The Cosmopolitics of Magical Realism in Cinema

Submitted by

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In loving memory of my Ku Ku (maternal uncle)

Terry LIM Eng Leong

1 August 1948 – 22 December 2007

who was very much part of this dissertation.

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The term ‘magical realism’ gained international popularity with the boom in Latin American literary fiction in the 1950s and 1960s. More recently, this term has been used in postcolonial contexts, particularly as part of the decolonisation process, because it enables the articulation of a non-empirical (and non-Western) worldview where reality cannot and need not be rationally explained. The term is strongly associated with literature, however, with increasing frequency, it has been applied to cinema. Few studies have been done on magical realism in the medium of film, and film critics often misappropriate the term. This dissertation seeks to better understand the significance of magical realism in cinema by charting its development in relation to the politics of cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitics. I argue that cosmopolitics is a key to understanding magical realist films in postcolonial and transnational contexts. The phenomenon of cosmopolitanism is the result of the dynamics and power struggle between the colonised and coloniser, still apparent today. Since magical realism became popular in Latin America, the analysis begins with New Latin American Cinema, also described as Third Cinema. Here I explore the minoritarian cosmopolitanism that encompasses the dynamics of postcolonial struggles. From New Latin American Cinema, the analysis moves to the treatment of magical realism in Hollywood, discussed in terms of metropolitan cosmopolitanism in the context of globalisation. Finally, the films of Emir Kusturica are analysed as a case study to explore the increasing significance of magical realist films in the contemporary international scene by focusing on the cosmopolitical situation of the Balkans.
Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

David Neo

24 March 2010
Chapter 1

The Provenance and Development of the Concept Magical Realism

The main purpose of this chapter is to map out the provenance and development of the concept of magical realism in order to form a foundational understanding of the term since it is such a contentious term and has had such a varied history. The secondary purpose is to review the literature on magical realism in the medium of film. There are three strands to magical realism: 1) its origins in Europe, specifically in modernist art followed by the uptake of the term in European fiction; 2) the application and appropriation of the term in Latin America, where the discourse surrounding the term mostly developed; 3) the postcolonial discourse on the term, starting in the late 1980s with Stephen Slemon’s seminal article, “Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse”. This chapter will structure its review of the diverse literature on magic realism according to these three strands, ending with the literature review of magical realism in film.

Before I continue, I will explain my usage of “magical realism” and my repudiation of other terms, and then clarify magical realism as a specific mode that should not be conflated with the fantastic. In Magic(al) Realism, Maggie Ann Bowers differentiates magic realism, magical realism and magic(al) realism. According to the glossary, “magic realism” is a term introduced in 1925. It refers to art that attempts to produce a clear depiction of reality while including a presentation of the mysterious elements of everyday life. In the 1940s, “magical realism” was used to refer to narrative art that presents extraordinary occurrences as an ordinary part of everyday reality. Bowers then creates a third term, “magic(al) realism”, as an umbrella term to capture aspects of both magic realism and magical realism (131). I do not see the necessity in
make these differentiations and find the term “magic(al) realism” awkward. I will only be using “magic realism” when discussing Franz Roh’s work and will be using “magical realism” at all other times. To further complicate usage, Latin Americanists often differentiate “realismo maravilloso” (marvellous realism) from magical realism, arguing that marvellous realism is a distinctively Latin American phenomenon. However, this distinction is hardly made in the Anglophone discourse on magical realism. Rather, these terms are frequently conflated into the terms, magic or magical realism. Many writers use magic realism and magical realism interchangeably.

The other imperative is to clarify the mode of magical realism which is often confused with the fantastic. Both Irlemar Chiampi’s and Amaryll Beatrice Chanady’s work are useful in conceptualizing a clearer understanding and distinction between the two modes. As one of the first and most extensive writers on magical realism in literature by (Brazilian) Latin Americanists, Chiampi published _O Realismo Maravilhoso: Forma e Ideología no Romance Hispano-Americano_ in 1980. Her semiological study of magical realism focuses on “el realismo maravilloso” (marvellous realism), developed from Carpentier’s ideas. Chiampi argues that marvellous realism is separate from magical realism and is a unique Latin American phenomenon: it is the union of different elements from heterogeneous cultures, configuring a new historic reality and subverting the conventions of western rationality (35-36). She differentiates the marvellous real from the fantastic using the theoretical framework provided by Louis Vax, Tzvetan Todorov and Irène Bessiére and concludes that the fantastic is based on the “poetics of the uncertain” where the disjunction of the natural/supernatural is inherent. The marvellous real, however, contains the “effect of enchantment” where the unusual is incorporated into reality (59). One of the significant contributions of Chiampi’s work is the beginning
of the study of enunciation in contemporary Latin American narrative, through the analysis of narrative perspective and the subtle mechanics of narrator, narrated and cultural context (72-85).

Chanady’s *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (1985) builds on Chiampi’s work, discussing the enunciative devices found in magical realism and differentiating the fantastic from magical realism. Her argument is that magical realism resolves antinomy in the text whereas the fantastic does not. According to Chanady, the main distinction between these two modes is the manner in which the irrational world is perceived. In magical realism, the supernatural is not presented as problematic or disconcerting—magical realist narratives present a strange world without any judgement (*Antinomy* 23-24). Antinomy is thus resolved by including the supernatural, where the real and irreal (the mysterious, unexplainable and irrational) are simply accepted and co-habit as natural components of reality. Therefore, the description of events and situations such as hallucinations, dreams, superstitions and the supernatural, are treated as objectively real (*Antinomy* 29). By contrast, in the fantastic genre, there is unresolved antinomy when two distinct levels of reality are represented. One is ruled by the laws of reason and the other by the irrational, often seen in fantastic events that are inexplicable according to our rational logic and thus cannot be integrated into a logical framework (*Antinomy* 5).

The importance of Chanady’s work is in the examination of the roles of the narrator, implied reader, focaliser, implied author and authorial reticence, and how these devices are used in magical realism to resolve antinomy in the text. The narrator requires no explanation. However, the implied reader is not the real reader with individual beliefs, but a fictitious construct based entirely on the indications given by the text; thus, the
device of the implied reader consists of textual implications which often instruct the reader on how to read the text. The focaliser is the point of view according to the characters and actions presented to the reader. A non-focalised or “focalisation zéro” narrative is one in which an omniscient narrator knows more than the characters; “focalisation interne” occurs when the narrator adopts the view of a particular character; and “focalisation externe” is when the narrator describes the actions and external appearances but not the thoughts of a character (*Antinomy* 32-34). It is usually through focalisation that the irreal is transmitted, and Chanady cites the example of Miguel Angel Asturias’s work, who in portraying the Guatemalan Indians’ worldview fuses the real and the supernatural (*Antinomy* 37). In many cases of Latin American fiction, it is difficult to separate the focaliser from the implied author. The implied author usually refers to portions of the text that may imply an author, who may or may not be the actual author. Chanady tells us that we must be sensitive to detect the implied author, because it is often through the implied author that we can detect antinomy—the fantastic mode frequently employs the implied author to create the antinomic world of the real and irreal. Finally, authorial reticence is a relative term implying the absence of obvious intrusions and manipulation of the author, which according to Chanady, is a device often used to withhold information and explanations (*Antinomy* 121). In the fantastic genre, authorial reticence and the implied author are usually used to create a sense of hesitation, presenting the two disjunctive worlds of the real and irreal, a disjunction that functions according to both the laws of reason and the supernatural. In magical realism, there is no disjunction. Chanady’s focus on enunciative devices is a development from Chiampi’s earlier work. The devices provide useful guidelines to formal elements which distinguish the genre of the fantastic from magical realism. The distinction between the fantastic and
magical realism is an important one, which is often confusing and overlooked—many conflate these two modes and often it is not easy to make clear distinctions between the two.

1. The Provenance of Magic Realism and its European Strand

In this section, I will trace the origins of magic realism and analyse its development beginning in Europe. This contentious and malleable term has a varied history and has been applied and appropriated into many situations that make its meaning and definition elusive and problematic.

**Roh, Magic Realism and Painting**

Franz Roh, a German art critic coined the term *Magischer Realismus* or “magic realism” in 1923 to describe Karl Haider’s paintings because of certain metaphysical elements that he saw in them (Crockett 148). In 1925, he published *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (*Post-Expressionism, Magic Realism: Problems of the Newest European Painting*) (Guenther 34) and a book, *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus*. Roh saw magic realism as Post-Expressionism because it moves away from the exaggerated, fantastic, extraterrestrial and remote objects of Expressionism to what he describes as the “new objects” of the everyday, commonplace and mundane—where “objectivity” is reintegrated into reality, moving away from the spiritual (a preoccupation in Expressionism) to quotidian “tactile feeling” and the “feeling of existence” (*Magical Realism* 16-19). Unfortunately, this term did not become popular in Europe; it was obscured by museum director, Gustav Hartlaub’s term, *Neue Sachlichkeit* (Guenther 56). *Neue Sachlichkeit* means new reality or objectivity (Guenther 33 and 63). Both *Neue
Sachlichkeit and magic realism were frequently used in the 1920s to describe the emerging trend of Post-Expressionistic art by artists such as George Grosz, Carlo Mense and Georg Schrimpf. Soon after its coinage, and the initial articulation and theorisation of the concept by Roh, magic realism was overshadowed by Neue Sachlichkeit and has remained dormant, on the periphery of art criticism in the Western world.¹ There are a number of reasons for this. In 1925, there was a Neue Sachlichkeit exhibition that started in Mannheim and travelled for a year and a half in Germany. This exhibition gave currency to Hartlaub’s term (Crockett 153) and Roh actually assisted Hartlaub with the exhibition, although he was uncomfortable with the term (Guenther 43). Unlike Neue Sachlichkeit, there was no exhibition devoted to magic realism. And although Roh published a book on magic realism, art historian Dennis Crockett, has pointed out some of its failings: Roh did not relate magic realism to the immediate postwar sociopolitical situation and his central thesis was rather reductive. According to Crockett, Roh grossly overstated the differences between Expressionism and Post-Expressionism (155). Neue Sachlichkeit, on the other hand, was able to capture exceptionally well the contemporary urban life of Germany in that period (Guenther 43). But by the 1950s, art historians found both terms to be inadequate and they were replaced by the term, Post-Expressionism. Despite this, Crockett points out that “Regardless of their semantic pitfalls, Hartlaub’s Neue Sachlichkeit and Roh’s “magic realism” should ultimately be understood as synonyms for the Post-Expressionist development of the inflation years” (156).

¹ According to Menton, by 1958 Roh was less enthusiastic about magic realism, but he was still convinced of its existence. Roh believed that magic realism was subsumed by other more popular terms created with the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century in Europe such as Surrealism, Cubism and Futurism (Rediscovered 19).
In her article “Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic,” Irene Guenther provides a historical context and aesthetic explanation of magic realism and traces its origins to the old concept of *Magischer Idealismus* (magic idealism) found in German philosophy. Novalis in the late 18th century had written about “magical idealist” and “magical realist” and Roh used the idea and applied the term *Magischer Realismus* (magic realism) to an artistic context (Guenther 34). The term was an attempt to describe the strange, bizarre and illogical tendency found in art at the turn of the century. Roh in conceiving the term, was trying to describe a new movement that was emerging in German art—a movement that encapsulated naturalism, verism, neo-romanticism, lyricism, metaphysical elements and new spiritualism in the work of artists such as Otto Dix, Max Ernst and George Grosz (Crockett 146-148). Roh’s conception of magic realism focused on the “objective real” world—tangible reality, the quotidian, and the mundane, away from the fantastic and religious. It transcends and mildly transfigures reality with a “magical gaze” which Roh sees as enchantment (*Magical Realism* 16-20). He explains that “this new art is situated resolutely between extremes, between vague sensuality and highly structured schematics, as true philosophy may be located between ingenuous realism and exalted idealism” (*Magical Realism* 23). This, according to Roh, gives rise to the new idea of “realistic depiction” or the uncovering of true existence, which seeks to construct objects and forms evident in nature and in the world, in their particular primordial shape rather than in the abstract. Magic realism, therefore, evokes “in an intuitive way, the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world” (*Magical Realism* 24). Guenther explains that Roh sees reality as “reconstructed” through “spiritual” phenomena, driven by the artist’s conviction of the problematic character of the objective, palpable, phenomenal universe that yields “the magic of Being”. But this
“magic” is not a return to the spiritual, “demonic irrationalism” or “naïve vitalism”—rather, it is “an authentic rationalism” which venerates a miracle—a magic rationalism. It is a new way of seeing and rendering the everyday, of “creating a new world view” (Guenther 35-36). In Roh’s explanation, magic realism is “the mystery [that] does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (Magical Realism 16).

The term, however, did not endure as the more popular term, Neue Sachlichkeit (new objectivity), gained currency through museum exhibitions and because of its ability to capture the contemporary urban life of Germany. It became the more accepted term in describing the paintings of this period, until the 1950s. As Guenther argues, the problem with magic realism is that it did not embody a coherent style, but was comprised of numerous characteristics, new ways of seeing and depicting the familiar and the everyday, which she more accurately describes as a “new realism” (33). Seymour Menton’s Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981, explores magic realism in painting through the more popular art movements of German neue sächlichkeit; Italian pittura metafisica, novecento; French néoprimitivisme, purisme, néoclassicisme, réalisme classique and réalisme poétique; romantic realism and precisionism in the United States; and hyper realism, super realism and new realism. The paucity in the study of magical realism in other artistic media makes Menton’s book a rare and comprehensive publication on magical realism in painting.

Most of the discourse on magical realism pertains to Latin American fiction and a tacit understanding surrounds this aesthetic category in other artistic forms. Menton reiterates that magical realism has been made popular by Latin American fiction but his contention is that magical realism is “not only found in recent Latin American fiction but
in the art and literature of Germany, Italy, France and the United States from the end of World War I to the present” (9). He argues that the persistence of magical realism in the twentieth century can be attributed to the Western world’s search for an alternative to the limitations of an overly rational and technological society. He sees magical realism as a response to the despair felt by Germany’s crushing defeat during the post-World War I and II years, the existentialist angst caused by the cold war and the possibility of an atomic holocaust (9-10). As we can see, magic realism was a pictorial term born out of German modernist art.

Magical Realism in Literature

In attempting to map out how the term was appropriated by literary critics and writers, Guenther admits that gaps and conjecture abound. As a result of Roh’s preoccupation with painting, he had dismissed the literary question of magic realism by simply mentioning Arthur Rimbaud and Emile Zola. But according to Guenther, since 1925 the literary community more often than not appropriated the term for its own purposes, facilitated by the pliant meaning of “magic” and “realism”. Guenther mentions Austrian artist and writer Alfred Kubin, whose work borders between reality, dreams and the uncanny, and German writers such as Ernst Jünger, W. E. Süskind and Alfred Döblin (56-59). But it was Massimo Bontempelli (1878-1960), an Italian writer and critic, who was the first to apply the term to literature in 1926 (Walter 13). He adopted the idea from Roh and wrote magical realist fiction and critical essays in the 1920s (Bowers 61). He sees magical realism as a discovery of the magical quality of everyday life and things (Menton, Rediscovered 52) and conceives magical realism to be a combination of two
levels of reality—the world of the real and the world of the imagination that includes myths and legends and portrays an all-encompassing reality that reveals several dimensions and a more profound stratum of reality (Walter 13). Bontempelli’s magical realist fiction varies from more fantastical writing to short stories that explore the mysterious quality of reality (Bowers 61). The demarcation between the fantastic and magical realism is less distinct in the early years of the conceptualisation of the term and in the European strand of magical realism. In contrast, the Latin American strand of magical realism saw it as an American phenomenon, strongly focusing on its anthropological perspective (which is why Borges will be discussed here). The European strand of magical realism, however, overlaps with the fantastic and Surrealism.

In 1955 Angel Flores published one of the first articles on magical realism in English, “Magical realism in Spanish American Fiction”. The paper was first presented at the Modern Language Association Conference in New York in 1954 (Angulo 5). Flores takes a formalist approach and attempts to define the genre of magical realism in Spanish American Fiction. He considers 1935 to be the year that began a new phase of Latin American literature, which he describes as magical realism. For Flores, Jorge Luis Borges’s *Historia Universal de la Infamia* inaugurated the magical realism movement in Latin American literature, which included writers such as María Luisa Bombal, Silvina Ocampo and Luis Albamonte. According to Flores, the influence of magical realism stems from Franz Kafka whose short fiction Borges had translated into Spanish two years before. Flores also identifies a substantial body of literature and writers that he considers magical realist (113). He theorises magical realism as the amalgamation of realism and fantasy (112), a preoccupation with style, and the transformation of the common and everyday into the awesome and the unreal. He describes magical realists as:
cling[ing] to reality as if to prevent ‘literature’ from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms. The narrative proceeds in well-prepared, increasingly intense steps, which ultimately may lead to one great ambiguity or confusion …

to a confusion within clarity […] (115-116)

He argues that magical realism is an art of surprise that seeks to rid everything of the known and inject a new aspect and perspective toward things: magical realism throws its readers into a timeless and inconceivable flux that is “freighted with dramatic suspense” where time exists in a timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality (114-115).

Borges is a difficult writer to categorise and my discussion of him in this section exemplifies the gaps and conjecture highlighted by Guenther. Although Borges is an eminent figure in Latin American literature, literary critics are not in agreement as to whether he started or even should be classified as magical realist. He is a magic realist writer who straddles both Europe and Latin America, and as the discussion develops, it will be clearer why Borges is discussed as part of the European strand. Gerald Martin explains Borges well when he argues that magical realism is a form of modernist discourse in Latin America and describes the founders of magical realism as the “ABC of Magical Realism”: they are Mário de Andrade, Miguel Angel Asturias, Jorge Luis Borges and Alejo Carpentier (Journeys 123-141). He admits that Borges is distinctively different from the others—he was not revolutionary, neither was he interested in the primitive, Freud nor Marx; but Martin argues that “if you strip the flesh from many contemporary Latin American novels, you will soon be feeling Borges in the bones” (152-155).
Borges is a complex paradoxical phenomenon as his whole endeavour is to resolve the inferiority of local culture and “the superior metaconsciousness” of Europe that Argentines and Uruguayans inevitably feel, and he does this through a strategy of relativisation and redefinition (Martin 154). Borges is the least obviously “Latin American” writer of all the major Latin American writers because he is from the most “Europeanised” country in Latin America, Argentina. Martin argues that Borges acutely felt the “horror of being nowhere (a cultural vacuum frequently disguised as geographical distance)” so he turned to the Argentine writer’s true heritage which is the universe (155). It is through universality that Borges’s carries out his strategy of relativisation and redefinition. For Borges, because Argentines are traditionless, “one has to fall back on the Universe or, at least, on Western culture” (156). Therefore, he paradoxically dispenses with the twin sources of Latin American inspiration as intrinsically and simultaneously classicist and imperialist (156). Borges’s universality is intertexuality, based on the idea that “all writers are many writers” (157). He sees the whole planet as “Mestizo”: all cultures have a reciprocity of influences, and thus we are all citizens of the world and universe” (163). Borges takes cosmopolitanism to a connoisseur’s level in a particularly Latin American way (163). He represents the revenge of the Latin American mind—“its reconquest of global space through the intellect when force of arms, science or philosophy are not available for the task” (165). This is illustrated in what Martin describes as the four levels of Borges’s casuistical dialectic consciousness: first, in his early nationalist phase of the “Fervour of Buenos Aires”; second, his period of shame when he withdrew into complete universalism, which was actually Europeanism since Argentina is nowhere and Europe is somewhere; third, the move to universalise, instead of privileging Europe—so if Latin America is nowhere, Europe can be too; and fourth,
after his international success, his return to acknowledging his roots (162). Thus, Borges began the decolonisation process, encouraging Latin American writers to detach themselves from their colonisers and find their own voices.

Martin, however, does not agree that Borges marks the birth of magical realism and argues that this honour more appropriately belongs to Andrade, Asturias and Carpentier, and that Borges’s work is more akin to fantastic literature, a tradition that is more firmly rooted in Argentina and Uruguay (153-154). Nonetheless, Borges is still part of the Latin American labyrinth of magical realism that is inextricable from the modernist project of Latin America. The early conceptualisation of magical realism is linked to the fantastic, and this is why I have linked Borges to the European strand, as he is less political and more universal when compared with other Latin American magical realist writers.

Guenther’s work also emphasises the European connection when Roh’s article was first translated into Spanish and published in the *Revista de Occidente* in 1927. She informs us that within a year, magical realism was applied to the prose of European authors in the literary circles of Buenos Aires, resulting from the cultural migration from Europe to the Americas in the 1930s to 1940s as many were trying to escape the horrors of the Third Reich—over one-fifth of 500,000 exiles settled in Latin America. Meanwhile in Europe, beginning in 1948, articles started appearing employing magical realism as a literary concept. Magical realism, therefore, became an established term but with varying definitions in German literary criticism, and in more recent years, magical realism has been associated with a diverse variety of Austrian/German authors such as Alfred Döblin, Günter Grass, Ernst Jünger, Franz Kafka, Hermann Kasack, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Heimito von Doderer, Franz Werfel, illustrating the convoluted
The term also made its way to the Netherlands and Belgium, with writers such as Johan Daisne, who describes himself as magical realist and whose work plays with dreams and reality (Guenther 59-61). As Bowers points out, the magical realist works of Daisne (who also contrasts the magical perspective of childhood to adult reality) and later Hubert Lampo (who incorporates European myths and fairy tales) are closer to Surrealist and Jungian ideas (62). Bowers also mentions the Italian writer Italo Calvino and points out a similarity to Borges’s work insofar as Calvino’s work does not rely on a recognisable version of reality but is structured around its own “internal logic” (64).

Arturo Serrano-Plaja in 1970 published “Magic” Realism in Cervantes: Don Quixote as Seen through Tom Sawyer and the Idiot. His work applies magical realism to the works of Miguel de Cervantes who lived from 1547-1616, Fyodor Dostoyevsky from 1821-1881, and Mark Twain from 1835-1910—all these writers lived before the term magic realism was coined by Roh. I find this retrospective application of the term problematic. I believe that magical realism is a modern phenomenon and it should not be retrospectively applied. Its manifestation is the result of rational modernity that suppresses the ‘irreal’ and the inexplicable in life. But its elastic and ambiguous meaning makes it easy to apply it to pre-modern works, especially folklore, legends and even the Bible. This should be avoided as the term is already deeply mired in obfuscation. I do not believe that magical realism is a universal phenomenon unbound by time. From the

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3 David Young and Keith Hollaman also do this with the anthology that they published in 1984, Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology. They have included works from writers who lived before magic realism was conceived, writers such as Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), Henry James (1843-1916), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910).
discussion in this section, it is clear that the development of the concept of magical realism grew out of modernism and is subsumed by postmodernism.

David K. Danow in 1995 published *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque*. Danow draws on Mikhail Bakhtin and Carl Jung and explores archetypal manifestations in Holocaust and Latin American magical realist literature by focusing on the carnivalesque-grotesque (3). He examines oppositions and dualities, particularly the Apollonian-Dionysian antinomy explaining magical realism’s Dionysian preoccupation (137-153). His work emphasises the transgressive thread in magical realism and also examines a European context—the Holocaust. Quoting Bakhtin, he explains that the carnivalesque-grotesque consecrates inventive freedom, liberating a prevailing point of view because it offers a chance to have a new outlook, to realise the relative nature of all that exists and to enter a completely new order of things (142)—which is familiar as these were Roh’s ideas of magical realism.

