novel argues, can they conclude either investigation.

The depiction of male and female gender roles in *Cry No More*, however, goes beyond a simplistic opposition in order to create a complicated relationship between gender, racial and national identities. The novel actively encourages readers to perceive Milla and Díaz as representatives of a new national family; united in romance and in pursuit of justice, they provide a model of a nation that is both productive and righteous. Yet these two figures are not equal partners in creating this national configuration: Although she is depicted as physically weaker, Milla is morally superior, a devoted mother who ceaselessly seeks not only her own missing child but all others who are abducted. In opposition, the novel indicates that Díaz's physical strength is offset by an intangible difference that tinges his national and

racial identities in ways that make him an outlaw, literally a figure who operates outside of the purview of the nation-state. As such, Díaz is morally suspect, and the story of his romance with Milla is simultaneously a story of rehabilitation and assimilation.

*Cry No More* struggles to articulate just what form of difference distinguishes Díaz. At first, it is defined in national terms, with Milla musing, “He spoke English perfectly and with a west Texas accent, but there was still something, beyond his name, that spoke of Mexico. If he’d been born in the United States, she’d find a hat and eat it” (Howard 83).<sup>12</sup> Later, Díaz’s difference is both cultural and racial: Like his grandfather, Díaz is “proud and remote, and fierce when crossed” and “of Aztec lineage” (126). In the text, this combination of traits is defined as Mexican, and Díaz, despite having an American mother, “naturally” feels more at home in Mexico, rather than in the U.S., a setting that makes him feel “hemmed in” (127). Ultimately, race, culture, and gender combine to finally define Díaz as not belonging to the U.S.: “He was half Mexican, after all, and had spent part of his formative years here. The machismo of the culture had to have affected him at least a little” (194). The trifecta of racial, cultural, and gender differences combine to assign Díaz a national identity that is inferior to Milla’s.

In order to combat this difference and allow Milla to recover her son, Díaz must be domesticated so that he can help identify the organ traffickers who also operate a kidnapping ring and facilitate illegal adoptions. Díaz’s attraction to Milla’s femininity ultimately leads him away from the Mexican borderlands and into the domestic sphere—and into the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Milla Díaz’s marriage and the creation of



their new family in El Paso also removes Diaz from Mexico and legitimizes his masculinity through employment with "...the El Paso police department, the sheriff's department, and private security firms" (389). In this conclusion, Díaz ceases to be an outlaw and instead becomes part of the border enforcement and criminal justice apparatus that polices the borders of the United States. The national configuration produced by *Cry No More*, then, is one in which national borders are secured and traditional gender roles are maintained.

Ultimately, *Positive Match* and *Cry No More* endorse radically different visions of social change and national configuration. Where *Positive Match* appears to support a model of diversity, *Cry No More* privileges assimilation into hegemonic (read: white) society. Strikingly, however, both texts gradually shift from a focus on the borderlands to an assessment of the nation itself. This movement marks a turn from the ambiguities that make the borderlands a peripheral space to a questioning of the internal lines of difference that striate the nation-state. While these internal borders of race and gender can be selectively bridged, the national boundary at the heart of the borderlands remains insurmountable. The *frontera* remains a crime scene and is disconnected from each novel's interrogation of the nation. Rather than re-imagine the nation in terms that might more equitably incorporate the borderlands into a larger narrative of national formation, *Positive Match* and *Cry No More* retain the borderlands as a site defined by criminal activity and hence a location against which the nation must guard itself. The borderlands remain a space that must be policed by the nation-state. These novels reaffirm the strength of national boundaries by shifting their focus from transnational crime to the newly (re)configured

homeland.

*The Detective Novel in Mexico*

The three Mexican mystery novels that I will discuss propose similar responses to organ trafficking. As in the case of *Cry No More*, at times the focus of these texts shifts from simply identifying the traffickers in favor of other plotlines. Questions about national identity that resemble those proposed by the U.S. texts do also arise in these Mexican novels. Miriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo* and Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz's novella *Loverboy* trace trafficking activities in Nuevo Laredo and Baja California, respectively, while Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *La bicicleta de Leonardo* is more explicitly binational, showing the detective's investigative work in both Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. Addressed as a group, these Mexican novels depict a vision of the border where the U.S. presence overshadows discussions of national identity. These three novels comment explicitly on U.S.-Mexico relations yet ultimately reinscribe national borders. As much as they might hope for the possibility of transnational detection, these novels depict the U.S.'s inability to admit its complicity with cross-border crime as the primary reason why only national responses are available to resolve the threat that globalization poses to Mexico.

The explicit cultural and social critique that these narratives offer situates them within a larger tradition of Latin American detective fiction. In her literary history of the genre in Latin America, Amelia Simpson identifies the "stress on real-world sociopolitical contexts over literary and philosophical considerations" as one of its main characteristics (139). Furthermore, Persephone Braham has observed that "[u]nlike traditional detective fiction in English, the majority of detective fiction in

Spanish is *comprometido*, or socially committed” (Braham x). The detective serves as spokesperson for critiques of the state, often identifying its criminal activities and complicity in the oppression of its citizens. Consequently, the detective is doubly-marginalized, alienated from both the official operations of the nation as well as from the criminal world that they observe. According to Ilan Stavans, this type of detective also characterizes the genre in Mexico: “A crude, slow, and eclectic detective, who works for himself, outside of the government, who fights the criminals and the police at the same time, and who deals with the infiltration of spies or foreign interests, adapts more easily to the national atmosphere” (Stavans 51).<sup>14</sup>

That national atmosphere has largely been evoked through representations of Mexico City. Stavans identifies the Distrito Federal as a “literary theater,” and emphasizes the various forms that it has adopted in detective fiction: “...the city is seen as an anti-utopia, as a vehicle of nostalgia, or as a dangerous, ensnaring spider web. Or it is a zoo of aberrations in miniature, where at any moment one may discover obsolete, monstrous entities, ignominious and violent beings” (27).

The recent works of Laurini, Trujillo Muñoz and Taibo, however, are indicative of a shift away from the cultural and social center of the country towards its northern borderlands. Jennifer Insley ties this narrative movement to increased northbound migration (Insley 38). The increasing popularity of borderlands detective fiction also results from the intense scrutiny that the region has sustained in the period immediately preceding and following NAFTA. These three authors draw attention to globalization’s impact on the U.S.-Mexican border while calling for social and political change within Mexico itself.

*Morena en rojo and Loverboy*

Both Laurini and Trujillo Muñoz's novels feature detectives who travel to and through the spaces of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, narrating their investigations from the viewpoint of tourists who are not completely comfortable identifying themselves as *fronterizo* subjects. In *Morena en rojo*, the novel's eponymous narrator visits the *frontera* as the last stage of a journey through Mexico that extends from Mérida to Laredo. *Loverboy*, on the other hand, presents the investigative work of Miguel Ángel Morgado, a lawyer born in Mexicali but raised mostly in the Distrito Federal. The outsider perspectives associated with these detectives, along with their travels through the larger nation, allow both narrators to relate the borderlands crime that they witness to larger crises of the Mexican nation itself. Organ trafficking, in each text, becomes a symptom of larger, structural dilemmas brought about by internal and external forces that threaten Mexico's sovereignty and ability to protect and serve its citizens.

Much like the detectives featured in *Positive Match* and *Cry No More*, Laurini's protagonist, la Morena, is distanced from the nation through which she travels as well as from the female victims whose crimes she narrates. As the daughter of a Black engineer, la Morena represents a history that has been excluded from the larger narrative of Mexican national identity.<sup>15</sup> As Salvador C. Fernández's reading of the novel demonstrates, la Morena's racial identity is purposefully linked to the histories of other racialized populations that have been excluded from dominant configurations of *Mexicanidad*: Like other characters of African descent and displaced indigenous Guatemalans, la Morena's personal history establishes "...un

*leitmotiv que está presente en toda la novela: la pluralidad de comunidades emigrantes que forman parte de la sociedad mexicana y el racismo que sufren de la sociedad dominante*” (144). Despite this continued emphasis on race and marginalization, however, *Morena en rojo* demonstrates that issues of social class are equally, if not more, relevant than race.

Racial discrimination appears to have no impact on la Morena’s investigation: Instead, her middle-class, professional identity as a journalist presents a nearly insurmountable barrier to her work as a detective. In trying to align herself with the subjects of her multiple investigations—female *maquiladora* workers, the impoverished *campesinos* of the country’s rural regions as well as the urban poor working in the informal economy—la Morena alienates potential witnesses and her investigations remain incomplete. She never discovers the codes and circumstances under which the subjects of her investigations live, nor does she associate the various forms of exploitation from which they suffer to larger patterns of neoliberal globalization. This is most obvious in her failed investigation into the working conditions of female *maquila* workers.

At the same time, however, her failures are also attributed to a lack of courage that distinguishes la Morena from colleagues whose published articles deal directly with border crime. Afraid of retribution, la Morena hesitates to expose the truth in the one case, the murder of a border police commander, that she is able to resolve: Exposing corruption at all levels of the government and within national and local police forces would, la Morena fears, only lead to her death. However, this fear also demonstrates la Morena’s distance from the norms associated with investigative

journalists, both in fiction and reality. Ramírez-Pimienta and Fernández identify the frequency with which journalists function as detectives in borderlands mystery novels and note their correlation to actual figures who risk their own lives to publish accounts that anger both authorities and criminals alike (16). La Morena's silence, however, is justified in the text by her commitment to an ongoing, if unsystematic, investigation into child prostitution, an investigation that leads to her discovery of a transnational organ trafficking ring.

It is worth noting, however, that *Morena en rojo* avoids arguing that its protagonist's professional failures are linked to her gender. Although the novel makes it clear that la Morena is motivated both by a professional desire to seek out truth as much as she is sustained by a need to resolve the complications of her romantic life, it resists the simple proposition that female detectives are inherently less capable than their male counterparts. While la Morena's search for love occurs alongside (and indeed sometimes supersedes) her continued investigation into the trafficking of children for prostitution or organ sales, her haphazard detective work results from a personality flaw rather than any other characteristic linked to gender. La Morena simply refuses to see those aspects of reality that do not match with her preconceptions: She is just as unable to recognize that *maquila* workers must create strategies to organize themselves as she is unable to identify her lover, Lázaro, as one of the organ traffickers that she has been pursuing. While this reluctance to acknowledge unpleasant truths, political or personal, humanizes la Morena, it does interfere with her work as an investigator.

La Morena's failures as a detective, however, are quickly associated with

what Persephone Braham identifies as a “crisis of truth” that hopelessly complicates any contemporary investigation (Braham 4). Although Braham does not offer an extended definition of this crisis, I interpret it as a reference to the rupturing of the metanarratives that promoted a vision of a modernizing Mexico. The failure of those positivist discourses began to be broadly addressed by writers of detective fiction, Braham explains, in the wake of the 1968 student massacre at Tlatleloco, and similar critiques of the nation remain a notable characteristic of the genre in Mexico (68). *Morena en rojo* links the breakdown in narratives of modernization to the multiple crises that preceded the signing of NAFTA. In his analysis of 1980s, Mario Martin notes that “[l]a gran crisis mexicana de los ochenta fue sin duda un detonador que puso de manifiesto los desajustes entre las instituciones, las leyes y su cumplimiento, y a lo normatividad, la gobernabilidad y el estado de derecho” (42). The scope of this crisis led to a breakdown in all institutions associated with maintaining social and legal order, and la Morena points to, but does not immediately explicitly identify, their failure as the largest structural cause of the crimes that she investigates.<sup>16</sup> The apathy of the public who read newspaper accounts of crime, the impunity of governmental corruption, and the fear of violent reprisals from criminal figures combine to maintain a societal status quo in which social accords have been broken. The nation-state no longer concerns itself with the rights of its citizens, and its citizenry uses class- or race-based discrimination to hold victims responsible for their own suffering.

In keeping with her inability to recognize inconvenient truths, la Morena struggles to find a more easily identifiable villain or criminal group responsible for

trafficking children into the sex and black market organs trade. The novel, however, rejects the search for a simplistic answer by demonstrating the failure of all of la Morena's attempts to identify the traffickers. The collapse of structural narratives is reflected in the disintegration of the very means by which la Morena carries on her investigation. This collapse is most evident in la Morena's complete inability to communicate and coordinate with her infrequent detective partners, Rosi and el Güicho, whose important messages—intended to help la Morena identify and interpret significant clues—become hopelessly entangled in codes that distort and eliminate their meaning.<sup>17</sup>

Because she is unable to acknowledge that the identities of the traffickers are irrelevant in the face of societal and national failures that facilitate their operations, la Morena begins to attack the international forces that lie behind the black market for children and their organs. She defines trafficking as another form of U.S. imperialism which infringes upon the rights of innocent Mexicans. Thinking about the editorial that she would write, revealing this truth, la Morena thinks to herself, “*¿Cómo empezar? El primer mundo es un monstruo que se alimenta de nuestros niños*” (Laurini 187). In doing so, la Morena uses the border to clearly distinguish between a victimized Mexico and its aggressive northern neighbor. This scenario replaces her earlier recognition that the state and its police often instigated or were complicit in the crimes that they “solved.” In a move that parallels the responses of the Guatemalan press to allegations of infant organ sales, la Morena argues that trafficking is no longer due to internal Mexican corruption but rather to U.S. imperialist policies.

The police, ironically, reveal to la Morena the truth that she cannot recognize



on her own. Only when she accompanies the police to witness the capture of the traffickers is she forced to connect the clues that she herself observed but could not interpret: Her lover is indeed one of the organ traffickers. The extent of the parody of detection in which la Morena has been involved is revealed: Only those complicit in crimes can bring them to the attention of the public, and such actions occur only when the police can no longer benefit from their criminal associations. This realization sums up the novel's arguments about the need for national reform. If individuals such as la Morena are blocked from accessing truth, and the state itself is complicit in the denial of justice, then clearly some action must be taken. La Morena advocates exposing crime through the articles that she would like to publish, but she reluctantly acknowledges that exposing crime is not the same as punishing it, and that her own death would not achieve any measure of justice for the traffickers' victims.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than blame the U.S. for what the novel reveals to be "Mexican" problems, la Morena begins to articulate a more nuanced critique of the state before fleeing from the truth that has been revealed. Noting the presence of child psychologists sent to comfort the rescued children, she thinks to herself, "*El gobierno, el gobierno, a la menor oportunidad te refriegan al gobierno por la nariz. Y sabe que, Montiel, lo que debería hacer el gobierno es preocuparse por prevenir, por evitar que pasen estas tragedias que nos denigran a todos*" (219). Faced with the impossibility of such reform, la Morena flees yet again, even though the novel has already made it clear that governmental corruption cannot be escaped.

Similarly, in *Loverboy*, the complicity of the police and the corruption of the state's criminal justice system is assumed. Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz's text features his

serialized detective, Miguel Ángel Morgado, a lawyer specializing in human rights cases. In fact, Morgado is called upon by the Baja California state government precisely because he is unaffiliated with any state institution. As such, he is free to voice multiple critiques of the nation, most of which center around the failure of the rule of law in the country. Although he, like *la Morena*, is a member of the nation's professional class, Morgado's investigations are complicated not by his class identity but by the racist beliefs that permeate the *frontera*. *Loverboy*, however, follows the same pattern as *Morena en rojo*, establishing domestic factors that contribute to trafficking only after a lengthy critique of the United States.

The novella's statements about the U.S. are readily apparent, fairly heavy-handed and very similar in nature to those offered in *Morena en rojo*. As *la Morena* suspected in Laurini's novel, Morgado discovers in *Loverboy* that the United States and its corrupt citizens are responsible for kidnapping and killing Mexican children in order to harvest their organs. On the one hand, the U.S. is depicted as being corrupted by the greed that has made it a moral vacuum: When one of the U.S. surgeons involved in a transplant wonders about the organ donor, he is told, "It is not your problem, man...It's a Mexican problem" and another colleague reaffirms that in Mexico "all life is cheap" (Trujillo Muñoz 230, 231). In other words, the trafficking problem lies only to the south of the border, and the lesser value given to life in Mexico mitigates any of the ethical problems that nonconsensual organ donation might present. On the other hand, the U.S. is represented as a thoroughly racist country, one where the parents of a kidney recipient's greatest concern is whether or not the organ in question originated from an "American boy" (254). This vague

question points to the couples' presumed fear of contagion from a Mexican donor and draws attention to what Insley labels "the discrepancy between United States ideals of economic and social justice and their actual treatment of Mexican citizens" (Insley 44).

The racism that is hinted at in the worried parents' conversation is further exposed by Morgado's confrontation with John, a young American nurse who helps harvest organs. John both represents U.S. racism and symbolizes a nation that lacks ideological narratives that might provide a structure for national identity and give meaning to the lives of its citizens. His various psychoses point to a fundamental illness afflicting the very belief structure of the U.S. More than just a racist, John is a necrophiliac who delights in dismembering and mutilating his victims. Deprived of any ideological narrative that would give purpose to his life, he has declared himself a vampire, a situation which Morgado later laments: "*Pienso en lo que he vivido estos últimos días. En el video de tu amigo doctor, en la casa macabre donde se sacrificaron tantas vidas inocentes, en ese muchacho John, tan ansioso de creer en algo y tan capaz de matar por un hambre de vampiro*" (Trujillo Muñoz 284). Morgado's identification of John's mental illness as a tragedy equivalent to the murders that he has committed indicates the scope of the social problems that the novella attributes to the U.S.

Despite this rather heavy-handed critique of the U.S., *Loverboy* also draws attention to racism in Mexico. Its critique here, however, is slightly more nuanced than that offered of the U.S., which is represented as a uniformly racist nation. Here Trujillo Muñoz's text exposes anti-indigenous attitudes as a characteristic of Mexican

frontier subjects: After the police question an indigenous woman as an accomplice to the traffickers, they decide to hold her responsible for crimes which she did not commit, noting, “*Pero los politicos necesitan un chivo expiatorio. Y qué mejor que una india de fuera*” (260). The following exchange between Morgado and a doctor who overhears the police officer’s remarks clearly establishes the text’s critique of prejudices against Native peoples that fail to recognize their status as equal citizens of the nation:

—*¿Una india de fuera?*—*Morgado casi gritó—. Es una mexicana, como todos nosotros.*

—*Será como ustedes*—*dijo el doctor Acosta, pintando su rayita racial—pero no como yo. No hay que confundir la magnesia con la gimnasia.* (260)

Of course, given Morgado’s commitment to human rights, Dr. Acosta’s assertion that “*aquí somos gente decente*” is roundly rejected (260). Instead, the novella asserts that the “*gente decente*” of the border bear prejudiced beliefs that separate them from better informed subjects from the Distrito Federal.

Yet the novella’s discussion of Mexican racism goes beyond merely illustrating the prejudiced attitudes of frontera dwellers. In *Loverboy*, racist attitudes interfere with Morgado’s investigation—that is, they block Morgado’s access to truth. Trying to locate John’s accomplice before she kidnaps her latest victim, Morgado struggles to establish exactly how she is disguised. Although recent reports on the wave of kidnappings claimed that the children were abducted by an indigenous woman, Morgado knows that these claims are untrustworthy: “*Pero acá, en el norte, a cualquiera le dicen indígena, sólo que no lleve la ropa vaquera habitual: blusa de*

*aldogón, pantalon de mezclilla y botas de cuero. Con que vistas de china poblana o de tehua...*” (276). Despite this obstacle, however, Morgado warns shoppers at a busy bargain market of the kidnapper in their midst. In order to do so, though, he is forced to identify the woman as indigenous, even though he is well aware that she likely is not.

Morgado’s complicity in vocalizing the same stereotypes that he has criticized before is paralleled by his responsibility for her death. Although he is a human rights advocate, Morgado incites a riot that ends only when the kidnapper has been beaten to death by a crowd of angry shoppers. Despite his best intentions, Morgado is responsible for what he labels a “*linchamiento*,” and the text invites readers to sympathize with his agony for his role in the extra-judicial killing: “*Las palabras ‘derechos humanos’ le zumbaban en el oído. Como el ángel bueno de las caricaturas de su infancia, que posado en el hombro de su protegido le conminaba a portarse bien. Inútilmente, desde luego*” (283).

The novella further uses the attack on the kidnapper to highlight the failure of justice and of the rule of law on the frontier. This extends the text’s earlier critique of the state’s official criminal justice system. *Loverboy* indicts the corruption of the police but furthers this criticism by demonstrating the general public’s lack of respect for human rights. After hearing about the mob’s attack, a taxi driver celebrates, commenting, “*¡Qué bonito!, ¿no? Espero que mi señora le haya entrado*” (283). He also establishes that the crime will strengthen the region’s reputation: “*A ver si así aprenden a no robar a nuestros niños. Ahora Mexicali va a ser respetado. Dicen que hasta los noticieros de la capital van a pasar la noticia. En Mexicali la raza es*

*brava. Y las viejas, más*” (283). The taxi driver’s evident pride in the “*venganza apache*” further establishes the lawlessness of the region (282).

*Loverboy* exposes the futility of striving to strengthen civil society and implement human rights awareness along the *frontera*, making it not only a profoundly pessimistic text but also an exception within the larger corpus of detective texts by Trujillo Muñoz. In other novels in the Morgado series, the public identification of criminals does not lead to their death at the hands of an angry mob. Instead, as Insley argues, Morgado is able to “shame the perpetrators into reform,” a course of action that is Morgado’s only option in a society in which “the entire power structure seems implicated in widespread criminality” (Insley 46). When confronted with the realities of organ trafficking, however, Morgado is unable to rely upon public identification as a means of achieving any form of justice, within or outside of Mexico: he fails even to identify the parents who have purchased an illegally obtained kidney for their son (46).

The lack of any cross-border investigation into the identities of the organ purchasers or the larger network of organ procurers also makes this novella an anomaly when compared to the other texts in the Morgado detective series. In Trujillo Muñoz’s other *frontera* mysteries, Morgado frequently consults with Harry Jeremy Dávalos, a San Diego-based DEA agent. Despite Morgado’s lack of confidence in Dávalos and his contempt for the DEA, Dávalos often provides the information Morgado needs to conclude his investigations. Yet in *Loverboy*, Dávalos is mysteriously absent, leading readers to believe that cross-border investigation is impossible, either because the U.S. is complicit in the organ trade or because neither

the U.S. nor Mexico can effectively identify the traffickers and halt their illicit activities. As in *Morena en rojo*, in *Loverboy* there appears to be no adequate response to organ trafficking. There is no nation-state that can successfully confront this manifestation of economic globalization, and even a human rights activist is powerless to fully investigate the extent of the trade, let alone bring it to a halt.

*La bicicleta de Leonardo*

The scenario posited in *Loverboy* and *Morena en rojo*, in which organs are taken from disposable Mexican bodies for the benefit of the U.S., is reversed in Paco Ignacio Taibo II's *La bicicleta de Leonardo*. In this novel, a young basketball player for the University of Texas Longhorns has her kidney stolen after being kidnapped while celebrating her team's victory in Ciudad Juárez. This north-to-south movement of organs immediately distinguishes Taibo's novel from the others discussed in this chapter and also reproduces the kidney heist legend discussed in Chapter One. The absence of Taibo's famous serialized detective, Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, also makes this novel somewhat uncharacteristic; its border setting also deviates from Taibo's usual representations of crimes in Mexico City. Also in contrast to the other Héctor Belascoarán Shayne novels (as well as the others discussed here), *La bicicleta de Leonardo* features multiple plot lines, which center around widely ranging topics. Along with the investigation into the identity of kidney snatchers, the novel's narratives also address Leonardo da Vinci's multiple inventions (most prominently, his creation of detailed plans for a bicycle approximately four hundred years before its recognized invention), socialist and anarchist uprisings against fascism in 1920s Barcelona, and the whereabouts of a few million dollars of heroin entrusted by a

former CIA agent to a Bulgarian ex-secret service agent during the U.S. evacuation of Saigon in 1975. The abrupt changes in temporal and physical location make *La bicicleta de Leonardo* rather inaccessible. As Ilan Stavans notes, the multiple narratives only “complicate matters and pull PITII [Taibo] and the reader out of focus....The narrative wanders without a center, and the style becomes increasingly vulgar and uninviting” (“Review” 792). While it seems an overstatement to dismiss the novel for its structural complexity, the confusion created by the multiple plotlines does warrant further discussion.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Stavans, who views the confusion that the text creates as a manifestation of “the writer’s artistic defects,” I argue that this confusion is productive, offering a commentary on the process of writing and the creation of narratives that structure reality (792). *La bicicleta de Leonardo* is explicitly meta-textual. The primary narrator (and protagonist), José Daniel Fierro, is a frustrated writer who incorporates himself into the novel that he is struggling to write. Thus, Fierro becomes both the narrator of the novel as well as the protagonist of the embedded novel included in the text. This embedded narrative brings together the two stories that Fierro previously explained that he wanted to unite: the contemporary theft of Karen Turner’s kidney and the history of his grandfather’s resistance in Barcelona. The relative difficulty of uniting these two narratives is explicitly commented upon by Fierro: “But the book just could not get beyond the first draft, beyond the sixty pages of supposedly finished paragraphs, together with the notes that led nowhere. The characters came together in anecdotes, but could not make atmospheric links between revolutionary Barcelona and Mexico fucking City” (Taibo



30).<sup>20</sup> From the beginning, then, this novel is remarkably self-aware about the problematic nature of the connections that it hopes to draw.

Those difficulties, however, do not stop readers from observing certain parallels between these two narratives. The two plotlines seem to parallel one another—in one, Fierro narrates his investigation into the crime against Turner; in the other, he writes about Antonio Amador, a freelance journalist whose reports expose and attack the fascist Barcelona leadership that oppresses the city's socialist and union activists. Amador functions as Fierro's fictional literary counterpart. Both writers record and comment upon the historical events that they witness, embellish upon the truth, and are ultimately committed to solving mysteries. For Fierro, this entails identifying the kidney thieves; for Amador, this means discovering the true identity of the Black Angel, the anti-fascist militant who leaves copies of a drawing of Leonardo's bicycle as his calling card. While multiple interpretations of these plotlines are possible, the parallel created between Fierro and Amador seems to suggest that both are involved in utopian struggles against oppressive forces—though those forces are more easily identified in Amador's narrative than in Fierro's.

The nature of those oppressive forces becomes clearer as the novel's narrative progresses, due to revelations about the identity of Turner's kidnappers. It becomes clear that Turner's kidney was stolen by Jerry, a former CIA agent, for the Bulgarian ex-secret service operative, now living in exile in Mexico City. In return for the kidney, the Bulgarian will return to Jerry money owed for the heroin entrusted to him by Jerry during the U.S. evacuation of Saigon. The novel suggests that globalization—or, more specifically, the global reach of U.S. imperial intentions (in

this text, the two are the same)—is the force which Fierro resists. In other words, the same arrogance and imperialism that the novel attributes to the U.S. presence in Vietnam is also attributed to the theft of Karen’s kidney. It is just one more case of the U.S. acting in its own interests within the borders of countries that it dominates. In her reading of this novel, Claire Fox concludes, “Mexico thus becomes the post-Cold War playground of long-established, mutually destructive First and Second World criminal networks. A cunning, border-crossing Fierro outwits the bad guys on his, and their, own turf” (“Left” 191). Yet the novel reveals that all three characters (Fierro, Jerry, and the Bulgarian) claim Mexico as their turf. Since Jerry orchestrates the seizure of Turner’s kidney and its illicit transplantation in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico becomes a scene of criminal activity where the U.S. acts with impunity—just as the novel claims it did in Vietnam.

Even as it highlights this unequal relationship between Mexico and the U.S., however, *La bicicleta de Leonardo* complicates its representation of Fierro’s investigation into the theft of Turner’s kidney. First, this investigation is narrated in the future tense, calling into question whether or not the events that Fierro narrates will actually occur or are simply imagined. Secondly, that narration itself comments upon the impossibility of investigation itself. Even as Fierro writes about the detective work he may or may not accomplish in the future, he constructs multiple identities that he adopts and discards during the course of this investigation. With each persona that he adopts, Fierro identifies new clues and discards identities as his progress towards the truth is impeded. Unsurprisingly, lost amidst these frequent

transformations, Fierro begins to doubt his own true identity and question the nature of reality itself:

But just as I might be sure about Karen Turner's situation, I might not be so sure about the place that I, José Daniel Fierro, would have in this plot. I would not know myself as a person or as a character. And if that is the way it is, and if there might be some kind of trick or trap, there would be some other sumbitch who would be writing a novel about me, who would be writing about me as a character: the E.T. of the Wild Frontier, the Aztec Karate Kid, by now transformed into the one and only, mixed-up and perplexed Traveling Irrationality Salesman. (Taibo 174-175)

Fierro's confusion is only clarified when he begins to narrate his investigation as himself, as a middle-aged mystery writer in a run-down motel in Ciudad Juárez. At this point, however, it soon becomes clear that Fierro is more invested in probing the nature of investigation than he is in solving the crime: His narrative features Karen Turner asking, "Do we want to find them [the kidney thieves] or are we just writing a novel?" (387). To this important question, Fierro has no reply.

Fierro's lack of response indicates that the goal of investigation—the patient unraveling of clues to arrive at the truth and in doing so, achieve justice for the victim—is impossible, at least in Mexico. Fierro comments, "...looking for justice is like wading through a swamp. In the United States you have a hard time picking up simple things like that" (426). Wading through a swamp, indeed: a frustrating if not futile endeavor whose motivations and purpose are unclear. In this case in particular, no justice appears possible for Turner. After their lengthy investigation, the pair

arrives at a literal dead end—the corpse of the Bulgarian and a note which reads “*His name was Christo Mandajsiev, he was Bulgarian. I’ve left the kidney in the refrigerator for you. Sorry for all the trouble. J,*” (438). In Fierro’s narration, it becomes clear that justice (or any real resolution) cannot be obtained:

The certainty of his macabre conclusion would slowly lead me to another one: that Jerry had gotten away. As much as we might look for him in airports and border crossings, he would be a long way by now from any chance of revenge, settling accounts, or justice. And accompanying this would be the awareness that the Bulgarian in the well-lit room would not be able to tell us the fucked-up story at the back of all this. (438)

As Fierro imagines it, Turner may (improbably) have her kidney re-transplanted into her own body, but little justice will be served. Ultimately, this narrative of impeded investigation is revealed to be fictitious, just one of the many stories that Fierro has considered writing:

So there was the novel that would not come out, and for which it seemed José Daniel Fierro would never find the ending he liked. A version that alters all previous versions. In this novel, Karen would be a volleyball player and would go home one day, she would back to playing volleyball she would say, as she left José Daniel the night before his fifty-fourth birthday, which he would say was his fifty-third, just to fool himself a little. (448)

Ultimately, all the various identities and scenarios of investigation are simply the workings of a frustrated writer’s mind, a writer whose imaginings reveal the futility of discovering the truth that lies behind any crime.

How, then, to interpret this text? On the one hand, it addresses the absurdity of trying to find truth in what is assumed to be a corrupt nation. On the other, it attempts to discuss Mexico's unequal relationship with the U.S. by documenting its imperial intentions abroad. Unlike the other Mexican texts discussed, however, this novel at least hints at the possibility of binational responses to the neoliberal excesses that Turner's kidney theft represents. For Fox, this is an optimistic response to globalization: According to her interpretation, "[t]he search for the kidney's new owner and the May-December relationship that develops between the two characters permits Taibo to explore issues of U.S. imperialism in the age of globalization, at the same time that it offers one model of a viable, albeit asymmetric, U.S.-Mexican partnership" ("Left" 191). Just as Fox interprets the drawing of Leonardo's bicycle as "an emblem of the novel's guarded utopianism, suggesting the neocolonial writer's capacity to produce signs that will in turn create the objects they describe," her reading of the pairing of Fierro and Turner presents the possibility that their literary partnership will be reproduced on a real level (190-191).

On the contrary, I would argue that the binational partnership that Fierro and Turner model is optimistic only to the extent that the novel's opening statement about sketches is correct. Taibo writes,

Sketches are better than the finished product because they reveal the experiment, because they illustrate the quest, because within them lies an array of alternatives and variations stemming from which there will doubtless be a one and only, a unique, final result.

They are better, because as well as foreshadowing the final result, there is a quest to be found within them. (3-4)

Yet *La bicicleta de Leonardo* is much more pessimistic than this encomium to the creative process would suggest. The sketches of detection that the novel offers ultimately fail; neither truth nor justice can be found. Embracing the positive allegory that Fox reads in Turner and Fierro's investigation implies a belief that the two actually meet and are not merely brought together within one of the many narratives fleetingly imagined by Fierro as the narrator of a failed novel.

#### *Justice in the Absence of Civil and Human Rights*

Although each of the five novels considered in this chapter promotes a strategy through which the nation will be able to defend itself from organ traffickers, these solutions ultimately promote the reinforcing of national borders. In doing so, these novels turn away from the borderlands in favor of shoring up the nation and its often-failed institutions. This desire to enact solutions at a national level also points to the incomplete investigations offered by text's detectives, each of whom acknowledges his/her inability to alter the fundamental inequities that facilitate organ trafficking.<sup>21</sup> At best, these detectives are able to provide minimal justice through vigilante actions: Only la Morena rejects vigilanteism, but her investigation is the least able to promote justice. This recognition that the nation and its formal mechanisms for meting out justice have failed reinstates constructions of the borderlands that have long associated the region with vigilante justice. Yet neither the detectives' investigations nor their vigilantism can alter the unequal power relations that striate each nation. The fundamental operations of capitalism remain the

same: Because it commodifies everything in its path and facilitates the movement of goods between buyers and sellers, the neoliberal globalization depicted in these texts enables traffickers to profit from the racial and class divisions that frustrate investigations into their illicit activities.

The incomplete models of investigation in these novels result in their inability to construct national or transnational solutions for the crimes that they depict. Consequently, they reinforce the contradictions of the border under NAFTA. This neo-liberal trade regime is so powerful, they assert, that there is simply no defense against the commodification of all aspects of border life. At the same time, however, these novels deny the possibility that a nationally-based system of civil rights or a transnational human rights framework might facilitate the pursuit of justice. As an institution, the nation-state is presumed to be reluctant, if not powerless, to regulate the passage of goods across its borders, even when the goods in question are human organs.

These novels demonstrate that the nation-state no longer (if it ever did) acts as a guarantor for the civil rights of its citizens. The contravention of civil rights occurs at the same time that the failure of human rights frameworks is demonstrated. The most obvious example of this failure occurs in *Loverboy* but the pattern of extra-judicial killings as detectives target organ traffickers reinforces the failure of both rights regimes. The mere existence of organ trafficking rings in all of these texts implies that notions of human rights cannot be adequately applied to regions that are defined by uneven geographical development: Much as Harvey insists that “uneven geographical development” is a “corollary of capitalist stability,” these novels insist

that the subversion of human rights is also a byproduct of neo-liberal globalization (“Key Word” 93). This again links back to the contradictory nature of the U.S.-Mexico border, which privileges commodities over people.

The absence of human and civil rights in these novels is filled by other notions of citizenship. As a result, the construction of the borderlands in these texts also serves as the construction of a forum for voicing these competing definitions of citizenship, both of which are grounded in the body. As a medical anthropologist investigating organ trafficking, Nancy Scheper-Hughes has developed the term medical citizenship to refer to

...the growing awareness and claims made by patients and by organized patient advocacy groups of their rights as citizens and as medical consumers to free access to medical information, including the latest cutting-edge research, to participation (or not) in experimental drug-testing procedures, to control over the conditions of one’s treatment regime and ultimately over the management of one’s sickness and death. (“Parts Unknown” 69)

As Scheper-Hughes’ ethnographic research has demonstrated, patient claims authorized by this conception of medical citizenship include “the right to a [purchased] fresh kidney” rather than an organ harvested from a brain-dead donor (“Commodity Fetishism” 50). Scheper-Hughes recognizes the basis of this form of citizenship in “the classical liberal episteme” and notes its relationship to “juridical concepts of the autonomous individual subject, equal opportunity, radical freedom [and] accumulation” (“Parts Unknown” 35). Thus medical citizenship can—but does not always—imply the individual’s right to the body of the Other. Interestingly, the



spokespersons for medical citizenship are largely absent from these novels: This form of citizenship is deemed illegitimate—none of these texts presents a legal trade in human organs—but its existence is unquestioned. Without medical citizenship's claims to the stolen body parts, there certainly would be organ trafficking to investigate in these novels.

These texts, however, do begin to produce a competing discourse of corporeal citizenship. On a basic level, corporeal citizenship as I define it refers to one's right to maintain control of his/her own body, or quite simply, the right to refuse competing claims authorizing medical access to one's body. However, the characters that could argue most strongly for corporeal citizenship are also largely silenced in these novels: Unlike the representatives of medical citizenship whose presence is implied, advocates for corporeal citizenship are unable to speak because they are dead. (In fact, it is their deaths that set these novel's plots in action.) I refer here to the unwilling donors killed by each novel's ruthless traffickers, depicted as undocumented immigrants and kidnapped children, subjects who are already denied full human and civil rights on both sides of the border.

Of course, I'm using citizenship here in a very loose sense: Claims to corporeal citizenship are not authorized by either the U.S. or Mexico, and the failure of the nation-state to ensure human and civil rights makes it highly improbable that it would acknowledge additional claims by the disenfranchised. But the capitalist logic under which medical citizenship guarantees the rights of medical consumers seems to demand a response that would seek to protect the rights of medical producers: the organ donors themselves. And this is how these novels treat the victims of the organ

traffickers: Not as fully developed characters but as donor-victims, notable only for the commodities that they produce, their bodies and their organs. If, as these novels assert, these victims do not merit state protections on the basis of citizenship or simple humanity, perhaps they do warrant protection as producers of highly coveted goods.

Although it is incompletely articulated in these novels, the notion of corporeal citizenship that they develop is dangerous because it is grounded in an appeal to capitalist market forces. Because it allows capitalism to set the terms of the debate about the legitimacy of human organ sales, corporeal citizenship could very easily be invoked in ways that make the disenfranchised complicit in their own victimization. After all, it's an easy slide from arguing that the right to control one's own body authorizes a potential donor's refusal to donate an organ to the argument that the right to control one's own body includes the right to sell one's own organs. While this scenario is not present in these novels, it has appeared in "real life," as demonstrated in the previous chapter's discussion of the Brazilian organ sellers who based their argument that the state could not criminalize their decision to sell their kidneys on their status as "*donos*," or masters, of their own bodies. The realities of a neoliberal framework that privileges the right to consume (and by implication, the right to purchase) any good available through a free market make it highly doubtful that individual autonomy would not be destabilized by the same market forces that reduced the nation-state's ability to secure the civil rights of its citizens.

What I want to suggest is that in their representations of organ trafficking, these detective novels highlight a change in how the body is conceived of in the U.S.-

Mexico borderlands. They call attention to capitalism's complete infiltration of the region and its ability to construct the area as a "free market" for all goods. The commodification of all aspects of daily life is evident in these novels, right down to the commodification of life itself. These detective novels point to a situation in which the market determines the value of human life, and they raise the important question of how these market forces can be resisted. The nation-state's inability to resist those market forces and its own internal divisions lead these novels to create problematic solutions to the threat of organ trafficking. By promoting a system of producers and consumers, these novels present a problematic solution for crimes that cannot be stopped through appeals to the nation or to notions of humanity itself.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The lack of details related to these economic and social institutions places Trujillo-Muñoz's borderlands representation in the company of many other descriptions that have emptied landscapes of humans (or incorporated only "traces of human history" (Pratt 125). As Mary Louise Pratt argues in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), the production of uncivilized and/or untamed landscapes in travel writing provided a justification for European economic expansion. In particular, Trujillo-Muñoz's landscape appears to be a twentieth-century repetition of older modes of representing the "New World." Pratt traces the creation of ahistorical and unpopulated landscapes in the writings of Alexander von Humbolt, and she places his constructions of South American space within the context of Christopher Columbus' letters and their production of a fertile, untamed landscape that appeared to invite colonial expansion. See *Imperial Eyes*, especially chapter 6, for more on this construction of untamed landscapes throughout Latin American history.

<sup>2</sup> This borderlands construction is not new. U.S. film and literary texts possess a long history of borderlands representations that depict the area as a crime scene. This pattern of representation is discussed in further detail in Ronaldo Romero's "Border of Fear, Border of Desire." (*Borderlines* 1.1 (1993): 36-70.) See also Luz Calvo's discussion of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958) in "Lemme Stay, I Want to Watch: Ambivalence in Borderlands Cinema" (in *Latino/a Popular Culture*, ed. Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero. NY: NY UP, 2002. 73-81).

<sup>3</sup> David R. Maciel and María Rosa García-Acevedo make a similar claim in their analysis of the genre of immigration films from the U.S. and Mexico: "Structurewise, the plot is the single most important critical aspect of the text. In other words, what matters most in these films is the story itself" (152).

<sup>4</sup> See Sadowski-Smith, "Twenty-First-Century Chicana/o Border Writing" for a thorough review of the material and metaphoric uses of the border in key works of Chicano/a cultural production from the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 to the present day.

<sup>5</sup> Both Saldívar and Anzaldúa theorize frontera subjectivities. For Anzaldúa, this means proposing a Mestiza consciousness which will destabilize the us/them dichotomy in favor of a more plural perspective which, in embracing ambiguity, offers Chicana subjects the possibility of collective mobilization against dualistic thinking in all its forms (80). Saldívar's *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997) theorizes border subjectivities by explicitly addressing how "peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves not negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics" (Saldívar 13-14).

<sup>7</sup> In fact, the novel creates a narrative of events in which these characters' friendships are stronger than any form of cross-cultural tension. Nguyen-Anh nurses Ignacio back to health after he is mistaken for a gang member in a South Central drive-by; Walker becomes Ignacio's tutor during his recovery and is introduced to Nguyen-Anh, who becomes her mentor as well. Notably, Walker and Ignacio's friendship is cemented during the 1993 Los Angeles riots following the acquittal of the police who beat Rodney King (Chiu 123). The novel's use of the Los Angeles riots as a paradigmatic example of racial hostility between Blacks and whites in the urban U.S. serves as a contrast for the effortless friendship between Walker and Ignacio.

<sup>8</sup> This class is seen in opposition to (presumably government supported) skills programs which fail to provide inner-city youth with the technological skills needed for economic advancement:

Boot Up the 'Hood had been conceived by Nacio as an antidote to the teen workshops so commonplace in Los Angeles. He considered these little better than the bogus trade schools that advertised on late night TA. Hewing to a narrow and patronizing definition of computer literacy, they only drilled students in the specific software applications needed to gain such low-level jobs as data-entry operator or graphic-arts apprentice. (124)

<sup>9</sup> For example, the gang provides a livelihood for Large Quintanilla: When Large damages his anterior cruciate ligament, he loses his football scholarship. As the novel notes, "To the rescue had come Ayala, Large's best friend from sandbox days. Tres Equis sponsored a gamut of after-school sports teams ranging from soccer to basketball to track; Quintanilla now helped run them" (199). Pondering this situation, Nguyen-Anh sees it as an improvement on the opportunity's that dominant society would have offered Large, "Large Quintanilla could have worn out the rest of his body muscling crates for a living. Instead, both [Large and Ayala] had bettered themselves" (200).

<sup>10</sup> The language employed to describe Elspeth here minimizes the violence that produced the Brazilian model of racial democracy that she represents.

<sup>11</sup> This is only one of the novel's references to the productive possibilities of *mestizaje*, although perhaps the most heavy-handed. In another example, Dupree notes, "*Life* had this article eight, ten years ago, speculating about the future. Did you know that by 2025, more than half the U.S. population will be like us, people of color? Maybe that's when the madness ends" (414). Here again the novel endorses the view that the end of white dominance will signal the beginning of a more equitable future.

<sup>12</sup> Both *Positive Match* and *Cry No More* problematize the use of surnames to establish ethnic and national identities. Maggie Sepulveda is questioned at least once to see if she claims a Latina identity. Although she does not, her surname, the legacy of a failed marriage, places her racial and national identity in doubt for other

characters. In contrast, Díaz, who is an American citizen, has his national identity questioned by Milla, in part on the basis of his surname.

<sup>13</sup> Note Díaz's reaction soon after meeting Milla:

He liked the way she moved, so smooth and fluid. She wasn't pretty, not that bright American prettiness that made him think of cheerleaders. Her face was strongly molded, with high cheekbones, a firm jawline, dramatic dark brows and lashes. Her hair, worn not quite shoulder length, was a froth of light brown curls, with that startling streak of white in front. Her mouth was completely feminine, soft and full and pink. And her eyes...her brown eyes were the saddest eyes he'd ever seen.

Those eyes made him want to put himself between her and the world, and kill anyone who causes her one more iota of pain. (127-128)

<sup>14</sup> For Stavans, the detective appears to be necessarily masculine: None of the texts that he discusses in *Antiheroes: Mexico and Its Detective Novels* (1997) feature female detectives. In part, this is due to the relatively scarcity of mystery novels featuring women as protagonists, but as I will show later, authors such as Miriam Laurini have developed such female detectives who critique existing gender relations.

<sup>15</sup> The novel itself contrasts racial formations from the U.S. and Mexico: la Morena's father is literally named el Black while she is labeled *morena*. The differences between these formations is under-explored in the novel.

<sup>16</sup> Salvador C. Fernández makes a similar point, when he argues that la Morena's investigation into the case of María Crucita identifies "las estructuras sociales, económicas y culturales que hacen que María Crucita asesine al Comandante Videla y no la identidad del delincuente o las razones personales por la causa del crimen, característica tradicional de la novela policiaca" (135). I argue, however, that la Morena's detective work continuously indicts systemic failures of Mexico's economic, social, and cultural structures as the causes of all crimes, not only the assassination carried out by María Crucita.

<sup>17</sup> For example, la Morena notes,

Siete meses en Nogales y no sé cuántos que les había escrito, cuando llegó la respuesta del Güico. Una cara llena errores de ortografía y de frases incoherentes, como que planchara bien mi ropa, que tendiera bien mi cama, que solo tomara tequila nacional. Pasé toda la tarde tratando de descifrarla.

El código que habíamos establecido se hacía difícil y complicado, especialmente cuando en vez de escribir servicio se escribía cervisio, avitazón, definitibo. (115)

Only after great effort does la Morena succeed in deciphering the encoded letter, only to find an equally puzzling and meaningless message: “OY COMIMOS CACA DE MONO. EL PEC ES PEC. SOI CHILAN. COME CACA TU” (115).

<sup>18</sup> Ramírez-Pimienta and Fernández distinguish between exposing and punishing injustices; however, they argue that “algo es mejor que nada” and validate the efforts of investigative journalists, real and fictional, who document *frontera* crimes (16). This view, however, is rejected in *Morena en rojo*, where it is obvious that la Morena’s articles would be ignored by a society that is unwilling to acknowledge the structural causes of crime.

<sup>19</sup> Stavans does argue that *La bicicleta de Leonardo* should be dismissed: “In the end, *La bicicleta de Leonardo* is just a sideboard of the writer’s artistic defects, an exercise in excess and centrifugence. The reader is left thinking that PITII should stick to what he does best: brief, straightforward novels about politics in which Héctor Belascoarán Shayne is at center stage” (“Review” 792).

<sup>20</sup> *La bicicleta de Leonardo* is the only Mexican detective novel that I discuss which has been translated into English. When possible, I will quote from the English translation, making references as needed to the original Spanish text as necessary.

<sup>21</sup> The critique of neoliberalism that these novels produce is, in itself, significant. As Misha Kokotovic argues in his reading of Central American detective fiction, the detective’s inability to produce a solution to the economic systems that s/he criticizes is not a failure but should instead be viewed as calling attention to “the need for social, economic, and political change” (26).

### Chapter 3: Organ Trafficking in Mexican Popular Film

#### Introduction

In the opening scenes of *Santo en la frontera del terror* (1979), the camera focuses in on cars speeding across a bridge, the muddy waters of a river moving slowly underneath. As the camera pulls back, the river divides the screen. In the foreground, viewers see brush, rocks, and dusty soil. Across the river, there are factories and houses. As the camera pans 180 degrees, the landscape of the foreground is increasingly contrasted with images of capitalist development across the river. After the movie titles finish rolling and a brief wrestling scene concludes, the river reappears, this time in a close-up shot. A series of shots features men—clad only in their underwear—nervously approaching the water. A sheriff and deputy with guns are waiting on the other side: Even without any dialogue, it is clear that this scene takes place on the banks of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo, where the undocumented border-crossers will be repelled by the U.S. authorities.

This footage of the river is one of two paradigmatic establishing shots identified by Claire Fox in *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Images of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo and barbed and chain-link fences have been adopted by cultural producers on both sides of the border to immediately establish borderlands settings (Fox, *Fence* 46). With a title that calls attention to the film's location, the necessity of this establishing shot in *Santo en la frontera del terror* is debatable. Yet in Mexican popular films from the early 1990s, these establishing shots have disappeared, even though the crimes that they depict—organ theft and kidnapping—are linked thematically to action films about the *frontera*



*norte* and presented in the same visual style that characterizes these *fronterizo* films. For example, the opening sequence of *Comerciantes de niños* (1991) bears a strong resemblance to *Santo en la frontera del terror*'s establishing shot: The camera follows the same panning motion, but the landscape that is presented to viewers is that of Costa Rica, quickly followed shots of El Salvador and Guatemala, each following the same pattern of camera movement. Borderlands locations are certainly established in this opening sequence, but the nature and location of the border itself has changed.

*Comerciantes de niños* is neither filmed nor set in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, but this film and others analyzed in this chapter are best understood in the context of traditional border films that *Santo en la frontera del terror* evokes. In this chapter, I explore how the representation of organ trafficking in Mexican popular films is transformed over a period of fifteen years from 1979 to 1994. This requires close analysis of the films themselves, both in terms of content and genre because, as I show, each of these filmic elements influences the other. Furthermore, during this time period, content and genre largely replace an emphasis on the visual aspects of popular films. In the absence of large production budgets and special effects wizardry, these films minimize the significance of the actual on-screen representations of organ trafficking and the locations in which illicit activities occur. As was the case in the detective fiction texts discussed in the previous chapter, the most important aspect of these films are the stories that they tell: Wildly inventive and following their own inconsistent logic, these movies elaborate on the organ theft narratives addressed in Chapter One of this dissertation.

The films that I consider in this chapter offer an opportunity to examine how hemispheric economic changes are reflected in movies produced at key moments in Mexican history, the years of economic decline preceding the 1982 economic crisis and the period leading up to the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. Although these films do not realistically portray the grim realities of the organs trade, they do offer insight into the anxieties about Mexican society triggered by these two key events. Furthermore, they produce a unique construction of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By focusing on the localized impact of global economic change, they expand the geographic range of the *frontera* to include the entire nation, thus transforming Mexico from a sovereign country that controls its own borders to a wholly peripheral space. This newly “borderized space” is defined by the forces of economic and social change that pass through the region. In other words, the construction of the borderlands as a zone through which people pass that is established in the opening scenes of *Santo en la frontera del terror* is replaced by the construction of a borderlands nation that is defined by the social and economic forces that pass through people, transforming them from subjects and citizens into commodities. As a result, the entire country is constructed through references to a borderlands economy that is once again defined by organ trafficking and a growing crisis of insecurity.

*Santo en la frontera del terror* (Rafael Pérez Grovas, 1979), *Comerciantes de niños* (Fernando Durán, 1991), *Secuestro salvaje* (Alejandro Todd, 1992), *Traficantes de muerte* (Aurora Martínez, 1994) and *Trasplantes ilegales* (Aurora Martínez, 1994) are works of *cinema populachero*, films belonging to a genre that rarely receives critical attention. In my analysis of these movies, I will examine how they adapt film

models from Mexico's cinematic history to create a new genre that is heavily influenced by the contemporary *cine de narcos*. Each uses similar tropes and characters to present different responses to the realities of Mexico's economic instability and the insecurity that threatens all levels of Mexican society.

Considered as a group, these films express anxieties about economic stability, personal security, and gender roles during the presidencies of José López Portillo (1976-1982) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). On the one hand, *Santo en la frontera del terror*, *Comerciantes de niños*, and *Trasplantes ilegales* all dismiss the nation-state's ability to protect its citizens; on the other, *Secuestro salvaje* and *Traficantes de muerte* celebrate a paternal model of the state whose criminal justice system defends citizens from globalization's worst excesses. These contradictory responses highlight the difficulty with which complex phenomena are represented in films destined for an audience that lacks formal education but possesses an intimate knowledge of globalization's impact on the Americas. Finally, I discuss the films themselves as products of a globalized model of film production and consumption.