In 1998, Menton published another book on magical realism, this time in Spanish, *Historia Verdadera Del Realismo Mágico* (*The Real History of Magical Realism*). Unlike his earlier book focused on painting, this book deals with magical realist literature. Menton continues his Jungian approach to magical realism by analysing: the treatment of time—mythical, historical, cyclical and backward time; narrative techniques; archetypes and eccentric characters; Rabelaisian (transgressive) tendencies; the variety of symbols found in magical realism—chromatic, entomological, ornithological, ichthyological and zoological; the construction of magical spaces such as Zemyock (in Schwarz-Bart’s *The Last of the Just*) and García Márquez’s Macondo; and “mysterious invaders” and “imminent assaults” where protagonists are threatened by aggressive forces that endanger the stability of their isolated worlds. His analysis does not just include Latin American
fiction but works by André Schwarz-Bart, Robert Nathan, Truman Capote, Maryse Condé, Toni Morison, Ana Castillo and Cristine García. Interestingly, he also argues that André Schwarz-Bart is a bridge between Borges and García Márquez (81-110).

Evidently, Holocaust literature in Europe is a fertile ground for magical realism; this is understandable given the strong escapist nature of magical realism. Its magical aspects conveniently allow the use of metaphors that give animation and hue to the pain experienced during the war years which is akin to the oppression and colonisation experienced in Latin America. Bowers, in her observation of Daisne’s work, also notes that magical realism is “a reaction against the horrific experience of the Second World War” (62).

But the European strand of magical realism then becomes caught up with postmodernism. Magical realism’s propensity for experimentation makes it an easy and convenient mode for ludic literary techniques, where master narratives and absolute truths are questioned. Grass’s The Tin Drum is one example of this, where we are subjected to an unreliable narrator who gives us the perspective of a boy, and later, a man, who is trapped in the body of a child; but Oskar, the narrator, is also an inmate in an asylum for the mentally ill. The narrative techniques of The Tin Drum, therefore, play with the “genius” of madness and also make us question the veracity of the narratives. Another more recent example is Patrick Süskind’s Das parfum about a man, Grenouille, with no personal scent but an incredible sensitive sense of smell, whose ambition is to create the most intoxicating scent in the world in order to make the world love him. He does this by murdering young women and distilling their personal scent. The novel is written in a matter-of-fact narrative with minute details of the life of a man living in eighteenth-century France. But what is interesting and even shocking about the novel is a
recognisable and reliable perspective of a conscienceless psychopath who presents his murderous deeds as part of everyday reality (Bowers 62-65). Postmodernist work repudiates grand narratives and absolute truths, exalting marginal perspectives, as in Das *parfum*’s case where the “reliable” point of view is that of a psychopath. The European vision of magical realism is preoccupied with bourgeois style and the expression of individual artistic vision (as opposed to the Latin American proletariat strand). The European strand of magical realism was spawned out of the avant-garde movement in the early twentieth century and becomes subsumed by postmodernism by the end of the century, while the Latin American brand of magical realism is quite different.

2. Magical Realism in Latin American

Arturo Uslar Pietri was the first to apply the term magical realism to Latin American fiction, specifically to Venezuelan short stories of the 1930s and 1940s, in an introduction that he wrote for a book in 1948. But he never clearly defines magical realism (Angulo 4, Leal 120 and Walter 13-14). This section will discuss the Latin American strand of magical realism, which is largely where most of the discourse on magical realism is found. As pointed out by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, Latin Americanists have been prime movers in developing the critical concept of magical realism and are still primary voices in its discussion (2).

The Essentialist Appropriation of Magical Realism

Aside from Roh, Alejo Carpentier’s essays have also been considered the foundational texts of magical realism, particularly in the Latin American context. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, literary critics have used Carpentier and Roh to devise their theories of magical realism (75). Carpentier’s
approach is both expressionist and humanist. In “De lo real maravilloso americano” (On the Marvellous Real in America), which was published in El Nacional in 1948 (Angulo 4), Carpentier muses over the wonders and cultures of China, Persia, Soviet Union and Prague before he concludes with Latin America. He specifically explores the unique idea of “lo real maravilloso” (marvellous real), which presupposes faith. According to him, *mestizaje* or “fecund racial mixing” is responsible for the marvellous reality of Latin America and he provides examples such as Mackandal’s lycanthropic powers, the Cuban *santería*, voodoo and the flamboyant festivals that have roots in autochthonous African and European cultures (Marvelous 83-88). Carpentier employs the term “lo real maravilloso americano” (marvellous American reality) to describe a unique American form of magical realism, as opposed to European Surrealism (Zamora and Faris 75).

In “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso” (The Baroque and the Marvellous Real), originally a lecture given at the Caracas Athenaeum on 22 May, 1975, and first published in 1981 in Carpentier’s *La novella latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo* (Zamora and Faris 108), Carpentier claims that the marvellous real is founded on José Martí’s notion of “*America mestiza*” or “*mestizaje*”. He argues that the idea of miscegenation is baroque and that America has always been baroque because of its *criollo* (Latin American miscegenetic) culture that gives rise to the baroque *criollo* spirit, which he calls “the marvelous real” (Baroque 98-100). Carpentier also differentiates magical realism and Surrealism from the marvellous real. According to him, magical realism pertains to painting and has elements of reality that are transferred into a dreamlike and oneiric atmosphere; but in Surrealism, the marvellous is often premeditated and calculated, where it incorporates strange elements to create a marvellous vision (Baroque 102-103). It should be noted that Carpentier’s description of
Surrealism contradicts the very basic principle of automatism in Surrealism, which is neither premeditated nor calculated. But Carpentier’s point is that Surrealist artists set out to create Surrealist artworks, hence feeding into a very self-conscious “literary ruse” (Marvelous 86); whereas the marvellous real is simply an expression of the inherent nature of Latin American reality, which is neither premeditated nor calculated. Therefore, the marvellous real encountered in Latin America is “in its raw state, latent and omnipresent”—where “the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace” (Baroque 104). The marvellous real is the strange in the ordinary and everyday, which Carpentier describes as the “extraordinary”. It encompasses myth and the mythic, and it is not necessarily lovely or beautiful: “Ugliness, deformity, [and] all that is terrible can also be marvellous” (Baroque 101-102). The marvellous real is inextricable from the untamed environment of Latin America which also contributes to its baroqueness. As Carpentier writes, the Latin American environment is baroque because of “the unruly complexities of its nature and its vegetation, the many colours that surround us, the telluric pulse of the phenomenon that we still feel” (105). The significance of Carpentier’s work is the rallying of Latin American writers to look to the rich American continent, rather than to Europe, as a source of inspiration (Angulo 5).

In 1956, Jacques Stephen Aléxis published “Of the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians”. Like Carpentier, he adopts a humanist and expressionist approach. According to Alexis, the Haitians “express their whole consciousness of reality by the use of the Marvellous […]” (195). The “Marvellous” includes hybridity, their folk legends, their Voodoo religion, their misery—their underdevelopment and poverty and how they cope with it, their music, their “negro” origin and the supernatural (194-197). To the Haitians, reality is unintelligible—it is unlike the Western culture that has been shaped by the
industrial and mechanical civilisation; hence, Haitians do not seek to understand reality rationally but simply live it. Aléxis summarises the objectives of marvellous realism as follows:

1. To sing the beauties of the Haitian motherland, its greatness as well as its wretchedness, with the sense of the magnificent prospects which are opened up by the struggles of its people and the universal and the profound truth of life;

2. To reject all art which has no real and social content;

3. To find the forms of expression proper to its own people, those which correspond to their psychology, while employing in a renovated and widened form, the universal models, naturally in accordance with the personality of each creator;

4. To have a clear consciousness of specific and concrete current problems and the real dramas which confront the masses, with the purpose of touching and cultivating more deeply, and of carrying the people with them in their struggles. (198)

Aléxis creates an avant-garde role for artists in the political struggle, which is very different from the European strand of magical realism. Marvellous realism in Latin America, therefore, becomes a means by which the continent can express and construct its identity.

Ray A. Verzasconi, in his 1965 doctoral dissertation, *Magic Realism and the Literary World of Miguel Angel Asturias*, fails to see the aesthetic unity of the list of writers and works provided by Flores. Verzasconi argues that disparity exists between writers such as Borges, Enrique Anderson Imbert, Juan Rulfo and Eduardo Mallea.
Writing in the formalist vein, Verzasconi’s dissertation is specifically focused on the textual analysis of Asturias’s work. He also disagrees with Flores’s definition of magical realism as he does not consider fantasy to be part of magic. To Verzasconi, magic is usually associated with the occult or supernatural powers. But more importantly, he sees magical realism as an “ideological movement”—a form of “regionalism” (12-15). Similar to Carpentier, Verzasconi sees magical realism as a form of *mestizaje*, an expression of the “reality in the mind of the contemporary New World […]” (16). For him, “The majority of magical realists are from countries with large Afro-American or Indo-American populations” (16). He defines magical realism as “an expression of the New World reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European supercivilization and the irrational elements of a primitive America” (17).

In 1967 Luis Leal published a journal article, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature”. Leal takes a humanist approach and is more preoccupied with the definition of magical realism. An anthropological perspective, that magical realism exemplifies Latin American reality, begins to intensify. The seeds of this claim as we have seen were sown by Carpentier. Leal’s conception of magical realism draws on Roh’s and Carpentier’s ideas. He relates magical realism to Roh’s idea of the mystery of reality that does not descend to the represented world but rather hides and palpitates behind it (*Magical Realism* 16), and to Carpentier’s conception of *lo real maravilloso* or the marvellous real, which according to Leal,

arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unusual insight that particularly favours the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, a reality thus perceived with special intensity by
virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state.

(120-121)

According to Leal, magical realism does not distort reality or create imagined worlds (as writers of fantastic literature and science fiction do), but rather discovers the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. Hence, magical realism does not emphasise the psychological analysis of characters, but aims to articulate a certain reality (121). It is therefore neither fantastic literature, psychological literature or Surrealism. Both Carpentier and Leal believe that the marvellous real is an American phenomenon (found in the entire American continent), and that the marvellous real of the continent itself is responsible for inaugurating magical realism in Latin American literature (Leal 122). Hence, Leal rejects Flores’s postulations that magical realism is derived from Franz Kafka’s work (which, Flores argues, heavily influenced Borges) and his list of magical realist writers (120-121). The similarity of the titles between Leal’s and Flores’s articles is obviously a parody as Leal is scathing in his comments on Flores’s work. However, the repudiation of any European influences in the discourse of magical realism is often overstated. The quest for identity is understandable by the Latin American intelligentsia but the term “magic realism” did originate in Europe and, as Guenther argues, there was an unprecedented cultural migration from Europe to the Americas in the 1930s and 1940s (61). Borges did translate Kafka’s work and Carpentier was also involved (albeit for a short stint) with the Surrealist movement in Europe in the early twentieth century. How can we measure the influence that these experiences may have had on Borges and Carpentier? It is unrealistic to say that these experiences bore no influence on them. The matrix of Latin American identity cannot exclude Europe and the

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4 Kafka’s work has been more accurately categorised as fantastic literature rather than magical realism.
paradoxes and complexities of this relationship between self and other are apparent in how Latin Americanists conceive magical realism.

Finally, Michael Dash published a short but important humanist and political article in 1973 about racism towards black people and how to subvert it. “Marvellous Realism: The Way out of Négritude” deals with the double alienation of the black man. According to Dash, the black man is not only politically and economically disadvantaged but requires psychological and spiritual reconstruction as well. The reconstruction he proposes is to tap into the imagination of enslaved peoples as that is the only thing they possessed that could not be tampered with, and in doing so, reorder their reality so as to acquire a “new re-creative sensibility”, which could aid in the harsh battle for survival (199-200). He shows how Jacques Stephen Aléxis and Wilson Harris do this in their novels by turning to the myths, legends and superstitions of the folk, and by tapping into the “Marvellous”. Therefore, marvellous realism becomes a way out of “negritude”.

**The Structuralist and Poststructuralist Phase of Magical Realism**

With the structuralist and poststructuralist phase, magical realism moves away from an essentialist idea to defining and reinterpreting the genre in its formal, structural and discursive modes. Floyd Merrell’s 1975 article, “The Ideal World in Search of Its Reference: An Inquiry into the Underlying Nature of Magical Realism”, moves magical realism into its structuralist phase. In search of a structure of magical realism, Merrell investigates the “epistemological implications” of magical realism by analysing the symbols, myth and discourse of magical realism. He uses concepts of modern anthropology, philosophy and language in his complex analysis of magical realism by engaging with the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ernst Cassirer (11). He argues that
magical realism is part of the discovery and invention of a new additional continent, America (7-9). Thus, he concludes with the fundamental notion that “Magical Realism, in the final analysis, must be considered a local expression whose function and structure reveal a universal epistemological phenomenon” (13). He conceives magical realism as a process of “becoming”—where “the text is not a faithful copy of reality but a ‘transformation’ of that reality as a result of the writer’s dynamic mental activity” (9). Therefore, magical realism or Hispanic American narrative is the manifestation of the tension between genesis and mimesis.

The 1980s saw extensive theoretical work done on magical realism in literature by Latin Americanists. Chiampi continues the structuralist approach and was the first to conduct a substantial semiological study of the evolution of the forms in Latin American narrative. Chiampi argues that marvellous realism is a discourse of Latin American reality (115) and explains that marvellous realism is a quest for identity that expresses mestizo angst (121). According to Chiampi, the American “real maravilloso” is a cultural unit because it is a semantic unity inserted into the system of conventions of Hispanic American culture. Within this cultural unity, she conceives six different ideologemes. She sees ideologemes as literary, poetic or textual organisations and explains that each ideologeme comes out of a historical crisis (93). The ideologemes that she identifies are: the “origins of the chronicle”, which encapsulates the discovery of America; the “illustrated neo-utopia” that captures the birth of criolla culture; “civilisation versus barbarism” where decolonisation and the consolidation of independence movements are marked by the appearance of the discourses of Andrés Bello and Simón Bolívar; “Mestizo America” marked by leftist revolutionary ideas of the Mexican and Cuban revolutions; “Europeanism versus indigenism” where the idea of the Indian is politicised.
and neo-colonialism is resisted; and finally, the “cultural mestizaje” of the birth of Latin American identity infused by postcolonial ideology (124-174). Like Carpentier, Chiampi believes that Latin American identity is mestizaje (154-155) and this is manifested in marvellous realism, which she argues is truly a “bastard culture” that is postcolonial (163).

Argentinean Graciela Ricci Della Grisa’s 1985 book, Realismo Mágico y Conciencia Mitica en América Latina: Textos y Contextos, is the other extensive study of magical realism produced in Latin America that moves into poststructuralism. It is a hermeneutical study of magical realism (Angulo xii). Ricci Della Grisa creates the term “realismo mágico-maravilloso” (marvellous magical realism), combining the two terms proposed by earlier critics to summarise the cultural synthesis of Latin American narratives (Ricci Della Grisa 87). Her work traces the historical definition of myth and the magical vision of America, arguing that magical realism is a profound expression of the spiritual evolution of American consciousness (40). She identifies the different archetypal-cultural stages of Latin America, which according to her, are the three mythic cycles: the myth of creation, which she describes as “Extroversion”; the myth of the hero, “Introversion”; and the myth of transformation, “Centroversion”. The first cycle (myth of creation/Extroversion) spans from 1492 to 1825 and covers the discovery (Spanish chronicles), colonisation (indigenous chronicles) and independence (enlightenment) of Latin America. The second cycle (myth of the hero/Introversion) stretches from 1825-1925 and involves: postcolonialism (civilisation-barbarism) seen in Bello, Bolívar and Domingo Sarmiento; positivism; confrontation with neo-colonialism; and the idea of “América Latina” (José Enrique Rodó) and “América Indígena” (José Vasconcelos and José Carlos Mariátegui). And the final cycle (myth of transformation) consists of two
periods: the first is Centroversion from the years 1925-1960; and the second, the post-war period, which is “realismo mágico maravilloso” or mestizaje (65-73).

The basis of Ricci Della Grisa’s work is the concept of “ontoconciencia”, a term that she has coined, in a distinctive shift from Carpentier. She sees “ontoconciencia” as the creative process where the fundamental role of symbols generates elements of conscious creation to achieve a certain state of fullness or internal maturity (13-15). This basic idea is extended to Matté Blanco’s conception of the unconscious system where the two concepts of the unconscious and mythic consciousness are integrated to achieve “ontoconciencia” (109). According to Ricci Della Grisa, “realismo mágico-maravilloso” is a form of “ontoconciencia” that unites two ends of the psycho-intellectual reality at the semantic level, which is the literary projection of the cultural phenomenon of mestizaje, and at the syntactic and discursive level of the text (87). Ricci Della Grisa’s work is more abstract, but both she and Chiampi are the first to treat magical realism with theoretical rigour.

Scott Simpkins’s article “Sources of Magic Realism/Supplements to Realism in Contemporary Latin American Literature” first published in 1988, where he argues that magical realism is caught in the conundrum and paradoxical dilemma of language, also takes a poststructuralist position. He highlights the limitations of language and shows how the strategy of magical realism is devising supplements to realism in the hope of capturing reality (153). According to him, the one unifying constant is the “ineluctable lack in communication, a condition which prevents the merger of signifier and signified” (148); hence, magical realism plays within this continuum of the “lack”—what Simpkins calls “textual apparition”. He cites examples from Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude and Borges’s The Garden of Forking Paths. In One Hundred
Years of Solitude a variety of supplemental strategies are employed such as illusion and amnesia to increase the “significative force” in the text (148-150); and in The Garden of Forking Paths these strategies are even more extreme. Borges creates a multinarrative or multiperspective text that covers all fictional possibilities, saturating the text with infinite linguistic possibilities, or an “infinite text,” which employs defamiliarisation. Therefore, what Borges attempts to do is to achieve a desired state of complete signification (150-151). But this is deceptive, because the textual style is based on loss—as Simpkins explains: “This strategy, which reveals the desire to increase signification, to embrace the fluttering essence of illumination, always ends—because it begins—in loss” (150). This fundamental and paradoxical purpose in magical realism (compounded with the reality that many cultures in which magical realism is manifested tend to also have to deal with heavy censorship), means that textual apparitions such as allegories are an appropriate and salient feature of magical realism.

3. Postcolonialism and Magical Realism

In the 1990s magical realism was co-opted by postcolonialism. Stephen Slemon’s seminal article “Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse” globalised magical realism, giving it increasing and stable currency. However, the postcolonial element in magical realism was always inherent in the Latin American strand of magical realism. Zamora and Faris consider magical realism “an international commodity.” As “a return on capitalism’s hegemonic investment in its colonies, magical realism is especially alive and well in postcolonial contexts and is now achieving a compensatory extension of its

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Defamiliarization was used by Russian Formalists to radically emphasise the common elements of reality that have become virtually invisible because of their familiarity (Simpkins 150).
Decolonisation and Transculturalism in Latin America

From the discussion so far, it is evident that decolonisation has always been a part of magical realism in Latin America—the humanist strand of magical realism, beginning with Carpentier, poignantly culminates with Aléxis’s and Dash’s work. Decolonisation is inherently part of Latin America’s quest for identity. Robert J. C. Young’s prodigious book, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, maps out the history of postcolonialism in the world and explains that Latin America has a special place in the history of anti-colonialism and its relation to postcolonial theory. According to Young, Latin America has been postcolonial for two centuries, and its postcolonial era began even before many territories became colonial and before imperial powers such as Germany and Italy became nations. Latin America has a complex history of resistance to Spanish, Portuguese and United States imperialism that stretches over five hundred years. The domination of the latter brought about the Latin American Dependency theory that was first developed by José Carlos Mariátegui of Peru. Revolutionary activity has a long history in Latin America and has been accompanied by a wide range of cultural writings challenging dependency theory and articulating forms of cultural autonomy through concepts such as transculturation, hybridity and even “anthropophagy” (which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter) in the lively Modernist period of Brazil (193-201).

The articulation of cultural autonomy found in Latin America is embroiled in cultural contact and mixing which is realised through transculturation, clearly seen in Carpentier’s discussion of *criollo* culture and miscegenation. The concept of...
transculturación operates as a product of the people, contrary to “acculturation” which implies the assimilation of indigenous groups into the dominant culture. Transculturación is “the moment of passage from one culture to another in which different heterogeneous cultures collide and ferment in a concoction or stew” (Young Postcolonialism 202), where reinvention and reinscription of cultural materials occur, and forms of modernity can be refashioned and reinflected. A good example of this is tropicalism in Brazil (discussed in detail in the analysis of Macunaíma later in the thesis) which Young discusses through “imitation” based on Roberto Schwarz’s concept of “cultural transplantation” and the productive generation of “misplaced ideas”. This type of reconstruction of ideas, said to be characteristic of Latin America and the postcolonial theory that manifested in the continent, is central to the work of writers such as Schwarz, Haroldo da Campos, Fernando Ortiz, Angel Rama, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Silviano Santiago (Young, Postcolonialism 201-203). Chanady’s article “The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms” in Zamora and Faris’s anthology, further explores some of these ideas.

Chanady argues that magical realism is part of Latin America’s identity construction and a form of territorialisation of the Latin American imaginary. Her article explores the uniqueness of Latin American culture, its long history of colonisation and its rebellion against imposed metropolitan models and neo-colonial domination. She draws on Carpentier’s conception of the marvellous real, José Martí’s notion of ‘America mestiza’, and the idea that Latin America is part of the New World requiring its own paradigms to solve its own problems—which all feed into what Chanady describes as the “new world imaginary of Latin America”. The most pertinent point in the article is Latin America’s assertion of its superiority through Latin American writers. These writers
insist on rejecting retrograde metropolitan paradigms by depicting the colonial heritage in a pejorative light (134). This is done through subversion and transgression, mediated through what Chanady calls the notion of “Calibanisation”. Calibanisation is used in resisting and subverting rational colonisation in order to show that the coloniser is the real Caliban with its cruel domination of its colonies. In this way, Calibanisation situates the marginal Caliban (colonised/Latin America) in the centre while Prospero (the coloniser) is marginalised. Latin American artists, therefore, challenge official dogma by using subversive discourses and figures, such as Brazilian modernismo that advocates “anthropophagia” or selective cannibalism, where dominant figures and systems are satirised (134-141). This can be seen in the film, *Macunaíma*, which will be discussed in a later chapter, where the epic genre is transgressed, subverted and Calibanised. Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* (1971) is also an excellent example of Calibanisation.

Decolonisation and transculturalism are realised through magical realism and Calibanisation is inherent in the Latin American strand of magical realism, which has significantly contributed to its quest and reconstruction of identity. The next section will map out how magical realism intensifies as a postcolonial strategy and becomes an international commodity.

**Slemon and the Globalisation of Magical Realism**

According to Bowers, magical realism appeared in the English-speaking world in the 1970s, namely in Canada, West Africa and the United States, quickly spreading to South Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand. She emphasises the political nature of magical realism. Its writers tend to be anti-imperial, feminist or Marxist, engaging in the
cultural politics of postcolonialism, cross-culturalism or clashes between empirical Western culture and the oral and mythical basis of non-Western cultures (47). In 1980, Geoff Hancock published a collection of magical realist short stories by Canadian authors entitled *Magic Realism*. He writes in his introduction that the anthology “owes everything to international literary influences” (7); later he writes that “this exotic imported literary technique has a place in the variety of Canadian landscapes” (10). But he does not explain further the significance of magical realism in the Canadian context.

The exploration of magical realism in the Canadian context intensified when the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University held a conference in 1985 on Magic Realist Writing in Canada. The proceedings were compiled and edited by Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski and published in 1986. It is in this collection that Hancock’s essay, “Magic or Realism: The Marvellous in Canadian Fiction”, shows how Canada and Latin America with their pre-colonial indigenous people and culture have similar historiographies. In the same collection is Stanley E. McMullin’s “‘Adams Mad in Eden’: Magic Realism as Hinterland Experience”, which compares magical realist hinterland experiences with heartland (metropolitan) experiences. He highlights how hinterland culture is marginalised:

> If the heartland defines imperial identity, the hinterland, striving for cultural survival, seeks mythology which reveals its unique regional identity; however, since the “cultural industries”—especially publishing—are for the most part controlled in the heartland, it is extremely difficult for hinterland authors to find an outlet for distinctive regional art. (16)
The similarities between Latin American and Canada become apparent—characteristics of postcoloniality and marginality, and even transculturalism in Canada are evident especially in Slemon’s analysis.