### *Santo en la frontera del terror*

*Santo en la frontera del terror* predates the other four films by at least eleven years, but it is the first Mexican film connect the commodification of a body's labor with the commodification of the body's parts. As a result, this Mexican wrestling movie offers a starting point for a comparative analysis of organ trafficking in later films. My analysis is also facilitated by the intended audience shared by these multiple films. Most commonly defined by social class, the exact number and nature

of this viewing audience is difficult to ascertain in great detail. However, multiple film critics have defined it in general terms, outlining a group working class viewers who possess a low level of formal education. This audience is transnational and includes migrant workers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>1</sup>

This category of film, often pejoratively labeled *cine lépero*, *cine popaluchero* or *cine de churros*, is generally overlooked in most studies of Mexican cinema (García Riera 342). The majority of Mexican films studies work has focused on the “Golden Age” of Mexican film, which Carlos Monsiváis dates from roughly 1935 to 1955 (“Mexican Cinema” 144). More recently, film criticism has emphasized the growth of a “New Mexican Cinema,” directed mainly by graduates of the *Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía* (Sánchez 237) or the *Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos* (Arbeláez 638). Authorized by their directors’ institutional credentials, these films circulate on the art-house circuit and in international film competitions. They are generally distinguished by careful and expensive film production and feature complex plots driven by character development. Furthermore, films from the Golden Age as well as those associated with the “New Mexican Cinema” benefit from state subsidization: Thus, they must be assessed within the context of the post-revolutionary Mexican state’s considerable investment in constructing and maintaining a particular and patriarchal vision of *mexicanidad*.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, the popular films discussed in this chapter are generally wholly commercial vehicles, produced and distributed without state support. As such, they are not subject to the same state-authorized cultural policies that authorize and shore up “official” narratives of the nation. Popular films are also easily identified by their

reliance on action-driven plots, sketchy character development and low-cost production models. Most popular films are produced within a very short period of time (weeks, rather than months) by crews shooting several movies simultaneously at one location (Iglesias, “Reconstructing” 234). These popular movies also benefit from a “star system” in which the appearance of a particular actor almost guarantees immediate success (Iglesias, *Entre Yerba* 117). This leads certain actors to become ubiquitous in these low-brow films. For example, actor Mário Almada has appeared in at least two hundred and seventy-five movies during his film career, and he plays a primary protagonist in three of the four contemporary movies that I discuss (Internet Movie Database).

Derided precisely because of its intended audience and its perceived willingness to cater to their demands, popular film remains a topic that merits further critical attention. Critics agree that mass audiences watch these movies in great numbers, yet relatively few studies of popular film have been undertaken. However, the comments used to justify the study of other forms of Mexican cinema also apply to analyses of popular film. Mora argues that “...the cumulative effect of seeing a number of movies of different themes and genres made by a variety of directors can be to offer some insights into the various ways in which that society sees itself as well as to its tensions and biases” (xiii). García Canclini goes further and asserts that films consolidate and construct national and societal identities (“¿Habrà?” 27). The five contemporary films discussed in the second half of this chapter provide insight into a society in transition; they also present multiple solutions to the problems and tensions that they document. Like the detective novels discussed in the previous chapter, these

works largely eschew aesthetics in favor of the plot itself. As a result, their plots become arguments in and of themselves, offering viewers an opportunity to analyze the solutions they propose to the complicated scenarios that they present.

While they share a common sensationalist approach to the subject of organ trafficking, this group of films combine different genres and emerge at distinct historical moments. *Santo en la frontera del terror* works within the confines of the post-World War II *cine de luchadores* and also repeats key elements of the immigration films that became tremendously popular during the 1970s and which continue to attract audiences today (Maciel and García-Acevedo 174). This film also incorporates aspects of the *cabaretera* films of the 1950s (Arbeláez 640). The resulting film is unique, one of the last in a cycle of Santo films that were losing popularity.

The question of genre in *Santo en la frontera del terror* is particularly significant. As is the case in most genre films, the movie's content conforms to audience expectations. In *Santo en la frontera del terror*, the formulas of Mexican wrestling films establish a clear division between good and evil. As in all of his films, Santo, *el enmasacardo de plata*, is pitted against a diabolical enemy: Dr. Sombra, the ominously named physician who attends to *bracero* workers on a large ranch owned by an absentee landlord, the Anglo American Mr. Richards. The patterns established by the forty-eight *lucha libre* films starring Santo that precede *Santo en la frontera del terror* make it obvious to viewers that his adversary will be the mad doctor. An evil scientist clearly follows the pattern of Santo's other vanquished foes, which include vampires, mummies, Martians and werewolves.

Thus, laughable as it may seem, the development of a plotline in which Dr. Sombra harvests and sells the migrant workers' organs in order to further his own diabolical plans is entirely conceivable within this cycle of films. The horrific evil that Dr. Sombra represents requires the intervention of a hero like Santo.

The inclusion of elements of *cinema de mojadados*, however, plays with audience expectations about just who Santo's rival will be. Popularized by a long-running series of films including *Espaldas mojadadas* (1954) and *Deportados* (1975), films about undocumented immigration northward consolidated an image of U.S. antagonism towards Mexican migrant workers. In particular, Mexican immigration films clearly demonstrate the perils of crossing the border: Women lose their moral compass, children abandon the ideal of filial respect, and workers are routinely exploited, returning to Mexico penniless and alone. Given this genre blueprint, viewers would expect Mr. Richards to join Dr. Sombra in fighting Santo and logically assume that he is heavily involved in Dr. Sombra's organ-selling scheme. Yet Mr. Richards is redeemed by his ignorance of Dr. Sombra's activities and his admiration for his Mexican laborers' honesty and hard-working ways. By altering the standard plotline of migration films, *Santo en la frontera del terror* erases much of the political impact of the film's comparison of commodified bodies (the laboring *braceros*) and commodified body parts (the eyeballs floating in a jar). Instead, the combination of *lucha libre* and migrant film conventions renders the subject of organ trafficking laughable.

*Santo en la frontera del terror* also incorporates yet another genre of Mexican popular film. Prior to the explosion of Mexican wrestling films in the late 1940s and

early 1950s, *cabaretera* films appeared in increasingly large numbers. These movies, featuring the lives of virtuous women forced to work in cabarets and bars of ill-repute, generally conclude with their redemption and safe return home. In *Santo en la frontera del terror*, Azucena fills the role of the *cabaretera*: Despite harassment from her male clientele, Azucena dances and sings in a nightclub in order to earn money for an operation that will restore her blind younger sister's sight. Her boyfriend, Fernando, opts to work on Mr. Richards' ranch in order to redeem Azucena through marriage after paying for her sister's surgery. His choice to work as a *bracero* is, of course, a bad one: The audience all but knows that Fernando's plan is doomed as soon as he explains that "...*mañana me voy a trabajar en el otro lado y con muy bueno pago*" on Mr. Richards' ranch, who is "*un tipo que se ve derecho.*" This generic redemption plotline is particularly significant because it positions Azucena as a damsel in distress, unable to save herself (or her sister) from the cabaret and the men it attracts. As a result, the film avoids political commentary by presenting Fernando as a relatively privileged *bracero*, driven to work in the U.S. not by poverty or a lack of other employment options, but out of a desire to save the woman he loves. Accordingly, Fernando becomes a secondary protagonist in the film, not heroic enough to single-handedly confront Dr. Sombra, but strong enough to back Santo in his fight against evil.

The genres evoked by *Santo en la frontera del terror* combine to both thwart and support the formulaic plots that audiences had come to expect. The alliance between an Anglo rancher, an oppressed worker and a cultural icon defuses the antagonism that was assumed to exist between U.S. property owners and Mexican



migrant laborers. In granting Mr. Richards even a minor role in combating Dr. Sombra, the film once again sidesteps political commentary and increases its comedic value. *Santo en la frontera del terror* adheres most closely to genre formulas only in depicting Azucena and Fernando's happy reunion, but the film ends before resolving the question of how Fernando and Azucena will be able to pay for their wedding. This happy ending also allows the film to undermine its earlier emphasis on the unpaid *bracero* worker. The resulting film is thoroughly laughable, a comedy in which Santo fights a battle deprived of any political content. As a result, critics have derided the film, labeling it "[t]he single most improbable and far-fetched immigration film to date" (Maciel and García-Acevedo 177).

This mixture of *lucha libre*, *mojado* and *cabaretera* genres also arrives at a strange moment in Mexican history. Every genre is tied to a particular historical moment, and the varieties combined in this film were not simultaneously successful. In particular, wrestling movies had largely seen their popularity fade. By the time that *Santo en la frontera del terror* premiered in 1981, the *lucha libre* genre (or at least those films featuring Santo) was losing ground, both in terms of the number of films produced and with regard to its ability to attract large audiences. Likewise, films about Mexican migration to the U.S. were also undergoing a significant shift. A new emphasis on vilifying Anglo-Americans for their oppression of Mexican migrants had previous depictions of the hazards of working in the U.S. *Santo en la frontera del terror* appeared long after the first wave of *cabaretera* films concluded in 1952. Furthermore, by depicting the plight of undocumented workers engaged in agricultural work, the film gestures back in time to the *Bracero* project, which

concluded in 1961. The director's choices here are puzzling, given that Rafael Pérez Grovas at least moderately successful and had proven himself capable of producing films whose formulaic tendencies nearly assured a wide audience. Those choices are more understandable when placed in the larger sociohistoric context in which *Santo en la frontera del terror* was produced and consumed. They are indicative of the film's tendency to contrast the situations of past and present Mexican workers and subjects. Yet the film's combination of genres acts to dispel any political implications that might arise from the images that it presents.

Although this Santo film was produced during the José López Portillo presidency, a *sexenio* characterized by increased censorship in Mexican film, this fact alone does not explain the film's use of comedy to avoid political tensions. The context of its production, the three year span between 1979 and 1981, was a moment of societal and economic crisis. Following the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, alienated youth became increasingly bitter about the manner in which they believed the ideals of the Mexican Revolution had been betrayed (Meyer and Sherman 675). This disillusionment became stronger as José López Portillo ended the brief *abertura democrática* that had characterized the 1970-1976 term of the previous president, Luis Echeverría (Berg 51). Despite the developmentalist rhetoric of both politicians, Mexico had neither become a member of the "First World" nor had it reduced the gap between the wealthy and the poor.

The 1970s were also marked by increased concern about the Mexican economy. During the waning years of the Echeverría presidency, Mexico slid into an economic crisis that resulted in the 1976 peso devaluation, a move prompted by the

elite's lack of confidence in the national economy (Meyer and Sherman 675). Even the prosperous oil industry could not keep the economy afloat, and by the end of the 1970s, the unemployment rate had climbed to nearly twenty-five percent, while almost fifty percent of the population was underemployed (675). Although the worst was yet to come during the 1982 economic crisis, the period during which *Santo en la frontera del terror* was produced was one of considerable economic uncertainty. The growth of the Mexican oil industry had failed to stimulate overall economic growth, and the weaknesses of the national economy were becoming increasingly apparent.

The López Portillo *sexenio* also saw Mexico undergo a rapid demographic transformation. Traditional Catholic attitudes towards birth control, along with former President Echeverría's insistence that birth control was unnecessary, fueled a dramatic population increase (709). During the decade of the 1970s, the population grew from nearly 50 million to 70 million people (706). Sustained (if not increased) rates of rural poverty led to an increase in rural to urban migration, where high unemployment rates drove men northward in search of jobs (Berg 55). This reality undermined the petroleum-based political might that López Portillo sought to demonstrate in his foreign relations with the U.S. (Meyer and Sherman 685).

Despite its apparent lack of explicit political commentary, *Santo en la frontera del terror* uses the trope of the unhappy *bracero* in order to comment upon these difficult economic and social times. By reproducing, even in laughable terms, a history of undocumented immigration to the U.S., *Santo en la frontera del terror* gestures back in time in order to comment on the conditions of film's viewing audience. In 1942, faced with a shortage of male workers due to WWII, Franklin D.

Roosevelt and Manuel Avila Camacho signed an accord that established the Emergency Farm Labor Program (known as the *Bracero* Program), formalizing a system of limited legal immigration to the U.S. for temporary work in the agricultural sector. The *Bracero* Program was extended several times and lasted until 1964 but did not end undocumented immigration to the U.S. Instead, as Juan Gómez-Quiñones and David Maciel demonstrate, the *Bracero* Program was paralleled by an increase in the employment of undocumented workers, who lost even the loosely regulated rights guaranteed by the formal agreement (40). The depiction of undocumented *bracero* workers in *Santo en la frontera del terror* demonstrates a system that is exploitative of Mexican labor.

This representation, however, is not indicative of changes in the U.S.-Mexico border region during the 1970s. Following the end of the *Bracero* program, Mexico instituted the Border Industrialization Program, which was intended to absorb the nation's surplus labor. The creation of a "twin plants" manufacturing model led multiple multinational firms to establish *maquiladoras* in the Mexican border states. While the *maquilas* were intended to ease male unemployment, managers quickly targeted women as potential employees. By 1985, *maquiladoras* overwhelmingly depended on a female workforce, a reality that changed traditional gender roles as well as internal migration patterns within Mexico (Tiano 22). *Santo en la frontera del terror*, however, ignores the changing reality of women workers in the border region in favor of replicating the clichéd image of the *cabaretera* singer. In doing so, the film sends a conservative message arguing that work is damaging to women: Azucena's work in the cabaret is ultimately demeaning and places her in danger.

Although the film's multiple plot-lines refer to Mexico's stagnant economy and societal tensions in the late 1970s, those anxieties are largely displaced through comedy. As noted above, much of that displacement occurs through film's historic setting. Any remaining tension is eliminated by the generic conclusions prescribed by the film's multiple genres. *Lucha libre* and *carabetera* films require a happy ending; audiences know that the wrong-doers will be punished and that victimized women will find redemption. The many *mojado* films released prior to 1979 made it clear that the exploited worker, Fernando, would find his way back to Mexico, sadder and poorer, yet wiser. To fulfill these generic constraints and vanquish Dr. Sombra, the film requires an intervention as unrealistic as the organ trafficking threat that it presents. By staging a battle between Santo and Dr. Sombra, the movie simultaneously satisfies its popular audience and undermines its own comparison between the economic and social conditions depicted on-screen and Mexico's changing reality.

This point is worth repeating: *Santo en la frontera del terror* avoids presenting a viable solution to the problems that it documents. Neither Azucena nor the workers can escape the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. Instead, the film relies upon Santo's intercession in order to resolve Azucena's familial problems and to rescue Fernando and his compatriots on the other side of the border. Santo acts as a *deus ex machina* whose timely appearances allow the film to resolve its anxieties while avoiding a thorough critique of the problems that it has documented.

### Organ Trafficking in Contemporary Thrillers

Issues of genre in the other four movies that I consider here are far less complicated. While *Santo en la frontera del terror* is situated at the intersection of several genres, *Comerciantes de niños*, *Trasplantes ilegales*, *Secuestro salvaje* and *Traficantes de muerte* draw upon two models from Mexican film history. On the one hand, all invoke the familial melodrama, a genre that is near-ubiquitous in the history of Mexican cinema. On the other, all draw heavily from *narcocinema*'s suspense and action-filled films about drug trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border. This combination of tear-jerking melodrama and gun-filled action sequences merges past and contemporary popular audience preferences.

As was the case in my previous discussion of *Santo en la frontera del terror*, this combination of genres is noteworthy. As Ana López explains, the melodrama is “deeply embedded” in Mexican culture (“Tears” 150). Both López and Carlos Monsiváis see in the melodrama a form of contradictory resistance through its hyperbolic take on Hollywood’s classical narrative films (150). Melodrama’s excesses of emotion, plot complications, and acting signal the cooptation of a Hollywood genre that is remade according to Mexican aesthetics, perhaps most notably in the sentimentalism that characterizes many Golden Age films. In contrast, the thriller or, more specifically, the *cine de narcos*, eschews this sentimentality in favor of what García Canclini labels an “aesthetics of action” (*Consumers* 117).

The excesses that define the melodrama are also present in the contemporary Mexican thriller, albeit in a different form. The Mexican thriller’s desire to replicate

Hollywood-style action films without corresponding budgets or technical skills leads to an emphasis on violence and action that becomes nearly parodic:

*Fruto de la imitación descarada, del culto a la pobreza en materia de efectos especiales, el thriller en América Latina suple con parodias las emociones genuinas que la invocación del alto riesgo debería provocar. Los espectadores se divierten con el universo de cartón piedra, los trucos lamentables, los asesinos que—para ganarle la mano a las balas—se derrumban antes de que alguien dispare. (Monsiváis, “South” 75-76)*

The impact of excessive violence and action is difficult to assess. As Monsiváis notes, the absence of the advanced special effects common in Hollywood thrillers undermines the visual impact of these films. Yet however laughable the results, it is important to keep in mind that the excess of gunfights and car chases is intended to simulate the violence and gore that characterize some Hollywood productions (for example, Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill I* and *II*). However incomplete the imitation, the *cine de narcos*’ adoption of ultra-violence parallels Mexican melodrama’s excessive embrace of sentimentality as a way of reproducing a Hollywood genre following Mexican aesthetics.

In contrast with the melodrama, the thriller in Mexico does not entirely succeed in co-opting its Hollywood model. According to Monsiváis, despite its attempts to reflect purported Mexican realities—hence the numerous narco-trafficking films—the Mexican thriller can only expose popular frustrations through a thoroughly Americanized vehicle (76). However, the *cine de narcos* does integrate a lengthy Mexican tradition of incorporating musical interludes (Gonzalez). Where the earliest

Golden Age *ranchera* films included popular songs, the first drug trafficking films present *narcocorridos* popularized by groups like *Los Tigres del Norte* (Gonzalez). Cameo appearances and performances by other *narcocorrido* singers are common in the *cine de narcos* and offer a clear distinction from the standard Hollywood thriller.

The blending of these two genres results in a cinema of organ trafficking that unevenly balances portrayals of families in turmoil with representations of a nation under siege by organ traffickers. These films are best understood as an attempt to merge the aesthetics of Mexican melodrama with a vision of the *cine de narcos* that imitates the Hollywood model by eliminating musical interludes.<sup>3</sup> In another departure from the *cine de narcos* model, these films in no way celebrate the organ traffickers. Instead, they are presented as evil and maniacal at worst, bumbling and inefficient at best. Where narcofilms often celebrate the trafficker as an outlaw hero, these movies uniformly demonize the organs trade and its participants. While this might seem self-evident—who would make a kidney thief a hero?—it is noteworthy. The U.S.-Mexico borderlands are portrayed as a lawless region in narcofilms, a prime breeding ground for entrepreneurs who can move a high-profit product to a region where it is in high demand. Despite the allegations that organ trafficking films make about the riches to be made by selling body parts, the traffickers never profit from their actions, and the enterprise is deemed morally reprehensible where drug sales are not.

By uniformly demonizing illicit organ sales, these films shift the focus from the traffickers to their victims. Each of these films centralizes the role of the family as a Mexican institution, either by explicitly depicting scenes of familial reunification



or by documenting its fragility. In the case of *Comerciantes de niños* and *Secuestro salvaje*, the organs of kidnapped children will be harvested if their families are not able to find them soon enough. *Trasplantes ilegales* and *Traficantes de muerte* document the negative effects of families torn apart. In *Trasplantes ilegales*, the loss of a mother drives a man to father children for the sole purpose of selling their organs. *Traficantes de muerte* laments the fate of nameless children whose corpses serve as evidence of organ trafficking. The destruction of the family lies at the heart of these films; heavy-handed scenes of sobbing mothers and sobering commentaries offered over children's corpses make it clear that this institution is under attack.

The use of the family as an allegorical stand-in for the nation has a long history in Latin America, and is perhaps most notable in the national romances discussed in Doris Summers' *Foundational Fictions* (1984). In Mexican film, however, representations of the family have also been manipulated in order to consolidate national identities and advance varying arguments about the morality of its citizens.<sup>4</sup> In its earliest depictions, the Mexican family appeared as a "*sagrada institución que protege a sus miembros de los embates del mundo exterior*" (Aviña 138). Attacks on the family in Golden Age cinema, consequently, are blows to *the* foundational building block of Mexican society and all it represents, interpreted by Charles Berg to include "virtually *everything*: capitalism, patriarchy, and *machismo*" (21). At the heart of these national melodramas, then, lie the mothers: self-abnegating martyrs whose dilemmas reveal the contradictory nature of the melodramatic family. As Ana López persuasively argues, women's roles in familial melodramas position them within an institution (the family) that possesses "a contradictory symbolic status

as a site for the crystallization of tensions between traditional patriarchal values (especially the cult of machismo) and modernizing tendencies and as a source of maternal support and nurturing that the secular state could not replace” (“Tears” 153).

Contemporary organ trafficking films engage this dynamic tension between the family as a site informed by patriarchal authority that is both threatened and protected by state intervention. This results in formulaic plots that vacillate between weepy sentimentality and an aesthetics of violence that privileges direct (preferably aggressive) action over dialogue, democratic intervention or a discussion of the root causes of the commodification of bodies that they depict. The films’ resolutions to the problem of trafficking are compelled by genre constraints to be both bloody and tragic, but as further analysis demonstrates, the solutions proposed in these films are diverse as they are improbable. As was the case in *Santo en la frontera del terror*, the representation of organ trafficking in these movies presents a opportunity to work out anxieties and tensions raised by the social and economic contexts in which they were filmed.

Before beginning an analysis of the individual films, I would like to concentrate for a moment on two of the significant changes visible in these later films: the disappearance of the physical border and a shift in the meanings attributed to organ trafficking. In these films, the national border separating Mexico and the U.S. has vanished, with startling consequences for the representation of Mexico in these films. In *Santo en la frontera del terror*, Mexico was a place that characters like Fernando could leave, but it was also the home of important cultural icons like Santo, who could be called upon to protect the nation and its citizens. In

*Comerciantes de niños, Transplantes ilegales, Secuestro salvaje, and Traficantes de muerte*, the absence of national borders signals that the nation is no longer a physical space that characters can leave. Instead, they are trapped within a space that is under siege from globalizing economic forces. Where *narcocinema*'s focus on drug trafficking ties films to specific locations along the U.S.-Mexico border, the organ trafficking films that I discuss distribute the threat of organ theft throughout the entire country: The natural and built landscapes of Veracruz, Hidalgo, and the Distrito Federal all become crime scenes, signaling the extent to which the entire nation serves as a metaphorical borderlands.

The "borderization" of the nation is attributed to globalization, represented in its most vile form through organ trafficking. In *Santo en la frontera del terror*, organ trafficking was simply a part of Dr. Sombra's plan to perfect a human brain transplant, a plot mechanism for creating an enemy worthy of Santo's intervention. In contemporary trafficking films, organ trafficking is evil in and of itself, and the reality of its existence is presumed. Given the ludicrous scenarios proposed in this set of films, it is clear that they do not seek to present a realistic portrayal of organ sales. These texts avoid a detailed discussion of how the organs are harvested, transported and transplanted; instead, they offer vague scenarios that present trafficking as a societal and economic threat targeting the family, the fundamental building block of the nation. Although they hint at transnational conspiracies and international trafficking rings, these films maintain a focus on the local impact of a purportedly global industry. The larger ramifications of the organs trade are ignored in favor of emphasizing the local impact that the illicit trade has on Mexico. In all of these films,

organ trafficking is portrayed as an economic transaction that erases the humanity of both the traffickers and the victims and that strikes at the heart of the family, and hence the nation. Once this point is recognized, it becomes particularly interesting to see what defenses these films mobilize against this economic and societal threat. In the absence of a superhero like Santo, which figures and institutions are called into action to protect the innocent?

*Families that Must Save Themselves: Comerciantes de niños and Trasplantes Ilegales*

Both Fernando Durán's *Comerciantes de niños* (1991) and Aurora Martínez's *Trasplantes ilegales* (1994) share a similar concern for the family. *Comerciantes de niños* presents Arturo, a middle-class Guatemalan rancher, and his struggle to recover his kidnapped son, Tony. His investigations lead Arturo to Mexico City, where he encounters a Mexican father searching for his abducted son. Similarly, *Trasplantes ilegales* centers on the combined efforts of a private investigator, Saúl, and his father, Mario, to identify the corpse of a young child whose organs have been removed and sold. In both of these films, the protagonists are members of an upwardly mobile middle class who are victimized by the incursion of crime into their families and homes.

*Comerciantes de niños* is particularly significant due to its portrayal of Arturo's investigation of his son Tony's disappearance. Modeled on the traditional *macho* hero, Arturo is entrusted with the task of restoring the balance of his world: Like his predecessors in Golden Age *ranchera* films, Arturo's struggle is ultimately one that will allow him to re-establish "a well-ordered status quo" within his household (Berg 98). Tony's kidnapping obviously destabilizes the peaceful

domesticity that characterizes scenes of the family chatting in the kitchen. More importantly, this intrusion into the domestic sphere pushes Arturo from the countryside to city, and forces him to engage in increasingly violent acts. The mild manner with which he confronts the Jewish storeowner in his *pueblo* quickly transforms into a willingness to kill to regain his son when he reaches the urban nightmare of Mexico City. Following the pattern of on-screen *machismo*, the more violent Arturo becomes, the more successful he is (97). Arturo's transformation in the city reflects a reaction to the dehumanized urban space, and his violence should be read as an attempt to reinscribe traditional patriarchal values that have been replaced through the country's industrialization (López 153). This opposition between the rural and the urban is one that has endured throughout Mexican film history; its replication here demonstrates that the specter of organ traffickers exaggerates to the furthest extent the city's departure from traditional norms and its destruction of a moral order based on the family.

Most significantly, Arturo's actions demonstrate a disregard for the nation-state and its official criminal justice systems. The Guatemalan police are useless, and their Mexican counterparts are presumed to be so corrupt that Arturo never even contacts them. The role of the state is completely overwritten by the right and responsibility of the *pater familias* to defend what is his. A model of patriarchal authority supersedes that of a modern nation-state. Arturo succeeds in reuniting his family because precisely because he works outside of the law. Although he benefits from the timely (and inexplicable) intervention of two Los Angeles Police Department detectives, Arturo's triumph over the organ traffickers results from his

refusal to recognize any authority larger than his own. While the melodramatic tendencies of *Comerciantes de niños* predict a teary scene of familial reunification, the means by which this family will be brought together are largely determined by the film's reliance on the familiar trope of the *macho* hero who relies on brute violence to achieve his goals.