It was Stephen Slemon’s seminal article “Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse” published in 1988 that firmly steeped magical realism within postcolonialism. Homi Bhabha (two years later in 1990) confirms that “‘Magic realism’ after the Latin American Boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world” (Narration 7). Slemon’s article takes magical realism, which has predominantly been part of Latin America, out of that geographical context and applies it as a postcolonial strategy in the context of Canada. Slemon writes that “recently, the locus for critical studies on magic realism has been broadened from Latin America and the Caribbean to include speculations on its place in the literatures of India, Nigeria, and English Canada” (407). He argues that magical realism is presently caught up in the moment of “globalised postcolonialism”, furthering its international influence and movement (408). Using Jack Hodgins’s The Invention of the World and Robert Kroetsch’s What the Crow Said, and to a lesser degree Susan Kerslake’s Middlewatch and Keith Maillard’s Two-Strand River, Slemon recapitulates a postcolonial account of the social and historical relations in English-Canadian society where these texts are set. Postcoloniality in these works is evident in the recuperation of marginalised “silent voices” that contribute to the “positive imagined reconstruction of reality”. He argues that as a form of postcolonial discourse, magical realist texts comprise a positive and liberating engagement with the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity; and that through these “shreds and fragments”, colonial violence and otherness can be realised.
through new codes of recognition where the dispossessed can find voice and enter the
dialogic continuity of community and place (420-422).

The 1990s witnessed an increase in the study of magical realism becoming more
global. Jeanne Delbaere’s “Magic Realism: the Energy of the Margins”, published in
1992, looks at Canadian fiction and focuses on marginality, in the same vein as Slemon’s
work. In 1993 Roland Walter published *Magic Realism in Contemporary Chicano
Fiction*, adopting a formalist approach. Catherine Barlett is one of the first to publish
work on magical realism in Chicano writing. In her 1986 article “Magical Realism: The
Latin American Influence on Modern Chicano Writers”, she argues that Chicano writers
look south to draw inspiration for their work, particularly from magical realism.

A number of significant publications came out in 1995. María-Elena Angulo’s
*Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse* takes a formalist approach, analysing
“realismo maravilloso” as a type of narrative discourse specific to Latin America that
elucidates social problems of race, class and gender (xi). She analyses five texts: one
from the early 1930s, José de la Cuadra’s *Los sangurimas*; two canonical works: *El reino
de este mundo* by Alejo Carpentier and *Cien años de soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez;
and finally two Ecuadorian novels from the 1970s: Demetrio Aguilera’s *Siete lunas y
siete serpientes* and Alicia Yánez’s *Bruna, soroche y los tíos*. Her work shows the
common preoccupation of all these writers within a span of 50 years in expressing the
multifaceted and complex aspects of Latin American reality (106).

But the most significant publication that year was Lois Parkinson Zamora and
Wendy B. Faris’s *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, a much needed
anthology that consolidates the critical essays written on magical realism. The anthology
includes the foundational texts of Roh, Carpentier, Flores and Leal, and other articles that explore the theory, history and community of magical realism, and considers magical realism to be an “international commodity”. Zamora and Faris explain the ironic turn of magical realism as “a return on capitalism’s hegemonic investment in its colonies, […] now achieving a compensatory extension of its market worldwide” (2). Their observation of how magical realism currently harnesses capitalism is significant because magical realism is facilitated by capitalism, while often revealing very politicised, marginalised and postcolonial perspectives. They point to the “eccentric” nature of magical realism that gnaws at the “controlling centre”, creating a space for diversity.\(^6\) They note that “magic is often given as cultural corrective”, as these non-Western cultural systems often “privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation” (3). Slemon’s idea that magical realism is part of postcolonial discourse not particular to Latin America is indeed taking root; articles in the anthology explore magical realism in African, European, Indian, Indigenous American, Japanese and Middle-eastern fiction. Zamora and Faris explain that magical realism is an important presence in contemporary world literature because it creates “comparative connections, avoiding separatism while at the same time respecting cultural diversity” (4), and that it is a mode suited for exploring and transgressing boundaries (whether ontological, political, geographical or generic), facilitating fusion or the coexistence of possible worlds, spaces and systems that are often irreconcilable in other modes. Thus, magical realism is often liminal and pluralistic.

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\(^6\) This idea is from Theo L. D’haen’s article, “Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centres” (found in the same anthology) where he aligns magical realism with postmodernism and argues that it is “ex-centric”, speaking from the margins rather than “the” or “a” privileged centre (195).
Both Brenda Cooper’s *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* and Jean-Pierre Durix’s *Mimesis, Genres and Post-colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism*, published in 1998, intensified the postcolonial significance of magical realism in literature. Cooper, in her study of African fiction explains that:

Magical Realism strives, with greater or lesser success, to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death. Capturing such boundaries between spaces is to exist in a third space, in the fertile interstices between these extremes of time or space. (1)

According to Cooper, magical realism arises out of postcolonial contexts that frequently involve decolonizing strategies and identity reconstruction. It is usually found in unevenly developed places where old and new, modern and ancient, scientific and magical views of the world co-exist. It grapples with cultural syncretism usually resulting in hybrids, which include marginal, ambivalent and cosmopolitan voices (much of her work revolves around women). She concludes that the magical realist world is often of “Old Gods, New Worlds” which she aligns with postcolonialism and postmodernism. It involves seeing with the third eye, which is seeing the endlessness of possibilities (216-226).

Durix’s work explores the complex relationship between metropolises and colonies in postcolonial literature; however, he prefers the term “New Literatures” as the
adjective “post-colonial” may pejoratively connote “posteriority” (1). According to Durix, “Most post-colonial cultures are now a result of hybridization” (153). He argues that New Literatures presently play a major role in redefining popular culture. Multiculturalism underpins his work on hybrid aesthetics which is manifested in magical realism. In his analysis of magical realism’s increasing popularity, he explains that it is a new mode of expression whose potential is yet to be fully explored. He sees magical realism as the latest development in a series of radical changes in human perception of the universe over the past 150 years, beginning with Freud’s discoveries and the probing of unconscious desires (with writers such as Joseph Conrad, Henry James and Virginia Woolf), followed by Ferdinand De Saussure’s linguistic exploration of the radical break between the signifier and signified (making James Joyce’s parodic constructions possible). Thus, according to Durix, experiments in the revolutionary potential of the multicultural imagination (that are historically significant) from writers such as García Márquez, Amos Tutuola, Wilson Harris, Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri are a natural development that re-evaluate storytelling techniques and break away from the narcissistic, introspective excesses that came before. With the increasing growth of globalisation, the public is becoming more cosmopolitan and transnational, bringing about a new international culture; therefore, magical realism not only flatters the exotic taste of “First-World” readers, but also takes stock of the general recomposition of the cultures of metropolises (of Europe and North America) (159-162). In the following year, Elsa Linguanti, Francesco Casotti and Carmen Concilio edited *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English*, which is a

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7 Although Homi Bhabha argues that this should be taken to mean “beyond” the end of the century, beyond postmodernism, postcolonialism and postfeminism (*Culture 1*).
collection of essays that follow the theoretical threads articulated in Cooper’s and Durix’s work: postcolonialism, postmodernism, transformative and metaphorical reality, the periphery and marginalised, interstitiality, transculturalism and syncreticity (1-7).

Wendy B. Faris’s *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* in 2004 continues to follow the course that has been set up by Cooper and Durix. She argues that magical realism is the intersection of modernism and postmodernism and engages in both these sets of agendas and aesthetics. She argues that magical realism is an international style and a discourse which corresponds to the kind of cultural analysis James Clifford proposes for the study of cultural identity (the anthropological perspective discussed earlier). She then proceeds to investigate the cultural politics of magical realism—how it is frequently a cultural hybrid, exemplifying problematic relations that exist between selves and others, which she describes as “the postcolonial dynamics of alterity”, entailing decolonisation and the complex project of speaking of/with/for cultural others. And finally, she extends her exploration in magical realism to include studies on gender, particularly analysing magical realism according to feminist theory and criticism. She explains that she has done this because the decolonizing force of magical realism is akin to magical realism’s disenchantment with patriarchal culture. What she calls “female strategy” often manifests itself in multivocal and defocalised narratives such as using the female body as a bridge to the beyond (3-5).

In 2005, Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang published *A Companion to Magical Realism*, providing a substantial purview of magical realism. It supplements Zamora and Faris’s anthology published a decade before. *A Companion to Magical Realism* grounds the globalisation of magical realism and enforces its postcolonial and postmodern
agenda, making it relevant in our global economy where production is dictated by consumption—with increased volume and speed of cross-cultural exchange, literary cross-fertilisation, ease of travel from one cosmopolis to another, the spread of internet technology and the reach of Hollywood (20). Hart describes the globalisation of magical realism as the “new politics of aesthetics” and notes that magical realist writers express a fissured and distorted world because of their cultural displacement (6-13). The book explores magical realism’s conflicting ideologies and desires—from the postcoloniality of the “Third World” to postmodernism of the “First World”, highlighting magical realism’s resistance, subversion and reconfiguration of modern Western epistemology (empiricism and empire), which is often manifested in its preoccupation with imperialism and nationalism (16-19; 153).

As we can see, the postcolonial discourse of magical realism is currently the most dynamic and significant development. It has overshadowed the European strand of magical realism and has only recently been reunited with its fraternal twin under the auspices of postmodernism. In the next section, I will be examining magical realism in the realm of film.

4. Magical Reelism

There is a paucity of research on magical realism in the medium of film. Compounding this problem is the tacit understanding (and misunderstanding) of ‘magical realist films’. Film critics are quick to tag the description onto films and frequently misunderstand and misappropriate the term, adding to the confusion. In 1989 Moylan C. Mills and Enrique Grönlund published “Magic Realism and Gabriel García Márquez’s Eréndira” in Literature and Film Quarterly. It deals with the film Eréndira (Ruy Guerra,
1983), adapted from García Márquez’s short story, “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother”. The article provides a simplistic overview of magical realism but is more preoccupied with the obvious differences between the film and the novella than with magical realism in film. The odd and disparate list of films and books that the authors classify as magical realist includes: Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*; Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now, Rumblefish*, and *One from the Heart*; Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Querelle*; and David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*. They provide no criteria by which to categorise these works as magical realist and fail to note that some of these works would be more appropriately categorised as fantastic realism, poetic realism or surrealism.

Thomas E. Martínez’s “Magical Realism in Film and Fiction” (1995) is written in the same vein of descriptive comparison of magical realist film and fiction. The article deals with three films that have been adapted from magical realist fiction: two from García Márquez, “An Old Man with Enormous Wings” and “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother” (both of these will be analysed in a later chapter) and Carlos Fuentes’s *The Old Gringo*. Martínez concludes that magical representation is best left to our imagination, rather than what has been realised in these films—which he fails to recognise as a product of Third Cinema. In 2000, Fiona A. Villella published “Magical Realism in *Conte d’automne*” on magical realism in Eric Rohmer’s film. Villella focuses on materiality and sensuality, which she considers to be significant elements of magical realism. Although these are elements of magical realism, the more important qualities such as the supernatural and fantastic, autochthonous elements, complex enunciation devices, political depth and a minoritarian perspective are absent in Rohmer’s *Conte d’automne*. The film belongs to a different tradition of
filmmaking, which, according to Solanas and Gettino’s tripartite schema of cinema (272-273), would be categorised as part of Second Cinema (or art cinema). Neither does the film possess any of the characteristics of the European strand of magical realism discussed above. Maggie Ann Bowers’s *Magic(al) Realism* (2004) devotes a chapter to children’s culture, television, film and painting. She argues that there is a strong connection between children’s reality and magical realism but in her discussion of magical realism in film, Bower analyses *Like Water for Chocolate, Wings of Desire, It’s a Wonderful life* and *Being John Malkovich*. Unlike Villella, Bowers highlights the experimental characteristics of these films, which can be linked with the postmodern aspect of magical realism.

In view of this limited scholarship, Fredric Jameson’s “On Magic Realism in Film” (1986) must be considered a seminal essay. Jameson draws on the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to elucidate a peculiar visual pleasure associated with magic realist film. According to Jameson, it is the combination of historical raw material, colour and narrative—often focused on violence and to a lesser degree sex—that creates the visual spell and enthrallment of magical realism for the cinema spectator. He explains historical raw material as “history-with-holes” (303), where disjunction is structurally inherent, involving an “overlap or coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features” (311). He argues that magical realism is “a possible alternative to the narrative logic of contemporary postmodernism” (302). Throughout the article, Jameson uses nostalgia films to exemplify contemporary postmodernism and shows how magical realist films function differently from nostalgia. He points out that postmodern nostalgia films are based on the organizing category or concept of “generation”: they are essentially simulacra of the past (310-11), whereby the image is consumed and becomes
a visual commodity (303). In contrast, historical raw material used in magical realist films refers to a mode of production that is in conflict with traces of an older mode, if not already displaying and foreshadowing the emergence of a future one. According to Jameson, this “anthropological view of literary magic realism” involves a “strategic reformulation” of Carpentier’s marvelous real—which is “not a realism to be transfigured by a ‘supplement’ of a magical perspective but a reality which is in and of itself magical or fantastic” (311). Jameson argues that in the social reality of Latin America, “realism” is already necessarily magical realism:

[…] the articulated superimposition of whole layers of the past with present (Indian or pre-Columbian realities, the colonial era, the wars of independence, caudillismo, the period of American domination—as in Asturias’s Weekend in Guatemala, about the 1954 coup) is the formal precondition for the emergence of this new narrative style. (311)

Clearly magical realism in film is not a simulacrum of the past but history-with-holes, in line with Latin America’s underdevelopment, miscegenation and mestizaje.

Colour is the next function of filmic magical realism that Jameson discusses by differentiating colour from glossiness. Glossiness is a feature of nostalgia, characterizing: the print as a whole, smearing its varied contents together in a unified display and transferring, as it were, the elegant gleam of clean glass to the ensemble of jumbled objects—bright flowers, sumptuous interiors, expensively groomed features, period fashions—which are arranged together as a single object of consumption by the camera lens. (312)
Jameson associates glossiness with Lacan’s conception of the “gaze” (driven by scopic consumption) which is grounded in “deceiving the eye” or “tromper l’œil”. Hence, he argues that glossiness engenders images to be consumed rather than representations of the actual thing. In contrast, in filmic magical realism, colour functions as a “libidinal apparatus” registering the pulsation of “discontinuous intensities” that involve drama and recall the notion of Freud’s “uncanny”. Jameson also relates colour (as opposed to glossiness) to the economic situation of Third World countries as it exemplifies their underdevelopment. Hence, political violence is often a preoccupation and part of the matrix of magical realism as it portrays poverty, oppression and in many cases colonisation as well. He aligns this concept of colour with the aesthetic politics of “imperfect cinema”. For Jameson, the “visual experiences [of magical realism] know some deeper articulations with a preconscious dimension of language itself” which he associates with Freud’s and Lacan’s notions of sexual desires and dream narratives (312-317).

Narrative is the final function of filmic magical realism which Jameson discusses in terms of history-with-holes. He sees filmic magical realist narrative as “a kind of bas-relief history…in which only bodily manifestations are retained, such that we are ourselves inserted into it without even minimal distance” (321). He relates filmic magical realist narrative more specifically to the “reduction of the body” insofar as it mobilises unexploited resources and potentialities of pornography and violence. He sees physical violence and pornography as raw materials. According to Jameson, magical realism in film is the waning of larger historical perspectives and narratives, and the neutralisation of an older complex of narrative interests and attentions (or forms of temporal consciousness) that releases uncodified intensities, akin to the chemical effect of drugs
that loosen our temporal “pro-tensions” and “re-tensions” into a “hallucinogenic” mesmerizing contemplation. He explains that magical realist films, unlike postmodern films, do not seek to imitate the experience of drugs, but rather, they “reconquer that experience by other, internally constructed means (much as Freud found himself obliged to abandon the external techniques of hypnosis)” (321).

In Jameson’s view, the mediation of the camera apparatus, and the insertion of its technology into our experience, are not external. Rather, the mystery of a technological externality becomes internal and intrinsic to the heart of the problem of the aesthetics of film, where our historical experience of decentering the psychic subject (in Freud and Lacan) meets and lends it new and no longer accidental significance. Thus, new historicism is included in magical realist films; it is part of the constitutive and privileged relationship with history grasped and sensed in a new way that is radically distinct from the chronologies of the historical novel and the fashion plates of nostalgia film. Jameson explores the ontology of reality and phenomenology of perception in filmic magical realist narrative, the anthropological perspective of magical realism, which Carpentier and others articulated. This is why Jameson sees filmic magical realist narrative as the “reduction of the body”, which is similar to the function of history-with-holes: through fragments or building blocks, the narrative attempts to reach the most elementary forms of bodily experience by employing pornography and violence. Yet narrative has not been subverted or abandoned as in experimental film, “but rather effectively neutralised, to the benefit of a seeing or a looking in the filmic present” (321). Hence, magical realism has a historical and sociological precondition: the radical fragmentation of modern life and the destruction of older communities and collectivities. However, Jameson does not see this as a loss or impoverishment, even though it may mean the loss of a rich culture of an
older modernism. Rather, he sees magical realism as a new kind of relationship with history (317-322). Jameson’s conception of filmic magical realism attempts to capture the experience of magical realism and does provide a sound theoretical framework in the tradition of magical realism (particularly according to the Latin American strand). However, this theoretical framework is more relevant and applicable to films of an “imperfect” or Third Cinema, particularly in the 1960s to 1980s. Films coming out of Latin America have since changed with globalisation. Thus, I find Jameson’s theoretical construct increasingly difficult to apply to more recent films.

Eva Santos-Phillips’s article, “Power of the Body in the Novella The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and of her Heartless Grandmother and the Film Eréndira” (2003) exemplifies Jameson’s theory as she explores the significance of the body (particularly Eréndira’s body) in both the novella and film. She argues that the allegories found in both novella and film are of the “violence” of Colombia’s political situation (from the 1940s until today), where the revolutionaries fought the civil authorities for better distribution of goods, autonomy and land. Eréndira, therefore, represents the people, and the grandmother and men who use her represent the different authorities (the government, the Catholic Church). According to Santos-Phillips, Eréndira’s body exemplifies the female body as the used object that becomes a powerful subject of individual freedom—in subjecting her body to those vying for power over her body (her grandmother and men), Eréndira’s physical submission shows how tradition and patriarchy renders her body as an object (118-119). Jameson’s ideas of historical raw material and narrative can be seen in Santos-Phillips’s analysis. “History-with-holes” is seen in the allegorical figures of abused Eréndira, the politician Onésimo Sánchez, and the allusions to the smuggling trade, which all capture the realities of Colombia and Latin
American politics. And the “reduction of the body” (which is similar to the function of history-with-holes) functions as narrative capturing the most elementary forms of bodily experience by employing pornography and violence—Eréndira servicing the men in the desert until she is physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted.

Zamora’s article, “Swords and Silver Rings: Magical Objects in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez” (2005), is particularly useful and insightful in its exploration of the “visualizing capacity” of magical realism, complementing and adding to Jameson’s work. Zamora explains that “magical-realist text often conflate sight and insight, thus collapsing the literal and figurative meanings of ‘vision’ by making the visible world the very source of insight” (31). Thus the visualizing capacity of magical realism is “its capacity to create (magical) meanings by envisioning ordinary things in extraordinary ways” (31). The essay explores Roh’s conception of magical realism that is based on defamiliarisation, the materiality of objects and our interiority of reconstructing the object, and analyses the differences between Borges and García Márquez. According to Zamora, Borges’s fiction reverses Roh’s understanding of the object, whereas García Márquez’s use of Baroque aesthetics and iconography are more akin to Roh. Borges creates “poetic objects” by not excessively naming them, thus, leaving them to our imagination, while García Márquez’s work is steeped in excess and the object is the idea. García Márquez’s objects are anything but quiet. His fictional world has the richness of narrative detail, possessing Baroque texture that is sensuous, ornate, dynamic and theatrical; his proliferating objects cast spells and his tapestries are so real that hens peck at the embroidered plants. Excess and horror vacui are characteristic of García Márquez’s writing, heightening the specificity and bringing out the materiality of the objects’ magic, working in the opposite
direction to Borges’s strategy. Roh and García Márquez insist on the invisible meaning inherent in visible artefacts, but Borges’s idealizing strategies subvert the magic of the material world in favour of the magic of “secondary” objects, which liberate him from the constraints of the real. But despite their differences in style and substance, their strategies renew the readers’ appreciation of realism and the real, and of magical realism (31-45). These dynamics expounded by Zamora are also found in Jameson’s sophisticated articulation of filmic magical realism, especially in his exploration of colour (which I will discuss in the chapter on García Márquez’s work).

I will conclude this section with a summary of Robert Stam’s Literature through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation (2005). This ambitious book adopts a multi-perspectival and polycentric approach to film and literature (15). According to Stam, the book “presents the history of literature through film” (1). In the book, he sketches out Cervantic parody, Defoe-style realism, Fieldingesque reflexivity, Flaubertian perspectivalism, Dostoevskian polyphony, New Wave experimentation and Márquezian “magic realism” (2). The book does not deal solely with magical realism but devotes its final chapter to it. Building on his idea that literature and film are part of a much longer transtextual span, this chapter provides good grounding to the film culture of Latin America and, more specifically, magical realism. Stam traces magical realism’s reconfiguration of realism from Cervantes, Rabelais and the Menippea—in terms of Latin America’s colonisation. He admits that magical realism is problematic because it serves as a shorthand for all the transgressive and alternative aesthetics rooted in the multicultures and cultural relativism of Latin America, such as Oswald de Andrade’s “anthropophagy”, Carpentier’s “lo real maravilloso”, Jacques Stephen Alexis’s “marvellous realism”, Eduardo Glissant’s “diversalité”, Glauber Rocha’s “aesthetics of
hunger”, Julio García Espinosa’s “Cine imperfecto”, Rogerio Sganzerla’s “aesthetics of garbage”, Raul Ruiz’s “shaman cinema”, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso’s “Tropicália”, Paul Leduc’s “salamander aesthetic”, Tomas-Ibarra Frausto’s “rasquachismo” and Arturo Lindsay’s “santeria aesthetics”, which is at once nativist and modern, nationalistic, pan-Latin American and cosmopolitan. He then discusses Macunaíma, both the book and film, describing it as “the mother of magical realism”; Brazilian magical realist films; “Márquesian magic”—the films that have been adapted from García Márquez’s fiction; and “the Marvelous American Real” in Barroco (Paul Leduc, 1988) which has been inspired by Carpentier’s Concierto barroc (307-370).

As I have discussed in the above literature review, most work that has been done on magical realism in film lacks sound theoretical rigour, misappropriates the term and hardly adds to the scholarship of magical realism in film. Jameson’s article, perhaps a little outdated, takes a more formalist approach in trying to determine certain characteristics of magical realism in film while Stam’s approach leans more towards cultural and film studies, relying on Bakhtin’s work, locating and aligning magical realism with the other art movements in Latin America (framing his analysis in the cultural, generic, ideological and industrial discursive grids of Latin American film culture). Both Jameson and Stam address the “underdevelopment” of Latin American film and do not discount but emphasise this imperative as a function of magical realism—their discussion brings in “third cinema”, “imperfect cinema”, the “aesthetics of hunger”, the “aesthetics of garbage” and “Tropicália” (to name a few), which I think are essential to exploring magical realism in film.
5. Conclusion

As we can see in this literature review, magical realism has a varied history and is a problematic term. Although its provenance was in German painting, the term faded into obscurity by the early twentieth century and only gained prominence when it was used to describe the “boom” literary phenomenon of Latin American fiction in the 1950s and 1960s. To this day, the concept of magical realism has been largely developed in literary criticism, particularly in the Latin American context, and little work has been done on magical realism in other art forms. It is an elastic term that frequently assumes tacit understanding and meaning. Yet despite its conceptual haziness, under postcolonialism since the late 1980s, the term is gaining unabated prominence and is no longer confined to Latin America but applied to many postcolonial contexts.

This chapter surveys the idea and phenomenon of magical realism. The significance of the globalised postcolonial discourse of magical realism and the paucity of work on magical realism and cinema has led me to explore the cosmopolitics of magical realism. I have found the transcultural, hybrid and cosmopolitan aspects of magical realist films to be imperative in understanding magical realism in our contemporary world. The study of these dynamics, which I define as cosmopolitics, will be the focus of this dissertation. The next two chapters will discuss the significance of cosmopolitics to magical realism and will map out minoritarian cosmopolitics in Latin American magical realist films. The following chapters will then analyse the significance of globalisation and its contribution to the metropolitan cosmopolitics of the reception and adoption of magical realism in Hollywood. And the final chapter will examine contemporary cosmopolitics with the increasing application of magical realism to other regions in the world, particularly in the Balkans with Emir Kusturica’s films.
Chapter 2

Cosmopolitics and Magical Realism

1. Classical Origins, the Enlightenment and the Development of Cosmopolitanism

The idea of cosmopolitanism and practices of citizenship are closely related and are not new phenomena. Kimberly Hutchings and Roland Dannreuther explain that cosmopolitanism has occupied marginal significance in mainstream political theory but “citizenship has always been a central focus of both classical and contemporary debate” (4). According to Martha Nussbaum, the old ideal of cosmopolitanism refers “to the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings” (4). Peng Cheah explains that cosmopolitanism is derived from the Greek word *kosmo-polites*, a composite of the Greek words—“world” and “citizen”. Therefore, cosmopolitanism is the pursuit of world citizenship, where each citizen of the world can enjoy equal rights despite their different culture and ethnicity (*Cosmopolitics* 22). The pursuit of this ideal through the practice of citizenship dates back to the ancient Greeks and I will provide a brief chronological overview of this. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to make an original contribution to the debate on cosmopolitanism. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to summarise the debate around cosmopolitanism in order to facilitate the investigation of its manifestation in magical realist films.

Greek cosmopolitanism emerged with the Cynics and its radical form was seen in Diogenes’s existentialist ideas where he considered himself without city and homeland, and his intellectual superiority, philosophical independence and self-sufficiency made him a true cosmopolite. According to Thomas J. Schlereth, it was the ultra-individualism of the Cynics that demanded complete alienation from the exclusiveness of the polis to
seek identification with the cosmic universe. It was these Greek social critics that began the cosmopolitan tradition in Western thought which was later considerably influenced by the Stoics, who integrated some of their doctrines and developed it into a more positive and mature ideal. Zeno of Citium envisioned a utopian polity of the oikouménē, a universal world of mankind governed by wise cosmopolites. Also during this time, Alexander’s policy of cultural fusion and his spectacular world conquests changed the ancient world. The expansion of trade, travel and knowledge forced the expansion of Greek perspectives. As the Stoics organised themselves into a philosophical and moral cadre, they influenced rulers and campaigned against prejudice and provincialism, widening the ethical concerns of cosmopolitanism, making the ideal into a reality (Schlereth xvii-xviii).

The ideal of cosmopolitanism continued to influence Roman thinkers such as Cicero, Epictetus, Plutarch and Seneca who were representative Roman cosmopolites. These philosophers combined Greek and Roman thought and developed it into the most mature form of cosmopolitanism in antiquity. They systematised the relativism, syncretism and eclecticism of the enormous empire and promulgated “citizenship of the world” as the ideal of all erudite and virtuous men worthy of membership in a world community of scholars (Schlereth xiv). So it was under the legal-minded and administratively adept Romans that the cosmopolitan ideal flourished and became a reality—a Roman was both a citizen of the city and the empire. Education for citizenship was part of Roman culture where there was a systematic use of schools to Romanise the conquered provinces by inculcating civic and patriotic consciousness (Heater 3-28). Cosmopolitanism in the ancient world culminated most conspicuously in the manifestation of the Augustan pax Romana that franchised the civis Romanus where
Roman citizenry involved a digest of international law, the expansion of an efficient imperial administration, the promotion of the freedom of commerce, and the development of a fluid social structure (Schlereth xix).

Christianity became more important with the collapse of the Roman Empire, especially in Medieval Europe. However, Christianity and citizenship were not compatible because in essence, Christianity is not a religion of this world. Citizenship took a spiritual form qua Christianity in the medieval times particularly with Saint Augustine’s magisterial work, *The City of God*. But it was Saint Thomas Aquinas, who was heavily influenced by Aristotle in the thirteenth century that brought Christianity and citizenship together because he believed that life is the expression of God’s purpose on earth. However, Christian doctrine and medieval secular thinking were not congruent as a good citizen does not necessarily have to possess the qualities of a good man. Aristotelian ideas conflicted with Christian principles of goodness and salvation, but what was to last is the classical concept of citizenship (Heater 42-45). Citizenship and cosmopolitanism flourished and prevailed again during the Renaissance. The discovery of the “New World” and Europe’s territorial expansion also further encouraged cosmopolitanism. With the rise of the scientific revolution, highly speculative cosmogonies, cosmographies and cosmologies led to the conception of an infinite universe, where European intellectuals offered solutions in cosmopolitan terms. Marsilio Ficino revived the Ciceronian aspiration of *humanitas* with religious and philosophical syncretism. Michel de Montaigne considered all men his compatriots and Desiderius Erasmus rejected national pride as petty self-love and proposed a theory of world

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1 Aristotle’s work at this time was reintroduced to Christian Europe from Jewish and Arabic sources (Heater 44).
government. Francis Bacon prophesied the advent of a world with the brotherhood of science and Jean Bodin opened up the relativity of all religions in a dialogue called *Colloquium heptaplomeres*. Renaissance cosmopolitanism drew support from classicism and humanism and opened up the articulation of the cosmopolitan ideal in many fields (Schlereth xxi-xxv). In *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (published in 1990), Stephen Toulmin traces the ideas of the cosmopolis from the period of the seventeenth century counter-Renaissance to the present day and argues that the idea of the cosmopolis is the hidden agenda of modernity. Toulmin’s study examines history, philosophy, theology, ethics and physics and shows how cosmopolitanism is a structuring force of modernity.

However, it was during the Enlightenment that cosmopolitanism peaked and became intellectually fashionable (Hutchings and Dannreuther 11). The self-conscious cosmopolitanism of this time was distinct from other periods, where terms such as “cosmopolite” and “citizen of the world” were prized by the intellectual elite of the Enlightenment, particularly with the sophistication that centred around Paris (Heater 70-72). Schlereth’s 1977 study of the enlightenment thought of Benjamin Franklin, David Hume and François Marie Arouet Voltaire, delineates cosmopolitanism in the work of these three significant Enlightenment philosophers from 1694-1790. Schlereth examines the intellectual premises, psychological dispositions and certain historical realities that conditioned the Enlightenment philosophers to the cosmopolitan ideal. Franklin, Hume and Voltaire are the focus of his study as they were the leaders of the Enlightenment movement in each of their respective countries. They also knew and corresponded with each other, and their work covered a century of the Enlightenment period (xiii-xvi). Immanuel Kant’s significant work on cosmopolitanism was also produced during this
period. According to Cheah, Kant’s work is the basis of contemporary cosmopolitanism and “remains the single most important source of contemporary normative theories of international relations”, formulated prior to the spread of nationalism (Cosmopolitics 23).²

2. The International Political Institutions of Post-World War I – Hegemonic Democracy led by the USA and Western Europe

National economies, as the basis of territorial states and the development of world economy according to historian E.J. Hobsbawm, developed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century (25). Scholars generally concede that the beginning of the European system of nation-states dates to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and spread to other parts of the world mainly through colonialism (Smith, Historiographical 28). Calhoun writes that “the Peace of Westphalia […] in 1648 established a principle of independent sovereignty and mutual recognition which became basic to the flourishing of nationalism” (31), and that “nationalism grew hand in hand with modern states and was basic to a new way of claiming political legitimacy” (48). But Hobsbawm notes that the modern state took its systematic shape particularly in the era of the French Revolution which was then “tightened and routinised” by the development of transport and communications (80-81)—and that the modern sense of the word “nation” is no older than the eighteenth century (3). He traces the source of the word to the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy and explains that the terms of “state”, “nation” and “language” in the modern manner did not exist before 1884. The idea of government and land was

² The thread of cosmopolitanism runs through much of Kant’s work, such as the discussion of cosmopolitan right in The Theory of Right; Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose; and his most cited work, Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch. Translations of these works into English can be found in Hans Reiss’s Kant’s Political Writings.
not linked to the concept of nation until 1884 and it was not until 1925 that the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy had a final version of the “nation”, which was defined as “the collectivity of persons who have the same ethnic origin and, in general, speak the same language and possess a common tradition” (14-15).

It was the First World War that changed the meaning of nation. Hobsbawm writes that: “If there was a moment when the nineteenth-century ‘principle of nationality’ triumphed it was at the end of World War I” (131). The war brought about the collapse of the great empires of central and eastern Europe and reconstructed Europe, which became a “jigsaw puzzle of states” as Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia emerged as new nations. By 1913, capitalist economies were already rapidly developing into large blocks of concentrated enterprise, supported, protected and even guided by governments. The inter-war economic crises reinforced the idea of the self-contained “national economy” (132). Hobsbawm also discusses the growing Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Catalan and Flemish nationalism in Europe and considers 1918 to 1950 as the apogee of nationalism (131-162). The Versailles settlement brought about the geographical spread of nationalist movements and the divergence of new ones from the European pattern (136). Another significant phenomenon that Hobsbawm highlights is decolonisation, which (more) visibly occurred after 1945 with growing intensity (as we have seen in Chapter One, the various degrees and forms of decolonisation arguably took shape in Latin America as long as 500 years ago, but only made worldwide significance after World War II). By 1947, the Republic of India and Pakistan gained independence from Great Britain, and with the Cold War, the idea of the Third World emerged, with their particular religious affiliations, such as various Islamic forms with East and West Pakistan, Turkish and Greek Cyprus, Sudan, Chad and Nigeria; and Buddhism with the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka.
The idea of national self-determination increased with modern high-technology, urbanisation, industrialisation and education, which intensified nationalism (149-162). The rise of modern mass media, particularly the press, cinema and radio, also standardised, homogenised and transformed popular ideologies; and the growing importance of sports had an impact on nationalism as well, particularly with the increasing significance of the Olympics and international football which brought about national competition—which is paradoxical as the intent was to integrate the national components of multi-national states (141-162).

The twentieth century also witnessed the growing influence of the United States in world affairs. According to David P. Calleo in *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance*, the Americans emerged from World War I as real winners as they were the world’s ultimate creditors. While Europe depleted their treasury to finance the war, the United States acquired the better part of the world’s gold (135). At the end of World War II, the United States stood out as the world’s most powerful state in possession of the nuclear bomb and about 50 per cent of the global gross product. After experiencing the Great Depression and World War II, the US shifted from its unilateral isolationism to a multilateralist engagement in world affairs and led the creation of the United Nations, signing the final charter in 1945 (Tehranian 14-15). The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), formed in 1949, further increased US dominance that allied North America and Western Europe, giving the postwar world its centre of military stability and politico-economic order (Calleo 3).

American imperialism is mapped out by Mark T. Berger in *Under Northern Eyes: Latin American Studies and US Hegemony in the Americas 1898-1990*. According to Berger, from 1898 and the onset of the Cold War, North American politicians, journalists
and historians have represented the US as the historical inheritor of the mantle of the classic empire-civilisations of the Roman and British empires. It began with the US assisting a number of “backward” countries in Latin America and Southeast Asia to modernise, which was a short-lived experiment that ended with World War II. However, since World War II, it is widely believed that the US has taken its “historical mission” as a global civilising force through its economic expansion and rise to political and military dominance, which has been conceived as *Pax Americana*. North American historians and political scientists have taken for granted that the US had a leading role to play in the emerging Third World. Although the language of US diplomacy was often anti-imperial, its foreign policy was not (2-4). The establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) and the growth of transnational corporations with global capitalism and informatic imperialism have instituted US international economic dominance (Aksu and Camilleri 6-8). The vision of *Pax Americana* reached new heights in the Reagan years and became more pronounced with the end of the cold war. In the pursuit of national security in the 1950s, the US crusaded against anti-communist governments in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, which enforced its political dominance (Berger 5-6).

Socially and ideologically, the US also promulgated the notion of an “international civil society” manifested in “bourgeois liberalism” in the West that rests on the consensual order and acceptance of the agenda and key ideas of the bourgeoisie. This entails a functioning parliamentary democratic system and minimal reliance on “illegitimate force”—viable only in developed states rather than in the less developed periphery. Capital expansion and accumulation underlies the core interest of this imperialism in which the US has hegemonic power. An array of agencies, organisations
and strategies (certain regimes and foreign policies) has emerged to protect these interests and, according to Berger, this can be seen in the “inter-connectedness of politics and economics in the inter-American and international system and the internationalisation of class structure in the Western hemisphere” (6). After 1945, the US clearly emerged as the hegemonic power at the centre of the international capitalist system (5-8).

According to Pnina Werbner, 1990 was a watershed year for the “new cosmopolitanism” scholarship. She argues that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the “speeded up” economic globalisation, the spectacular rise of the media particularly with the 1992 Gulf War, and the increasing consciousness of the perils of a looming ecological planetary disaster have brought about the “new normative cosmopolitanism”. She identifies three strands to this new norm, all responding to the demise of the so-called Westphalian order—the sacralised, inviolable sovereignty of the nation-state. The first strand relates to global governance; the second, to the revisioning of Kant’s Perpetual Peace (sometimes attributed to Habermas); and third, cosmopolitanism as an emerging ethical response to globalisation (where she particularly highlights Ulrich Beck’s work) (2-5).

These strands of new cosmopolitanism can be seen in Daniele Archibugi’s work. In 1995, Archibugi and David Held edited *Cosmopolitan Democracy: An Agenda for a New World Order*; in 1998, Archibugi, Held and Martin Köhler edited and published *Re-imagining Political Community: Studies in Cosmopolitan Democracy*; and in 2003 Archibugi edited and published *Debating Cosmopolitics*. Werbner explains that the optimistic and endless process of globalising democracy or democratising globalisation is based on the fact that democracy cannot be understood in static terms and that it should move from local democracy to the international arena (3). In our increasingly globalised
world, Archibugi and Held see cosmopolitan democracy becoming more relevant and pertinent, warning that “international politics faces new opportunities and new dangers” (*New World Order* 1). They define cosmopolitan democracy as “a model of political organisation in which citizens, wherever they are located in the world, have a voice, input and political representation in international affairs, in parallel with and independently of their own governments” (12) and that it is “a political project which aims to engender greater public accountability in the leading processes and structural alterations of the contemporary world” (*Archibugi, Held and Köhler, Re-imagining* 4). Archibugi conceives cosmopolitan democracy as a project to build a world order capable of promoting democracy on three different but mutually supporting levels: democracy within nations, democracy among nations, and global democracy (*Re-imagining* 208). Together, Archibugi, Held and Köhler examine the transformation of the interstate system under the pressures of globalisation. Their studies explore the processes of economic internationalisation, the problem of the environment and the protection of the rights of minorities—processes which are becoming less important in the national framework and more a matter of the world community as a whole (*Archibugi and Held, Democracy* 1-4).

Contrary to Archibugi’s ideas of cosmopolitan democracy, Danilo Zolo’s *Cosmopolis: Prospects for World Government* (1997) challenges cosmopolitanism. He presents a pejorative view of our current cosmopolitan political model, which he sees as “a hierarchical institutional model which superimposes the hegemonic tactics and aspirations of a narrow elite of superpowers on the sovereignty of all other countries” (164). He sees the United Nations as an instrument of this form of Eurocentric cosmopolitanism under the hegemony of the United States and conceives the Gulf War as
the “first cosmopolitan war” (164-166). He argues that the military intervention by the
US in Kuwait was to curtail Iraqi military power and strengthen the US presence in the
region. For Zolo, United States diplomacy scored a “noble” success when the war in
Kuwait was authorised by the United Nations and portrayed to the world (through the
media) as an operation of international policing carried out to ensure the protection of
cosmopolitan interests (38). These are the new dangers that Archibugi and Held warned
about (which they did explicitly articulate): when United States imperialism is veiled
under the cloak of cosmopolitanism. In Zolo’s critical view of cosmopolitanism, he
proposes an anti-cosmopolitan approach whereby “weak pacifism” and “weak
interventionism” should be embraced. He adopts a realistic and practical (even somewhat
radical) belief that human aggression and conflict cannot be suppressed and eradicated,
therefore minimal pacifism and intervention will safeguard the “plurality of regimes”, where
international aid should be structured to meet the needs of each country that defends
rather than destroys their culture and identities (166-169).

3. Globalisation, Transnational Realities and Cosmopolitan Citizenship

Arjun Appadurai in his seminal and astute summation of the globalised world in
“Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” (1990) explains that we
now live in “an interactive system” that “involves interactions of a new order and
intensity” governed by “global cultural flows.” Cultural exchange, therefore, is no longer
restricted by geography, ecology or even the “resistant Other” after the technological
explosion of transportation and information (in Modernity at Large 46-47). Appadurai
proffers five different types of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, technoscapes,
financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes (Modernity at Large 50-58). Ethnoscapes are
the landscapes of persons in our shifting world—tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles,
guest workers and other moving groups and individuals; technosscapes refer to the fluid global configuration of technology, both high and low, mechanical and informational technology that moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries; financescapes refer to the disposition of global capital, the “mysterious, rapid and difficult” landscape of currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations, which “move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed, with vast, absolute implications for small differences in percentage points and time units” (Modernity at Large 52). Finally, mediascapes and ideoscapes are closely related in terms of the landscapes of images. Mediascapes refer to images of the world distributed by electronic capabilities such as newspapers, magazines, television stations, film-production studios, and the internet. Ideoscapes, on the other hand, are “ideologies of states and counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capture state power or a piece of it” (Modernity at Large 53).

In Transnational Connections: Culture, Peoples, Places (1996), anthropologist Ulf Hannerz explores the reality of these global cultural flows from an anthropological perspective. He makes the point that transnational actors can be individuals, groups, movements or business enterprises. He explores notions of modernity, community and nation that have particularly been affected by computers; the dynamics of hybridity, pastiche and mélange; and the interplay between state, market and forms of life. The chapters on culture specifically explore the dynamics of local and global cultures, the landscape of modernity, diversity and creolisation. In terms of peoples, he is interested in collectivities and categories—the relationship between national identification and life experiences where he examines the diminishing significance of the nation to business and street people, foreign correspondents, and the growing influence of cosmpolitanism.
And finally, in his discussion of places, he assesses the “compression” of our world—the coming together of the First and Third Worlds, North and South, centre and periphery; the cultural role of world cities where there is a convergence of different categories of people who share transnational linkages; the importation of diversity from immigrants; and the death of apartheid that has engendered a new and mixed culture in South Africa (6-13). In our increasingly globalised and interconnected world, transnationalism of boundary-crossings and long-distance cultural flows are becoming an ever-increasing reality.

Timothy Brennan’s *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997) argues that cosmopolitanism masks the “surreptitious imaging of American values” (9)—an Americanism that is distinct from patriotism but yet jealously supports an imperial myth of the United States (308). He illustrates this with Queen Latifah’s performance of a rap video, *Ladies First* (1989). The video covers a large territory, moving Latifah from ceremonial dress as an African queen to a line of Black American women dressed in modern clothes. She is seemingly able to bring about an internationalism that has eluded others for so long by exploiting diasporic meanings. He argues that this performance is likely to be enjoyed widely, but not necessarily accepted politically, especially by Africans because of its distant, unacknowledged and even arrogant borrowings (6-8). Throughout his book, he reveals this phenomenon in third-world literature, academic methodology, transnational culture, the hybridity of New York’s Lower East Side and the export of Cuban popular music. Brennan’s work (like Zolo), exposes the subtleties of United States imperialism.

Nick Stevenson’s work further opens up the discussion of cosmopolitanism and brings together the obligations of culture and citizenship. In 2001, he edited *Culture and*
Citizenship, where he observes that “the ground does seem fertile for exploring the interconnections between these different domains” of culture and citizenship as there is a greater need to respect the diversity of modern popular cultures. In exploring theories of cultural citizenship, he points out that there is a “growth of a ‘surface’ cosmopolitanism that has helped produced a certain ‘openness’ to the rich patterns of geographical and historical cultures the globe has to offer” (1-2). In Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions (2003), Stevenson argues that new conflicts, networks, cultures of risk and reflexivity, globalisation and commodification have transformed the operation of citizenship and that cultural citizenship essentially fosters a communicative society (151). This may require measures to protect minorities from the effects of dominant cultures through democratic forums to empower the marginalised such as public forums and televised debates (66).

But Stevenson’s most interesting and pertinent discussion is the idea of ecological citizenship where he argues that we need to see ourselves as both part of and responsible for the environment as we need to change our mainstream thinking to attend to the environmental crisis because neither the market nor state institutions are likely to offer adequate responses (94). Stevenson’s conception of citizenship, therefore, encompasses all aspects of our lives. But his most relevant chapters for the purposes of this dissertation are on media and consumerism. With the emergence of transnational media, Stevenson contemplates “democratic communication” and discusses the issues involved in developing a cosmopolitan and global public sphere. Like Brennan, he raises the issue of the Americanisation of world cultures, where postcolonial thinkers have proposed the decolonisation of the Western mind and have questioned imperialistic ideas and images proliferated in the name of hybridity, multiple identity and diaspora. He also points out
the complexity of how the media and a cosmopolitan outlook favours the elite at the expense of the poor and third world countries and that cosmopolitan media have ambiguously constructed and deconstructed a host of stereotypes that still remain the common fare of journalism. This same phenomenon is also seen in his discussion of ‘speed culture’. While it is imperialistic on one level, it could also foster cosmopolitan compassion and the global spread of human rights (96-125). Our current culture of consumerism is closely linked with the media and Stevenson shows that increasingly marginalised groups such as gays, lesbians, young people, ethnic minorities and women are forging an identity through the commercial culture where one of the key characteristics in the modern world is the “right to be different”. He then discusses high and low culture and the complexities involved in developing an egalitarian and participatory cultural policy (134-150). However, his discussion on cultural policy is problematic and Eurocentric, often only relevant to developed countries.

Nonetheless, Stevenson, Brenan and (to a lesser extent) Hannerz set the stage to explore the realities of the second strand of a new cosmopolitanism which Werbner identifies as the revisioning and (hopeful) realisation of Kant’s Perpetual Peace. But the notion of cosmopolitan citizenship is a complex ideal that requires multiple levels of negotiation. The next section will deal with our displaced modernity and examine minoritarian cosmopolitics that will bring forth further the complexities of our modern world, which Werbner has identified as the third strand of new normative cosmopolitanism—cosmopolitanism as the emerging ethical response.