*Trasplantes ilegales*, however, moves far from this model. The industrialization and modernization that Arturo confronts in *Comerciantes de niños* is wholeheartedly embraced in *Trasplantes ilegales*. Technological advances take the place of brute violence. The film credits DNA analysis with miraculous powers that enable Mario to develop a reliable portrait of an organ trafficker based solely on a strand of hair. Looking seriously into the camera, Mario informs the audience several times that DNA analysis “*es más segura que la huella digital.*” The film's insistence on the reliability of forensic science serves to persuade viewers that any criminal, no matter how inhuman, can be brought to justice without violence. Mario's implacable nature and calm demeanor stand in contrast to Arturo's rage.

Technology, however, cannot fully empower the head of the household. Mario is shown to be blind to the faults of his own family. Mario's failure to recognize that his adopted son Sérgio is the trafficker that they seek places the rest of the family—in particular, his unborn grandchild—in danger. Mario's attempts to cajole Sérgio into surrender fail, and he must ultimately kill his son. With this conclusion, *Trasplantes ilegales* sends a mixed message: On the one hand, modern technology holds the potential to solve humanity's worst crimes. On the other, not even technology can prevent those crimes, so the family must resort to violence to

protect itself. Given that transplants themselves are only made possible by technological breakthroughs, the film holds modern technology responsible for both facilitating and impeding an unquestioned notion of “progress.” Yes, the film agrees with Mario, technology offers information that is even more reliable than a fingerprint, but it also provides Sérgio with a motive for slaughtering his own children. *Trasplantes ilegales* resolves this dilemma over the “true” nature of technology by reaffirming the traditional view that identity is inscribed in the blood.

With this conclusion, *Trasplantes ilegales* advances a view of identity that is biologically determined. While not explored in-depth in the film, Sérgio’s original adoption appears to motivate him to harvest and sell his own children’s organs. Sérgio’s constant refrain, that he was nothing more than an unloved “*maldito recogido*” is the film’s explanation for his warped sensibilities. The fact that he is not related by blood to his adopted family destabilizes Sérgio and the family unit that took him in. By depicting how adoption weakens the familial loyalties usually determined by blood ties, this film argues that Sérgio’s adoption results in his decision to sell infant organs. This representation of familial failure is a far cry from the idealized images that populated Golden Age films: Rather than protect its own, the family cannibalizes itself in the name of profit.

Paradoxically, however, the film holds out a faint hope for a reconstruction of the traditional familial model in its concluding scene: As Saúl and Mario escort Andrea to the hospital to deliver her baby, the film gestures at the possibility of a family that will reproduce itself successfully. Both Saúl and his father have demonstrated that they too can defend their family from incursions. Whether

wielding a gun or a knitting needle, this family's male protectors will not be defeated again. In other words, this film's conclusion advocates a new model of male agency, one that will combine a *machista* legacy with a more nuanced understanding of the modern technologies that now inform the nation's progress. This positivist view, however, remains rooted in a colonial obsession with *pureza de sangre*.<sup>5</sup>

*The State Saves the Day: Secuestro salvaje and Traficantes de muerte*

On the other hand, neither *Secuestro salvaje* nor *Traficantes de muerte* follows the patterns modeled by *Comerciantes de niños* and *Trasplantes ilegales*. The male patriarchs featured in the latter two films are replaced by agents of the state. In both *Secuestro salvaje* and *Traficantes de muerte*, the patriarchal authority of the father is superseded by that of the state. Although organ trafficking still threatens the sanctity of the Mexican family, the nature of its redemption varies tremendously.

*Secuestro salvaje* presents the kidnapping of a group of young schoolchildren. After being ambushed during a field trip, the children, their teacher, Marta Miranda, and their driver, are detained by Doctor Carlos Rivera. Their disappearance is investigated by Comandante Torres and Agente Tobar, who recognize that the kidnapping is related to a previously detected organ trafficking ring. The film's tension arises from the contrast between Torres and Tobar's painfully slow investigation and the increasing pace of Dr. Rivera's plans to kill all the kidnapped children. Multiple families have been torn apart in this kidnapping, and the two policemen assume the role played by the head of the family in *Comerciantes de niños* and *Trasplantes ilegales*. In fact, these two policemen assume these responsibilities so thoroughly that the film is able to avoid any mention of the kidnapped children's



real families. *Secuestro salvaje* thereby alters the traditional familial melodrama by shifting the plot from one of familial reunification and redemption to a discussion of the state's ability to protect its citizens. Any implication that the state might be complicit in organ trafficking is ignored.

A similar shift in focus occurs in *Traficantes de muerte*. In this film, the families of kidnapped children are also absent, and the victims themselves receive little or no screen time. Rather than evoke sympathy for the children whose organs are trafficked, this film seeks to provoke audience sympathies for the two detectives who struggle to identify the charred remains of the bodies they discover in the small town of Santa Clara. *Aguacil* Alvaro Jiménez and Doctor Efraín Arias work together, combining the local influence of the state's provincial criminal justice apparatus with the medical knowledge that the doctor has brought with him from in his retirement from an unnamed city. Once again, the film opposes the rural and urban spaces of the nation, with the urban space perceived to be dehumanizing: Doctor Arias lost his job because he performed a pro-bono surgery on an impoverished patient.

Recognizing that the poor also have a right to health care led to Dr. Arias' dismissal.

Unfortunately, the countryside does not pose an idyllic retreat for the good doctor. Instead, it has been invaded by the dehumanizing forces of the city: Doctor Rivera has also retreated to Santa Clara in order to carry out his trafficking plans. In order to neutralize the threat posed by organ traffickers, two types of guardians must be united: The local police as a state authority that can regulate the actions of citizens within a small, provincial area, and a surgeon, who attends to the health of the townspeople. Healthy bodies are thus equated with healthy communities.

Of course, there is one key difference between these two films. *Secuestro salvaje* emphasizes the large role that Marta's actions play in saving the children. She first succeeds in escaping the compound in which she and the children are being held, a task at which her male companions fail. Later, Marta evades assassins who attempt to kill her in the hospital, and her success is contrasted against the futile efforts of the male police force assigned to protect her. Finally, Marta leads Torres and Tobar back to the traffickers and then escorts the children to safety. As a female character, Marta is given much more agency than any other woman in this set of films. Her role as the children's guardian calls attention to larger issues of female representation in these films, a subject that I will touch on later in this chapter. For now, it is enough to see Marta's successful alliance with the local police as one that merges the state's official criminal justice system with its official teaching apparatus.

Each of these four films advances a conflicting message about the ability of Mexican society to protect itself against the threat posed by organ traffickers. Each, however, relies on a trope that uses the family to represent Mexico as a whole. Through these allegories, viewers learn that economic threats also seek to strike at the heart of the nation, by tearing families apart. The contradictory messages sent by these films both reinforce and undermine the strength of this institution, one that was long believed to encapsulate the nation's strength and viability. On the one hand, both *Comerciantes de niños* and *Trasplantes ilegales* argue that only the family can save itself. On the other, *Secuestro salvaje* and *Traficantes de muerte* posit that only the state can save the larger Mexican family, as that institution's defenselessness has already been demonstrated by the corpses of innocent children. Yet there are still

discrepancies in these strategies: *Comerciantes de niños* advocates brute force while *Trasplantes ilegales* and *Traficantes de muerte* call for an increased use of modern technologies of detection. And *Secuestro salvaje* stands alone in advocating a role for the nurturing educator—or women at all—in redeeming Mexican society. These inconsistent responses to the same phenomenon require additional contextual information in order to be fully understood.

### Context and Subtext in NAFTA-era Films

The production and premiere dates for these four films are particularly significant. *Comerciantes de niños* was both filmed and released in 1991 and was quickly followed by *Secuestro salvaje*, whose filming began in 1992 with a premiere in 1994, also the year in which *Traficantes de muerte* and *Trasplantes ilegales* were released. This year was also defined by the ratification and implementation of NAFTA. These four movies, then, considered as NAFTA-era cinema, reveal a great deal about the anxieties and tensions that dominated Mexico during the run-up to the ratification, a time period that coincided with the *sexenio* of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994).

Salinas campaigned on a platform that promised progress through modernization. Claiming that the Mexican Revolution and its ideals were dead, Salinas argued that technology and further industrialization offered an end to the nation's enduring poverty. For a nation still recovering from the 1982 peso crisis, Salinas promoted a national identity that endorsed a new vision of positivism, one which rewarded technological progress and rejected the agrarian image of the past. It is hard to underestimate the impact of this new national identity. The Revolution's

guiding principles had long played an important role in the country, and they had been institutionalized by the dominant political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). By declaring that the Revolution was dead, Salinas effectively dismantled the axis around which Mexico had consolidated its national identity. Where the old identity had been based in the nation's agrarian past, Salinas proposed an urbanized future, calling into question the role that *campesinos* would play in his new Mexico. It comes as little surprise, then, that all four of the pre-NAFTA organ trafficking films portray a threat that overwhelmingly targets rural areas. In each film, the one-time guardians of the nation's identity are turned into commodities. The ensuing organ trafficking scenarios call into question the nation's progress by attributing its previous success to the consumption of its own disenfranchised citizens. Child victims also indicate that this new society cannot reproduce itself.

In addition to radically restructuring the PRI's relationship to the ideals of the Revolution, Salinas also enacted structural reforms along neoliberal lines that amounted to a reshaping of the government's control of the national economy. Arguing for a smaller role for the state, Salinas privatized government-owned companies in many sectors of the economy, including finance (banks), entertainment (television networks), infrastructure (road construction, airlines), mining and steel production, and telecommunications (telephone companies). Previously, the government owned over a thousand companies; more than 85% were privatized by 1992 (Meyer, Sherman and Deeds 672). While the effects of these privatizations are subject to debate, it is clear that large job numbers of workers did lose their jobs as a result of Salinas' policies: "Between 1983 and 1993, an estimated 400,000 industrial

jobs were lost as a result of privatization. Virtually every privatized company reduced the size of its work force. Many more jobs were lost as plants were simply closed” (Russell 191).

This change in the role of the state, of course, does not pass unnoticed in these films. Tensions about the state’s ability to protect its citizens not only document a crisis in personal security but also reflect an underlying uneasiness with the rapid changes in the role of the nation-state. For years, pursuit of import substitution policies led to protectionist regimes in which the state sought to promote economic growth through high tariffs on imported goods and direct intervention by controlling and owning state companies. The rapid dismantling of these policies under Salinas upset years of precedent. The complete avoidance of any discussion of the state and its institutions as guarantors of citizens’ rights in *Comerciantes de niños* and *Trasplantes ilegales* can be read in relation to these changes: As the imprint of the state shrank, so did its ability to provide services to its citizens.

The role of technology in this new nation is also debated in these films. Its dismissal in *Comerciantes de niños* is hardly insignificant; the film calls for a return to the past, when the strength and dedication of a father to his family could overcome any obstacle. After all, Arturo succeeds in breaking up a trafficking ring whose very existence depends upon the technological advances in medicine that made organ transplantation a reality. On the other hand, Salinas’ positivist vision is endorsed in *Trasplantes ilegales*. Here, modernity and technology present a defense against the barbarity that would allow a father to sell the organs of his own children.

Nor is it insignificant that the traffickers' victims are overwhelmingly middle class, not the poor and/or indigenous figures who occupy the nation's margins. Although Salinas did engage in a wholesale neoliberal restructuring of the government, he did deviate from neoliberal orthodoxy by creating *Solidaridad*, an anti-poverty program that made impressive strides towards ameliorating the living conditions of the nation's poorest citizens.<sup>6</sup> Despite these gains, however, *Solidaridad* was unable to cushion the middle-class from an ever-increasing wealth gap. By the end of 1990, a study published in *Proceso*<sup>7</sup> found that "...the wealthiest 10% of the population received 41 percent of the gross domestic product, while the bottom 20 percent only received 3 percent" (quoted in Russell 279). Furthermore, by 1994, unemployment levels had increased:

*"El desempleo, de acuerdo con casi cualquiera de las numerosas definiciones que ofrece el Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Información (INEGI), había aumentado. Las cifras fluctuaban entre el desempleo abierto de alrededor de 3% de la PEA reportado por el gobierno hasta casi 30% de acuerdo con otras fuentes y definiciones."* (Gollás 249)

The increase in unemployment had a negative impact on the Mexican middle class: As Alejandro José Campos Azuara notes, the 1990s was characterized for many by a descent into poverty: "*Grandes grupos sociales descendieron hacia el umbral de la pobreza y otros engrosaron la capa social de la extrema pobreza*" (Campos Azuara 53).

As the middle class lost ground, poverty became a threat to those who previously believed themselves to be financially secure. In these films, the social

status of the traffickers' victims is presented in coded terms: The families whose children are targeted are always shown in their homes, which feature modern appliances and offer evidence of a comfortable lifestyle. In *Comerciantes de niños*, Arturo is a prosperous farmer, about to purchase a new tractor and take his family on vacation. The main characters in *Secuestro salvaje*, *Traficantes de muerte*, and *Trasplantes ilegales* are professionals who represent a wide range of employment sectors. As teachers, private investigators, and surgeons, these protagonists demonstrate the extent to which insecurity targeted the middle class.

The poor and marginalized are most notable for their absence in these films. Indigenous figures appear only briefly in two films: In *Comerciantes de niños*, indigenous women in traditional Mayan *traje* pass by Arturo and his wife as they wait outside the police station. The contrast between their costumes is striking and emphasizes the social distance between the two groups. Likewise, an actor performing as an indigenous *campesino* is used to highlight the skills and social superiority of Doctor Arias and *Aguacil* Jiménez in *Traficantes de muerte*. Distinguishable by his dress, speech patterns and “hopping, short-stepping gait,” the *campesino*'s insistence that the traffickers are *brujos* is rendered laughable by the state's representatives' recognition of the existence of a trafficking network (Berg 138). By asking audiences to identify organ trafficking as a threat that targets the middle class, these films document the economic instability that affected countless middle-class citizens during the Salinas *sexenio*.

Depictions of middle-class vulnerability also emphasize a lack of personal security. Along with financial stability, personal security became an increasingly

important issue during Salinas' period in office. Concurrent with (and, some would argue, a consequence of) the increase in the wealth gap, the level of violence in Mexican society increased. This upsurge in violence was most apparent in an increase in drug trafficking and kidnappings for ransom. While the history of drug trafficking in Mexico dates back to at least 1914, the trade intensified in the early 1980s shortly before Salinas assumed the presidency (Astorga 429). The growth of cocaine's popularity in the U.S. and the DEA's success in curtailing the drug's movement from Colombia to Miami led traffickers to seek out new routes through Mexico, giving rise to the first of the large Mexican drug cartels in Sinaloa, whose head, Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, would provide a model for future narcotraffickers (429). Under pressure from the U.S., Salinas' government increasingly militarized its approach to anti-drug enforcement. This escalation entered a new phase following the 1985 kidnapping and assassination of DEA Agent Enrique Camarena. The late 1980s and early 1990s were marked by high levels of violence as the state struggled to control drug trafficking, particularly in the border states.

Along with an increase in drug trafficking, the Salinas *sexenio* saw an intensification in organized crime activities including kidnappings (Benítez Manaut 148-149). Where kidnappers had previously targeted children, they now pursued the wealthy in order to extort large ransoms. Organized kidnapping rings targeted middle class victims, however, when the rich were able to foil their efforts by purchasing state-of-the-art security systems, hiring body guards and using armored cars (Campos Azuara 162). Now defined as "*secuestrable*," kidnappings of middle class citizens led to all-time high kidnapping rates in 1994 and 1995 (174). By the late 1990s,



Mexico was the site of more kidnapping than any other nation in Latin America, with the exception of Colombia. The threat posed by violent organized crime, whether from drug traffickers or kidnapers, is readily apparent in these films. These films' insistence that children are the primary target of organ traffickers resonates with an understanding that many of the victims of these two forms of violence were innocent bystanders.

Finally, these films reveal considerable anxiety about shifting gender roles during the Salinas administration. Although the Mexican workforce had long included female participants, the economic insecurities brought about by Salinas' campaign for modernization led to an increase in the number of women working outside of the home. This feminization of the workplace was most striking in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, where the *maquiladora* model of production relied (and, to a certain extent, still relies) heavily on women's labor. This shift in women's gender roles is largely ignored by these films, which prefer to represent women in the more traditional role of weeping mother.

The inclusion of this image in these movies attempts to reinstate a traditional model of the mother as guardian of the household and family. The most prominent mothers in these films do not work and are featured prominently in domestic scenes. Arturo's wife in *Comerciantes de niños* is most often portrayed in her kitchen or planning a celebratory meal; Andrea, Sérgio's wife and next target in *Trasplantes ilegales*, only appears within the confines of her house, and her pregnancy allows the film to emphasize her maternal status. These two films are perhaps the most obvious in their attempts to encourage their audiences to sympathize with this version of

Mexican motherhood because of their insistence that these women have done nothing—such as working outside the home, or in a cabaret like Azucena in *Santo en la frontera del terror*—to deserve the loss of their children.

Furthermore, when women do ally themselves with organ traffickers, as in *Secuestro salvaje* or *Comerciantes de niños*, their maternal instincts override their ruthlessness. Dr. Rivera's wife, Sandra, in *Secuestro salvaje* quickly abandons her allegiance to her husband when it becomes clear that they will be killing children—not simply following a catch and release model where kidnapped children are set free after a kidney is harvested. She helps the children to escape, and willingly surrenders to the police when they arrive. A similar scenario plays out in *Comerciantes de niños*, where a female trafficker's loyalty wavers long enough to allow Arturo to find his son. The natural role of a woman, these films argue, is that of a nurturing mother, and that innate disposition will cause women to fail in the workplace—even in the illegal workplace occupied by organ traffickers.

Marta in *Secuestro salvaje* offers the sole exception to this traditional image of femininity. As previously mentioned, Marta's escape from the traffickers makes the children's rescue possible. As a heroine, Marta is admirable: She thinks well on her feet, moves quickly, and demonstrates considerable courage. These characteristics, however, help Marta to act as a better mother-figure. While she displays considerable agency, Marta's character is a sort of foster-mother to the children that she teaches. Her professional role as a teacher is one that is traditionally female, and it is also one that is far removed from the realities of female employment under Salinas. In comparison to a *maquiladora* worker, Marta's position

is one of privilege. Furthermore, her status as a teacher also aligns her with the state because of the role that education has played in consolidating a Mexican national identity. The ambiguity of her position as a state representative, female professional and quasi-mother figure reflects a discomfort with the rapid shift in women's gender roles in the pre-NAFTA period.

### *Transnational Films for Transnational Audiences*

These contradictory responses highlight the difficulty with which the complex phenomena associated with globalization in the Americas are represented in films. The multiplicity of responses to the organ trafficking threat display a great deal of uncertainty about how to best meet the challenges brought about by rapid economic and social change. The variety of responses to a new form of bodily commodification produced in these films is exceptionally ironic given their intended audience. While I have discussed these films' attempts to create sense of identification between their victimized subjects and their audiences, I have described those audiences only in the most general terms. Recent critical work has demonstrated, however, that these films are created and marketed to a particular target audience, one that lacks formal education but often possess first-hand knowledge of globalization's impact on the Americas.

The popular cinema constituted by these films is largely aimed at a working class audience. This audience spans both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. In the U.S., this type of popular film is most often viewed by Mexican immigrants; these movies lack the same appeal to audiences composed of U.S. Latinos (López, "Continent" 11). Norma Iglesias' interviews of undocumented workers from Mexico

attending screenings of popular Mexican border movies in California demonstrate that these films play a key role in helping undocumented migrants to maintain a sense of connection to Mexico and a sense of national identity (*Entre yerba* 137-139). The irony here is exceptional: By watching films that document the negative impact of a globalizing economy, undocumented workers are offered a series of “solutions” that fail to take into account their lived experiences. Furthermore, these films’ representations of a middle class Mexico under siege only serve to inform their working class audiences that no escape from victimization is possible.

### *Popular Film Production: A Model of Globalization*

Aside from their own value as a medium in which anxieties about globalization can be staged, these films also represent a globalized model of production. Often identified as *cine fronterizo*, these movies are shot (if not explicitly staged) along the U.S.-Mexico border in order to leverage the advantages of working in both countries. As Iglesias reveals, low-budget film production has a distinctive history on both sides of the border, arising from family-dominated production models that took advantage of low labor costs in order produce films as cheaply as possible.

When border cinema grew in popularity in the 1970s, two family-based production companies came to dominate the industry. First attracted to the possibility of turning higher profits by distributing their films in the U.S. and thus benefiting from higher ticket prices, the Galindo family bought properties in Brownsville, Texas, where they filmed outdoors, avoiding studio expenses (62). Filming in the U.S. also allowed producers to avoid the high wages demanded by unionized Mexican workers by bringing their own non-union technical staff with

them to the U.S. (62-63). Furthermore, by founding family-owned production companies in the U.S., the Galindo family was able to guarantee their rights to their films in the U.S. by labeling them “co-productions” (63). Finally, by working “within the family,” the Galindo production company was able to dominate the border film industry, employing family members as directors, producers, administrators, designers, and in all other facets of the industry (63). This model, known as the *negocio redondo*, was quickly adopted by the Agrasánchez family, who also began filming in Brownsville (63). In both cases, filming on the U.S. side of the border allowed the companies to maximize their profits while limiting their expenses.

By 1985, however, this model of production ceased. U.S. demands that Mexican film companies employ U.S. technical staff while filming in Texas threatened the companies’ profit margins (78). In response, the Galindo and Agrasánchez families moved their companies back to the Mexican side of the border, where labor costs were now comparatively lower, but they still sought backing from U.S. financiers (78). This *maquiladora*-style model of production allowed Mexican companies to cheaply produce films that would be sold as videos to Mexican-born or –descended audiences in the U.S. An additional 115 production companies sprang up to compete with the Galindo and Agrasánchez enterprises, and many of their corporate headquarters were housed in the industrial cities of the Mexican borderlands (78). Filmmaking following this model also takes place throughout the nation, as demonstrated by the films discussed above. However, these films find their greatest profits not through domestic consumption but rather from distribution and exhibition in the U.S.

Despite their low production values, which range from poor film quality to awkwardly framed shots and low-budget sound and visual effects, popular films attract large audiences when screened in the U.S. or when sold as videocassettes or DVDs. The main draw for these films lies in their successful use of key figures in popular cinema: Actors such as Mario Almada and Jorge Reynoso can guarantee a film's instant popularity, no matter how trite the plot or how shoddy the production (116). Moreover, these films reach a wide audience precisely because they do not depend on being shown in a system of national movie theaters that increasingly play only U.S. blockbusters. Known as *videohomes*, these films are made for immediate transfer to video cassette or DVD and are sold to an audience that will watch them at home. Additional exposure is gained through their broadcast by media giants in Mexico like Televisa or Telemundo in the U.S.

This model of production is premised upon a desire to make as many movies as cheaply as possible to suit the desires of an audience whose ignorance is presumed. García Canclini ties this model to a transnational audience's ever-increasing desire for new products, which in turn sustains an industry of low-wage workers who write, film and edit a group of films known for their action sequences and derivative plots (*Consumers and Citizens* 116). The popular cinema industry seems to operate in a parallel universe from the more critically-acclaimed Mexican art house productions that reach a much smaller audience.

Since the success of low-budget films like those discussed in this chapter depends on a globalized model of production and consumption, the negative messages that they send about globalization and economic and social change require

further attention. This series of films adopts the same subject, organ trafficking, and portrays it as a dehumanizing threat, thereby revealing the producers' own assumptions about the fate of the working class. There is no effective model of resistance in these films; the organ traffickers may be captured, but their incursions cannot be prevented. Filmmakers vilify the existence of an economic regime that enables their own success and present an ambivalent warning call about globalization's ability to fuel Mexico's progress and narrow the gap between the wealthy and the poor.

That warning call remains relevant today: There is ample evidence of continued popular fears about organ trafficking in Mexico today. In 1995, the deaths of sixty-one babies in a Durango hospital were allegedly linked to organ traffickers.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the families of twelve kidnapped children protested in Ecatepec, convinced that their sons and daughters had fallen victim to organ traffickers.<sup>9</sup> Popular films continue to exploit these fears. *Operación Chacal*, a film originally released in 1991, was recently re-edited and re-released under the title *Traficantes de órganos* in 2002. Now available on video and DVD through Amazon.com, this re-release offers evidence that the topic of organ trafficking still resonates in Mexican populations at home and in the U.S.

Perhaps most significantly, Mexican authorities have posited the existence of organ trafficking in an attempt to explain the serial killings that have targeted the women of Ciudad Juárez. The abduction and murder of over 300 women from 1993 to the present has been labeled a femicide, and the killings are often convincingly linked to the transformation of the city by the more than 400 *maquiladoras*

constructed in the area following the implementation of the Border Industrialization Program.<sup>10</sup> These murders have posed a vexing problem for Mexico's state and federal governments, attracting negative publicity that calls attention to human rights violations and rampant corruption in the nation's criminal justice system. While most experts relate this femicide to a rapid growth in the *maquiladora* industry and a systemic devaluation of women's lives and labor, Mexican officials have found it convenient to blame a hypothetical ring of organ traffickers for the murders.

Despite the lack of credible evidence of any such organized crime group, in 2003 *Subprocurador B de Procedimientos Penales de la Procuraduría General de la República* Carlos Javier Vega Memije insisted that organ traffickers were responsible for the killings (Villalpando). These claims manipulated popular beliefs about organ thieves and may have been advanced in order to divert attention from the widespread belief that the police were either complicit in the murders or in their cover-up.<sup>11</sup> An insistence on organ trafficking also serves to distract potential victims from critically assessing their own location in an economy of labor that makes them particularly vulnerable. However, as these films suggest, it is not so hard to stop imagining a body as a source of labor and begin to see it as a harvestable source of commodities. After all, the fact that popular scenarios about organ trafficking are highly improbable does not mean that the working class and the marginalized who accept them are illogical: Certainly, their experiences demonstrate that their body parts might be more valued on the black market than in the body politic.<sup>12</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cultural critics often describe this audience in terms that reveal their own biases. Fernando Sánchez, for example, notes that popular film attracts “*el espectador menos exigentes [sic] del mundo*” (237). Others, like Carlos Mora, present their views in less inflammatory terms, and assert that domestic popular film audiences are members of the working class who possess three to eight years of education (164). Mora’s conclusions are sustained by Charles Berg, whose examination of ticket prices establishes the lower-class background of viewers of popular “genre cinema” (7-8), and Norma Iglesias adds that viewers form part of a broad market that includes migrant workers within Mexico and in the U.S. as well as their home towns (235). Finally, María S. Arbeláez argues that *fronterizo* subjects and Mexican communities in the U.S. form the largest audience for popular films (637). This claim is somewhat contradicted by Ana M. López, who notes that popular films are “perceived as entertainment fodder for the *recien llegados* who still do not speak English” (11).