What best describes the “new dangers” that Archibugi and Held alerted us to can be encapsulated by minoritarian cosmopolitics. Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins were the first to use the term “cosmopolitics” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (1998). Cheah describes cosmopolitics as the dynamics of “the mutating global field of political, economic, and cultural forces in which nationalism and cosmopolitanism are invoked as practical discourses” (*Cosmopolitics* 33). The collection of essays assesses the “macro-independencies” of our contemporary world and looks at the inescapable particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories and fates, postcolonial predicaments and the convoluted struggle between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In 2000, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenbridge and Dipesh Chakrabarty, edited a special issue of the journal, *Public Culture*, devoted to cosmopolitanism. In the introductory article, “Cosmopolitanism”, they insightfully point out that cosmopolitanism today does not spring from capitalism’s virtues of “Rationality”, “Universality” and “Progress”, and neither does it subscribe to the ideal of the citizen of the world. Rather, current cosmopolitans are often victims of modernity and failed by capitalism’s upward mobility which frequently deprives many of the comforts and customs of national belonging. The spirit of this particular community is largely represented by refugees, peoples of diaspora, migrants and exiles, who have come to be termed as “minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism” (582).

This insight serves only to accentuate and politicise the importance and relevance of Cheah and Robbin’s conception of cosmopolitics. Archibugi, too, in *Debating Cosmopolitics*, notes that contrary to his previous work, he is convinced that the term
“cosmopolitical” should be preferred to “cosmopolitan” (14). But the term “cosmopolitics” was further developed by Bishnupriya Ghosh when she applied it specifically to minoritarian modernity. Ghosh’s work on contemporary South Asian writers published in 2004 was entitled, *When Bourne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel*. The book emphasises the political and ethical dimensions of cosmopolitics. She describes her project as carving a space within “third-world cosmopolitan writing” and explains that despite international visibility, these South Asian writers would engage in politics that disrupt their own global circulation, reject overt fetishistic localism and even engage in local struggles. Ghosh distinguishes her work from Aihwa Ong’s work, which she describes as “elite transnationalism” and “flexible citizenship” (metropolitan cosmopolitanism) that generates capital and fetishises localism for global consumption. Ghosh also campaigns against “third-world metropolitan fiction writers” (also explored by Brennan), who imprudently “trope” democracy in the face of poverty, disease, dictatorship and revolution (19-20). Thus, Ghosh is committed to the politics and ethics of minoritarian cosmopolitanism, which I will refer to as minoritarian cosmopolitics.

Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, in *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia* (2007), draw on postcolonial theory and employ cosmopolitanism as a critical apparatus to understand and calibrate the complexities of cross-cultural interaction in Australian theatre between settler Australians, Aboriginals and Asians. Gilbert and Lo’s work focuses on yet another dispossessed people in modernity—the indigenous first nations that Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenbridge and Chakrabarty did not explicitly include. Although this study is specific to Australia, much of its insights can be applied to countries struggling with their own first nations. Gilbert
and Lo’s conception of cosmopolitics is the practice of cosmopolitanism “caught up in hybrid spaces, entangled histories and complex human corporeographies” (11). The book traces early anti-cosmopolitanism on the Australian stage from the 1830s to the 1970s, indigenisation and Asianisation of the Australian theatre in recent decades, the international arts festival, the cosmopolitics of specific productions and practices, hybridity, and the ethics and politics of dramatizing the experiences of asylum seekers within Australia’s detention system (10-21). Minoritarian cosmopolitics is becoming increasingly relevant, especially with socially conscious celebrities lobbying to eradicate poverty and philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Bono contributing substantially to find a remedy for AIDS and malaria in third world countries.

But modernity is riddled with conflicts and complexities. Kimberley Hutchings and Roland Dannreuther’s edited book (1999), *Cosmopolitan Citizenship*, focuses on cosmopolitan and bounded citizenship. In his chapter, Andrew Linklater conceives of cosmopolitan citizenship in relation to Kantian ideas (of Perpetual Peace) and advocates dialogic conceptions of world citizenship. This idea is based on the moral belief that outsiders should not be at the mercy of the economic, political and military power that one’s society or region has at its disposal. Therefore, Linklater advocates the normative commitment to “limitless communication” through the participation of diverse global communities—encouraging heterogeneity (49-55). Cosmopolitan citizenship is contrasted to bounded citizenship, which is based on republican citizenship linked to the nation-state. Bounded citizenship is rooted in the solidarity of a particular political culture (in terms of territoriality, sovereignty and shared nationality). Furthermore, it entails the obligation to fellow citizens of that particular culture steeped in the principle of a collective self-determination rather than to broader fellow human beings (28). But
Stephen C. Neff’s chapter, “International Law and the Critique of Cosmopolitan Citizenship”, argues that in practical reality, the legal ground in challenging bounded citizenship is weak and that cosmopolitan citizenship is really a mere moral position with an educative value (30). Dannreuther’s chapter, “Cosmopolitan Citizenship and the Middle East”, provides a non-Western perspective to the debate as he assesses the postcolonial Middle East, steeped in an Islamic legacy that is hostile to Western and liberal values. He points out that modernisation in non-Western cultures is not necessarily synonymous with westernisation (154). This collection reveals many complicated problems and complexities involved in trying to institute cosmopolitanism in our current world.

In 2002, Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen edited *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. In the chapter, “Interests and Identities in Cosmopolitan Politics”, John Tomlinson points out that “Cosmopolitanism is still largely a speculative discourse” (240), which Vertovec and Cohen reiterate when they explain that cosmopolitanism arises from new politics of the left, embodying middle-path alternatives between ethnocentric nationalism and particularistic multiculturalism. There are many conceptions of cosmopolitanism: some refer to a vision of global democracy and world citizenship; others, new transnational frameworks for making links between social movements; yet others, a non-communitarian post-identity and citizenship; and still others, socio-cultural processes or individual behaviours, values or dispositions manifesting a capacity to engage in cultural multiplicity (1). In “Colonial Cosmopolitanism”, Peter Van der Veer describes cosmopolitanism as a product of colonial modernity, arguing that it developed from European Enlightenment and is an inextricable part of European modernity, marked by the simultaneous expansion of both imperialism and nationalism (165). He notes that it is
ironic to see the celebration of cosmopolitanism in some post-colonial writing without any critical reflection on the genealogy of the concept. He particularly criticises Homi Bhabha’s work where he argues that instead of a “contra-modernity”, the postcolonialism that Bhabha advocates is precisely a modernity where intellectuals are from the “post-colony”. They not only receive and imbibe the project of educating the native, but become agents in its reproduction after the demise of the colony-metropole divide (similar to Brennan’s observation). The obsolete demarcation between natives and metropolitans is replaced by cosmopolitanism (which as Zolo points out is undesirable, cosmopolitanism being the underlying cause of the Gulf War) (Van der Veer 165-169).

Andrew Linklater’s and Mary Kaldor’s chapters, “Cosmopolitan Harm Conventions” and “Cosmopolitanism and Organized Violence” respectively are the most illuminating in this collection. Linklater’s basis of harm is developed from the Hippocratic Oath, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in France in 1789, and the modern legal conventions on the environment, torture and genocide. His cosmopolitan harm conventions (which he gives the acronym CHCs) are neither free from national limitations and attachments nor do they privilege the interests of insiders or outsiders. CHCs require respect for persons and a belief that elementary principles of international morality are the duty of each society. Thus, CHCs become “cosmopolitan conversations” that deal with the question of justice, where there is an open dialogue with past and potential victims to compensate them for earlier injuries, at the same time consulting them about decisions that may cause future injuries. He believes that the harm principle should have a central place in international ethics and that cosmopolitan duties should override duties of co-nationals and the obligation to obey military orders (255-259). Linklater explains the pertinence of CHCs, especially in the recent developments of
world politics: economic globalisation, specifically the global patterns of trade and investment, which have created insecurity in large sections of the world’s population; global industrialisation that has caused harmful consequences to the physical environment; and the current structure of the world order that have disadvantaged and caused insecurities for the Third World (minoritarian modernity) as a result of global commitments to neo-liberal conceptions of economy and society promoted by global economic institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (262). World citizenship underlies CHCs, which is the commitment towards cosmopolitan duty, respecting cosmopolitan rights and working toward the process and project of a democratic worldwide public sphere (264-267).

Kaldor’s chapter, on the other hand, speaks of “new wars” or “organised violence” and how a cosmopolitan political project could be a way to deal with these wars as “Globalization is a wild process involving interconnectedness and exclusion, integration and fragmentation, homogenization and diversity” (269). The fundamental source of “new wars” is the instability of the state authority. She attributes the state’s declining legitimacy to the establishment of post-colonial states in the 1970s and 1980s and the post-communist states after 1989. She argues that the monopoly of violence and taxation (which has in the past been controlled by the nation-state authority) is being eroded and the balance has shifted between public and private, and internal and external. Thus, the tax revenue base is eroded by corruption and clientilism. This growing informal economy—associated with increased inequalities, unemployment and rural-urban migration, and compounded by the waning legitimacy of the rule of law—may lead to the emergence of privatised forms of violence, for example, organised crimes such as the substitution of taxation, illegal trading and private security guards protecting economic
facilities or paramilitary groups associated with particular political factions. Privatisation and globalisation are Janus-faced—privatisation breaks down authoritarian tendencies and globalisation brings about external pressures to reform. These forces give rise to “new wars”. These wars are about access to state power and are often connected to identity, involving ethnicity, language or religions which in many cases are assisted by diasporic funding and techniques that are speeded up by the electronic media—so they become “globalised wars” that are no longer discrete or confined in time and space (268-271).

As a solution, Kaldor suggests a cosmopolitan approach that requires a multi-layered authority—one that is global, regional and local as well as national. It is a new form of cosmopolitan politics that is against the politics of exclusion. It requires respect for the cosmopolitan law which becomes an international law that applies to individuals and not to states, basically consisting of two main tenets: the Human Rights Law; and Laws of War. Its aim is not to engage an enemy but to defend civilians, not to destroy soldiers and infrastructure but to save lives. This cosmopolitan political project requires global justice where economic and social rights are respected even in conflict zones and includes provision for humanitarian assistance, providing a way that is consistent with human dignity (273-278).

Ulrich Beck in 2006 published *The Cosmopolitan Vision* which is one of the most comprehensive and relevant studies of contemporary cosmopolitanism thus far. He argues that a cosmopolitan outlook is imperative today because the human condition has itself become cosmopolitan. Being “uprooted”, “disintegrated”, “homeless” and “living between cultural stools” are common realities. Borders are increasingly blurring and differences dissolving, making ambivalence a reality, which Beck describes as
“boundarylessness”. The mass media facilitates and quickens much of this boundarylessness. New identities and particularities emerge as the “neonational”—introverted forms of nationalism that give rise to threats of terror. According to Beck, this is reflexive or second modernity. First modernity with its “national outlook”—its social image of frozen, separated worlds and identities, and separate nationally organised societies—has become obsolete. He advocates a cosmopolitan outlook and outlines principles for this particular vision:

- first, the principle of the *experience of crisis in world society*: the awareness of interdependence and the resulting ‘civilizational community of fate’ induced by global risks and crisis, which overcomes the boundaries between internal and external, us and them, the national and the international;
- second, the principle of *recognition of cosmopolitan differences* and the resulting *cosmopolitan conflict character*, and the (limited) curiosity concerning difference of culture and identity;
- third, the principle of cosmopolitan empathy and of *perspective-taking* and virtual interchangeability of situations (as both an opportunity and a threat);
- fourth, the principle of the *impossibility of living in a world society* without borders and the resulting compulsion to redraw old boundaries and rebuild old walls;
- fifth, the *mélange principle*: the principle that local, national, ethnic, religious *and* cosmopolitan cultures and traditions interpenetrate, interconnect and intermingle – cosmopolitanism
without provincialism is empty, provincialism without cosmopolitanism is blind. (2-13)

Beck’s principles entail paradoxes and conundrums but his work explains the complexity of our displaced modernity and its conflicts, making cosmopolitics especially relevant today. My aim is to investigate and explore magical realism in cinema from the perspective of cosmopolitics—in all its complexity.

5. The Minoritarian Cosmopolitics of *Macunaima* – a Brazilian Odyssey

I have chosen *Macunaima* to begin this labyrinthine cosmopolitical journey into magical realism because Robert Stam describes it as a Brazilian odyssey and the “mother” of magical realism in film (324). The novel was written by Mário de Andrade in 1928, four decades before the film was made and, according to Stam, it is “the novelistic epitome of the modernist movement and a powerful (albeit rarely recognised) precursor of ‘magic realism’” (323). The novel is one of the earliest magical realist works and is still relatively unknown compared to works by Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, and especially Gabriel García Márquez, whose works came to epitomise magical realist writing. The scant recognition that *Macunaima* has received is probably because the novel was not translated into English until 1984 and Anglophone literary scholarship has largely ignored this important work.

The film, directed by Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, is brilliantly realised in terms of its artistic and political possibilities and considered one of the masterpieces of Brazilian Cinema. When it was released, *Macunaima* was a box office success—it ranked among the twenty-five biggest box office hits from 1968-1973 (Molotnik 24). This sardonic political comedy captured the Brazilian people’s hearts. The film condenses three major
currents: the cinematic modernism of *Cinema Novo*, the proleptic postmodernism of the pop culture called *Tropicália*, and the radical revolutionary politics of 1968 and tricontinental Third Worldism (Stam, *Literature* 329). When the film was released, it was seen as a celebration of *Cinema Novo*, tropicalism and Brazilian identity. J. R. Molotnik in his review of the film in 1976 reported: “Brazilian avant-gardists have always defended formal experimentation and internationalism in style. At best, they have produced art works which reformulate foreign influences to meet local needs” (Molotnik 24). In New York when the film opened, it was dubbed “Jungle Freaks”, “zany farce” and described as “95 minutes of Brazil nuts”; and although the subtler political messages may not be as poignant outside of Brazil, the critiques of capitalism (the Italian industrialist, Venceslau Pietro Pietra) and repression (female guerrilla fighter, Ci) are obvious (24-25). Critics in the past have frequently read *Macunaima* in terms of Brazilian Modernism (particularly anthropophagy), *Cinema Novo* and tropicalism, and to a lesser extent, Third Worldism (as pointed out by Stam), which I will discuss in my analysis. But the film has not been discussed in terms of cosmopolitics, which (as I have charted above) only gained significance in the last decade or so. Cosmopolitics provides a contemporary and relevant framework to understand the film—it provides new perspectives on magical realism and allows us to understand, navigate and negotiate relations with the Other, postcolonialism, postmodernism, multiculturalism, nationalism and balkanisation. The analysis of this film will illustrate minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism, and begin an exploration of the significance of cosmopolitics in magical realist films.
The Epic of a Tropical Anti-hero

*Macunaíma* is a significant film that draws on and contributes to the cultural movement of *tropicália* in Brazil that emerged in the late 1960s. According to Christopher Dunn, cultural conflicts came to a head in 1968 within the middle-class urban milieu in Brazil and artists and intellectuals began to re-evaluate the failures of earlier political and cultural projects. The manifestation of *tropicália* was both a mournful critique of these defeats as well as an exuberant and ironic celebration of Brazilian culture and its continuous permutations. The movement plays on Brazil’s tropical climate, which throughout its history has been exalted for generating lush abundance or lamented for impeding economic development. The tropicalists purposefully invoke stereotypical images of Brazil as a tropical paradise only to subvert them with pointed references to political violence and social misery, which for Dunn, can be encapsulated in the idea of “brutality garden”—the central idea and title of his book (3). This is clearly evident in *Macunaíma*, for the film ironically plays on the genre of the epic, depicting Macunaíma’s ‘unheroic’ and farcical journey and subverting the idea of the hero and Brazil as a tropical paradise.

The name Macunaíma, as explained by Stam, is an oxymoron. “Maku” means bad, and “ima”—great. Hence Macunaíma essentially means “a hero without character”, an anti-hero. Stam describes him as lacking “character not only in the conventional moral sense but also lacking the psychological ‘coherence’ of the autonomous ego and the sociological coherence of the verisimilar character”; and further, Macunaíma’s logic (both character and film) is in having no logic at all (*Literature* 325). In the film, Macunaíma (Grande Otelo) is comically born as a fully grown black man. His mother (Paulo José) thinks he is ugly and intentionally names him Macunaíma, saying that
names starting with “M” bring bad luck; yet, his brother, Jiguê (Milton Gonclaves) quickly inverts this and hails him as “Macunaíma, hero of the people”. Macunaíma, as depicted in the film, is a very real and flawed human being—he is lazy, selfish, generous, cruel, sensual and tender all at once; he is also ethnically ambiguous—he changes from black (played by Grande Otelo) to white and native (played by Paulo José) throughout the film, embodying the reality of miscegenation in the continent (*Literature* 325).

Macunaíma’s intelligence is obvious from an early age, but he does not speak until he is six. He is also lazy and sleeps all day. He watches his family work but refuses to do so himself, and his favourite pastime is to decapitate ants’ heads—a subtle satirical metaphor of capitalism that runs throughout the film. The metaphor illustrates that Brazilians (and capitalism at large) are subjected to an unfair pecking order where the powerful continuously exploit the poor. This becomes even more obvious when the characters are in the city. The narrator of the film tells us that Macunaíma will only wake when he hears of money or when the family goes to swim naked in the river—he is only interested in money and sex. His intelligence is apparent when he devises a successful plan to trap a piglet but, despite his contribution to the family’s subsistence, he is only rewarded with entrails while the rest of the family enjoys the pig. Macunaíma’s resourcefulness is evident in times of natural catastrophe such as a flood, when he is able to find food—only revealing this to his mother as he is determined to hide his food stash from the rest of the family. But angered at his selfishness, his mother abandons him to fend for himself, which begins Macunaíma’s epic and odyssey, a comical and ludic journey. From the beginning of the film and at a young age, Macunaíma already clearly displays the carnivalesque qualities necessary for this journey.
Carnivalesque Anthropophagy

According to Randal Johnson, the cultural trends of the 1960s such as tropicalism and Cinema Novo owe much of its inspiration to the Brazilian modernist avant-garde of the 1920s, particularly Oswald de Andrade’s notion of “anthropophagy” (Cannibalism 178). Anthropophagy is an entrenched idea in Brazilian culture that stems from the aboriginal Tupinambá Indians of Brazil. Sérgio Luis Prado Bellei’s article, “Brazilian Anthropophagy Revisited”, explores the significance of anthropophagy in Brazilian culture in the twentieth century, tracing it from Brazilian modernismo of the 1920s to contemporary times. For Bellei, anthropophagy is a metaphor and a cultural strategy for identity construction. He likens it to the stomach without ideas, ready to devour everything: it is “a metaphor for the cosmopolitan enterprise of absorbing both foreign and native cultures as the means to construe a hybrid and unique Brazilian cultural identity” (91). Therefore,

Anthropophagy in this sense is a metaphor for an elitist cultural strategy of identity construction based on a diagnostic of the social evils plaguing an undeveloped, colonised country desperately in need of becoming modern in terms of aesthetics, politics, and social reform. Only by this ambitious programme of reforms would the embarrassing problem of underdevelopment be left behind. The Brazilian modernista intellectual of the anthropophagic movement inevitably had then the experience of a split consciousness in which there was, on the one hand, the awareness of a superior Western culture as an object of desire, and on the other, the awareness of the distance between this culture and the cultural and material conditions of backwardness of a marginal nation. His function
was essentially to travel between these locations with the purpose of, if possible, dissolving the frontiers between them. (Prado Bellei 91-92)

It is within this context that Stam conceives the idea of carnivalesque anthropophagy, which he sees as a significant component of magical realism. He concedes that magical realism has been variously defined but has noted certain salient characteristics of it. One of its distinctive features is polyperspectival narration. Stam explains that magical realism bypasses formal conventions of dramatic and illusionistic realism in favour of alternative modes such as the carnivalesque, anthropophagic, reflexive-modernist and the resistant postmodernist. These are often rooted in non-realist, non-Western traditions that have very different outlook towards history, narrative structures, views of the body, sexuality, spirituality and collective life. Magical realism, according to Stam, integrates the oral, popular, erudite, native and European, which he describes as integrating “the Menippea and the carnivalesque, with Apuleius, Rabelais, and Cervantes” (Literature 317). Carnivalesque anthropophagy combines Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque with Brazilian modernism or modernismo, which is an artistic practice that is nationalist, cosmopolitan, nativist and modern (particularly being modern in a marginalised country) all at once. One of the cornerstones of Brazilian modernism is Oswald de Andrade’s “Cannibalist Manifesto”, where Andrade conceives the idea of “cultural anthropophagy” which is devouring the techniques and information of super-developed countries in order to better struggle with domination. It is based on the idea of the aboriginal Tupinambá Indians of Brazil, who devoured their enemies in order to appropriate their force. Likewise, the Brazilian modernists argued that “Brazilian artists and intellectuals should digest imported cultural products and exploit them as raw material for a new synthesis, thus turning the imposed culture back, transformed, against
the coloniser” (320). So for the modernist, cannibalism becomes an authentic native tradition as well a key metaphor for cultural independence. According to Stam, “anthropophagy” assumes the inescapability of cultural exchange between Latin America and the metropolitan centres and the consequent impossibility of any nostalgic return to an original purity—“Since there can be no unproblematic recovery of national origins undefiled by alien influences, the artist in the dominated culture should not ignore the foreign presence but rather swallow it, carnivalise it, recycle it for national ends” (320-321).

Stam does not explicitly mention *tropicália* in his conception of carnivalesque anthropophagy but does so in his analysis of the film *Macunaíma*, found in his chapter on magical realism. However, according to Christopher Dunn’s conception of the tropicalist movement, *tropicália* should be a part of the idea of carnivalesque anthropophagy. Dunn’s book, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*, is the most detailed work on *tropicália* in English. *Tropicália* was a Brazilian cultural protest movement primarily in popular music with significant manifestations in other artistic fields. It critiqued “cultural products originating from, or mediated by, the United States and Europe, which elicited charges of political alienation and inauthenticity” (120-121). According to Dunn, the work of modernist iconoclast Oswald de Andrade, which has been neglected since the 1920s, is pivotal to the tropicalist project in the late 1960s—“The tropicalists were particularly attracted to Oswald’s notion of *anthropofagia*, or cannibalism, as a strategy for critically devouring foreign cultural products and technologies in order to create art that was both locally inscribed and cosmopolitan”. Thus, *tropicália* revisits anthropophagy and plays on the images of Brazil as a “tropical paradise” and advocates “aggressive nationalism” rather
than “defensive nationalism”. Caetano Veloso, who was a significant proponent of
tropicalism, explains that “the idea of cultural cannibalism fits us, the tropicalists, like a
glove. We are ‘eating’ the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix” (73-74). The allegories of
cannibalism and tropicalism are, therefore, born out of Brazil’s underdevelopment and
these allegories exemplify the cosmopolitics of magical realism, articulating minoritarian
modernity and cosmopolitanism.

Not unrelated to tropicalism, the violent allegories of digestion in *Macunaíma* are
also inspired by *Cinema Novo*’s eminent filmmaker, Glauber Rocha’s seminal manifesto,
“An Esthetic of Hunger”, which explains that Brazil is cursed by underdevelopment and
driven to and by hunger (68-71). In a preface written for the Venice Film Festival,
Andrade (the director of *Macunaíma*) explains that his film is allegorically about a
Brazilian devoured by Brazil (Stam, *Literature* 329-330). In the film, the first person who
Macunaíma meets when he is abandoned, is an ogre who cuts off a piece of meat from
his thigh to feed hungry Macunaíma. But the piece of meat after Macunaíma has
consumed it comically ‘speaks’ from within Macunaíma revealing his whereabouts to the
ogre, as the ogre means to devour Macunaíma. Macunaíma runs from the ogre, trying to
silence the meat but ultimately is forced to vomit it up so that he can hide. In the city,
Macunaíma encounters the ravenous Italo-Brazilian giant industrialist, Venceslau Pietro
Pietra (Jardel Filho) and his family, who are preoccupied with eating and cannibalism.
They engage in a ruse where Pietro Pietra’s wife and daughters attempt to cook and eat
Macunaíma, but he was fortunate enough to escape. Also, at Pietro Pietra’s daughter’s
wedding, a *feijoada*, a Brazilian national dish made from beans and pork ends, is
nauseatingly prepared in the swimming pool full of piranhas, where the guests are pushed
into the pool and resurface as tasty tidbits. With great agility and trickery, Macunaíma,
wearing the national colours of Brazil—green and gold, manages to trick Pietro Pietra into the pool (Molotnik 23). These allegories comically, ironically and poignantly satirise how Macunaíma and Brazil are victimised and consumed by the voracious power of the capitalist model implemented in the 1960s, making specific reference to the short-lived “economic miracle” of Brazil at that time (Stam, Literature 329).

When Iriqui (Macunaíma’s sister-in-law) arrives with the family in the city, she is quickly able to find a job in the “house”, an allusion to how easily and quickly she is sucked into prostitution. And when Macunaíma first arrives in the city, he disturbingly cannot tell men from machines and vice-versa, until he eventually concludes that in the city men are machines and machines are men. Men in the city have become cogs of capitalism and are subjected to a vicious cycle of endless exploitation—Macunaíma is swindled into buying a goose that is supposed to defecate money; he in turn, robs a shoeshine boy, who becomes twice robbed. Capitalism is a system of callous exploitation, and the greatest victims are the poor. Pietro Pietra, the giant industrialist undoubtedly represents the reality of “multinational” economic giants plundering Brazil’s natural resources in the late 1960s. When we are introduced to Pietro Pietra in the film, he is proudly showing off his second-hand technology that he has purchased from the United States, which is shown to have ravaged the beautiful natural Brazilian landscape. Likewise, the episode of the female urban guerrilla fighter, Ci (representing Brazil) who falls in love with Macunaíma in the city, makes reference to the repressive military regime in power in Brazil in the 1960s. But Ci meets her end with her own self-made bomb that detonates unexpectedly, illustrating the entrapped vicious cycle of Brazilians being devoured by Brazil’s underdevelopment. These allegories in the film function as history-with-holes, which according to Jameson encapsulates filmic magical realism.
Jameson argues that magical realist films contain both historical and sociological preconditions, namely the radical fragmentation of modern life and the destruction of older communities and collectivities, which he describes as an alternative to postmodernism (Magic 317-322).

Jameson’s notions of “historical raw materials”, colour and narrative, which is played out through the “reduction of the body” (discussed in Chapter One) are evident in Macunaíma. The comical yet poignant allegories employed in the film function as historical raw materials. Colour, however, plays a more subtle function through tropicalism in the film. Jameson differentiates colour from glossiness and according to him, glossiness is intrinsic to nostalgia films because it is preoccupied with the gaze and scopic consumption of images. Dunn explains that one of the central aesthetic operations of tropicalism is the irreverent and celebratory citation of cafona which is “bad taste” or kitsch in Brazilian culture. It plays on the hackneyed stereotypes of life in the Brazilian tropics and consists of temporal disjuncture, often appearing anachronistic, inauthentic, or crudely imitative, yet its use is purposeful, highly ambiguous and multivalent (124-125). Thus in Macunaíma, Jameson’s conception of colour is complexly played out through tropical kitsch. Stam has remarked that Macunaíma exemplifies the proleptic postmodernism of the pop culture called tropicália. Stam’s ideas of proleptic postmodernism seem to correspond with Jameson’s notion of disjuncture and his theory that magical realism is an alternative to postmodernism—that magical realism is not about the loss of an older culture but a new kind of relationship with history. Filmic magical realism is not a simulacrum of the past (as glossy nostalgic films are). Both Stam and Jameson refer to the same cultural phenomenon but focus on different aspects expounded in different theoretical constructs.
Tropicalism is most obvious in the costumes and mise-en-scene of the film. Macunaíma’s colourful princely jester suit at the beginning of the film when he is able to magically transform himself from a black native to a white prince satirises the stereotypical images of the black savage and civilised white prince. The bright and colourful clothes of the characters throughout the film recall the colourfulness of the tropics with strong colours such as purple, pink and luminous green shirts, pants, ties and suits, as well as the flamboyant female clothes that Macunaíma wears when he cross-dresses to visit Pietro Pietra. The industrialist’s opulently and garishly decorated mansion, and the vibrant colours found in Ci’s apartment all attest to the kitsch aesthetic, as well as Macunaíma’s purple bathrobe bearing images of the male genitals (Johnson, *Cannibalism* 187). The naked men and women encased in glass in Pietro Pietra’s home and his “broadminded” sexuality in trying to seduce Macunaíma even when he discovers that Macunaíma is actually a man, play on the image of the unfettered sexuality of the tropics. As pointed out by Jameson, colour functions as a “libidinal apparatus” registering “discontinuous intensities” recalling psychoanalysis, which is also linked to narrative where bodily manifestations are retained, in what he terms “reduction of the body”. These intensities are peculiarly manifested and played out through violence and sexuality. Macunaíma’s first violent and sexual encounter with Ci exemplifies this. Ci kills a van full of men, coming out with severed limbs in her hands and runs away. Macunaíma deflects her pursuers and catches up with her. Ci then fights and defeats Macunaíma, contorting his body until Jiguê (Macunaíma’s brother) hits her with a brick. It seems that in her unconsciousness, Macunaíma takes advantage of Ci but when she comes to, she sexually ravages him. The couple then engages in incessant love-making and a black baby (again played by Grande Otelo) is born, emphasizing racism and
miscegenation. This episode violently ends with Ci and their baby killed by the bomb made by Ci. The violence (Brazil’s political and physically harsh environment, and oppressive reality), carnivalesque, transgressive and unbridled sexuality, are all part of the complex matrix of tropicalism that exemplifies Brazilian magical realism.

The constant sexual romp throughout the film strongly alludes to the libidinous. Not only in Macunaima and Ci’s incessant and rapacious lovemaking, but also at the beginning of the film when Macunaima magically transforms from a black man into a white prince after smoking a cigarette from Sofara’s (Joanna Fromm) crotch. Colour and narrative (reduction of the body) manifested through tropicalism create visually pleasurable experiences of magical realism (that is different from the glossiness and the generational organisation of nostalgia films or simulacra of the past). Narrative infused with colour reveal deeper articulations of the convoluted preconscious dimensions of language that relate to Freud’s and Lacan’s notions of sexual desires and dream narratives. The bisexuality, gender play and confusion—Macunaima cross-dressing, Paulo José playing a female role as Macunaima’s mother at the beginning of the film, and the hyper masculinity of the female guerrilla fighters (Ci and in another instance, a female guerrilla fighter who telephones Ci and speaks in a deep male voice) all allude to misrecognition in psychoanalysis. Luis Madureira also notes Ci’s deeply disjunctive, paradoxical and complex function when he explains that:

Ci embodies not just modern technology, but the city itself. She is the imperious machine-mother whose vortical womb...represents a ‘gentle uterine prison’ (Xavier 1993: 147). She is a metaphor for the contradictoriness and inauthenticity of the condition of underdevelopment itself. (112)
According to Freud, love is a home-sickness that recalls uterine familiarity and unfamiliarity—the fear and joy of the female/mother’s genitals and body that evoke the repressions of the castration complex (398-399). In Ci (and to a lesser degree Sofara), sexuality and violence are inextricably linked, evoking pre-oedipal urges. Unlike Macunaíma’s laziness, Ci’s lawlessness and aggressive propensity to make war is part of the city and modern technology that also equals her primitive, insatiable and dominant sexual appetite and makes reference to matriarchy. Ci makes love, money (when she comes home to the apartment with wads of cash, Macunaíma is not even up and is still in his bathrobe) and war. But she is eventually blown up by her own bomb, and Macunaíma’s mother (Paulo José) is in reality a man, suggesting that there is no room for female sexual desire or feminist ideals, thus sanctioning the law of patriarchy. Yet the film’s paradoxical ending ludically inverts these notions when Macunaíma is ultimately returned to the uterine familiarity by being devoured by the femme fatale and water cannibal, Uiara. The ending feeds into the theme that Brazilians are devoured by Brazil, ultimately showing that modern luxuries such as the television and blender are irrelevant in the jungle. The film depicts the uneven development and underdevelopment of Brazil, revealing the disjuncture, lack of “language” and modernisation in Brazilian society. The closing shot shows the uterine yet muddied water of the (yellow) river consuming Macunaíma—the colour yellow, and the green jacket (that Macunaíma is wearing), which are the national colours of the Brazilian flag, with (Brazilian) blood gushing from under it. Therefore, colour and narrative are sophisticatedly realised through tropicalism that speaks allegorically of Brazil’s economic situation (history-with-holes), which is a form of minoritarian modernity (uneven modernisation) trapped in the conundrum of Third World underdevelopment. It is understandable, then, that violence becomes a
natural preoccupation and indelible component of magical realism. Colour, linked with narrative, involves the unexploited resources and potentialities of violence and pornography that evoke the castration complex through the visceral experiences of tropicalism. In Macunaima, this is evident particularly in the “reduction of the body”, where basic sexual pleasure is entangled with violence (of hunger), which stands for underdevelopment. The polyperspectival narration of magical realism is exemplary in Macunaima.

6. Conclusion

In Macunaima, the cosmopolitics of magical realism can be seen through tropicalism, which employs allegory, historical raw materials, colour and narrative. Tropicalism takes us on a Brazilian Odyssey through minoritarian modernity, as seen in the failed dream of modernisation. While minoritarian cosmopolitanism, realised through the digestion of other cultural influences and products, creates a truly hybrid, tropicalist Brazilian identity. Intertext, disjunctures and the overlap and coexistence of precapitalist and nascent capitalist or technological features are evident in the melding of the folkloric and industrial, native and foreign, nativist and modern, and nationalist and cosmopolitan, which are characteristics of magical realism. Macunaima, the epic of a tropical anti-hero engages with the discourse of nationalism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism through the alternative aesthetics and politics of Third Cinema. Hence, the film’s loaded visceral experiences become part of the visual spell and enthrallment of magical realism, which employs the transgressive, carnivalesque and tropicalist to subvert the idea of an epic with the story of a flawed and lazy anti-hero.
The next chapter will focus on the international Latin American celebrity-author Gabriel García Márquez and the adaptation of his fictional works in terms of the cosmopolitics of postcolonialism that contribute to the New Latin American Cinema movement. Chapter Four will explore globalisation and Hollywood and the infiltration of magical realism under metropolitan cosmopolitanism that is driven by capital gains. And finally, the last chapter will explore the dynamics of Balkanisation through the cosmopolitics of internationally acclaimed Balkan filmmaker, Emir Kusturica, whose films have been repeatedly described as magical realist.
Chapter 3

The Cosmopolitics of Márquesian Magic and New Latin American Cinema

Gabriel García Márquez is a significant figure in the world of magical realism, particularly the magical realism that shaped Latin America. This chapter will examine his literary and filmic contribution to magical realism through three films that have been adapted from his short stories; the comparison of the short stories and films will form the basis of the analysis of García Márquez’s work. To understand the wonderful Márquesian magical realist world, it is necessary to interpret it according to fantasy, allegory and internal and external wonder. This chapter argues that Márquesian magic employs fantasy in a dynamic and fascinating way to articulate Latin American reality that fulfils the purpose of New Latin American Cinema. It does this while engaging in the cosmopolitics of postcolonialism through magical realism. The aim of this chapter is to understand García Márquez’s work in terms of the cosmopolitics of Latin American postcolonialism. Márquesian magic, therefore, will be discussed within the framework of the New Latin American cinema.

1. Gabriel García Márquez and Film

Gabriel García Márquez is internationally renowned for his magical realist fiction and he has been described as a “free-lance ambassador for Latin America to the world” (McNerney 155). In 1982 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (McMurray 1). Naomi Lindstrom in *Twentieth-Century Spanish American Fiction* writes that Gabriel García Márquez (Columbia, b. 1928) was the boom writer whose writing, along with that of Borges from an earlier generation, represented
new Spanish American narrative and, especially, magical realism to the
largest and most popular international readership. (183)

One Hundred Years of Solitude, García Márquez’s most popular book, was published in
1967 and sold 8,000 copies within a week. It continued to sell out new print runs each
week, going on to sell half a million copies within three years and 30 million by its
twentieth anniversary in 1987. It has been translated into 36 languages and has won four
international prizes (McNerney xi).

In Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America, John King observes that
García Márquez has obsessed cineastes from the 1960s to the present and that it is the
“fate” of many Latin American filmmakers to try at least once to adapt García Márquez’s
fiction on film (182). Stam, in his discussion of magical realism in film, devotes a whole
section to García Márquez, which he has called “Márquesian Magic” (Literature 340-
348). Stam also notes that many magical realist writers have been fascinated with film:
Borges with von Sternberg’s films; Manuel Puig studied filmmaking; Carlos Fuentes,
Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Julio Cortazar were all involved in scriptwriting and
writing film reviews. García Márquez, too, has always been fascinated with film—his life
and work have always been intimately linked to cinema. He is known to have said that
his relationship with film is like that of an ill-matched couple who “can’t live with, or
without” one another (Literature 340-341). He studied film in Rome in 1955 and was
determined to become a screenwriter but disappointed at the technical and directorial
focus at Centro Sperimentale, he dropped out after one year, and returned to writing
fiction (Mills and Grönlund 117). But in the early 1960s in Mexico, García Márquez
collaborated with Carlos Fuentes on the film El gallo de oro, based on a short story by
Juan Rulfo (Stam, Literature 341). Interestingly, García Márquez wrote the original
screenplay of *Eréndira and Her Grandmother* in the mid-1960s, but when the film did not materialise, he incorporated parts of it into *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and it later took the shape of a novella, *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother* (Mills and Grönlund 117). He also worked as a film critic for *El Espectador* in Bogota. And his script *Tiempo de morir* was filmed by Mexican director Arturo Ripstein, who later directed *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (another work of García Márquez). García Márquez also worked on three film scripts with Luis Buñuel’s scriptwriter, Luis Alcoriza (Stam, *Literature* 341). He even lectured at the film school of the National University in Mexico City (Oberhelman 55) and has been the president of the Latin American Film Foundation since its inception in 1985 (Pick 32-33), working with the institute in sponsoring aspiring Latin American filmmakers (Oberhelman 55). In 1989, he directed a workshop for 10 Hispanic screenwriters at Robert Redford’s Sundance Institute in Utah (Oberhelman 55). To date, apart from García Márquez’s many published novels and short stories, he has writing credits on 46 television and film productions.¹ It is clear that any in-depth study of magical realism in film cannot exclude García Márquez’s influence.

This chapter will analyse three films that are based on García Márquez’s short stories: *Eréndira* (Ruy Guerra, 1983), *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* (Fernando Birri, 1988), and *Miracle in Rome* (Lisandro Duque Naranjo, 1988). *Eréndira* and *Miracle in Rome* are based on short stories with variant titles: *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother* and *The Saint* respectively. García Márquez was significantly involved in the production of all these films. Both *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* and *Miracle in Rome* are part of a six-episode series

¹ This is according International Movie Database under Gabriel García Márquez.
based on García Márquez’s works called *Amores difíciles*, which was funded by Television Española (Pick 33). The three films selected for analysis in this chapter, were made by Latin American filmmakers of different nationalities—Ruy Guerra is considered Brazilian; Fernando Birri is Argentine; and Lisandro Duque Naranjo (as well as García Márquez) is Colombian. The Pan-Latin-American (transnational and cosmopolitan) collaboration on these films exemplifies the solidarity of the New Latin American Cinema, which Zuzana M. Pick (1-11) and Michael T. Martin have described as at once national and continental (*Transcontinental* 11). I will compare these films with the short stories that they were adapted from to explore Márquesian magic, which will be discussed according to fantasy, allegory and internal and external wonder. Fantasy, allegory and wonder are important devices employed by García Márquez in critiquing colonialism and neo-colonialism, and these postcolonial strategies of magical realism are also harnessed in accordance with the political agenda of the New Latin American Cinema.

2. **The Wonderful World of Márquesian Fantasy**

García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has been described as “unfilmable” and he has also declared that he would never allow it to be filmed. He has apparently been offered two million dollars to make the film but he intimates that he prefers to let readers go on seeing the characters as they have imagined them. He sees the novel as uniquely verbal, virtual and phantasmatic (Stam, *Literature* 341). Throughout this chapter, the comparison between García Márquez’s literary and filmic work will be

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2 Guerra has been described as cosmopolitan and his background as “polyphonic”, as he was born in Mozambique, studied filmmaking at the Institute des Hautes Etudes Cinematographie in Paris, but has always identified with *Cinema Novo* of his adopted country, Brazil (Stam 344).
made in order to analyse the internal and external wonder of the Márquesian fantasy world. William Senior, in “Oliphaunts in the Perilous Realm: The Function of Internal Wonder in Fantasy”, explains that “Fantasy, through the medium of wonder, not only allows us to see things as they aren’t; but lets us realise things as they are—from the inside-out” (122). This section will, therefore, analyse fantasy in the Márquesian world of magical realism.

In Strategies of Fantasy, Brian Attebery defines fantasy as: “a sophisticated mode of storytelling characterised by stylistic playfulness, self-reflexiveness, and a subversive treatment of established orders of society and thought” (1). Rosemary Jackson explores the subversive nature of fantasy in her seminal book, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, where she explains that fantasy is based on desire, primarily as an expression of unconscious drives. For her it is absurd to try to understand fantasy without some reference to psychoanalysis. This is the major flaw she finds in Todorov’s work, maintaining that his repudiation of Freudian theory is a blind-spot that neglects the political and ideological issues surrounding fantasy (6-9). Jackson’s book focuses on post-Romantic fantasy and explains that fantasy recombines and inverts the real but it does not escape reality. Reality and fantasy exist in a parasitical and symbiotic relationship and “The fantastic cannot exist independently of that ‘real’ world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite” (20). Therefore, fantasy is a world filled with wonder that is contrived by the imagination to meet our psychological and emotional needs. Even Todorov concedes that “the concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary” (25). But he draws the boundaries of the fantastic by saying that “either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is this hesitation which sustains its [fantasy’s] life” (31). Magical realism,
therefore, as explained in Chanady’s work (discussed in Chapter One), is beyond fantasy as it resolves the antinomy between the real and irreal, eliminating hesitation. It will be argued in this chapter that Márquesian magic employs fantasy in a dynamic way to articulate the Latin American predicament represented in New Latin American Cinema, while also engaging in the cosmopolitics of postcolonialism through magical realism.

Senior explains that the operating principle of fantasy is the evocation of wonder. His article specifically explores the function of internal wonder in fantasy, which he defines as “the awe, surprise, amazement, fascination, experienced and expressed by and at those in fantasy fiction” (115). In other words, internal wonder is contained within the diegetic world. Senior’s article does not explicitly define external wonder but seems to suggest that it is the evocation of wonder that is experienced by the reader, which is non-diegetic. Senior’s work, especially his notions of internal and external wonder, is a useful framework to analyse how fantasy functions in magical realism. García Márquez explains his style of writing:

The tone that I eventually used in One Hundred Years of Solitude was based on the way my grandmother used to tell stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness… What was most important was the expression she had on her face. She did not change her expression at all when telling her stories and everyone was surprised. In previous attempts to write, I tried to tell the story without believing in it. I discovered that what I had to do was believe in them myself and write them with the same expression with which my grandmother told them: with a brick face. (Ruch 10)
It is through this mode of expression that García Márquez is able to invoke both internal and external wonder, which constitutes Márquesian magical realism.

Chanady explains that magical realism is characterised by two conflicting but autonomously coherent perspectives—one based on an ‘enlightened’ and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the irreal (fantasy, supernatural, etc) as part of everyday reality (*Antinomy* 21-22). Thus, the irreal is not presented as problematic in magical realism, as seen in García Márquez’s explanation of his style of telling stories which contain supernatural and fantastic elements told “with a brick face”. Unlike the fantastic, in magical realism, there is no hesitation between the real and the imagined, nor a struggle between belief and unbelief. Rather, magical realism exacts a subtle form of acquiescence and seduction. It creates a position that includes and implicates the reader or the spectator into its world, dispelling hesitation and eliciting their active engagement and interpretation. In the fantasy/fantastic genre, we often find ourselves in a position where we are conscious that we are drawn into the fantasy world created by the author, which is frequently naïve and we are infantilised by wonder and awe.

In both the short story and film of Eréndira, the Cinderella story is evoked,³ conforming to the morphologies that Vladimir Propp delineates in the Russian folk tale, but which García Márquez eventually subverts (Joel Hancock 152-158). A cruel grandmother prostitutes her granddaughter, fourteen year old Eréndira, as punishment for accidentally burning down her mansion. The story is told in a deadpan yet fantastic style:

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³ According to Norma Rowen, the Cinderella story is one of the oldest in the world and was apparently first found in China (29); but since Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published it in *Nursery and Household Tales* in 1812, the Cinderella story has endured in popularity (Joel Hancock 152).
Eréndira was bathing her grandmother when the wind of her misfortune began to blow. The enormous mansion of moonlike concrete lost in the solitude of the desert trembled down to its foundations with the first attack. But Eréndira and her grandmother were used to the risks of the wild nature there, and in the bathroom decorated with a series of peacocks and childish mosaics of Roman baths they scarcely paid any attention to the calibre of the wind. (García Márquez, *Innocent Eréndira* 1)

The film, however, opens with the mysterious shot of a couple of solitary tombstones of the Amadises seemingly in the desert. The film then cuts to Eréndira bathing her grandmother, and both grandmother and granddaughter engage in an odd and arcane conversation that evokes the foreboding “wind of misfortune” in the short story. The grandmother intimates to Eréndira that she dreamt she was expecting a letter. Eréndira asks what day it was in the dream and the grandmother replies: “Thursday,” to which Eréndira responds enigmatically: “then it was a letter with bad news.” The whole episode in the short story and film is shrouded in superstition but related in a matter-of-fact manner, invoking both internal and external wonder. The short story creates the beautiful imagery of the wind of misfortune blowing and shaking the mansion down to its very foundations. The film captures this idea through the esoteric conversation between the grandmother and Eréndira, and the unrealistic sound and depiction of the gusty wind that constantly blows inside and through the house. Both short story and film engage different means to create the internal wonder of the Márquesian fantasy world.

The mise-en-scene of the film is particularly interesting. The opulent interior of the mansion (before it was burned down by the wind of misfortune) and the interior of the moving bordello tent in the desert (that the grandmother creates with the earnings
from Eréndira's prostitution) recall cafona of the tropicália movement although the film, unlike Macunaima, is not tropicalist. The garish fake flowers of discordant colours, the Persian rugs, the embellished vaults, the elaborate place settings on the table, the throne-like chairs, the intricate brass bed, colourful costumes and jewellery of the grandmother, and even the songs sung and played in the film, speak of excessive and dramatic passions. This not only shows the indulgent and bad taste of the grandmother but also adds to the eccentric world of García Márquez, magical realism and Latin American fiction. All these elements contribute to the baroque style and aesthetics that Carpentier describes, evoking and invoking the marvellous real that he argues is uniquely and eccentrically Latin American (discussed in Chapter One). The lengthy titles such as The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother and The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings also exemplify baroqueness. The style in which the story is told without a doubt is baroque as well:

The grandmother, naked and huge in the marble tub, looked like a handsome white whale. The granddaughter had just turned fourteen and was languid, soft-boned, and too meek for her age. With a parsimony that had something like sacred rigor about it, she was bathing her grandmother with water in which purifying herbs and aromatic leaves had been boiled, the latter clinging to the succulent back, the flowing metal-colored hair, and the powerful shoulders which are so mercilessly tattooed as to put sailors to shame. (García Márquez Innocent Eréndira 1-2)

The extraordinary, imaginative and fantastic descriptive details given by García Márquez of the whale-like grandmother, her tattooed shoulders that “put sailors to shame” and the aromatic therapy of her bath draw the readers into an eccentric Márquesian fantasy
world. Guerra’s Eréndira and the articulation of magical realism are quite different from Birri’s Old Man and even Duque Naranjo’s Miracle in Rome (which I will discuss later). Unlike the strong documentary style that Birri brings to his rendition of Old Man (discussed later), Guerra’s Eréndira creates an eccentric baroque style of Latin America. But Old Man is also baroque. The opening credits of the film, the spread of the news of the old man from Mexico to Guatemala/Honduras to the Caribbean (a continental project), the colourful and whimsical artwork that creates and gives a sense of animation to the film, along with the subtitle of the short story that tells us this is a tale for children, all contribute to the baroque, magical realist fantasy of the Márquesian world. Miracle in Rome, however, with its focus on the supernatural, plays with and questions reality rather than employing fantasy.