<sup>2</sup> The role of the Mexican state in creating and sustaining a national cinema is discussed at length in Emilio García Riera’s *Breve historia del cine mexicano: Primer siglo, 1897-1997*. State cultural policies and their impact on film are detailed in following two works: David R. Maciel’s “Cinema and the State in Contemporary Mexico, 1970-1999” and Sergio de la Mora’s *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*, especially Chapter 4, “Mexico’s Third-Wave New Cinema and the Cultural Politics of Film.”

<sup>3</sup> The minor role of *corridos* in these films may be the result of low budgets that preclude paying for musical performances and the presumed scarcity of *corridos* about organ trafficking.

<sup>4</sup> For two insightful analyses of familial representations in Mexican melodramas, see Ana M. López’s “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema” (*Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*. Ed. John King, Ana M. López, and Manuel Avarado. London, England: British Film Institute, 1993. 147-163.) and Susan Dever’s *Celluloid Nationalism and Other Melodramas: From Post-Revolutionary Mexico to fin del siglo Mexamérica* (New York: SUNY Albany P, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Walter Mignolo discusses the significance and repercussions of colonial beliefs in *pureza de sangre* in *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, And Border Thinking* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Russell offers the following brief assessment of *Solidaridad*’s achievements: “Statistically, the results of Solidarity are impressive. It has built or renovated schools for 10 million children, distributed milk to 7 million, newly built or remodeled health facilities to care for 6 million, provided electricity to 11 million and

drinking water to 8 million, and constructed 14,000 kilometers of roads and renovated another 110,000” (285).

<sup>7</sup> According to Russell, who cites these figures in *Mexico Under Salinas*, they appeared in *Proceso* (Dec. 3, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> For coverage of this incident, see the Associated Press article, “Baby Deaths Linked to Organ Smuggling” (*Hamilton Spectator* 12 June 1995 A7.)

<sup>9</sup> For coverage of this protest, see the Agencia Mexicana de Noticias article, “*Piden padres de niños desaparecidos en Ecatepec resolución de casos*” 6 October 2005.

<sup>10</sup> For a thorough analysis of the connections between the Ciudad Juárez murders and the region’s changing economy, see Jessica Livingstone’s “Murders in Juárez” (*Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 25.1 (2004): 59-76).

<sup>11</sup> Most explanations for the allegations of organ trafficking in the Ciudad Juárez murders argue that the claims were made in order to distract attention from the real murderers by playing to local journalists’ “*amarillista*” tendencies. The Washington Office on Latin America, however, believes that the allegations of organ trafficking were made in order to allow the federal government to join the ongoing state investigation (“Crying Out for Justice”). Since only crimes such as “terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping for ransom, car theft, assault, weapons trafficking, and organ trafficking” fall under federal jurisdiction, the federal government could only intervene once allegations of organ trafficking had been made (“Crying Out for Justice”). While reasonable, this explanation appears insufficient: The federal government certainly could have claimed a connection to drug trafficking (as many observers did) and intervened when the killings began in 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes makes a similar claim when she discusses the widespread credence in organ trafficking rumors amongst Brazil’s poor in the 1980s: “In all, the organ stealing rumor has its basis in poor people’s perceptions, grounded in a social and biomedical reality, that their bodies and those of their children might be worth more dead than alive to the rich and the powerful. They can all too easily imagine that their bodies, and the bodies of their young children, may be eyed longingly by those with money” (7).

## Chapter 4: Body Parts in the Narrative and Economic Systems of the Americas

### Introduction

“Originally drafted in the late '80s, Phase One of the much-touted project of globalization has now been thoroughly completed: macro-economic communities such as the European Union and NAFTA have replaced the ‘dated’ functions of the nation state. Politicians are now ‘trading partners,’ and their religious *dictum* is called transnational ‘free trade’ (‘free’ meaning that it benefits only those who have the power to determine its terms). The ‘information superhighway,’ the Internet, e-commerce, cable TV, and ‘smart’ tourism have ideologically narrowed the world and the word. Effectively, ‘the world’ is now ‘at our fingertips,’ or at least that’s how we’re invited to (mis)perceive it so long as we are members of that elite micro-minority which stands on the benign side of globalization. The dark side of this project, however, is implacable. Entire Third World countries have become sweatshops, quaint bordellos, and entertainment parks for the First World; and for the inhabitants of the Southern Hemisphere the only options for participation in the ‘global’ economy are as passive consumers of ‘global’ trash, or providers of cheap labor or *materia prima*. Those excluded from these ‘options’ are forced to become part of a transnational economy of crime (sex, drug and organs trafficking, child labor, kidnappings, *fayuca* [smuggled goods], etc.). Many will cross the border North in search of the source of the rainbow, only to find racial hatred and inhumane working conditions.

Now that humanistic concerns are perceived as passé, U.S., European, and Asian corporations and governments are no longer accountable to anyone. The ‘global’ goal is to add several zeros to their accounts by simply pressing a button. It is savage capitalism at its most efficient and diabolical: virtual operators discreetly trading capital, products, weapons, and hollow dreams; and starving or killing their inconsequential victims in the ether of virtual space, a parallel ‘world’ devoid of ethical or ideological implications, of tears and blood. It’s economic-darwinism.com.”

--Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The New Global Culture: Somewhere Between Corporate Multiculturalism and the Mainstream Bizarre (a border perspective)”

In this 2001 essay, performance artist and cultural critic Guillermo Gómez-Peña adopts an uncharacteristically pessimistic tone. Even in works such as *Border Brujo* (1990) that adopt a highly critical perspective on transnational, cross-cultural, and cross-border relationships, Gómez-Peña generally maintains a sense of the generative possibilities inherent in the borderlands. He almost always acknowledges the agency, however partial, fragmented and fleeting it may be, that allows disenfranchised border subjects to critique the power relations that seek to subjugate and invalidate their histories, lived experiences and cultural production. In “The New Global Culture” excerpt cited above, however, Gómez-Peña theorizes the rise of a

new phase of capitalism in which globalization's winners have helped themselves to all of the commodities of the Third World—and to the labor produced by “Third World” bodies and their parts as well. Gómez-Peña hints that this situation is both new and inescapable, and he conjures an image of a “new world order” distinguished by its lack of humanity and its blindness to the simple fact that the wealth of the few is procured through the suffering of the world's poorest masses. Gómez-Peña identifies here a theory of world systems in which the actions of a minority of First World citizens produces the agony of the Third World.

The unequal capitalist system that Gómez-Peña decries is, of course, the same world system critiqued by the texts discussed earlier in this dissertation. Like Gómez-Peña, the films, novels, and print media discussed thus far tend to portray globalization itself as a crime, synonymous with organ trafficking itself. In this final chapter, however, I want to question the fairly uncomplicated depiction of global capitalism that emerges from the texts analyzed earlier in this work. Rather than imagine globalization as the only process that defines the incomplete integration of the globe, I would like to look at how globalization interacts with economic and literary systems on multiple levels. In doing so, my analysis of organ trafficking representations in contemporary U.S. narrative fiction covers familiar ground, but with nuances and claims that differ from those previously discussed.

The four novels that I consider in this last chapter present an opportunity to look back at the images and discourses central to the texts addressed earlier. Francisco Goldman's *Long Night of the White Chickens* (1992) takes up, in fictional form, the rumors of infant organ trafficking that dominated the Guatemalan press

during its civil war. *Tropic of Orange* (1997), by Karen Tei Yamashita, features a new sort of masked Mexican wrestler who fights to extend the free movement of goods across the U.S.-Mexico border to all immigrants seeking to move northward. Finally, Leslie Marmon Silko's apocalyptic novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), contrasts the neoliberal economic system referred to in nearly all the texts considered in this dissertation with a complex spiritual economy that ascribes different meanings to the body and its parts.

Assessed as a group, these novels also present an opportunity to engage in an expansive and nuanced discussion of representations of organ trafficking in the context of several economic systems. Where the print media, popular films, and detective novels discussed earlier presented organ trafficking as a literal commodification of the human body, Goldman, Yamashita, and Silko's novels use the trope of organ trafficking to open a discursive space in which the body, used as a metaphor on multiple levels, and its relation to various world systems can be debated. That is to say, by expanding the metaphorical meanings attributed to organ trafficking, these novels interrogate the significance of the individual human body and its attendant human and civil rights (or lack thereof), the body of the family as a social institution, the body politic that composes the nation, and the regional economic bodies that compose the increasingly globalized Americas. In addition, the body of each text—its narrative form—is also regenerated and changed through its discussion of organ trafficking.

I consider the functions of each of these “bodies” within the narrative and economic systems of the Americas, as well as their global equivalents. Within these

four novels, organ trafficking is featured as an illicit economic system that profoundly affects how the human body, the family, the nation, and the Americas as a region are conceived. These changes are reflected in each work's narrative structure, further demonstrating how organ trafficking as a topic is accompanied by a restructuring of the body of the text. Goldman, Yamashita, and Silko's texts create literary forms capable of narrating the changes that they document. These novels also present a model for connecting U.S. literature with larger global economic and literary world systems.

Before I present my analyses of these three novels, some additional introductions are necessary, both of world systems theories as well as of the texts and their authors. World systems theories evolved from early theories of underdevelopment and dependence popularized in the mid-1970s by André Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Samir Amin, among others. Arguing against theories of development that assumed that underdeveloped nations would follow the historical pattern of industrialization and modernization established by developed nations, Frank, in particular, claimed that underdevelopment in the Third World was a direct result of the strategies of capitalist accumulation practiced by First World nations. By establishing a link between colonial and mercantile relationships of dependence and the continuing underdevelopment of Latin America, Frank became the English-language spokesperson for a Marxist analysis of the world economy that highlighted the negative effects of unequal systems of international exchange. Although the architects of dependency theory soon moved beyond its original

precepts, the emphasis that they originally placed on a global economic system was revolutionary.

I emphasize André Gunder Frank's role in establishing underdevelopment as a structural consequence of capitalism because of his willingness to later discard this theory in favor of a world systems model that could more accurately describe the processes of capitalist expansion and contraction and the structural relationships of inequality that he observed in the Americas. Acknowledging in 1974 that dependency as a theoretical paradigm "has ended or is completing that cycle of its natural life, at least in the Latin America that gave it birth," Frank proposed, along with Wallerstein, that a more accurate representation of the global economy involved an analysis of the world systems that regulated the relationships between core, periphery and semi-periphery nations (Frank 40). At the end of a long career, Frank proposed with theorist Barry K. Gills that even world systems models were inaccurate. Frank and Gills argued instead that all—or at least 5,000 years—of economic history could be subsumed within a single world system that predated Marx, the industrial revolution in Europe, and the so-called rise of the West. Prior to his death, Frank championed his new world system theory as an alternative to Eurocentric versions of history and development that ignore the interactions and trade patterns (primarily in Asia) that predate the expansion of European hegemony in the Americas, generally recognized as the beginning of the consolidation of a capitalist world economy.

Certainly, Frank's theories (and in particular, his model of a 5,000-year-old world system) have attracted a great deal of criticism and have been commented upon

at length by his former allies and rivals alike. My goal in referring to Frank here is neither to rehabilitate nor reject his models of global economics. Instead, I propose that Frank's expansive and ever-changing vision of global capitalism serves as a useful model for approaching *The Long Night of White Chickens*, *Tropic of Orange* and *Almanac of the Dead*. These narratives follow the gradual widening of Frank's perspective, focusing first on an unequal relationship between the U.S. and Guatemala, then addressing regional models of (under)development and (in)equality, and finally seeking to connect the Americas with larger systems of material and spiritual accumulation. And, much like Yamashita and Silko's texts, Frank's body of work serves as an important reminder that the contemporary phase of globalization—perceived through the lens of neoliberalism—is neither exceptional nor altogether new.

While I do not want to enter into the lengthy debate over when globalization began, I do want to suggest that the contemporary tendency to equate globalization with neoliberalism may be at best shortsighted and at worst misguided. At the very least this equation threatens to distract from the lengthy history of colonial and neocolonial power structures that have resulted in unequal and incomplete development throughout Latin America. While these continuing inequalities cannot be divorced from an understanding of neoliberal economic and social policies in both the U.S. and Latin America, the conflation of globalization with neoliberalism tends to naturalize this ideological and economic framework and limit other ways of considering the region. In this regard, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is particularly



useful in modeling how other systems of exchange can coexist—or compete with—theories of neoliberal development.

*Almanac of the Dead*, along with Goldman and Yamashita's novels, also provides an opportunity to explore a way of tracing the impact of changing economic systems on the world of literary cultural production. By identifying the intersections of different narrative world systems in these three texts, I present an overview of the globalization and transformation of literary forms at a particular moment in time. I refer here to narrative world systems in descriptive, not prescriptive terms. To argue that narrative discussions of globalization, or organ trafficking, for that matter, do or should adopt a particular form or aesthetics would be an extreme overgeneralization. Fredric Jameson's much-critiqued argument placing all "Third World" literature within the confines of national allegory in his essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" demonstrates the problematic nature of such a broad claim.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I wish simply to discuss how these texts in particular combine different oral and literary traditions through aesthetic and formal choices in a way that I argue is connected to their mobilization of the trope of organ trafficking.

Each of these writers is usually positioned within a different narrative system: That is to say, Francisco Goldman is often discussed as a U.S. Latino author (a label which he has self-consciously analyzed and adopted)<sup>2</sup>, while Leslie Marmon Silko is considered a luminary in the field of Native American/American Indian literature. Karen Tei Yamashita's position as a representative Asian American author is often questioned, but her writing is most often assessed in relation to this body of literature. Each author is most often discussed as a representative of his/her respective "U.S.

ethnic” literature, with most comparisons made to other writers who share a similar cultural background.<sup>3</sup>

While each novel has, to a certain extent, been heralded as signaling a change within the larger body of U.S. Latino/a, American Indian, and Asian American cultural production, each appears somewhat anomalous within the larger context of each author’s work. *The Long Night of White Chickens* was Goldman’s first, and intensely autobiographical, novel. Written while reporting on Central America’s civil wars during the 1980s, *The Long Nigh of White Chickens* recounts, in fictionalized form, events that defined Goldman’s youth and his coming to terms with the violence that he documented in journalistic form. His subsequent texts have moved away from this autobiographical tendency, and the alter ego, Roger(io) Graetz, that Goldman creates in *Long Night* has not since reappeared. In contrast, *Tropic of Orange* is Yamashita’s third novel, and it differs sharply from the first two both in content and form. *Brazil Maru* (1993) and *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) focus, albeit in very different ways, on the experiences of the *Nikkei* in Brazil. Yamashita’s concentration on the lives of Japanese emigrants to Brazil and their Japanese Brazilian descendants is largely absent in *Tropic of Orange*. Although one of *Tropic’s* seven narrators is of Japanese American descent, the novel is also related by narrators who self-identify as Mexican, Chicano, ethnic Chinese from Singapore living under a false Vietnamese name, and African American. The text’s use of multiple narrators also marks a departure from Yamashita’s earlier works. Finally, *Almanac of the Dead* also marks a shift in Silko’s body of literary texts. Her first novel, *Ceremony* (1977) presented the experiences of a Laguna Pueblo WWII veteran

returning to civilian life and also incorporated traditional clan stories. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko broadens both her cultural and historical focus, presenting an alternative chronicle of the Americas that centralizes multiple Native traditions while invoking a far more apocalyptic tone than is present in her other works.

In discussing these three texts, I am constructing a somewhat artificial distinction echoing those commonly made between texts deemed to represent “popular” culture and those that are deemed works of “literary fiction.” My analyses in the preceding chapters have treated popular texts as equally worthy of critical attention as any other work considered to be more “erudite” or “sophisticated.” My goal in grouping *Almanac of the Dead*, *Tropic of Orange*, and *The Long Night of the White Chickens* together is certainly not to reinforce any assumption that would hold them in greater esteem. Rather, I consider these three works together because of their willingness to depart from the constraints of realism, a characteristic that is not seen in the U.S. and Mexican detective fiction discussed earlier.

More importantly, a comparative analysis of these three novels also begins to articulate a strategy for connecting the growing field of Hemispheric American studies with “ethnic” literary studies. Of course, the field of Chicano/a studies (and U.S. Latino/a studies, as well) has already produced strategies and theoretical paradigms that make this critical connection through a focus on the historical construction of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and theoretical interrogations of the construction of cultural identities that resist national boundaries. My approach in this chapter differs slightly; although I also address the construction of borderlands in these texts, I do so by addressing the creation of illicit economies and the subsequent

construction of inherently unequal linkages between nations. While this approach shares with border theories a concern for the material conditions under which borderlands subjects live, it also accepts that the unequal power relations determined by illicit economies will be inscribed on the body, as defined on multiple levels.

*The Long Night of White Chickens*

In *The Long Night of White Chickens*, Goldman presents two narrators' attempts to resolve the seemingly-random murder of Flor de Mayo Puac. Flor, as she is often referred to within Goldman's novel, was a Mayan girl orphaned during Guatemala's civil war. Sent from Guatemala City to Namoset, Massachusetts by the matriarchal grandmother of the wealthy Arrau family, Flor was intended to be a servant in her daughter, Mirabel Arrau de Graetz's, household. However, her son-in-law, Ira Graetz, adopted Flor and treated her as a daughter. Flor soon became Roger(io) Graetz's closest companion during adolescences marked by difference, hers due to her adopted status and indigenous heritage, his by his bi-cultural upbringing in a town distinguished by its whiteness. After graduating from Wellesley College, Flor returned to Guatemala in 1979 in order to head an orphanage.<sup>4</sup> Her death in 1983 led Roger to travel to Guatemala in order to identify Flor's murderers, a task in which he is joined by journalist Luis Moya Martínez. Narrated by Roger and Moya in free-indirect discourse, *Long Night* resists narrative closure: The truth surrounding Flor's death is never revealed; nor is her voice ever directly heard. Roger learns slowly that she may have been involved in illicit adoptions, the selling of children linked by rumor and the popular press to infant organ sales.

Following a narrative logic that differs from Yamashita and Silko's texts, *The Long Night of White Chickens* moves toward a discussion of organ trafficking rather than using the trope as a point of departure. The narrative structure of Goldman's novel is particularly significant: First and foremost, it establishes Flor as a member of a family and only later as an alleged organ trafficker. As a result, Goldman's text directs readers' attention almost immediately to the construction of the body of the family as a social institution as well as Flor's role within the immediate Graetz family and the larger body politic of U.S. society. By contrasting Roger's memories of their childhoods with his reading of Flor's diaries and letters, the novel presents different models of filiation and calls attention to how socio-cultural context informs the construction of the family. Roger, of course, is secure in his childhood knowledge that he is his parents' biological child. Flor's adoption, however, raises questions as to whether she should be viewed as an addition to or an imposition on the Graetz family: Certainly, Ira views her as the former and his wife as the latter.<sup>5</sup> As an adoptee who was not chosen by her new family, Flor's presence destabilizes the hegemonic model of the American family.

Like the Mexican films discussed earlier, *Long Night* conflates the body of the American family with the larger body politic of the nation. Ira Graetz's perception of Flor allows the text to downplay the family's role in creating educated and productive citizens and highlight instead the production of individual subjects within a larger capitalist society. Ira Graetz embodies a belief system tied to a idealized narrative of the Harvard Man: Reflecting on their childhood, Roger remembers, "Flor and I were raised in the shadows of such idealizations—Harvard, the Kennedys

even....in the saturating fairy-tale shadows of this tangible yet hard to espouse sense of...the thirties and forties, of the Depression and the War...of what good character and good education and good politics meant” (Goldman 64). Ira’s principles, which Roger struggles to articulate, advocate a vision of a meritocratic nation where opportunities are available to all, and where hard work holds the key to success. This view undermines any role that the family might play in the creation of educated and productive citizens.

By contrasting Flor as an immigrant (much like his Russian émigré father) who “made good” with his perception of his son as lazy, unfocused and unambitious, Ira Graetz downplays his own role in Flor’s “assimilation” into dominant U.S. culture and society. In his eyes, both Flor’s success and Roger’s failures result from individual choices that could be made only in the context of an American meritocratic society. This narrative model of “individual uplift” is proto-nationalist: Flor’s success is depicted as a uniquely American success, an outcome that would have been unthinkable in the class-bound Guatemalan society in which she is born. As Ira exclaims after learning of rumors surrounding Flor’s death,

This is a girl, Consul Simms....who always had her head on straight. Who *knew* right from wrong, a very moral, thoughtful, wonderful girl. Educated at one of the very best colleges. She started out in this life with everything going against her and she made it into the *elite*, but, oh, modest as can be, so down to earth. (Goldman 62)

Through Ira Graetz, the novel invites readers to believe that the American body politic can assimilate—and thus eliminate—all forms of difference.

On the other hand, Flor herself appears less sanguine about the possibility of full acceptance into either the Graetz household or U.S. society. Flor occupies an unstable position as both adopted daughter and family servant, a position that makes her as an outsider to family life. Despite Ira's best efforts, Flor's constant recreations of her "American self" reveal her own self-perception as an outsider. Again, Roger's memories of Flor are instructive here. He recalls Flor's intense pursuit of a college education, and notes, "That was her late-Namoset persona; anyway. She wouldn't let anyone see her impatience and boredom, her deeper confusions" (348). Later at Wellesley, Flor creates another persona, and she invents another personal history to tell her roommates, a version of life with the Graetz's where she and Roger conduct an intense love affair. Interpreted in light of Ira Graetz's belief that Flor's success models the American Dream, Flor's mediated narrative demonstrates that the body of the foreigner remains excluded (at worst) from the national family, or at best only partially incorporated.

A similar commentary emerges from the depiction of the Guatemalan body politic. Once more, the family is conflated with the nation, only this time racist and classist societal norms prevent Flor from being welcomed into a model of the national family. Flor is excluded from the Guatemalan branch of the Arrau family just as she and other members of the nation's indigenous population are refused entry into the larger body politic. *The Long Night of White Chickens* presents many examples of this rejection: For example, when Flor accompanies Roger to visit his Guatemalan relatives, she is told to sleep in the maid's quarters, a clear attempt to revoke her quasi-familial status. More significantly, Flor herself voices the nation's rejection of

its indigenous members: Reflecting on the many transnational adoptions that she has arranged, Flor notes that she has never found a Guatemalan couple interested in adopting any of the orphaned children that she struggles to place, and she ties this fact to the country's systematic attempts to terrorize the indigenous peoples:

Remembering an unpublished editorial that he and Flor discussed, Moya recounts Flor saying,

I wrote that if the people with money are going to support a policy of massacres in the highlands as a way of preventing revolution, they have an obligation to look after all the abandoned and orphaned kids that policy is causing. Oh I know, they say they don't believe that massacre stuff anyway, they never go up there, it's not in the papers *here*, it's Commie propaganda, well, who are they going to believe, their servants? So they'll adopt a baby parrot, a macaw, a monkey, a curlew, but an Indian orphan, *olvidate*, forget it. Not one Guatemalan has ever tried to adopt a kid from my orphanage. Not one. (Goldman 149)

In *The Long Night of White Chickens*, orphans thus become evidence of a fratricidal attempt to reconstitute the Guatemalan national family through violence.

In this context of conflated national and familial discourses, the slow revelation that Flor may have sold infants (and/or their organs) attains additional significance. Perhaps most clearly and obviously, it points to a breakdown of the altruistic values that provide a framework for transnational adoption. As Craft explains, adoption in *The Long Night of White Chickens* functions within a competing framework of humanism and human rights: On the one hand, Flor's attempts to find



better lives for her orphans is a humanitarian gesture based “on the revolutionary idea that love and opportunity within the adoptive context can level social and economic disparities” (Craft 433-434). On the other, Flor’s potential involvement in organ trafficking aligns her with the Guatemalan elite who define orphans as disposable citizens who accrue neither human nor civil rights in either country. The trade in human organs also rejects Ira’s inclusive view of the U.S. body politic.

In both the U.S. and Guatemalan contexts, the orphans that Flor may or may not have sold are also stripped of their humanity. Flor’s role in the alleged orphan trafficking scheme is that of a vilified martyr, whose murder is not (and never will be) fully investigated: Her murder, however, erases her from both the U.S. and Guatemalan families but does not resolve the mystery of the missing children from the novel. The bodies of the missing children that Roger Graetz must find to complete his investigation come to symbolize Flor’s potential vindication and re-inscription into the U.S. body politic. These orphans also represent other Guatemalans deprived of human and civil rights: The guerrillas, the victims of death squads, the street children and Flor all become bodies haunting the text as it moves towards an incomplete conclusion.

Finally, the rumor that infant organs are being sold on an international black market connects the novel’s two national families. Where Flor’s incomplete assimilation into either national family points to the shortcomings of both models, the rumors of organ trafficking in the novel highlight the unequal power relations between these two nations. As Moya explains to Roger, for *faferos*, reporters bribed by members of the government or simply seeking the approval of the elite, Flor’s

story is simply too easily manipulated to pass over: This opportunity "...excited the *faferos*, because here was *their* chance to make great patriotic rhetoric against baby sellers and make it sound like they were blaming the hypocritical gringo slanderers of Guatemala all in one murder" (Goldman 232). As was the case in the Guatemalan newspapers discussed earlier, Goldman's *faferos* also contrast infant organ sales with U.S. rhetoric surrounding human rights.

The hypocrisy of the U.S., however, is not established through these rumors but rather through another of the novel's sub-plots: the constant questioning of Moya's political allegiances and possible guerilla affiliations. Although Moya's connection to the guerrillas is disclosed as he flees Guatemala after he and Roger's investigation results in heavy handed "warnings" from the armed forces, the extent of his involvement with the opposition is never made clear. Certainly, Moya's commentary on the U.S.' willingness to continue a Cold War battle at the expense of Central America makes it clear that the military aid provided by the U.S. acts against Guatemala's attempts to create its own democracy:

...if only countries like mine were given the chance to humiliate our own criminals. Maybe we would find the courage and coherence to do so, perhaps not. But, *puta*, as it stands now, even excellent friends such as you, Sylvia, essentially propose that we endure every human indignity because of the Soviet Union. Why don't you take your worries about Central America directly to the Soviet Union then, I'm sure you can work something out, and leave us alone! (274)

Through Moya, *The Long Night of White Chickens* highlights the U.S.' attempts to exert hegemonic control over Guatemala (as well as the rest of the isthmus) during the 1980s via military and economic aid. Flor's death, it appears, is either due to the corruption of Guatemala's political elite who are trafficking children and their organs, or her murder is simply an unintended result of the U.S.' militarization of the Central American nation. The unresolved circumstances of Flor's murder thus become symptomatic of the novel's refusal to answer the larger question of why Guatemala has failed as a nation: Is due to the nation's inability to conceive of an inclusive familial model? Does failure result from race and class prejudices? Is it the ultimate consequence of the neocolonial (or imperial) relationship between the U.S. and Guatemala? Although the novel points to these unequal power relations through the constant refrain, "*Guatemala no existe,*" *The Long Night of White Chickens* leaves the questions surrounding Flor's death and the nation's fracturing unresolved equally unresolved.

By resisting closure and refusing to resolve these questions, *The Long Night of White Chickens* successfully uses organ trafficking to comment on various formations of the body. Incompletely incorporated into both the Graetz family and the U.S. national body politic and rejected as a member of the Guatemalan Graetz family and the national family that it represents, Flor herself comes to symbolize all those orphaned during Guatemala's Civil War: Trafficked to the U.S., Flor was treated as a commodity, a disposable labor source who happened to be redeemed by benefactors. Her return to Guatemala and alleged trafficking of other children illustrates the

novel's attempt to indict both countries for engaging in atrocities equivalent to slaughtering children for their organs.

*Tropic of Orange*

Where Goldman focuses tightly on one transnational family, Yamashita utilizes a diverse series of characters in order to better represent a region. In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita employs seven narrators to present a series of cataclysmic events that occur in L.A. Southern California appears as a “transnational contact zone” in which hegemonic visions of the U.S. converge with the histories of its internal minorities as well as those of transnational migrants from Latin America and Asia.<sup>6</sup> Alvinia Quintana identifies in the novel “a variety of California cultural codes,” the most significant of which for my project is “the ‘Cultural Diversity’ that demarcates this city at the edge of the North/South border” and which “is amplified with specific reference to the East/West ‘Pacific Rim’ border” (222).

Cultural diversity is indeed the primary characteristic that defines Los Angeles as the center of a economic and cultural borderland situated within several regional imaginaries. Yet the city is not depicted in utopian terms but rather as a region subject to its own internal borders: As Hauser explains, “The negative effects of industrialization, post-Fordist de-industrialization, and global neoliberalism creates, within the borders of L.A., socially engendered and racially codified spaces” (11). Yamashita incorporates narrators who inhabit these codified spaces and who present simultaneous and diverse perspectives on the city. According to Hsu, those multiple perspectives are necessary in order to understand Los Angeles’ significance within the text: Each character’s perspective “...does not merely intersect with the others;

rather the ways that Los Angeles exists are mutually constitutive and ultimately cannot be truthfully imagined or thought about as discrete or separate without in some way distorting each sphere” (77).

L.A., then, is where the novel’s many characters and plotlines converge. Briefly summarized, *Tropic of Orange*’s multiple plots build off of one another: Rafaela, a undocumented janitor, has left her husband Bobby, and taken her son, Sol, to the Mexican vacation home of Gabriel, a Chicano journalist. Once there, she discovers an orange growing on a tree that Gabriel has planted directly on the Tropic of Cancer. At the same time that Gabriel begins to investigate rumors of contraband arriving in L.A. via igloo coolers transported by plane from Ciudad Juárez, Rafaela becomes concerned with the suspicious activities of her neighbor’s thuggish son. After discovering a cooler in her neighbor’s refrigerator that appears to contain an infant heart, Rafaela steals the cooler, and fearing for Sol’s life, heads north. Along the way, she is joined by an old man named Arcangel, who performs miraculous feats and becomes Sol’s caretaker. Meanwhile, Bobby is contacted by human traffickers who have transported a previously-unknown cousin from Singapore to Tijuana. Simultaneously, a death due to a poisoned orange causes a freeway disaster whose cascading effects bring traffic to a halt in the city. Emi, a Japanese-American news producer travels to the site of the crash and witnesses an “invasion” of the homeless, who peacefully appropriate abandoned vehicles and create a new freeway-based society. As Rafaela moves towards the U.S.-Mexico border, she realizes that the orange (now in Arcangel’s possession) is pulling all of the Tropic of Cancer northwards with it. At the border, Arcangel transforms into El Gran Mojado, who

announces that he will fight his northern counterpart, SuperNAFTA, in a battle for control of the region. Gabriel's online revelation about infant organ trafficking occurs at the same time as the wrestling match, the police invasion of the freeway camp and the attempt to eradicate the last known orange (now held by Sol, as he watches the fight). As Rafaela transforms into a jaguar to fight off the organ (and, it seems, cocaine-spiked orange) trafficker, Bobby rescues Sol and finds himself holding the Tropic of Cancer and at the center of the region's reconfigured (and thoroughly transformed) geography.

As this summary shows, organ trafficking is but one of the many plots in *Tropic of Orange*, but the clear connection between the illicit organs and the orange of the title attests to its centrality. Both the cooler containing the trafficked heart and the orange follow the same path to the U.S.-Mexico border, and much of the novel's narrative action revolves around Gabriel's attempt to uncover the truth about both forms of trafficking. That said, *Tropic of Orange* resists the temptation to become a conventional detective novel seeking to identify the traffickers and their nefarious motivations. As Rody notes,

...the reader may expect *Tropic of Orange* to exemplify a far simpler scheme of U.S.-style pluralist egalitarianism, the kind that casts the multicultural crime-fighting teams in the movies or the friendly neighborhood on Sesame Street. Yamashita gives to each of seven main ethnic characters' stories seven discrete chapters, in first or limited third-person narration, marked by the character's particular idiolect....But instead of containing each of the characters in an ethnic narrative enclosure, the chapters actually send them all

busily into the multicultural mix. Yamashita's ethnics thus emerge not as representatives of their ethnic groups—indeed they are barely connected to ethnic families—but as participants in a heteroglossic metropolis and region, who, through their discourse, their relationships, their work, and increasingly, as the novel progresses, the interlacing of their stories, exceed ethnic and national definitions. (135-136).

Instead of producing the multicultural detective team featured in *Positive Match*, *Tropic of Orange*'s character resist easy identification as ethnic representatives of the city's diverse population. Instead, characters like Bobby make it clear that neither race, nationality nor language can completely define one's position in the globalized/ing city:

If you know your Asians, you look at Bobby. You say, that's Vietnamese. That's what you say. Color's pallid. Kinda blue just beneath the skin. Little underweight. Korean's got rounder face. Chinese's taller. Japanese's dressed better. If you know your Asians. Turns out you'll be wrong. And you gonna be confused. Dude speaks Spanish. Comprende? So you figure it's one of those Japanese from Peru. Or maybe Korean from Brazil. Or Chinamex. Turn's out Bobby's from Singapore. You say, okay, Indonesian. Malaysian. Wrong again. You say, look at his name. That's gotta be Vietnam. Ngu. Bobby Ngu. They all got Ngu names. Hey, it's not his real name. Real name's Li Kwan Yu. But don't tell nobody. Go figure. Bobby's Chinese. Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnamese name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown. That's it. (Yamashita 15)

Furthermore, other characters, such as Emi refuse the “happy family” vision of multiculturalism produced by texts such as *Positive Match*. Emi flatly pronounces that “cultural diversity is bullshit,” a comment that she follows with “I hate being multicultural” (128). Clearly, this text is not interested in mobilizing an alliance of ethnic representatives as a strategy to prevent organ trafficking.

Instead, Yamashita’s novel demonstrates that organ smuggling is but one of the illicit economies that characterizes Los Angeles’ status as a globalized city within the region of the Americas. Perhaps the most obvious example of another of the city’s illicit economies lies in the trafficking of persons, as demonstrated by the numerous undocumented characters in the novel, most notably, Bobby’s cousin, Xiayue, whom Bobby rescues from snakeheads operating in Tijuana who threaten to make her a prostitute. As Molly Wallace observes, crossing the border is enabled by consumption, as Bobby’s cousin purchases the goods that code her with a new identity as an American, or at least, as belonging to an American group of consumers: “Consumerism, in *Tropic of Orange*, replaces nationalism as a form of ‘postnational’ identification that can be exported around the world” (154).

Other illicit economies are represented in *Tropic of Orange* as well. A new method of drug trafficking has catastrophic consequences: A liquid, super-potent form of cocaine is injected into oranges, which become scattered amongst other agricultural goods as they cross the border into the U.S. This economy in turn fuels others: The novel also points to the creation of a support-network of technologies designed to track the illegal goods. The juxtaposition of the careful tracking of the organs and oranges highlights the ineffective (and human-based) surveillance



mechanisms designed to track human movement across the border. That is to say, illicit commodities are clearly deemed more valuable by their producers than undocumented persons are by the authorities who seek to limit their free movement across the border.

Ultimately, the novel can be read as suggesting that all capitalist economies are, by nature, illicit: At times, the text explicitly makes this point, as when Rafaela critiques the region's reliance on an exploited and undocumented workforce. As Bobby remembers, before leaving with Sol, Rafaela argued that their work is undervalued: "But she kept talking, saying we're not wanted here. Nobody respects our work. Say we cost money. Live on welfare. It's a lie. We pay taxes" (Yamashita 80). By centralizing class as the most powerful determinant of difference *Tropic of Orange* demonstrates how the capitalist economy of the Americas selectively empowers and subjugates the region's residents. This is perhaps most evident in Buzzworm's narrative: After connecting the deaths of a roadside fruit seller and a gang member to the poisoned oranges, Buzzworm comments, "Maybe it wasn't just Van Nuys [location where two residents had died after eating oranges]. Maybe Margarita and the little homey had made it home the same way. But they weren't the names on the news. 'Course they'd probably never be. They got under some other statistics. When the class action suit came 'round, they'd be left behind" (139). In the end, the violent invasion of the homeless' freeway encampment demonstrates the extent to which the elite is prepared to defend its privilege.

*Tropic of Orange* also documents the ever-increasing struggle to produce new consumers within the capitalist economy: Corporate attempts to retain control of the

marketplace are also highlighted within the text. After oranges are declared “illegal” (and then identified as “illegal aliens”) Minute Maid quickly copyrights the name “Passion” and moves to dominate the world’s passionfruit crop (140, 141). Their advertisements, which Emi coordinates even as she broadcasts guerrilla programming from the homeless encampment on the freeway, are depicted as numbing citizen interest in the social issues that surround them:

Emi stared at the on-air monitor. Sure enough, Tide was selling cleaner whiter brighter, and Minute Maid has wasted no time in moving on to *Passion*. She looked down from the van’s window at the tattered and soiled man curled in the back seat of a Buick. It seemed to make sense. But a second commercial cut to a Buick sailing down coastal roads. The poor man next to her rolled over on his other side. Emi shrugged. Whatever. (177)

Rather than open a discussion on homelessness, or present any analysis of the conditions of poverty and insecurity in which the homeless survive, the broadcasts from the encampment become a mere vehicle that allows non-stop advertising campaigns to create consumers rather than engaged citizens.

The novel’s mobilization of two key symbols also attracts readers’ attention to other connections between economic and political concerns in the borderlands. *Tropic of Orange* uses the images of the trafficked infant heart and the orange to “literalize” the economic interactions linking the Americas. As Molly Rauch notes in her review of the novel, the orange is it itself a traveling hybrid, brought to Spain through Muslim trade in Asia, and later transported (in seed form) to the Americas by Columbus, who sought to establish a crop there and prevent scurvy from afflicting his

sailors (Rauch 28).<sup>7</sup> The Asian origins of the orange are particularly significant; they also point to an East-West division that the novel hopes to dismantle even as it destabilizes the borders between North and South.

The particular orange named in the novel's title grew on a tree planted by Gabriel, in a wry re-interpretation of Columbus' citrus crop: In Mexico, Gabriel buys "...a hacienda, a ranchero, his own little colony. A writer's colony, of course. Ruben Salazar is his idol. But the other kind of colony can't be far from his mind. He brings down one fruit sapling each visit. And in a slow re-enactment of the Columbianizing of the Caribbean, only one tree, planted right on the Tropic, produces fruit" (Rauch 28). This tropical orange is carried north and drags along with it the Tropic of Cancer, itself a border created not by geography or political institution, but by the sun itself. This radical "de-bordering" calls attention to multiple boundaries inscribed upon the land and their relative fragility. In this case, a commodity is capable of uprooting and erasing all attempts to parcel out or delineate the land, regardless of whether those claims are authorized by politics, geography, or nature itself.

Both the orange and the child's heart come to symbolize a history of economic and geographic exchanges that have defined the U.S. and its (often oppressive) relationships with Latin America. The orange travels in Arcangel's suitcase, who associates the fruit with the many other commodities that the region has provided: "*Haitian farmers burning and slashing cane, / workers stirring molasses into white gold. / Guatemalans loading trucks with / crates of bananas and corn. / Indians, who mined tin in the Cerro Rico / and saltpeter from the Atacama desert*" (146). The child's heart, as well, conveys a similar message: Taken from an

unidentified infant and trafficked by the same cartel that used oranges to transport cocaine, the organ represents the “dismembering” of the Americas and its populations in pursuit of illicit commodities.

Despite the legacy of unequal exchanges that these symbols invoke, the resilience of Latin Americans and the failure of the U.S. to control the borders that it has established are made clear through the transformation of the region’s geography, as the orange pulls the South, its labor, products and population to the heart of L.A. The arrival of both items in L.A. occurs during on Saturday, the day before the wrestling match between El Gran Mojado/Arcangel and SuperNAFTA. Both orange and organ carry with them the weight of the histories that they represent; the organ disappears, but the orange becomes a spectator to the wrestling match. The novel implies that the scourge of organ trafficking will disappear like the infant’s heart when Gabriel publishes an online expose. The hope of a more equitable relationship that this represents is transferred to the wrestling match itself.

The wrestling match is a fight for control of the border region, and its staging at the Pacific Rim Arena at least acknowledges the impact that the NAFTA will have on global economies beyond those of the U.S. and Mexico. Both competitors are masked wrestlers who combine both Mexican and U.S. wrestling and performance traditions in an unscripted yet highly stylized battle. SuperNAFTA, described as “a masked man in a titanium suit with a head of raging fire,” serves as spokesperson for the neoliberal ideology upon which the free trade agreement was built:

My opponent doesn’t want progress. He doesn’t care about the future of all you wonderful kids. He thinks you ought to run across the border and pick

grapes. Think about it. Before any one of you can be truly free, you need to have enough money to do what you want. The only way that's gonna happen is to free the technology and the commerce that make the money go round.

(259)

This symbol of the U.S.' continued efforts to establish hegemony in the region, however, is countered by El Gran Mojado, one of the many personas adopted by Arcangel. Drawn from a variety of popular culture references, El Gran Mojado wears "a ski mask of camouflage nylon, blue cape with the magic image of Guadalupe in an aura of gold feathers and blood roses, leopard bicycle tights, and blue boots" (260). SuperNAFTA's victory would imply the ascendance of a technologically-powered regime of border enforcement, maintaining a boundary that is impervious to most people but freely crossed by goods. El Gran Mojado's triumph, on the other hand, would symbolize the end of a five hundred year struggle for control of the territories of the Americas. His message is one of resistance to neoliberal capitalism: "*The myth of the first world is that / development is wealth and technology progress. / It is all rubbish. / It means that you are no longer human beings / but only labor*" (261). His victory would imply a regenerated landscape, inalterably transformed by the people, cultures, and goods from the South that have accompanied him to the arena.

The match, however, is inconclusive: Unlike Santo's clear defeat of Dr. Sombra in *Santo en la frontera del terror*, this competition ends with the two combatants dying even as they attempt to kill each other. The orange makes a final appearance, separated from the invisible Tropic of Cancer and fed to El Gran Mojado, although it is not clear whether the orange will help the wounded competitor:

Enmascarado chews and smiles. It's all over. Crowds rushing in. Picking him up. Taking him away with orange peels scattered on his chest, stink of orange on his lips, like he's floating on a human wave. Gonna take him home. Home where mi casa es su casa. Bury him under an orange tree. Plant him at the very edge of the sun's shadow. Maybe grow another line right there. Mark the place. Tag it good. (269)

The hope that Arcangel/El Gran Mojado could be reborn and create a new border, thus recreating the cycle that brought him northward, implies a new set of borderlands confrontations to come, perhaps with a more positive conclusion. In the meantime, the severing of the border from the orange occurs only after the landscape of Southern California has been transformed. With this conclusion, the novel implies that the Americas have finally been reconfigured in a new formation that acknowledges the cumulative effects of a five-hundred year long process of economic and cultural transformation. The people of Latin America are finally transported into the landscape of L.A., the heart of a region already defined by Latin American goods, labor, immigration and cultural influences.

More importantly, with no border to police, NAFTA is meaningless, and with no remaining barriers, *Tropic of Orange* predicts that the region's populations will be forced to "embrace." Bobby, who had been left holding the two sides of the severed border together, questions and abandons his own efforts: "He's gritting his teeth and crying like a fool. What are these goddamn lines anyway? What do they connect? What do they divide? What's he holding on to?....That's when he lets go. Lets the

lines slither around his wrists, past his palms, through his fingers. Lets go. Go figure. Embrace” (270).

Of course, this conclusion does not offer a final resolution to the conflicts chronicled in *Tropic of Orange*. The issues of class and social justice, for example, that the novel raises remain unresolved. For Hauser, the very scope of the changes implicit in the de/re-bordering of the region demand a micro-, rather than macro-level solution: “This transformation has a massive impact on *Tropic of Orange*’s Los Angeles. These ‘shock waves’ are too vast to be dealt with individually and demand collective resolutions, like the Ngu-Cortes family reunion” (17-18). And, as Wallace explains, the command to embrace is itself ambiguous:

“The question of what will become of this landscape, no longer moored geographically, is left productively ambivalent. In whose embrace will the continent be locked? Is this simply the ‘American Express,’ as the title of the final chapter suggests, whereby the globe is railroaded into a new kind of homogeneous consumerist Americanization? Or is it, as the subtitle of the chapter, ‘Mi Casa/Su Casa,’ suggests, a more democratic promise of hybridity? (157)

I see in this final image of Bobby, Rafaela, and Sol reunited a more positive image than Wallace suggests. While she is correct to question whether or not a more equitable vision than that associated with neoliberalism will define the new borderlands, the implied reconciliation between Bobby and Rafaela suggests that their previous conflict over workers’ rights and social justice has been resolved. Certainly, Rafaela’s defeat of the organ/orange traffickers implies that the most harmful

versions of savage capitalism have been banished, at least temporarily, from the region.

*Almanac of the Dead*

While *Tropic of Orange* concludes on a somewhat celebratory note, its optimistic tone is largely absent from Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*. Silko's novel significantly expands the geographical and historical scope associated with Yamashita's text. Although *Tropic of Orange* does include a productive, if limited, discussion of California as part of a larger Pacific Rim economic system that also intersects with the north-south axis of the Americas, *Almanac of the Dead* incorporates nearly all regions of the globe, with plotlines incorporating references to indigenous cultures from every continent, including Europe and Asia. Where *Tropic of Orange*'s conceptualization of geographic space is tied to Western epistemologies and its reliance on east-west and north-south axes created through precise systems of longitude and latitude, *Almanac of the Dead* employs a web-like geography that centers on the U.S. Southwest but which emanates in all directions as well as forward and backward in time.<sup>8</sup> The novel also represents competing world systems that, it claims, long pre-dated Columbus' arrival in the Americas. By appropriating and reproducing pre-Columbian cultures within its text, *Almanac of the Dead* moves beyond the five-hundred-year history that informs *Tropic of Orange*. My analysis of *Almanac* focuses on these competing world systems, and the significance of bodies and body parts within those systems.

Of all the novels discussed in this chapter, *Almanac of the Dead* has attracted the most critical attention. This is, however, ironic, given the slowness with which



analyses of the text were published in the years immediately following its publication. This has been attributed to several factors: The introductory essay to *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays* questions whether this critical silence is due to the novel's "powerful vision of cultural decadence, racial conflict, and fearful retribution," and speculates that these characteristics were so "unpalatable" as to "obscure the novel's achievement" (2). Or, Claudia Sadowski-Smith observes, "[t]he lack of critical attention to *Almanac*...has been attributed to the novel's overtly anti-capitalist message which, following a tendency to conflate race and class hierarchies, has often been interpreted to mean 'anti-white'"(96). Even setting ideological biases and emotional reactions aside, the density of the novel's intricate plots and the sheer number of characters populating the text make it difficult to find a place to ground an analysis. Furthermore, a wide range of literature and orature informs *Almanac of the Dead*, presenting a series of implicit subtexts that further complicate analyses.

Recently, however, a variety of articles have presented analyses of the text that are informed by theories central to geography, cultural studies, anthropology and indigenous studies. Most critical attention has focused upon the novel's depiction of a five-hundred-year-old integrated world economy that is dependent upon (and, many would claim, has always depended on) raw materials stolen from the Americas. Beginning with David Moore and Jane Olmstead's analyses, published in 1999, these examinations of *Almanac of the Dead* both build upon and contradict one another. Moore, in his article "Silko's Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*," calls attention to the role of the reader as witness to episodes of extreme violence; Silko's employment of "the trope of blood," he asserts, alerts

witnesses/readers to the power of stories that circulate like blood (150). Blood itself, he claims, does not possess an allegorical or symbolic meaning within the text; rather, it is both “a sign and signifier, a trope for the circulation of all these energies,” (175). Olmstead also affirms that blood “is the central metaphor of the novel, its circulatory system, yet she argues that “[o]ne might even imagine that blood is a specialized language not just of the body but of the soul: for Silko, blood defines the extent of corruption in a society consuming itself; blood signifies a material freed from the bounds of time, reaching back, a link to the past and future, in effect an anti-material, incorporeal but real” (465-466). The ubiquitous presence of blood, along with other body parts, has clearly intrigued and troubled critics, who attest to its centrality to the novel but struggle to articulate its significance.

Nor has this debate been conclusively settled. In the article “Economies of Memory: Trafficking in Blood, Body Parts, and Crossblood Ancestors,” Dorothea Fisher-Hornung ties the circulation of blood to the circulation of goods in the world economy. She argues that Silko utilizes blood in order to critique “global vampiric capitalism” (205). Furthermore, according to Fisher-Hornung, the depiction of blood as a circulating commodity parallels the circulation of blood within the body, thus establishing that life—as a spiritual commodity—is also being traded in incommensurate exchanges that strip dignity from the disenfranchised (208). Ann Brigham, on the other hand, claims that the novel’s depiction of the trafficking of human blood and body parts exemplifies a model of capitalist globalization that celebrates the individual and aggressively pursues expansion through exclusion (316-317). In other words, organ trafficking is central to an economy that honors “the

putting of the self against all else as other in order to privatize and commodify the other as resource and profit” (316-317).

Although the authors previously mentioned correctly assess the importance of the body and its parts in the globalized economy envisioned in *Almanac*, their readings of the novel do not account for the contradictory meanings ascribed to the commodification of bodies and their parts in the text. Neither blood nor body parts possess a single, stable meaning within the text. Instead, the significance of organ and tissue trafficking must be assessed in relation to particular characters. As numerous critics have argued, much of the narrative tension in *Almanac of the Dead* results from the characters’ attempts to impose one of two dueling world systems. The names attributed to these world systems vary; although nearly all analyses condemn the capitalist ideologies present in the text, the labels employed by critics to identify the cosmology articulated in opposition to capitalism differ. Ann Brigham identifies this competing worldview as “the tribal” (318); John Muthaya refers to “the dream of the fifth world,” a term drawn from Pueblo/Keresan myth cycles (357). Marc Priewe establishes the category of the “glocal” in opposition to the “global” (225). Finally, Chanette Romero refers to “tribal internationalists” working against the goals of international capitalism (623). For nearly all of these theorists, the primary characteristic of this oppositional cosmology is its basis in indigenous cultures’ belief systems, whether or not this category is limited to that of one Native group or expanded to include all tribally-based Native peoples in the Americas (if not the world). These groupings tend to reinforce a Manichean binary dividing European capitalists from communitarian or tribalist Native peoples. They also emphasize a

contrast between a world system that is grounded in particular cultural notions of place and one that homogenizes all places in an economic and cultural system that celebrates the individual and his/her property rights.

To a large extent, *Almanac of the Dead* does appear to support these cosmological characterizations. Certainly, several Eurocentric “savage capitalists,” most notably Serlo and Beaufrey, attempt to control the global economy and actively seek the death and destruction of innocents in order to shore up their plans for local and global hegemony. Yaqui and Mayan characters, including Lecha, Calabazas, Angelita, Wacah and El Feo present a pan-indigenous cosmology that asserts the primacy of the connections between the land and the indigenous peoples who inhabit it. However, the novel also contains examples that resist this larger tendency to establish a direct correlation between cosmology and racial/ethnic identity. Seese, an Anglo woman, Roy and Clinton, white and Black Vietnam veterans, and a white eco-terrorist group modeled on Earth First! also align themselves with communitarian Indians while Menardo, a mestizo who rejects his tribal upbringing, represents a particularly self-loathing merging of Eurocentrism and capitalism. More significantly, the novel also labels these characters Destroyers and presents a historical account of how “sorcerer-sacrificers” in the area now known as Mexico (a implied reference to the Aztecs) called European Destroyers to the Americas, launching the Conquest of the Americas (Silko 475).<sup>9</sup> That is to say, Silko emphasizes that capitalism is merely the latest tool through which a global alliance of evildoers (for lack of a better term) seek to impose their world system.