**The Internal Wonder of Cruelty and Resilience**

García Márquez’s storytelling style is akin to oral traditions that give many of his stories a fairytale texture. However, unlike moral fables, García Márquez’s stories are steeped in a reality that disguises and reveals the Latin American predicament, supporting Jackson’s theory that fantasy reveals political and ideological issues. This section will examine the internal wonder of García Márquez’s fantasy world to uncover the cosmopolitics of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Gene H. Bell-Villada in García Márquez: The Man and His Work, explores García Márquez’s populist and left-wing orientation and describes him as “a poet of plebeian and street life” (62). García Márquez is concerned with the underdogs of Latin America such as smugglers, street performers and prostitutes, and he captures these colourful aspects of Latin American life in his work. All his life, he has written with passion and commitment about the popular. In fact, in his twenties, García Márquez suggested that comic strips should be constituted as a
literary genre and also eulogised Afro-Hispanic musical forms such as the *guaracha*, *mambo* and *bolero*, which highbrow academics and some priests have patronised and, on occasions, even condemned as satanic (63).

The Márquesian fantasy world is replete with allegories of resilient human beings in a cruel world that reflects Latin American reality: Eréndira and the calculatingly cruel grandmother who heartlessly and mercilessly pimps her granddaughter; the old man who is gawked at, ridiculed and exploited; and the girl who is transformed into a spider. Joel Hancock argues that the story of Eréndira conforms to the fairy tale genre according to Proppian morphology, and as mentioned earlier, it plays on the Cinderella archetype. According to Proppian morphology, most fairy tales begin with a situation that leads to the violation of an interdiction. In Eréndira’s case, despite her endless chores, she is to ensure that everything is in perfect order before going to bed, but, constantly fatigued by her excessive and abusive chores, she often falls asleep on the job. Eventually one night she forgets to extinguish the candles before retiring and her grandmother’s mansion burns down. This brings about her exacting and cruel punishment where Eréndira is forced into prostitution until she pays her debt to her grandmother in full. According to Propp, the harm or injury by the villain is the most significant function as it generates the rest of the action in the story. The next stage is then marked by the appearance of the hero, in this case, Ulises,⁴ who is magically summoned by mental telepathy to rescue the damsel in distress. The concluding phase is the confrontation between the hero and the villain, where the villain is defeated (Joel Hancock 153-155).

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⁴ The Spanish spelling “Ulises” is used in the English translation of García Márquez’s novella and in the film.
Eréndira follows the basic Proppian fairytale structure, with the exception of the ending and the characterisation of Ulises. Although the ending seems to imply that Eréndira lived ‘happily ever after’—she runs off by herself with her grandmother’s gold (which she has worked for) and leaves Ulises, which is atypical of fairy tales. This defies Propp’s final function, where the hero is married and ascends the throne (157). The character of Ulises deviates from the expected pattern. He is somewhat of an anti-hero, an ‘anti-’ Prince Charming. Ulises is the son of a Dutch smuggler, far from royalty; he steals from his father to enjoy pleasure with Eréndira; he is inexperienced in love, non-aggressive and innocent and it is Eréndira who initiates him into the rites of love. In the end, he becomes an assassin (156). The spelling variation of his name plays on the (Latin American) anti-hero that he is supposed to represent (much like Macunaíma)—the opposite of the archetypal Ulysses. With the story of Eréndira, García Márquez subverts the folk tale genre to show us the impasse and grim reality of Colombia (and also Brazil and Mexico) and Latin America, where the vicious cycle of oppression and exploitation is a way of life. As pointed out by Jameson, García Márquez creates a certain poetic transfiguration that changes our perception of things perceived (and particularly in this analysis) through the sophisticated matrix of cruelty and resilience, narrated in the simple and seemingly naïve fashion of a fairy tale—employing parody to humour, entertain and teach. According to Jameson, García Márquez’s left-wing strategies create the mystificatory value of magical realism, which is the Márquesian fantasy world or ‘magic’ (Magic Realism 301-302). Oberhelman has noted that after One Hundred Years of Solitude, García Márquez’s work shifted to the central theme of exploitation, both on the personal and national scale, and the extraordinary power of the human imagination (36). Themes of oppression and exploitation are indeed significant in García Márquez’s work,
as they are depicted in *Old Man, Miracle in Rome* and in *Eréndira*. One of the lasting images in *Eréndira* depicts the grandmother selling Eréndira’s virginity for 250 pesos. The poignancy of this scene is felt when we see Eréndira’s assailant, after haggling over the price of her virginity, slaps her when she resists his advances; he tears her dress, and roughly kisses, fondles and penetrates her. The enduring image that is imprinted in our minds is of the fourteen-year-old child’s blank, stone-cold expression as the wicked deed is done. *Eréndira* does not speak only of García Márquez’s Colombia, but of Latin America in general. Bell-Villada in his analysis of the anatomy of tyranny writes that tyranny “is a painful, complex, long-standing historical reality all too familiar to the denizens of most Latin nations” (149). As mentioned in Chapter One, Eva Santos-Phillips explores the significance of Eréndira’s body in both the novella and film, and she explains that the allegories found in both novella and film are of the “violence” of Colombia’s political situation (in the 1940s)—where the revolutionaries fought the civil authorities for better distribution of goods, autonomy and land. Eréndira represents the people, and the grandmother and men who use her are the different authorities (government, the Catholic Church). Santos-Phillips argues that the female body exemplifies the used object that becomes a powerful subject of individual (Eréndira’s) freedom—in subjecting her body to those vying for power over her body (her grandmother and men), Eréndira’s physical submission shows how tradition and patriarchy renders her body as an object (118-119). Jameson’s ideas of historical raw material and narrative are clearly evident here as well. The allegories of abused Eréndira; the politician, Onésimo Sánchez; the violence and the allusions to the smuggling trade, all capture the realities of Colombia and Latin American politics and are evidences of “history-with-holes”. The graphic sexual violence invokes “reduction to the body”,
capturing the most elementary forms of the bodily experience by employing pornography and violence—Eréndira servicing the men in the desert until she is physically, mentally and emotional exhausted.

Bell-Villada, Oberhelman and Raymond L. Williams attest to the fact that García Márquez’s journalism background has contributed significantly to his fiction writing (Bell-Villada 62; Oberhelman 15; and Williams 134). Stephen Minta quotes García Márquez commenting on his own work: “every single line…in all my books…has a starting point in reality” (2). Oberhelman also notes that between the years of 1947 to 1955, it is difficult if not impossible to separate the two genres of journalism and fiction from García Márquez’s literary work (15). García Márquez, himself, in an interview in 1970 said:

I had in my head the glimmerings of One Hundred Years of Solitude, and I said to myself: “How can I keep on working in this mythical field and with this poetical style, in the circumstances that we’re living through? It seems like an evasion.” It was a political decision, a mistaken one, I now think. I decided to come nearer to the actuality of the Colombian experience and I wrote No One Writes to the Colonel and In Evil Hour. I didn’t exactly write what you could call a novel of the violencia, for two reasons: one, because I hadn’t experienced the violencia directly, I lived in the cities; and two, because I considered that the important thing, in terms of literature, was not the inventory of death and the description of the methods of violence—which was what the writers were doing—but what mattered to me, was the root of that violence, the motives … and, above
García Márquez’s clever parodies and allegories that humour, entertain and teach—all give significance, depth and dimension to the political and mystificatory value of magical realism, which is also Jameson’s notion of history-with-holes (historical raw materials, colour and narrative).

Robert Scholes in *Fabulation and Metafiction* explains the importance of allegory: “reality is too subtle for realism to catch it. It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, by fabulation, we may find a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come” (13). Magical realism is indeed paradoxical: superficially, it appears escapist, but in its escapism and artifice, it brings us closer to reality. As Jameson has observed, magical realism “is a certain type of narrative and representation to be distinguished from realism” (*Magic Realism* 301) because it is there that its magic and seduction lie. In Stam and Xavier’s article, “Transformation of National Allegory: Brazilian Cinema from Dictatorship to Redemocratisation”, they explain that “the majority of Brazilian films, even the most apparently frivolous, demonstrate a penchant for allegory” (296). However, they do not subscribe to Jameson’s hasty claim that all Third World texts are necessarily allegorical (*Third-World Literature* 69); in fact, they point out the relevance of allegory to all national cinemas, including First World cinema (Stam and Xavier 296). Aijaz Ahmad in “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” has strongly challenged Jameson’s notion of Third World national allegory. Nonetheless, Jameson’s observation that many Third World cultures are locked in various life-and-death struggles with first-world cultural imperialism—euphemistically termed “modernisation”—is relevant to much of New
Latin American Cinema (Third-Word Literature 68). Xavier in his book, Allegories of Underdevelopment: Aesthetics and Politics in Modern Brazilian Cinema also affirms this when he explains that within the Brazilian debate of the 1970s and 1980s, “the central theme was the issue of national identity in a peripheral country entangled in the heteronomous movement of modernization” (6).

Stam and Xavier also argue that the employment of realism versus anti-realism, which has to do with “legibility” and “communication” with a broader public, is a complex relationship between the left and nationalism (296). It is imperative to note that realism and anti-realism through magical realism and allegories are radical strategies employed by Latin American artists to battle censorship and repression. In their discussion of the national, Stam and Xavier point out that the left and nationalism lie at the heart of Brazilian cinema, resulting in the Cinema Novo movement that is highly resistant to cultural colonialism (297-298). In Erêndira, this resistance is evident. Guerra is not an insignificant filmmaker of the Cinema Novo movement; in fact, Randal Johnson in Cinema Novo x 5: Masters of Contemporary Brazilian Film includes Guerra in his study of Cinema Novo filmmakers and states that “there can be no doubt that the five discussed here are eminently representative of Cinema Novo’s major concerns” (217). However, Erêndira interestingly was not made with Brazilian support but with Mexican support in the years of Guerra’s self-exile from Brazil because of its repressive regime. This is a good example of the pan-Latin-American and cosmopolitical nature of New Latin American Cinema—where Latin American artists band together to work toward a common goal of national and continental liberation.

Howard Fraser, in his exploration of the techniques of fantasy in magical realism, explains that the allegory of prostitution describes the vast proportions of the exploitation
of human liberty, and exemplifies both the frustration of the individual and continental freedom (49). This is clearly seen in the character of Eréndira, who suffers under her exploitative grandmother. Scholes argues that “allegory, at its best, is thinking in images, intuitive and open to truth” (11), which can be seen in the use of the allegory of prostitution that succinctly captures Latin America reality. García Márquez certainly capitalises on this and uses it efficaciously. The allegory of prostitution in Eréndira refers to both capitalism and colonialism. Oberhelman argues that the grandmother evokes Spanish colonialism and that she represents “Spain holding sway over its colonies” (49). This is also implied in the name, Amadis, (presumably) the grandmother’s husband and son’s (Eréndira’s father) names. Amadis refers to the Spanish chivalric hero in the novel Amadis de Gaula (Amadis of Gaule). The gold that Eréndira produces from her prostitution, which her grandmother keeps in her vest, is clearly a satirical reference to the wealth that Spain plundered from Latin America, specially during the colonial times (49-50). It is, therefore, interesting to ponder the mysterious opening shot with the tombstones of the Amadises at the beginning of the film, in light of Oberhelman’s argument, and the framed photograph of the two men (presumably the Amadises) on the grand piano in the grandmother’s mansion. Both refer to the mysterious, ambiguous and prevalent legacy of Spanish colonialism and patriarchy in Latin America, yet at the same time, they also speak of its death as reflected in the image and idea of the tombstone and the picture being burned away along with the grandmother’s mansion. These images optimistically suggest the end of exploitation, colonialism and capitalism, and the forging of a new identity that is Colombian (Brazilian, Mexican) and Latin American.

In Old Man, exploitation is also rife. The angel (old man) becomes a freak show as Elisenda seizes the opportunity to charge the crowd to view the angel. The couple
(Elisenda and Pelayo) make a fortune as they are able to upgrade their shanty shack to a solid concrete house, the only one on the block. The theme of the cycle of exploitation runs throughout the whole film—Lucky and the black lady swindle Pelayo and the carnival moves in to opportunistically exploit the crowd that has gathered to see the angel. In *Eréndira*, the grandmother exploits Eréndira and the lonely men in the desert by offering Eréndira’s sexual services; the grandmother even attempts to exploit the photographer by trying to charge him for the music and atmosphere that she provides, but he cleverly argues that they do not come out in the photographs.

The dynamics of internal and external wonder are most interesting in the narrative of *The Saint* and *Miracle in Rome*, which utilises the supernatural. The supernatural in García Márquez’s work functions similarly to fantasy and is part of the Márquesian fantasy world. The fantastic in magical realism is taken to mean the irreal (anything that cannot be rationally explained in reality), which encompasses the supernatural as well. The supernatural is another means by which García Márquez draws us into his magical realist world, where the real and irreal are often melded or fluidly move along together without distinction between the two, where these apparently separate worlds (after our minds have been colonised by science and rationality) co-exist. The story of *The Saint* and *Miracle in Rome* is about a seven year old girl, Evelia, who dies mysteriously. But 12 years later when she is exhumed, her body has not decomposed. The local community and government send Margarito Duarte (Frank Ramírez in the film), Evelia’s father, to have Evelia canonised as a saint but this is met with little success due to the bureaucracy and chicanery of the Roman Catholic Church. Although this is the main gist of the short story and film, both have interesting variations and a relationship with each other that exploits external wonder.
In García Márquez’s short story, *The Saint*, we are never told the name of Margarito’s daughter; she is always referred to as “the saint”. García Márquez plays with the idea of sainthood and actually points to Margarito as the real long-suffering saint as he patiently bears his cross of trying to get his daughter canonised (because of her incorruptible body). The concluding paragraph of the short story reads:

Four popes had died, eternal Rome was showing the first signs of decrepitude, and still he waited. “I’ve waited so long it can’t be much longer now,” he told me as he said good-bye after almost four hours of nostalgia. “It may be a matter of months.” He shuffled down the middle of the street, wearing the combat boots and faded cap of an old Roman, ignoring the puddles of rain where the light was beginning to decay. Then I had no doubt, if I ever had any at all, that the Saint was Margarito. Without realizing it, by means of his daughter’s incorruptible body and while he was still alive, he spent twenty-two years fighting for the legitimate cause of his own canonization. (53)

The film, however, ends differently: Margarito resurrects his dead daughter. *Miracle in Rome* focuses on a father’s eternal love for his daughter and the painful separation of death. At the beginning of the film, the epigraph reads: “Love makes death brief”. Thus, the film plays on the paradoxical ideas of short and long, life and death, pain and joy, ultimately showing that love conquers death—the ultimate Christian message, which is satirised through the responses of the church.

García Márquez’s intertextual construction of the short story and film, which reference each other, is most intriguing. The structure creates a complex relationship between the internal and external wonder of the story. This complex and reflexive
construction demonstrates an acute awareness of the two very different media—literature and film, stretching the capacity of both. The short story is told in a first-person voice, and we are told that the narrator was a film student at the Experimental Film Centre in Rome 22 years ago (The Saint 40, 53), clearly referring to García Márquez himself, adding to the reflexive nature of the story. García Márquez invokes neorealism as a strong influence on New Latin American Cinema when he casts Cesare Zavattini (best known for writing Bicycle Thieves) in the short story as the narrator’s teacher in film school. Zavattini’s Bicycle Thieves has often been discussed in relation to the Italian film movement, neorealism. John Hess, in his article “Neo-realism and New Latin American Cinema: Bicycle Thieves and the Blood of Condor” describes Bicycle Thieves as “one of the founding and most influential films of Italian neo-realism” (105). In the short story, it is Lakis, another film student, who brings the saint (Margarito’s daughter) to the attention of Zavattini, to see if he could make a critical film out of the story of Margarito’s daughter. But Zavattini thinks it is too incredulous and that nobody would believe it if it were made into a film. However, on further contemplation and discussion, Zavattini suggests that the film might work if Margarito could wake his daughter in the film (which actually happens in Miracle in Rome). Thus in a strange, uncanny and mise-en-abyme way, the short story predicts the film, making the relationship between the short story and film complex and highly reflexive; yet in the film, there is no character of Zavattini nor any discussion about film, which creates a more realistic feel. The internal and external wonder of the story (of both short story and film) are, therefore, connected, creating and playing on the Freudian ideas of the uncanny (recalling notions of home, the familiar and unfamiliar) that Jameson refers to in his explication of magical realism, which is also tied up with the ideas of colonialism and neo-colonialism. On another level,
the relationship between the short story and film makes us question the reality of our elusive postmodern visual culture—it questions our faith (or disbelief) in visual images.

_The Saint_ and _Miracle in Rome_ also deal with exploitation through their critiques of colonialism and neocolonialism (which will be discussed more appropriately in detail in the next section). The point to the internal wonder of cruelty and resilience within magical realism is the creative process and outcome of the fight for human liberty and dignity in the face of oppression and exploitation—this is precisely what many of García Márquez’s magical realist stories are about. This is the magical and marvellous effect of the internal wonder of cruelty and resilience—where our perception and things perceived are both transformed. Internal wonder is the regeneration of the buzzard wings of the old man so he can fly again into the broad horizon; the lines that finally appear on Eréndira’s palm where once there were no lines; and the calling and resurrection of the dead. The Márquesian magic of the internal wonder of cruelty and resilience is, as Fraser has so eloquently phrased it, “man’s fundamental dignity and stoical determination to survive despite the forces of degradation which threaten his existence” (Gabriel García Márquez 47). All these moments of internal wonder contribute to the political, cosmopolitical and mystificatory value of magical realism. They point to the national and continental liberation of Latin America as Minta has correctly observed when he writes that Latin America is:

a people for whom history has seemed a process to be endured rather than created, a people divorced from a sense of history because theirs has been written by outsiders, a people condemned to a peripheral role in relation to a greater world whose limits have been defined elsewhere. (Minta 301)
It is this struggle that connects Latin America as a continent, exemplified in the cosmopolitical film collaboration around García Márquez’s work that also constitutes New Latin American Cinema. The internal and external wonder of the Márquesian fantasy world are distinctive aspects of these stories and films that engage in postcolonial politics.

3. New Latin American Cinema and Márquesian Magic

The 1960s marked a very significant moment for Latin American Cinema which critics have called the New Latin American Cinema. The beginnings of this movement were initiated within Latin American universities that provided the settings to discuss alternative cinematographic strategies. Diverse, nationally based techniques were developed, giving political coherence to a cinematic movement that aligned innovative strategies with the struggle against cultural dependency (Pick 14). King captures the essence of New Latin American Cinema when he explains:

> the filmmakers who were also the theoreticians of “new” cinema were clear about the difference of their own filmic practices. The various manifestos of the 1960s, usefully collected by Michael Chanan in his *Twenty-Five Years of New Latin American Cinema*, all point to a distinctive break with the past and with the dominant hegemonic discourses. Theirs would be a lucid, critical realist, popular, anti-imperialist, revolutionary cinema which would break with neocolonial attitudes and the monopolistic practices of North American companies. No aesthetic formulae were laid down: flexibility would be needed to adapt to different social situations. (66)
According to Pick, New Latin American Cinema is an “eccentric” movement that sought to engage the continuous struggles for cultural and political autonomy, freedom of expression and social change—but always as an active agent of diverse yet similar histories of violence and discontinuity. Pick outlines the events that consolidated this movement—The International Festival of Latin American Cinema at Viña del Mar in Chile (1967 and 1969); the First Encounter of Latin American Documentary Film at the University of Mérida in Venezuela (1968) that facilitated contacts among the filmmakers who worked in different countries; a parallel initiative, the Cinematheque of the Third World (1969) in Montevideo (Uruguay) that initiated the distribution and exhibition of films and a film festival that brought about the periodical *Marcha*; the Committee of Latin American Filmmakers (1974) that became the New Latin American Film Foundation (set up in 1985 of which García Márquez became the president); and the International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Havana that began in 1979. These events consolidated the support of the creative endeavour of the movement and provided the opportunity to circulate ideas which were crucial to its development (13-14).

The New Latin American Cinema, therefore, is a cinema distinct from its commercial North American and bourgeois European counterparts—a movement noted by Martin as cosmopolitan, national and continental (*Transcontinental* 11). The next three decades would witness the manifestation of alternative film legacies in Latin America, although much of the movement was brutally stifled by the dictatorships that arose in the 1970s (King, *Magical* 72-74). The films that have been selected in this chapter (as well as *Macunaima* discussed in the previous chapter) were all made within the context of New Latin American Cinema. They are all part of the decolonizing
political struggle of Latin America that also engages in the postcolonial strategies of magical realism. Despite a strong manifestation of magical realism in the literary sphere, this tendency was not as pervasive in the medium of film. Financial constraint is the main reason for the lack of magical realist films in Latin America; but the magical realist films that have been produced are uniquely steeped in the aesthetics and agenda of the New Latin American Cinema. These films do not employ “Spielbergian pyrotechnics” (as Stam describes it), which many would expect of magical realist films (Literature 346). It is easier and much less expensive to create magical realist worlds with words because much is left to the imagination, but not so with film—to create such fantastic worlds or sets would require substantial financial backing, a reality unavailable to Latin America because of its chronic underdevelopment. But the magical realist films produced in Latin America are highly creative and resourceful. There has been a strong documentary disposition in Latin American cinema since its inception because portraying the real image of Latin America has always been a preoccupation of Latin American filmmakers as they struggle with underdevelopment. But it is only with New Latin American Cinema that filmmakers have found ways to invert and subvert this economic “disadvantage” to their advantage by asserting it as part of their identity. These filmmakers recognise the power of films and conceive film as a social process where one can change reality.