Rather than rely on racial categorizations, it is more useful to focus upon the relationships of both cosmologies' adherents to the land. As Romero explains, "The characters the novel portrays least sympathetically are those most removed from the natural earth..." (625). That is to say, *Almanac of the Dead* draws a sharp distinction between those characters who view the land as commodity to be exploited and those who recognize their connection to the land as a source of identity and spiritual power and strength. Those who align themselves in the second category form an alliance of the disenfranchised and adopt a communitarian view that rejects the nation-state as a European institution and believes that "all ideas and beliefs of the Europeans would gradually wither and drop away," culminating in the disappearance (through death and migration) of all European descendents in the Americas (Silko 511). The global struggle between the capitalist Destroyers and the alliance of the disenfranchised is thus very much a debate about how the Americas will be integrated into a world system, and who will control the system itself. More than Tucson's fate is at stake in the novel; *Almanac of the Dead* presents a competition which pits neoliberal doctrines against the survival of life on Earth.

By emphasizing the competition between these world systems, however, it is easy to overlook a key similarity that connects the ideologies voiced by both groups' adherents: Both cosmologies centralize the body and its parts as the source of global flows that provide agency/empower each side. The meanings attributed to the body, however, differ strongly. The significance of bodily commodification is perhaps most apparent when assessing the Destroyers' rise to power during the five-hundred-year-long time period that the novel labels the "Reign of Death-Eye Dog." Referring

implicitly to the role of human sacrifice in Aztec religious rituals, *Almanac* establishes the body as a source of divine power: A poem presenting an old priest's perspective on human sacrifice is recorded in the novel's embedded almanac and notes that "Barbarians may sacrifice prisoners of war or slaves; / but the truth is, the spirits only listen when / the bloodshed is royal from the rich" (593). Over time, according to the almanac reproduced in the novel's text, the thirst for blood to feed the spirits twisted the souls of these priests, motivated the Conquest of the Americas and created an alliance between Cortés and Moctezuma, who had been "meant for one another" (Silko 570). Their shared thirst for blood required, obviously, control over the bodies of others, leading to the enslavement of first indigenous peoples and later imported Africans. The novel implies that a desire for the spiritual power previously granted through blood sacrifice led to the creation of an economy fueled by the commodification of the body and its parts. For the Destroyers, power, whether conceived of in economic or spiritual terms, originates from the spilling of blood and facilitates the commodification of all things related to the human body.

*Almanac of the Dead* asserts that the commodification of the body lies at the heart of the Destroyers' plans to establish control over the Americas, and the world itself. In the novel's invocation of the present and near-future, the characters aligned with the Destroyers both profit from and indulge in activities that represent a continuum of corporeal commodification: prostitution, pornography, and licit (blood banks) and illicit organ trafficking. Perhaps more than any other characters, Beaufrey and Serlo, the novel's most grotesque villains, epitomize the Destroyers' tendency to revel in the commodification of all things related to the body. Beaufrey relies on

male prostitution for sexual pleasure, and traffics in both torture videos and infant organs. This illicit trafficking in turn funds the activities of an unnamed secret society to which Serlo belongs, a white-supremacist group dedicated to preserving the privileges of a narrowly-defined global economic elite. In the past, this group collaborated to spread AIDS/HIV among the world's poor, and they plan to eventually abandon the earth after reaping all possible benefits from the land:

In the end, the earth would be uninhabitable. The Alternative Earth modules would be loaded with the last of the earth's uncontaminated soil, water, and oxygen and would be launched by immense rockets into high orbits around the earth where sunlight would sustain plants to supply oxygen, as well as food. Alternative Earth modules would orbit together in colonies, and the select few would continue as they always had, gliding in luxury and ease across polished decks of steel and glass islands where they looked down on earth as they had once gazed down at Rome or Mexico City from luxury penthouses, still sipping cocktails. (Silko 542)

Beaufrey and Serlo exemplify the Destroyers' commodification of *everything* in order to maintain global (and eventually, the novel hints, intergalactic) hegemony. The novel also portrays Beaufrey and Serlo's actions as a mere continuation of the commodification of bodies that began in pre-Columbian times and intensified following the Conquest.

While the centrality of the commodification of the body is clearly established in *Almanac's* portrayal of the Destroyers, the connection between the commodification of the body and the oppositional efforts of the alliance of the

disenfranchised is more difficult to discern. Yet, as David Moore makes clear in his article, “Silko’s Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*,” blood also maintains a spiritual significance for the members of the alliance of the disenfranchised: “The trope of blood as energy deconstructs the binary of life and death, so that in a certain sacrifice even death becomes a making sacred, a giving rather than a taking of life” (175). In contrast to the destructive use of blood employed by the Destroyers, for many alliance members, blood is a sacred commodity used to appease vengeful ancestor spirits and fetishized objects:

The unborn baby drank the mother’s blood; unborn chicks grew from delicate halos of blood inside the egg. The spirits of the mountains had to have their share; if people did not sacrifice to the mountains willingly, then the mountains trembled and shook with hurt and anger. The dead bodies strewn across winding mountain roads after head-on collisions provided blood to calm angry mountain spirits. Particular curves on the mountain roads not only had shrines and altars, but special feast days to pacify the spirits who inhabited the curves or crossroads. (Silko 512)

In addition, at several points in the novel, the characters note that the spirits of the ancestors and the land itself are angry, and demand blood in compensation for the outrages that they have suffered. For example, El Feo, leader of the spirit army, believes that the spirits will allow them to succeed even if confronted by the U.S. armed forces:

They might fall by the hundreds but still the people would keep walking; not running or screaming or fighting, but always walking. Their faith lay in the



spirits of the earth and the mountains that casually destroyed entire cities. Their faith lay in the spirits outraged by the Europeans who had burned alive the sacred macaws and parrots of Tenochtitlan; for these crimes and all the killing and destruction, now the Europeans would suffocate in their burning cities without rain or water any longer. (711)

The exchange of blood for spiritual power also occurs on smaller levels within the text. Objects imbued with spiritual power, such as Clinton's knife and Menardo's bulletproof vest, also require ritual feeding of blood.<sup>10</sup> For those not "infected," however, with an obscene and perverse obsession with blood and pain, the sacrifices offered to inanimate objects provide a conduit for the transmission of spiritual energy and power that forms a basis for this worldview. Here I am in agreement with David Moore, who argues that just as electricity in the novel is neither good nor bad, blood is a neutral commodity that enables the resistance of those characters who oppose the Destroyers even as it fuels the Destroyers' own plans (175).

That said, bodies, their blood, and their organs are not neutral for the novel's characters. Looking more closely at two of the novel's intertwined plotlines, I argue that the neutrality associated with the body, its parts and their power is undermined by the representation of Serlo's corporeal alienation, Trig's construction of a body-parts empire, Seese's search for her missing child, and Lecha's compilation, translation and transcription of the novel's embedded almanac. A close reading of these plots establishes that the competing visions of world systems represented within *Almanac of the Dead* are institutionalized at the level of the body and through its connection to the material and economic worlds in which it exists.

Serlo, as mentioned previously, is aligned with the Destroyers, and one of his primary desires is to be free of the body and the uncleanness of those lacking *sangre pura*. Serlo represents the Destroyers' unhealthy tendency to alienate themselves from their material surroundings, down to the level of the body. Serlo values blood (in terms of breeding) above all else but has withdrawn completely from the land around him, seeing it only in terms of the commodities and wealth it can provide or its ability to sustain those of *sangre pura* once they leave for space. Rejection of the body is a rejection of the land which sustains it which, the novel implies, is the root of the Destroyers' twisted nature.

Other characters seek to commodify the body for personal gain. For Trigg, body parts hold dual potential. On the one hand, they are the commodity that will finance his business ventures, including the Pleasure Mall dedicated to the body. On the other, they represent regenerative potential: Trigg operates under the illusion that the body parts that he supplies to medical schools will one day result in the discovery of regenerative therapies that will allow him to escape the wheelchair that confines his paralyzed body. Furthermore, Trigg's performance of oral sex on the homeless "donors" as he drains their blood from their bodies reinforces the connection that Trigg sees between regeneration and rebirth and organ trafficking.

Perhaps the most obvious example of the heavy weight attached to bodies in this text originates in Seese's attempts to locate her kidnapped son, who, the readers learn, has been killed and his organs sold on the black market controlled by Beaufrey and Serlo. Seese's futile search is central to the novel's interrogation of competing

world systems; it opens the discursive space that connects the figure of the missing boy to the novel's many dead and their need for justice and desire for retribution.

The body of the *Almanac* is littered with corpses, and Lecha, a Demerol-addict and talk-show sensation, is able to locate the missing dead. In other words, she is able to find the Destroyers' victims. The embedded almanac of which Lecha is guardian further documents the (hi)stories of these missing bodies. In this way, bodies are refigured and provided with explanatory narratives that, in the retelling, provide additional power for the alliance. A striking example of this can be seen in the story of Yoeme's escape from jail, which she incorporated into the almanac before its guardianship was passed on to Lecha. As Yoeme relates, she was sentenced to hang for committing sedition and treason, but she is spared by the mass deaths caused by the 1918 flu epidemic (579-580). The power of this story enables others to find their freedom:

Yoeme had believed power resides within certain stories; this power ensures the story to be retold, and with each retelling a slight but permanent shift took place. Yoeme's story of her deliverance changed forever the odds against all captives; each time a revolutionist escaped death in one century, two revolutionists escaped certain death in the following century even if they had never heard such an escape story. Where such miraculous escape stories are greatly prized and rapidly circulated, miraculous escapes from death gradually increase. (581)

The creation and circulation of narratives that identify and historicize the bodies of the dead and forgotten—not just Yoeme but also the victims of the flu mentioned

above—is thus linked to the circulation of powerful spiritual flows that effect positive change.

The novel thus documents the ambivalent status of the body at the level of the person: In commodified form, it provides Destroyers with power and money. When commodification is resisted, members of the alliance gain strength. On both sides, the body becomes the site at which competing ideologies are contested. Bodies, and body parts, possess no intrinsic value but are rather a resource that can provide strength for either world system.

The novel extends this ambivalence into its conclusion: It is not at all clear at the novel's end which world system will emerge dominant. The primary members of the alliance of the disenfranchised begin plans to merge their forces, and Lecha's almanac prophesizes violence and war to come:

Earthquakes and tidal waves would wipe out entire cities and great chunks of U.S. wealth. The Japanese were due to be pounded by angry earth spirits, and the world would watch in shock as billions of dollars and thousands of lives were suddenly washed away. Still there would be no rain, and high temperatures would trigger famines that sent refugees north faster and faster.

The old almanac said 'civil strife, civil crisis, civil war.' (756)

The novel offers only a hint of optimism through the reintegration of Sterling, an exiled member of the Laguna nation, into his community. The peace associated with Sterling's homecoming, however, is overshadowed by Sterling's recognition that an army is amassing in the South in preparation for a final, apocalyptic battle: "...Sterling knew why the giant snake had returned now; he knew

what the snake's message was to the people. The snake was looking south, in the direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come" (763).

### Narrative Systems

I began this chapter with the claim that each of these very different novels' discussions of organ trafficking lead to significant changes in the body of the text itself. The representation of organ trafficking, and its impact on an array of bodies and institutions, is linked in these texts to formal innovations and the inclusion and/or appropriation of literary modes associated with other regions of the Americas. While each of these novels similarly refuses to work within the constraints of realism and resists reaching a narrative conclusion, each text draws upon a different range of literatures, oratures and other cultural texts.

Placing *The Long Night of White Chickens* into a particular genre has proved problematic for critics of Goldman's novel. Linda Craft notes that the novel incorporates "discourses of the *Bildungsroman*, the love story, and 'whodunit' fiction" (430). For Gabriela Yanes Gómez, this blending of genres is troublesome. She explains,

*Estamos ante una novela que no puede categorarse genéricamente con facilidad: se relata un crimen y sus posibles soluciones pero no es una novela policiaca; las acciones de sus personajes no generan suspenso; son el pretexto para revisar críticamente el territorio y el ser guatemalteco. Hay un deliberado esfuerzo por crear la psique de los personajes pero son sus acciones las que mejor los definen, de tal manera que no podemos clasificarla como novela psicologista. Tampoco es una novela política aunque el*

*panorama social de Guatemala en los años ochenta esté tan minuciosamente retratado, pues no hay una reflexión crítica sobre las estructuras de poder.*

(645)

Marc Zimmerman, however, avoids this tendency to define *The Long Night of White Chickens* in terms of what it is not; instead, he simply labels it an example of the “*nueva narrativa guatemalteca*” (652).

While Goldman’s novel can certainly be defined by its relation to the *bildungsroman*, detective fiction, or even romantic fiction, for my purposes, it is most useful to consider *The Long Night of White Chickens* in relation to the Central American genre of *testimonio* as well as the discourses of print journalism. As Ana Patricia Rodríguez explains, fictional texts that employ *testimonio* style narratives have been employed by many U.S. Latina/o authors, including Goldman in *The Ordinary Seaman*, to “rework discourses of war, revolution, displacement, immigration, structural adjustment politics, and (new) social movements” (401). In *The Long Night of White Chickens*, Goldman adopts a similar tactic, but his narrative style diminishes the potential for *testimonio* to allow readers access to the lived experiences of the Guatemalan and U.S. characters that he creates.

*The Long Night of White Chickens* narrates the investigation of Flor’s death, but this novel works at a distance. Although Flor is herself the central mystery of the text, readers are denied access to her voice much as Roger and Moya were prevented from learning the truth about Flor’s life and death. Flor’s voice only appears in the text as mediated through Roger or Moya’s memories or through embedded versions of her letters. Although mediation is often a characteristic of *testimonio*, Roger and

Moya's narratives possess none of the transparency that would give Flor's voice primacy. She exists in the novel only as much as she can be partially reconstructed by Roger and Moya. Furthermore, the novel also resists the notion of "truth" or the belief that text can accurately represent lived experiences, both concepts that appear to support the *testimonio* as a genre. This realization ultimately leads Roger to abandon his investigation: About to meet with informants, Roger realizes that he has not found the truth but has rather created a situation that will allow him to confirm what he already believes. His contacts can verify only what he already knows: that Flor's eyelash curler and mink stole disappeared from her room after the police's cursory investigation. The eyelash curler that the informants showed him can prove nothing other than the theft itself; no investigation will ever reveal why Flor was murdered.

The novel also resists the "truth claims" that structure print journalism. As the novel's depiction of *faferos* demonstrates, the press corps cannot be relied upon to print unbiased accounts of events. Even "honest" journalists such as Moya are forced by political pressures or outright censorship to alter the content of their stories. For example, in order to expose the postal service's theft of money sent from abroad and army's "control of the black-market trade for dollars," Moya resorts to concocting an elaborate tale about a woman who never received a crucial love letter from her boyfriend living abroad (Goldman 289). Even this critique of governmental corruption, however, is enough to result in threats against Moya's life. In this context, the truth cannot be published, even if it can be determined.

Finally, much like the Mexican detective novels discussed earlier, the novel also plays with genre expectations associated with mystery novels. The documentation of the slow disintegration of Roger and Moya's investigation once again undermines the belief that there is a verifiable "truth" waiting to be discovered. For Marc Zimmerman, this discrediting of the very notion of truth occurs through the frequent invocation of the refrain, "*Guatemala no existe*": "*El lector nunca sabrá con certeza, pues ¿cómo se puede descubrir una verdad fundamental o fija en un país que no existe, o en la referencialidad siempre mediada o encubierta de una ficción novelística?*" (661).

The novel's reluctance to verify any sort of truth claim is connected to its shifting pattern of narration and its jumbled chronology. *The Long Night of White Chickens* two narrators relate events according to their own internal logic. Both Roger and Moya interpolate their recollections of past events—particularly their interactions with Flor, but also information regarding the progress of their investigation—in a decidedly non-chronological format. Readers are given access to information as the narrators create connections between their past and present lives. As a result, the structure of the novel undermines the kind of Enlightenment belief in rationality that provides a structure for detective fiction: There is no clear path from past to present, and there is no way to connect cause and effect in order to determine why Flor was killed, whether she trafficked in children or their organs, or what her motives were for becoming involved in transnational adoptions.



Instead, the past haunts the present. The novel presents a literal version of this by documenting Roger's sense of being chased by the *knishes chapín* truck: Roger recalls

...the truck's panel decorated with the too familiar symbols of Guatemalan kitsch: cartoony quetzal birds in unfurled flight, a grape purple volcano, a Maya pyramid, and the painted letters "KNISHES CHAPÍN"—*chapín* being Central American slang for Guatemalan. A post-Maya *chapín* selling Jewish knosh food in Brooklyn. I tried to stay away from that truck as if it were a joke aimed just at them, would literally cross the street to avoid it... (Goldman 13)

Of course, in more psychological terms, Roger's memories of Flor and his continual reinterpretation of them also affect his day-to-day existence. The recognition of this constant interplay of past and present also leads Roger to stop his investigation:

On the bridge, when I heard Flor's voice—that wasn't just memory. Her voice still exists, and that was proof. Memory is like a long conversation during which, at any moment, Flor might tell me something unexpected—as long as I, despite many other preoccupations, go on keeping up my end well enough, and listening. (448)

If, as Roger asserts here, there is no real boundary between the past and present, then there is no need to continue his detective work: Arriving at a conclusion or identifying Flor's murderers would impose a break between the past and present that would undermine his conviction that Flor's voice can still be heard.

In contrast to the casual and constant intermingling of narrative times and voices in *The Long Night of White Chickens*, *Tropic of Orange* employs a much more carefully structured narrative form that almost always remains in the character's narrative present.<sup>11</sup> Yamashita presents readers with a metatextual map, labeled "Hypercontexts" that precedes the text and introduces readers to the novel's strict chronological and narrative systems: As the map demonstrates, the novel's action occurs over the course of seven days, and each of the seven narrators presents a portion of each day's action. As a result, readers encounter seven perspectives of the events that take place each day.

This carefully orchestrated narrative form destabilizes the genre expectations associated with detective fiction. *Tropic of Orange*'s structure prevents readers from connecting events in a causal fashion. Hauser asserts that the combination of so many narrative perspectives, presented in an inconsistent order, are "combined into a single textual corpus by a twisted logic of causality which is incomprehensible for the protagonists and hard to understand for the reader" (Hauser 21). As a result, Hauser claims that "interpreting the text becomes a risky and altering endeavor" because the novel's structure denies readers access to "firm knowledge" that will not be destabilized by the realizations or information provided by other narrators (21). He concludes that the novel itself is a "performance of indeterminacy" (21).

While Hauser's comments are valid, *Tropic of Orange*'s structure and its effects may be better understood as offering readers insight into the communal lived experiences within an internally divided space such as Los Angeles. I borrow here from Kandice Chuh's recent analysis of Yamashita's *Through the Arc of Rain Forest*.

In her reading of this novel, Chuh concludes that the use of multiple narrators emphasizes “relationality” and thus “refuses and refutes claims to definitive, discrete knowledge” (Chuh 629). While similar to Hauser’s claim, Chuh’s argument is ultimately more positive, for she sees generative possibilities in these relational narratives: “Understanding emerges from precisely the sites of intersection of individual stories, which are those spaces in which individual authority erodes in favor of collaborative storytelling” (629). In other words, the reader’s ability to assess and connect these intersections grants access into a communal narrative in which, by definition, no one perspective can be complete or definitive. Applied to *Tropic of Orange*, this analysis suggests that the denial of causality results in the creation of readers better positioned to observe and, perhaps, destabilize the borders of race, class and nationality that artificially separate the novel’s characters.

Although Yamashita’s text is constrained by a strictly ordered narrative structure, the events that it narrates evade all the limits imposed by realism. Yamashita draws heavily upon Latin American and U.S. Latino/a literary traditions in her construction of a fictionalized L.A. As Hauser explains, Yamashita’s text models magic realism in its depiction of the Tropic of Cancer’s journey northward. For Hauser, however, Yamashita’s adoption of this literary form is the cause of the novel’s lack of causality: “Magic Realism defines a highly complex spatial representation in the novel....It breaks up causal linearity which sets this narrative mode into analogy with the moving tropic and the transition in geography” (Hauser 14).

This explanation, however, is somewhat limited when applied to other examples of the marvelously real in the text: Rafaela’s transformation into a serpent

during her battle with Hernando, the organ/orange trafficker, is more than a simple textual evasion of causality: It is a strategic attempt to link Rafaela with Coatlicue, a pre-Columbian goddess used by Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa in her theorization of female border subjects.<sup>12</sup> And, as Claudia Sadowski-Smith explains, Rafaela's victory over Hernando, a reference to Hernán Cortés, is part of a re-working of the Malinche story and the Conquest of the Americas (Sadowski-Smith 103). Rather than simply defy the causality that realism relies upon, then, *Tropic of Orange* uses magical realism to make connections to other literary, oral and performative traditions.

The character of Arcangel is perhaps the most obvious reference to another work of literature in *Tropic of Orange*. As Rauch notes in her review of the novel, "You know you're in for some good old-fashioned magic realism when, in the first chapter, Rafaela, the housekeeper, calmly sweeps crabs from the terra cotta floors of Gabriel's landlocked house in Mazatlan. So too begins Gabriel Garcia Márquez's 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings'" (Rauch 29). Of course, to ensure that readers appreciate this textual reference, Yamashita herself mentions that "in one installation he [Arcangel] wore wings and sat in a cage. Gabriel García Márquez himself came to the opening..." (Yamashita 48). In reconstructing García Márquez's character, Yamashita ties her work to a literary tradition used (in the case of García Márquez, at least) to critique the formation and failures of the nation-state, concerns shared by *Tropic of Orange*.

Arcangel, however, also exemplifies the novel's emphasis on performative identities, which also serve to link *Tropic of Orange* to U.S. Latino/a and Mexican cultural production. Alvinia Quintana has documented Arcangel/El Gran Mojado's

similarities to Guillermo Gómez- Peña's adoption of multiple performative identities in *Border Brujo* (221). Furthermore, Yamashita herself has acknowledged modeling this character on Gómez-Peña (Vengua Gier and Tejeda par. 16). Her use of Gómez-Peña's "Freefalling Towards a Borderless Future" as an epigraph speaks to her engagement with his work. This association, in particular, reinforces her text's assertion that identities are performed, not essential: Emi's resistance to performing stereotypical versions of Japanese American identities provide one example of this argument.

Finally, El Gran Mojado presents a link to the *enmascarado* heroes of Mexican wrestling traditions, who perform "cultural virtues" as they fight various villains: Sadowski-Smith places El Gran Mojado within a history of *enmascarados* that includes Zorro, El Santo, and "the contemporary urban social rights and performance artist Superbarrio Gómez, who has been righting wrongs in the streets of Mexico City since the 1980s" as well as ski-mask-wearing members of the Zapatista Army, such as Subcomandante Marcos (Sadowski-Smith, "Borderlands Write" 106). Through these references, *Tropic of Orange* connects itself to a performative history of resistance that spans national borders.<sup>13</sup>

*Almanac of the Dead* performs a similar move and connects itself to a long history of resistance in the Americas through its form. Silko's text is at once a work of historiographic metafiction and an almanac. In its self-conscious commentary on the writing of history and its presentation of an alternate history of the Americas, *Almanac of the Dead* resists hegemonic versions of U.S. history and offers a model of history that accounts for both written and oral traditions. Rather than insist on

imposing on the Americas a new, single historical narrative, *Almanac of the Dead* incorporates histories and chronicles created by several characters that taken together, promote a multi-vocal and inclusive history that acknowledge acts of resistance by Native and African American subjects: Virginia Bell identifies Angelita la Escapía's oral chronology of Native rebellions, and Clinton's notebooks and radio broadcasts as two important examples of the text's rewriting of history (Bell 19). Most significantly, *Almanac of the Dead* also constructs a "counter-chronicle" through the embedded transcriptions of the ancient almanac that Lecha guards (19).

This process of transcription calls attention to the pre- and post-Columbian origins of the almanac in the Americas. As Donnelly notes, the embedded almanac (as well as the novel itself) represent Silko's attempt to recreate an additional codex to stand alongside the three Mayan pre-Conquest codices that are held in libraries in Paris, Madrid, and Dresden (247). However, the embedded almanac is also a fictional descendent of Aztec and Toltec prophecies as well as the "post-Conquest *Books of Chilam Balam*, which are named for the Mayan priest of the immediate pre-Conquest period who became famous for having predicted the Spanish invasion" (247). Finally, allusions to the *Popul Vuh* also situate the novel within another context of Mayan narrative and spirituality: As Bell points out, El Feo and Tacho are "revisions of the twin brothers Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the heroes of the Maya *Popul Vuh*" (Bell 20).

This is not to say, however, that *Almanac of the Dead* and its embedded almanac should be viewed solely within the context of indigenous traditions. On the contrary, the almanac as a literary and historiographic form possesses a hybrid history

of its own: Paul Beekman Taylor notes that "...in its earliest recorded context, the Arabic-Spanish *almanakh* is a translation into local dialect of Greek *ephemerides* 'daily' with the sense 'a diary, a record of days'..." (45). He also argues that Columbus' use of the *Ephemerides ab Anno 1475-1506*, an astronomical calendar, marks the arrival of the form in the Americas, and he claims that Silko's appropriation of the form creates "palimpsest, or a 'writing over' the almanac that steered the European destroyer to the plunder and rape of the 'New World'" (45).

An almanac, however, is more than a diary or record of past events; it also serves as a guide for the future. The novel's chronicling of Native resistance throughout the past five hundred years occurs alongside prophecies that indicate the forthcoming destruction of all things European in the Americas. Furthermore, the embedded almanac foretells the creation of the alliance of the disenfranchised even as the novel's characters prepare for its formation at the International Holistic Healers Convention in Tucson. The embedded almanac prophecies, "One day a story will arrive at your town. It will come from far away, from the southwest or southeast—people won't agree. The story may arrive with a stranger or perhaps with the parrot trader. But when you hear this story, you will know that it is the signal for you and the others to prepare" (Silko 153-136). Later, the "story" presented by the Barefoot Hopi at the Convention provides an impetus for a meeting of the leaders of several indigenous armies, resulting in a collaboration that merges forces traveling north from Chiapas with members of Indian nations from the Plains and Eskimo warriors headed south (762).

*Almanac of the Dead*'s simultaneous incorporation of past, present and future results in a novel that cannot, due to its very nature, present events in a strict chronological order. Priewe argues that the text's structure is best understood as a spiral: "By constantly withdrawing from the narrative present to delineate past events, the text spirals towards its conclusion (that lies in the future), while underlining 'the inextricable relationship between the present and the past'" (229-230). Most other critics of the novel, however, call attention to its web-like construction, which Ann Stanford, in particular, links to indigenous oral traditions, explaining that *Almanac of the Dead* is "Fashioned like the spider web structure Silko says is integral to Pueblo storytelling" (Stanford 23). Whether perceived as a web or a spiral, *Almanac of the Dead* requires careful attention from readers able to track the constantly shifting chronology.

Perhaps in recognition of the difficulty her novel's structure might pose to some audiences, Silko presents a map that precedes the text and serves as a metatextual guide to the novel's characters, action, and movement. Alex Hunt establishes that maps in the body of the text serve as a symbol of cartography linked to colonial appropriations of indigenous lands; Silko, he claims, reverses this use by strategically deploying maps that re-write colonial histories (Hunt 260). The metatextual map serves this very purpose; as Bell explains, its de-centering of national boundaries and inclusion of narratives relating past, present, and future events results in the creation of "a map of circuits that undo spatial and temporal borders" (Bell 18). Seese's pursuit of her missing son, the trafficking of arms, torture videos, and the westward spread of organized crime are all circuits of illicit activities



plotted on this map. Silko's text requires this visual representation in order to make connections between past and present illicit and immoral activities in the Americas.

*Almanac of the Dead, Tropic of Orange and The Long Night of White*

*Chickens* all employ narrative structures that deviate from the linear chronologies and realist narratives that ground most economic- and social science-based analyses of globalization. As a result, these works are able to engage in imaginative play that creates different perspectives on the global changes that they document. By constructing alternate chronologies, all three texts take different paths yet make the legitimate argument that an understanding of the present can neither be separated from an interrogation of the past nor can it be divorced from a reckoning with the future. Their incorporation of both numerous narrative threads as well as multiple narrators emphasizes the situated nature of all knowledges and serves as a reminder that diverse perspectives must be taken into account in order avoid imposing a single paradigm, such as neoliberalism, on a highly complex system of economic, social, and cultural change that has the potential to divide the globe into the dystopia that Gómez-Peña describes in the epigraph to this chapter. Instead, as these three works demonstrate, in the context of illicit economies, we must all struggle to develop new, and more inclusive, ways of understanding and representing change. This will, if these texts serve as a model, necessitate the continual search for a form that Goldman announces in his use of Darío in the epigraph ("*Busco una forma*") to his novel. It is not at all clear what this form will be in other novels touching on globalization, but the mobilization of the trope of organ trafficking in these novels results in particular structural and narrative changes to the body of the text.

I also suggested at the beginning of this chapter that these three novels provide an opportunity to explore strategies for linking U.S. literature with larger world literary systems. As these works are often critiqued within the framework of U.S. ethnic literatures, fields that have historically engaged in thorough critiques of the nation. By no means am I suggesting that the fields of U.S. Latino/a, Native American or Asian American literatures and cultural studies “give up on the nation” as a category of analysis. But these novels do offer a point of departure for expanding these fields through conversations with other literatures of the Americas. Each of these texts points to a North-South axis and is best understood within the context of cultural production in multiple forms from locations along that axis. Furthermore, addressed as a group, these novels highlight the multiple, competing claims made upon the nations of the Americas.

I would like to suggest that *Tropic of Orange* and *Almanac of the Dead* in particular present valuable opportunities to engage in an analysis of the theoretical construction of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By placing non-Chicano histories of immigration alongside the mythology of Aztlán, *Tropic of Orange* raises important questions about who can claim this landscape, and to what effect. *Almanac of the Dead* makes a similar argument through its depiction of the Yaqui nation, whose land is bifurcated by a border that the novel’s indigenous characters ignore. Finally, through narratives that alternately privilege movement and situatedness, these three novels present a challenge for the field of the Literatures of the Americas as a whole: How will the field balance a desire to track the movement of peoples, cultures and forms with the necessity of paying attention to that which is rooted?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jameson, Fredric. "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88. For a succinct analysis of the critical response to this essay, see Neil Lazarus' "Fredric Jameson on 'Third World Literature': A Qualified Defense," p. 42-61 in *Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader* (Ed. Douglas Kellner and Sean Homer, Great Britain, Palgrave P, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See Goldman, Francisco. "State of the Art: Latino Writers." *Washington Post* 28 February 1999, p.1+.

<sup>3</sup> One important exception to this general rule is Claudia Sadowski-Smith's comparison of *Almanac of the Dead* and *Tropic of Orange* in her article "The U.S.-Mexico Borderlands Write Back: Cross-Cultural Transnationalism in Contemporary U.S. Women of Color Fiction." *Arizona Quarterly* 57.1 (2001): 91-112.

<sup>4</sup> In his article "'Woody Allen visita Guatemala' o una reivindicación frustrada," Marc Zimmerman identifies the novel's action as occurring mainly between 1983-1987 (654).

<sup>5</sup> See "International Adoption as a Fictional Construct: Francisco Goldman's *The Long Night of White Chickens*," by Linda Craft for an analysis of the impact of these two models of adoption on the narrative structure of the text.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Louise Pratt develops this term in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992).

<sup>7</sup> Molly Wallace makes a similar point, without citing Rauch, in her "Tropics of Globalization: Reading the New North America." *Symploke* 9.1-2 (2001): 145-160. Accessed through Project MUSE, 3/3/2004.

<sup>8</sup> Although *Tropic of Orange* incorporates, largely through Arcangel's poetic pronouncements, historical references to resistance against European domination of the Americas, these references are neither as extensive or as detailed as those offered with *Almanac of the Dead*.

<sup>9</sup> This history repeats that presented in Silko's earlier novel, *Ceremony* (1977). In *Almanac of the Dead*, the narrator comments, "The old parrot priests used to tell stories about a time of turmoil hundreds of years before the Europeans came, a time when communities had split into factions over sacrifices and the sight and smell of fresh blood. The people who went away had fled north, and behind them the dynasties of sorcerer-sacrificers had gradually taken over the towns and cities of the South. In fact, it had been these sorcerer-sacrificers who had 'called down' the alien invaders, sorcerer-cannibals from Europe, magically sent to hurry the destruction and slaughter already begun by the Destroyers' secret clan" (475).

<sup>10</sup> This recognition that objects have a value beyond that ascribed to them by the economic market is detailed by Fisher-Hornung, who explains that the spiritual economy represented in *Almanac* is also fueled by the connection made between the producer's human spirit and the commodities s/he creates: "The energy that is imparted to material culture of indigenous peoples in a spiritual, non-market economy is radically different from the energies of fetishized objects in a globalized market economy. Silko, therefore, links Marx's critique of vampire capitalism to the energies of the human spirit" (208).

<sup>11</sup> Although *Tropic of Orange* does incorporate occasional flash-backs, these are easily identified by readers who recognize that the events being narrated have occurred in the narrator's past. This is far different from *The Long Night of White Chickens*, where readers are not always able to place the narrators' recollections into a time-line of events. Overall, however, *Tropic of Oranges'* narrators document their actions and thoughts as they occur, remaining in the text's narrative present.

<sup>12</sup> See Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (California: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), especially chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>13</sup> Both Sadowski-Smith and Quintana observe links to Native trickster traditions in Arcangel / El Gran Mojado's performances.

## Conclusion

“The Incienso Bridge spans a vast, deep *barranco* behind Zona 2, a densely packed slum spreading down one steep slope, garbage perpetually smoldering all over the other. Five hundred dollars folded up in an envelope in my pocket, I walked all the way out into the middle like I was supposed to, and waited, standing on the pedestrian walkway inside the rail. The bridge seemed to sway beneath me whenever heavy trucks sped across [...]

I didn't feel particularly nervous at first. I guess I was in a suspended state, waiting to see what would happen and knowing that I needed calm much more than fear to get what I wanted from the meeting. I wanted to know, is all, and wasn't it worth the effort to find out? But do you know what I actually felt at that moment, Flor? You know what I was actually thinking? [...]

By then I'd already begun to walk off. Casually, looking down, hands in pockets, as if really I was just going to pace back and forth a bit, impatiently, though what I was thinking now was Who else would have actually kept that eyelash curler around but a poor cop's wife? Some poor beat cop with control over a teenage *mara*. Five hundred bucks, a lot to some loser cop who'd probably keep most of it for himself, sharing the rest with his two subservient punks, Gato Cinco and Teardrop. By then I'd already started running into Zona 1, and didn't stop until I'd reached the Avenida Elena, which marks the beginning of my neighborhood.”  
-- Francisco Goldman, *The Long Night of White Chickens*, 444-445

One of the final images of Roger Graetz, the protagonist and would-be detective of *The Long Night of White Chickens*, places him in unstable territory, in both literal and figurative terms. In the first passage cited above, Roger stands on a bridge, awaiting the arrival of an informant who might finally explain Flor's murder and account for the rumors of infant organ trafficking that surround her death. Roger is suspended over a slum, a location that reflects his class privilege and also gestures at his own indeterminate position: Over the course of his investigation, Roger travels through neighborhoods defined by poverty and petty crime as well as the upper levels of an elite society characterized by comfort and corruption. He is suspended as well between the past and his future, and between Guatemala and the United States. The second passage emphasizes the ambivalence of Roger's mental state: He wants to know more but realizes that this knowledge will mark the ending of his investigation.

Even more alarming, the act of “knowing” will fix his position, firmly returning him to a world of certainties where the ground no longer moves beneath his feet.

Roger’s next actions reject this possibility. He flees, discarding the stability that the informant’s knowledge might bring. As discussed in the previous chapter, this rejection arises from Roger’s realization that the informant cannot tell him anything more than he already knows. Roger’s epiphany establishes that he will have to carry his own incomplete understanding of events with him into the future. He will have a lifetime in which to return to his memories and to formulate new questions: Roger’s investigation ends not with a concrete conclusion but instead emphasizes his sobering realization that such a conclusion is impossible. His sprint back to his own neighborhood can be read as an attempt to outrun this recognition or, in more positive terms, as a race towards those future investigations.

I prefer to interpret this image of Roger as a caution against embracing false certainties and as an invitation to welcome new investigations. This symbolism seems particularly apt for the beginning of a conclusion that synthesizes past research and also identifies new fields of inquiry. This dissertation has explored the use of organ trafficking as a means of critiquing the consolidation of neoliberal globalization in the Americas. Each chapter focuses on a different genre and analyzes texts articulated in response to conditions grounded in different locations. These analyses are linked by their responses to several larger questions: What do these texts represent as globalization’s the distinguishing characteristics? What changes in the representation of the body are made visible in these texts, and how do the texts themselves account for these changes? How does cultural production from this

particular time frame respond to the “problems of place and scale” made evident as neoliberalism became the dominant economic reality of the Americas? Finally, how does the use of different genres and literary forms affect the meanings ascribed to the trope of organ trafficking? In the discussion that follows, I engage these questions one by one and then highlight additional questions raised by my research project.

The texts analyzed in this dissertation collectively establish several key characteristics of globalization that distinguish it from earlier forms of capitalism. Together, they outline the contradictions of a regime that depends on mobility and establish the new, inescapable scope of economic changes that alter the relationship between the nation-state and its inhabitants. The texts’ characterization of neoliberal globalization begins with their contrasting representations of the mobility of goods and people. As they demonstrate, globalization in the Americas relies upon the free movement of commercial goods. This stands in stark contrast to the circumscribed mobility ascribed to people under this regime. This contradiction is made most evident through detective fiction and popular film representations of the U.S.-Mexico border region, where organ traffickers move commodified body parts across the same national borders that restrict the northward movement of people. In those texts that do not explicitly feature *frontera* spaces, the implied or explicit international circulation of black-market body parts stands in opposition to its victims’ inability to flee the global forces that target them.

These texts also argue that neoliberalism is defined by its integration into all aspects of daily life. The metaphor of organ trafficking calls attention to the unwanted invasion of private spaces by capitalism. At the most overt level, this trope

highlights the commodification of the human body itself. However, the focus on the invasion of families and homes in many films and novels discussed in this dissertation also emphasizes the extent to which globalization collapses any pre-existing distinctions between private and public spheres. In the works discussed in this dissertation, there is no longer any aspect of lived experiences that has been able to escape absorption into the world of global capital.

This in turn has provoked a fundamental change in the representation of the relationship of individuals to the nation-state. If the nation-state previously served to regulate capitalism, these texts demonstrate that its functions are now regulated or limited by globalization. Neoliberal globalization mandates a smaller role for the state and produces laws that safeguard the rights of capital over those of its citizens. The texts analyzed throughout this dissertation represent this change through depictions of nation-states that no longer protect citizens and their civil rights: Instead, these rights are replaced with the freedom to consume, which these texts associate with the commodification of former citizens. Even though these individuals may have been systematically marginalized by the state, the conversion of their bodies into commodities symbolizes an exclusionary process orchestrated by market forces and not the nation-state itself. The use of familial metaphors to represent the nation also highlights this altered relationship: In Mexican popular film, in particular, familial representations assert that families are no longer an institution that produces new citizens. Instead, they either consume themselves or rebel, asserting their right to self-defense against the state's facilitation of global capital flows.



Finally, these texts generally represent globalization as an inescapable reality. By staging different scenarios of resistance and almost always depicting their inherent flaws or outright failures, the majority of the works that I analyze present neoliberalism as a regime whose all-encompassing scope cannot be evaded. This extends the atomizing scope of neoliberalism detailed above and calls into question the possibility of imagining globalization in different terms. With only a single exception, neoliberal globalization is portrayed as a new reality in the Americas that can be critiqued but not changed.

As a new economic regime, neoliberalism is also linked to changes to the representation of the body. Even beyond the most immediately apparent level where neoliberalism is represented as the cause of the body's commodification, the works assessed in the previous chapters develop a new representation of the body: Bodies are now positioned outside of all the social structures and institutions that previously gave them meaning. In this new representation, the body's economic value replaces socially ascribed identities. Historically, throughout the Americas, individual bodies and entire populations defined by difference (defined in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.) have been selectively included and excluded from social formations at and below the scale of the nation-state: These texts now suggest that the "logic" of exclusion is dictated by market forces that have reconstituted the body politic. As noted above, even subnational social institutions like the family fail to produce social identities or reproduce social values that can exist outside of the neoliberal system.

Representations of the commodified body in these texts also selectively erase gender and race. With few exceptions, race and gender appear in these texts as strategic absences. By naturalizing poverty as the defining condition of victims of organ traffickers, these works sidestep discussions of the race and gender of newly commodified bodies. Instead, they tend to present the marginalized body—the poor body that possesses the least social capital—as the body that will be the first to be commodified according to the logic of neoliberalism. Marginalization is almost always defined in terms of social class rather than in terms of race and gender, so national formations based on exclusion go largely unquestioned. The exceptions to this pattern appear when individual texts propose new national formations or argue for pre-national or imagined supra-national formations.

Finally, one group of texts in particular point to the growth of a new set of identities grounded in the body. The works of detective fiction discussed in this dissertation articulate competing identities of medical and corporeal citizenship. Both identities are constructed according to the terms set by neoliberal economic regimes: Medical citizenship establishes the right of the consumer to purchase the most advanced medical technologies, even when this claim requires access to other bodies. The logic of medical citizenship relies upon the emphasis on individual rights to consume under neoliberal regimes; in its most exaggerated state, it structures the claim to purchase organs. In contrast, corporeal citizenship points to a competing right: that of the “producer” to safeguard his/her “property.” Identities grounded in claims to corporeal citizenship do not question the commodification of the human body; instead they respond by articulating a set of property rights that would allow

the corporeal citizen control over his/her own body. That is to say, they use the logic of neoliberalism to acknowledge a right to sell or not sell access to the commodified body. This competing identity is utopian in its aspiration to safeguard subjects from medical citizenship's claims to their bodies; however, as the Brazilian case discussed in Chapter One demonstrates, corporeal citizenship also presents the dystopian possibility of authorizing organ sales.

At the same time that they advance new representations that accentuate changes in the ways bodies are valued and defined, the texts studied in this dissertation also call attention to issues central to theories of globalization. These works respond to the "problems of place and scale" that became evident during the consolidation of neoliberalism in the Americas. The term "problem of place" refers to the unanticipated persistence of place as a significant category in the face of global capital flows. The "problem of scale," on the other hand, highlights the destabilization of the nation-state as the most applicable unit of measurement for assessing the effects of global economic change. These texts' representation of these interrelated problems demonstrates the need to acknowledge different types of locations and multiple levels of scale when theorizing the Americas.

Overwhelmingly, the texts analyzed in this dissertation reject the idea that globalization has rendered the category of place irrelevant. Instead, they assert place's continued significance by recalling particular histories of economic dominance and resistance associated with specific locations. They also represent the grounding or materialization of neoliberal processes in particular locations. Furthermore, they point to the construction of new kinds of spaces (i.e., the

borderlands) through uneven patterns of neoliberal development. Finally, they argue for the need to ascribe meaning to places other than the nation-state and the identities that it produces. Many texts discussed in this dissertation produce arguments that require the reaffirmation of the nation-state as a site of social and civil identities, while at least one argues in favor of pre-national tribal identities.

In general, the works considered in the preceding chapters respond to the problem of scale through representations of the destabilization of the nation-state under neoliberalism. These representations emphasize the reduced function of the nation-state: No longer the dominant source of social identities, the nation-state has been destabilized by neoliberal identities that are based in patterns of consumption. By highlighting the opposing identities of consumers and producers, these texts highlight the need to both theorize globalization at the level of the individual and in relation to supranational formations (NAFTA, free-trade blocs, etc). These arguments are also accompanied by a call for examining scales that are produced in relation to pre-national geographies.

This dissertation also engages in an investigation of the relation of literary genre to content. As my discussion of detective fiction and Mexican organ trafficking films demonstrates, generic form does at least partially constrain or shape the content of these works. To a certain extent, generic formulas predispose the construction of particular types of conclusions: In detective fiction, generic formulas call for the resolution of a crime and the restoring of social order. Familial melodramas, to offer another example, are predisposed to end with scenes of familial restoration. The need to produce these particular types of conclusions limits the content that these texts

include: For example, the need to resolve trafficking investigations appears to deter the works of detective fiction discussed in Chapter Two from exploring the larger economic structures that motivate international organ trafficking. Similarly, the desire to portray familial restoration in Mexican popular film requires these films to maintain a focus on the victims of organ trafficking rather than on the traffickers themselves. These correlations between content and form imply that genre performs an epistemological role, shaping the types of questions that can be asked through the use of the metaphor of organ trafficking.

In contrast, when literary works are positioned outside of genre constraints, the scope of the meanings attributed to organ trafficking expands, accompanied by formal innovations. Although the literary narratives discussed in Chapter Four also play with generic forms, including detective fiction and familial melodrama, they resist generic impulses that mandate the inclusion of formulaic conclusions. This appears to allow these texts to explore the significance of alternate conclusions: All of these texts explore the ramifications of incomplete investigations of organ trafficking. The indeterminacy that results from open-ended conclusions is replicated in formal innovations that allow the texts to resist producing fixed or totalizing narratives: Instead, they incorporate jumbled chronologies that undermine Enlightenment theories of knowledge production, produce structures of multiple narrators that emphasize relationality, or point to modes of mapping that emerge from non-Western epistemologies. This correlation between textual commentaries on the production of knowledge and the structure of literary form presents a fertile ground for further investigation.

This dissertation's analysis of representations of economic regimes and bodies, problems of place and scale, and questions of genre also points to new areas of future research. My investigation of the trope of organ trafficking in the Americas raises related research questions that would address not only the areas of inquiry outlined above but also discuss the model of the traveling trope as a methodology that might guide further work in the Literatures of the Americas/Hemispheric Literatures field.

My analyses of the trope of organ trafficking in the Americas highlight the use of the trope to critique neoliberal globalization. However, further research is needed to see what other meanings are attributed to this trope in other locations and from different perspectives. As a researcher raised and educated in the U.S., I approach the analysis of organ trafficking representations from a Northern perspective of considerable privilege. An assessment of other perspectives grounded in different geographic locations and socioeconomic realities would offer considerable insight into the use of organ trafficking metaphors. For example, it would be particularly important to incorporate Mayan Guatemalans' perspectives on the allegations of organ trafficking discussed in Chapter One. Their interpretation of the allegations is largely missing from the print media that I discuss. How might their articulation of the trope of organ trafficking call attention to issues of race, ethnicity, and class ignored by the press that identifies largely with members of the *ladino* elite?

This discussion of situated knowledges also points to a need to examine the extent to which economic and social conditions of places outside of the Americas provide the metaphor with different meanings. For example, Leonard Cohen

analyzes the representation of transplantation in Indian film in his article “The Other Kidney: Biopolitics Beyond Recognition” and concludes that this metaphor offers a strategy for combating caste structures that determine identities by blood. It would be particularly interesting to see if this claim holds true for representations of trafficked organs.

Organ trafficking and organ sales are a reality in many other locations. Aside from the Indian representations identified by Cohen, journalists and medical anthropologists have identified these practices in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Organ transplantation, licit or not, is ascribed diverse meanings in each of these locations, which points to the possibility of exploring different uses of trafficking metaphors. In the Middle East, fundamentalist interpretations of both Islam and Judaism regard organ donation as an immoral mutilation of the body: How might representations of organ trafficking account for this religious prohibition of donation? Which bodies, in the Gulf States in particular, are identified as donor or recipient bodies? In contrast, in the Philippines, kidney sales are more common and are often not viewed pejoratively: How might this context affect trafficking representations? Or, in the context of a communist state such as China that has executed prisoners in order to produce organs for trafficking, the trope would almost certainly acquire new meanings. Finally, Nancy Scheper Hughes’ research on the use of human body parts in tribal ceremonies also points to the need for further investigations of trafficking metaphors in African regions that remain peripheral to the global economy.

The possibility of more globally-situated investigations of organ trafficking representations is also accompanied by a need for further work on the ethnic and racial dimensions of these representations. The texts discussed in this dissertation follow the general patterns revealed by Scheper Hughes' multi-sited ethnographic research: "In general, the circulation of kidneys follows established routes of capital from South to North, from East to West, from black and brown bodies to white ones, and from female to male or from poor low status men to more affluent men" (Scheper Hughes, "Keeping an Eye" 1645). Yet the works that I analyze also largely avoid discussions of the racial dynamics of organ trafficking by referring to race through strategic absences. Further investigation is needed to see if representations from other global sites replicate these erasures or reveal different dynamics. Perhaps the most well-known representation of organ trafficking, Stephen Frears' film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), produces a different dynamic in which immigrant bodies from Nigeria, Turkey and North Africa appear equally susceptible to redefinition as "donor" bodies. Does this film complicate the pattern of erasure that characterizes the texts analyzed in this dissertation? To what extent do representations from locations in Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia reveal new racial, ethnic, and gendered dimensions to the use of this metaphor?

Other research questions raised by my dissertation are also relevant within the framework of the Americas as well as within more globally-situated locations. I address the metaphoric meanings attributed to one half of transplantation procedures: the procurement of human organs. The implantation of the trafficked organ into the recipient's body is not explored in the texts discussed here. It would be particularly



intriguing to see what meanings are ascribed to bodies that receive donor organs. To what extent are organ recipients represented in the cultural production of the Americas, as well as that of other locations? How does the incorporation of trafficked organs alter representations of the body, and what significance is attributed to the economies of organ incorporation?

Finally, in terms of cultural production, my dissertation also points to a larger issue of interpretation that is central to the fields of literary and cultural studies.

Above, I briefly address the issue of genre in relation to literary and film forms that privilege action over aesthetics and argue that genre performs an epistemological function that limits the meanings attributed to organ trafficking metaphors. In texts where genre constraints are looser, changes at the level of textual form produce larger explorations of knowledge production. This difference speaks to a larger question of how popular culture forms differ from their more “literary” or “cinematic” counterparts. Although this dissertation resists valuing “high” culture over “low,” the differences between these forms of cultural production does raise significant questions about the types of projects that they fulfill. The question of audience in relation to cultural production also requires additional investigation: Does popular culture always address a different audience than “literary” audiences? To what extent does the assumed audience for popular cultural constrain the content of different generic forms? Finally, how do audiences interpret popular culture texts in comparison to more complicated forms of cultural production?

As the future lines of inquiry outlined above demonstrate, my dissertation is located at the juncture of multiple fields: Globalization studies, cultural studies,

American studies, literary studies, Latin American studies, and cultural geography. However, these multiple theoretical paradigms allow me to place texts from different locations within the context of a larger hemispheric framework: That is, even more than their shared use of a single trope, the texts analyzed in this dissertation are united by their articulation of the Americas, in the broadest sense. They produce “overlapping stories” that demonstrate a legacy of economic and cultural production.<sup>1</sup> Through the metaphor of organ trafficking, they call attention to the unequal effects of that shared history. This textual construction of the Americas fulfills, at least in part, the recent call to recognize “the asymmetry and interdependency of nation-state development throughout the hemisphere” (Levander and Levine 401). By emphasizing the nation-state’s complicated relationship with capitalist development in the Americas, these texts articulate an understanding that the region must be understood as a constantly evolving unit. The construction of the Americas that these texts produce draws attention to the contingent nature of this formation by showing that it has been produced in response to recent economic changes.

The methodology that this dissertation follows in tracing the mobilization of a trope throughout the Americas offers a productive model for future investigations. Rather than stage comparisons that are defined solely in terms of national literatures, this methodology emphasizes the transnational through multi-sited investigations of cultural production. Because metaphors are produced in relation to local cultural contexts, attention to the “traveling trope” necessitates careful attention to the difficult work of establishing just what defines that local context and how it is connected to larger spatial formations on multiple levels. This will hopefully help

resist the tendency to produce comparisons based solely upon geographical proximity.

This dissertation also offers a model for expanding the trans-American imaginary that is becoming increasingly central to both Comparative Literature and American Literary/Cultural Studies. My dissertation examines the use of organ trafficking metaphors/representations in the construction of a fictional imaginary of the Americas. The use of this metaphor calls attention to historical inequalities and also alludes to the legacy of US hemispheric dominance even as it comments upon a current economic regime that has destabilized previous constructions of the Americas. My dissertation produces an interrogation of American cultural spaces—understood in the broadest sense—that acknowledges the work of both spatial and cultural forces in the construction of this hemispheric imaginary.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I borrow this useful phrase from Ifeoma C. K. Nwankwo's "The Promises and Perils of U.S. African-American Hemispherism: Latin America in Martin Delany's *Blake* and Gayl Jones's *Mosquito*" (*American Literary History* 18.3 (2006): 579-599).

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