The Birri Vision

Out of the three Márquesian films under discussion in this chapter, Birri’s Old Man best exemplifies and harnesses documentary features. The film is consistent with New Latin American Cinema because it is realist, critical and nationalist. If we compare the film to the short story, the film is more realistic than it is ‘magical realist’. The basic storyline of both short story and the film is of an old man with wings who appears
outside Pelayo and Elisenda’s house one day. The presence of the old man stirs the
curiosity of the neighbours when someone insists that he is an angel. Soon word spreads
about the bird-man and hordes of people begin to appear at Pelayo and Elisenda’s house
to see this ‘angel’. Opportunistic Pelayo and Elisenda exploit the situation by charging
the crowd to see the old man. Garcia Márquez’s short story published in 1968 is written
in a child-like fantastic style with the subtitle: “A Tale for Children” (Collected Stories
203). The title and subtitle of the short story immediately draws us into the fantasy world
of children, where the fantastic is not questioned:

It so happened that during those days, among so many other carnival
attractions, there arrived in the town the travelling show of the woman
who had been changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents. The
admission to see her was not only less than the admission to see the angel,
but people were permitted to ask her all manner of questions about her
absurd state and to examine her up and down so that no one would ever
doubt the truth of her horror. She was a frightful tarantula the size of a ram
and with the head of a sad maiden. What was most heart-rending,
however, was not her outlandish shape but the sincere affliction with
which she recounted the details of her misfortune. While still practically a
child she had sneaked out of her parents’ house to go to a dance, and while
she was coming back through the woods after having danced all night
without permission, a fearful thunderclap rent the sky into two and
through the crack came the lightning bolt of brimstone that changed her
into a spider. Her only nourishment came from the meatballs that
charitable souls chose to toss in her mouth. A spectacle like that, full of so
much human truth and with such a fearful lesson, was bound to defeat
without even trying that of a haughty angel who scarcely deigned to look
at mortals. Besides, the few miracles attributed to the angel showed a
certain mental disorder, like the blind man who didn’t recover his sight
but grew three teeth, or the paralytic who didn’t get to walk but almost
won the lottery, and the leper whose sores sprouted sunflowers. Those
consolation miracles, which were more like mocking fun, had already
ruined the angel’s reputation when the woman who had been changed into
a spider finally crushed him completely. (207-208)

García Márquez’s description is bizarre and strange: a woman turning into a spider for
disobeying her parents; absurd miracles such as the blind man, who instead of recovering
his sight when he visited the angel (old man) grew three teeth; a paralytic, who instead of
being delivered from his disability, almost wins a lottery; and a leper whose sores
sprouted flowers. The film, however, realises these episodes quite differently. The
representation of the spider-woman is part of a circus act employing the carnivalesque.
The woman who plays the spider-woman in the film is the voluptuous female star of the
travelling carnival that comes to the town where the angel resides to take advantage of
the crowd that has congregated there. The film capitalises on her sexuality. Her spider-
woman act involves her having her head attached to a canvass backdrop of the
gargantuan body of a spider and the story of her metamorphosis is told through a
sensuous song and dance television-video presentation, where the dancers’ bodies are
painted and scantily clad—playing on their sexuality. This carnivalesque television
presentation is a comment on the penetration of television technology in the 1980s in
Argentina (and Latin America) that has captured the imagination and energy of the
people—the general public is mesmerised and entertained by this new medium, affecting the popularity of cinema. Timothy Barnard reports that previously the working class in Argentina was the strongest market for its national film production but with the increase in the ownership of television and a wage freeze, cinema attendance began to drop drastically (*New Latin* 451).

The capitalisation of sex is taken further (which also continues the carnivalesque tendency of the film), when Lucky, the carnival manager, creeps up behind the actress while she is performing her spider-woman act and penetrates her. Her response to the copulative act is ambiguous. At first, she repudiates his advances but later her hands encourage him, and we are given a close-up shot of her orgasmic expression. In the short story, the spider-woman is severely (even divinely) punished for sneaking out to dance without her parents’ permission; but in the film, she blatantly revels in sex with no consequences. This exemplifies the “libidinal apparatus” associated with colour that Jameson describes, where the visual aesthetic of magical realism employs sex and violence to articulate the Lacanian preconscious dimensions of language (which is also seen and discussed in the previous chapter with *Macunaima*). Lucky takes advantage of the spider-woman sexually while she is performing her act, just as the carnival (as well as Elisenda and Pelayo and the continuous swindling throughout the film) are taking advantage of the crowd that has gathered to see the old man—a blatant criticism of the vicious cycle of systemic exploitation inherent in capitalism.

Birri’s neo-realist influence is inescapable, evident even in his early films. In *Tire Dié (Throw Us a Dime)* made in 1958, Birri and 80 students documented the children of a shanty town who risked their lives daily begging for coins along a main railway line. According to King, this film opened a dialogue with the local community (*Magical* 85).
Birri’s rendition of Old Man is steeped in reality rather than fantasy, unlike the short story. To understand Birri’s film better, we need to understand his vision of cinema. Birri returned to Argentina in 1953, after being trained at the Italian film school Centro Sperimentale, and founded La Escuela Documental de Santa Fé (Documentary Film School of Santa Fé) in 1956 (Barnard, New Latin 447). King sees Birri as the “precursor” and many have venerated him as the “pope” of the New Latin American Cinema (Magical 85). Birri recounts that when he returned from Europe, he had the idea of founding a school modelled after the Centro Sperimentale, but realised that this was premature. What was needed was a school that would combine the basics of sociology, history, geography and politics, because the real undertaking at hand was a quest for national identity (84-85). In “Popular Cinema and Populist Politics”, Barnard explains: “Birri’s main influence, though immense, thus lies not in the production of critical films in the mainstream but in his work as a teacher, theorist and documentarist of the country’s social reality, particularly in the interior” (447). Therefore, Birri, along with Julio García Espinosa, Octavio Gettino, Fernando Solanas, and the Cinema Novo directors such as Glauber Rocha and Ruy Guerra were all proponents of the New Latin American Cinema. As early as the 1950s, they began to forge a new Latin American cinema that was both national and continental, which Pick explains:

A desire to unveil the conflicting realities of their own countries had led young directors in Latin America since the early 1950s to explore the political potential of the medium. Responding to the social and political crises that prevailed across the continent, the filmmakers of the Documentary Film School of Sante Fé (Argentina), the Ukamau Group (Bolivia), the cinema novo (Brazil), as well as those of revolutionary Cuba
and others in Colombia, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela sought committed ways to use film as an instrument of social awareness. By the end of the decade and through a concerted effort, these filmmakers sought to join diverse radical projects developed within specific national contexts to broaden ideological and cultural agenda capable of encompassing the territorial expanse of the continent. This ideological agenda was initiated by and developed through a cinematographic movement known as the New Latin American Cinema. (1)

This agenda is evident in the Márquesian films discussed in this chapter. Although stylistically different, they converge in their political orientation—all three films express the underdevelopment that is entrenched in Latin American reality, which is a salient feature of the New Latin American Cinema.

Birri explains that the documentary in New Latin American Cinema was based on “the call for a nationalist, realist, and critical cinema, but, additionally, it was intrinsically related to the fourth, the popular, which is to say, it tried to interpret, express and communicate with the people” (90). In other words, it had a populist focus. According to Barnard, the film culture of Argentina during the military years of the third Peronist presidency saw two major trends emerge that were diametrically opposed, thematically and stylistically: the Argentine Nuevo Cine which was more bourgeois; and Birri’s conception of cinema. Birri’s idea of cinema was soon subsumed by Cine Liberación, which was actively promoted by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino in the late 1960s. This came to be known as the “guerrilla cinema”, which was an anti-imperialistic struggle for national liberation under neocolonialism (New Latin 449). Birri also explains that Latin American filmmakers were trying to develop an active cinema for an active
spectator—spectators who do not consume passively. In other words, Birri was intent on creating a cinema of and for liberation—economic, political, cultural liberation and also liberation of the image which includes the liberation of the imagination. New Latin American Cinema, therefore, was generated within reality (hence Jameson’s notion of history-with-holes), became concrete on the screen, and then returned back to reality, aspiring to transform it, which Birri calls “a poetics of the transformation of reality” (90). In this sense, New Latin American Cinema also functions on the level of external wonder, eliciting responses from its audience, in the hope of changing the ‘non-diegetic’ reality that we live in, particularly Latin America. The New Latin American Cinema endeavoured to capture on film the Latin American continent as never seen before—a continent perceived as vast and varied, rich and complex, contradictory and coarse.

*Old Man* is, therefore, imbued with Birri’s vision and bent on showing the Latin America that has not been traditionally shown—its underdevelopment. The film opens with Pelayo and Elisenda tending to their feverish baby in their cramped little shack of a home, crawling with crabs that Pelayo is trying to get rid of. The house is leaking and we see that the baby has only a crate as its crib. As Pelayo runs out to discard a pail full of crabs, he notices a pitiful old man caught in a bramble of wings against a rock. The visual reality and metaphor of poverty seen in the creeping crabs in their boxed-in environment and the trapped wings, certainly paint a miserable picture. The opening paragraph of the short story reads:

> On the third day of rain they had killed so many crabs inside the house that Pelayo had to cross his drenched courtyard and throw them into the sea, because the new born child had a temperature all night and they thought it was due to the stench. The world had been sad since Tuesday.
Sea and sky were a single ash-gray thing and the sands of the beach, which on March nights glimmered like powdered light, had become a stew of mud and rotten shellfish. The light was so weak at noon that when Pelayo was coming back to the house after throwing away the crabs, it was hard for him to see what it was that was moving and groaning in the rear of the courtyard. He had to go very close to see that it was an old man, a very old man, lying face down in the mud, who, in spite of his tremendous efforts, couldn’t get up, impeded by his enormous wings.

(García Márquez Collected Stories 203)

Neither the film nor the short story paint a flattering portrait of Latin America—more than anything, they bring out the sorry reality of the lives of Pelayo, Elisenda, the baby and the old man. The irony with the old man is that he is (later) mistaken for an angel who is sadly trapped by his own wings and lying face down in the mud, requiring a man to save him. The point of this fable is to illustrate the absurdity of life.

Birri also uses his artistic license to comically alter the “consolation miracles” of a “certain mental disorder” in the short story. Instead of a blind man growing three teeth, we see a blind bard whose shrill and grating voice changes into a guttural bass voice; a lame man who gains mobility—albeit seen in fast-motion through filmic manipulation; and a decrepit old lady who chants “33” and urinates on a card indicating this number—she only wins the rotary draw after the spider-woman rigs the rotary wheel to stop at 33. Birri imposes his realist cinema onto García Márquez’s magical realist short story. The magical realist moments are ambiguous and constantly questioned, creating a critical cinema. Throughout the film, there is a constant ambivalence between the supernatural and realism. Miracles occur but they are irrelevant and unnecessary, making the spectator
unsure how to read them. For example, the blind bard whose voice deepens and the cripple who walks in fast-motion—are these supposed to be miraculous or farcical? They are both reflexive, making us aware that we are watching a film. In the short story, we are never told that the old man’s wings are detachable. In fact, we are led to believe that they are a natural part of his body because when winter comes, they are regenerated (García Márquez Collected Stories 210). In the film, however, the old man is able to take off his wings and even cleans and mends them while they are off. In one particular scene, we see him totally naked in the form of a man, bathing himself. But at the end, he magically flies away. The fact that Birri has cast himself as the old man makes the film even more self-conscious and reflexive. Is Birri the filmmaker, film teacher, precursor and pope of the New Latin American Cinema, like the old man—unappreciated, ignored and even exploited? The film poses more questions than answers.

On another level, Old Man also sharply captures the paradoxical nature of faith, which is incomprehensible and inexplicable. If the (consolation) miracles were relevant and necessary, it would be mere magic and would not require faith—faith is beyond magic, a belief in something beyond finiteness and comprehension. The film, therefore, is indeed a type of critical cinema—one that employs internal and external wonders, one that liberates our imagination, from the very first sorry image of the old man entangled in his wings at the break of dawn, to the concluding image of the old man taking flight and disappearing into the horizon.

The Colombian Conundrum

The film situation in Colombia is different, yet the problems and issues found are not drastically dissimilar. Unlike Mexican, Brazilian and Argentine cinemas, the
Colombian film industry has always been small. Thus, there is little research on and recognition of Colombian cinema, especially in Anglophone film scholarship. Ilene S. Goldman’s article, “Recent Colombian Cinema: Public Histories and Private Stories” explains that recent Latin American film scholarship ignores Colombian films because they receive limited distribution at home and abroad. The tendency has been to collapse Colombian cinema into the discussions of the “Andean region” (57). King explains that Colombian cinema has always found it difficult to compete with North American and Mexican films that have dominated the market since the 1930s, and that Colombian film production has always been sporadic and uneven (Magical 207). The small Colombian film production output is unfortunate considering that Colombia has the third largest cinema audience in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico (Magical 211). According to Goldman, film-going has long been a primary source of entertainment in Colombia (59), but Colombia’s long and bloody political climate has made film production difficult. According to King, it was only after the Second World War that the first group of filmmakers emerged in the 1960s. These filmmakers studied abroad in Rome (alluded to in Miracle in Rome), Paris and the United States and were called the “generation of teachers”. The films they made tended toward documentary (Magical 208). The Colombian state-supported film industry, now defunct (Goldman 58), did not flourish until the “ley de sobreprecios” or “surcharge law” was put in place, where a surcharge was imposed on admission prices to assist the local film industry (King, Magical 211; Manrique 68). Along with the surcharge, the government also decreed that a short Colombian film should accompany all new releases in the country. In 1977, the government established a screen quota of 20 days a year devoted to the screening of national films, which increased to 30 days in 1978. Also in 1978, FOCINE, a film
development company was established, which greatly assisted in the development of Colombia’s film industry (King, *Magical* 211). FOCINE undertook the purchase of much needed equipment, financed national filmmakers and co-productions, imported technicians to train local talent and organised annual film competitions (Manrique 68). Between the years of 1980-1985, an average of 10 films were made per year, but very few of these films could cover their costs in the home market and the prospects of exporting these films were slim, since Colombia has no tradition of selling its films to Latin America, Europe or the United States. Colombia could not infiltrate the distribution and exhibition monopolies already in place (King, *Magical* 212). Goldman reiterates that “Colombia has never established an export market for its films, so, despite festival awards and international critical acclaim, its filmmakers cannot hope for international distribution or exhibition” (59). It is a Catch-22 situation: Colombia is trapped in the conundrum of underdevelopment like most Latin American film industries.

Therefore, it is no wonder that both the film *Miracle in Rome* and its director are obscure, albeit King has described Lisandro Duque Naranjo as “one of Colombia’s most respected film-makers and critics” (*Magical* 211) and Manrique describes the film as “the most winning translation yet of magic realism on the screen” (69), and as the most successful Colombian commercial film (68). Since both García Márquez and Duque Naranjo are Colombians, it follows that they would join forces to promote Latin America’s (and Colombia’s) most celebrated literary form—magical realism, made by one of Colombia’s most distinguished filmmakers. This sense of solidarity is not only a significant characteristic of Latin America but also (especially) of New Latin American Cinema because Latin American filmmakers realise that the only way to battle underdevelopment is to pool their resources.
Eréndira and Old Man were made under similar pan-Latin-American collaborative circumstances and were funded by European sources as well, demonstrating that they are transnational and cosmopolitan productions. Guerra, one of the prominent proponents of Cinema Novo of Brazil, did not shoot the film in Brazil but Mexico (in his self-exile) because of the repressive regime that was in power in Brazil at that time. Eréndira was a Mexican, French and West German production; while Old Man was a Cuban, Italian and Spanish production. These collaborative (transnational and cosmopolitan) film efforts gave birth to small body of work, which Stam has called Márquesian magic in the genre of magical realism within the framework of New Latin American Cinema.

4. The Postcolonial Politics of Magical Realism

The allegory of the church features strongly in all three films, contributing to the theme of exploitation and also serving as a deep comment on colonialism. Ironically and hypocritically, the church rescues Eréndira from prostitution and her grandmother, but only to subject her to other forms of exploitation—she is engaged in menial labour at the convent. The film exposes the hypocrisy of the church when we learn that teenage Indians were bribed to take their first communion and convert to Christianity. The grandmother, after learning this, bribes an Indian boy with even more money to marry Eréndira, so that Eréndira can leave the convent and return to her grandmother to resume the grandmother’s exploitative prostitution business. In Old Man, the allegory of the church is played out differently. The priest of the local church is determined to comprehend the phenomenon of the old man/angel according to Christian theology, so he studies Christian texts and writes to the Vatican to unravel the mystery of the bird-man. The crowd, however, convinced by the absurd miracles, hails the old man as an angel and
proceeds to enshrine him. But the priest, holding onto his rigid, dogmatic and even
obsolete (and ineffectual) Christian beliefs, virulently opposes them, accusing them of
heresy. Bell-Villada points out that Father Gonzaga bears the name of a legendary Jesuit
saint and hero, again alluding to Spanish colonialism. He also explains that Father
Gonzaga’s mistaken expectation that the bird-man should know Latin because it is “the
language of God” is erroneous, as Hebrew and Greek are the original languages of the
Bible (137). The local priest, therefore, represents and demonstrates the thoughtless, even
erroneous imitation and assimilation of the coloniser’s religion and culture that is clearly
not suited to Latin America—Latin America has different angels and miracles. It
parodies colonialism and neocolonialism in a most farcical way, showing the ineffectual
and ludicrous attempts to comprehend and run Latin America according to the irrelevant
and impractical ways of the colonisers.

The beginning of Miracle in Rome shows the impractical and unnecessary
upgrading of the cemetery in which Evelia is buried. The government and church have
conceived a plan to upgrade the cemetery into a “modern cemetery”, a farcical allegory
and scathing attack on the church, government, colonialism, neocolonialism,
modernisation and capitalism—what will a modern cemetery entail and what purpose
will it serve? Do tombstones need upgrading? If anything, we want to remember our dead
in the time that they lived—through old, antiquated tombstones rather than modernised
headstones. As the scene unfolds, we are informed through the announcements that the
remains of unclaimed graves will be buried in a common grave and that private ossuaries
are available for purchase at the local church—illustrating how modernity and capitalism
have penetrated the church, even corrupting it. The absurdity of the whole situation
becomes apparent when we catch the deliberations of an elderly couple who have come
to collect their mother’s remains. The woman insists that she will not bury her mother with strangers and so the only alternative is to bring the remains back home until the couple can afford to buy a private ossuary; however, her husband is horrified at the idea. So what benefits will a modern cemetery give to poor Latin Americans? The upgrade is really causing more harm—psychological, emotional, and most significantly, financial. In the short story, the cemetery has to move to make way for the building of a dam. Both film and short story comment on the inescapability of modernisation and capitalism.

When the people see the undecayed body of Evelia, they immediately exclaim that it is a miracle and venerate her as a saint. A visual satire follows when a priest opportunistically stands in front of a derelict arch proclaiming that indeed this is a miracle and sign from God approving the upgrade of the modern cemetery. The old derelict arch that towers over the priest suggests the obsolescence, yet dominant prevalence, of colonialism and neocolonialism in Colombia (and the rest of Latin America). The short story is less dramatic:

Hundreds of curiosity-seekers, attracted by the resounding news of the miracle, poured into the village. There was no doubt about it: The incorruptibility of the body was an unequivocal sign of sainthood, and even the bishop of the diocese agreed that such a prodigy should be submitted to the judgement of the Vatican. And therefore they took up a public collection so that Margarito Duarte could travel to Rome to battle for the cause that no longer was his alone or limited to the narrow confines of his village, but had become a national issue. (García Márquez The Saint 38)
In the film, the bishop is called to assess the situation. Sceptical and politically astute, he outrageously suggests that they try to hasten the decomposition process by re-burying Evelia in manure and soil, even flooding it if necessary. Margarito vehemently objects, refusing to drown his daughter and an argument ensues between the bishop and Margarito. Margarito points out that he is not concerned about the canonisation of his daughter, all he wants is for her to live there with him. The shrewd priest quickly retorts that it is morally outrageous and that it is illegal to keep an unburied corpse as it violates the Health Act. Realizing that his approach is not working, he softens and persuades Margarito to be reasonable, saying that if he had observed something extraordinary and prodigious about the situation, he would have begun the canonisation process. If the deceit of the bishop is not already obvious, it becomes scathingly blatant when an eclipse occurs and he is outraged by the natural phenomenon. When the crowd kneels, he promptly tells them that the eclipse had been forecast and is coincidental, urging them to rise because acknowledging it as a miraculous sign is a sacrilege. But as the crowd rises, a man incites the crowd by shouting: “This is just centralism. If it had happened in Armenia, it would be a miracle. But this is Filandia, so it’s pure coincidence.” Another man interjects: “I am very poor but I will put 1000 pesos so that Margarito can go to Rome and speak to the Pope.” At this, the crowd generously give of their money and valuables, making the canonisation of Evelia a national effort for recognition.

But Margarito’s problems do not end here—in fact, they have just begun. In Rome, the Colombian ambassador generously receives Margarito and arranges for his accommodation. However, his political manipulation is clear when he openly discusses the significance of Evelia’s canonisation with his colleagues over the phone in the presence of Margarito. Disgusted that he has become a political pawn, Margarito slips
away. This is the start of the tedious and maddening rigmarole that Margarito has to go through in seeking audience with the Vatican for the canonisation of Evelia—he finds out that audience with the Vatican can only be arranged by the ambassador of his country. In his desperation, he speaks to Evelia (whose coffin he carries around with him). Noticing Margarito’s distress, a priest befriends him and finds out his woes. The priest promises to help Margarito and asks for money to get things going. Meanwhile, the embassy tracks Margarito down and explains the long process of canonisation and that it can take from 200-800 years. They also inform Margarito that while all this time passes, the dead body must be buried as it is not legal to keep a corpse. Margarito, therefore, seeks out the friendly priest’s help, only to find that the priest is a fraud and that he has been swindled of most of his money. The police comes after Margarito and he is trapped in his room. In his desperation, he pleads with his daughter for help and she miraculously awakes.

The critique of colonialism and neocolonialism is obvious. Colombia and Latin America must conform to the ways and system of the coloniser, locking them into dependency. The superior and condescending attitudes of the (colonizing) Italians can be seen in the landlady and the guards of the Vatican making their patronizing and sneering remarks such as: “yet another Colombian” and “now they come from all over”. The situation of both Margarito and his housemate (the tenor, also from Colombia) allegorises colonialism and neocolonialism. The tenor had come to Rome with dreams of becoming an opera singer, which in many ways is similar to Margarito who has come to Rome in order to have Evelia canonised—the operatic art form and the Roman Catholic Church, with its bureaucratic procedural processes, both exemplify colonialism and neocolonialism from which Colombia (and Latin America) suffer. The parts that the tenor has gotten so far have all been minor parts, yet at one of his solo recitals, his high
note shatters a window, a cliché that playfully demonstrates his extraordinary abilities. But because both the tenor and Evelia are from Latin America, their accomplishments are undermined and unrecognised. García Márquez is suggesting that talents and miracles do come out of Latin America—perhaps even better ones. In the short story, Margarito is told of similar incorruptible corpses that are found in Palermo. He goes out to investigate this but finds that the bodies are actually mummies, unlike the undecayed body of his daughter:

she did not resemble the kind of withered mummy seen in so many museums of the world...her skin was smooth and warm, and her open eyes were clear and created the unbearable impression that they were looking at us from death. (García Márquez The Saint 38)

Indeed García Márquez is suggesting here that what is found in Latin America is even better—more wonderful and marvellous. When the daughter is first exhumed, we are told: “they could smell the scent of fresh-cut roses with which she has been buried” from 11 years ago (García Márquez The Saint 38). The internal and external wonder created with Evelia’s smooth, warm skin and open eyes staring from death and the smell of fresh-cut roses when the coffin was opened employ the supernatural (similar to how fantasy functions with the other stories and films) to create the Márquesian magical realist world. The postcolonial politics of magical realism harness fantasy and the supernatural to create allegories, internal and external wonder that exemplifies minoritarian cosmopolitanism (like Macunaima).

Finally, I will examine the minoritarian cosmopolitical messages of García Márquez’s postcolonial allegorical critique in Eréndira. Kathleen McNerny, in Understanding Gabriel García Márquez, discusses the binding impasse of corruption
that Latin America is trapped in. She points out the irony of the grandmother securing a letter of recommendation for her good character from the politician, Senator Onésimo Sánchez, who is every bit as degenerate as herself, and the pointlessness of showing the letter to the policeman who is illiterate (127). In *Gabriel García Márquez: Writer of Colombia*, Minta points out that Colombia’s scale of political deaths per generation and level of political conflict is the highest in the world (6). Colombians are born into different political factions and have traditionally identified with one of the two main parties, the Liberal or the Conservative. Therefore, to change one’s political identification in Colombia would entail the drastic corresponding change of one’s closest social and personal relationships (Minta 8). The bankruptcy and corruption of the politics in Colombia (and Latin America) is illustrated through the character of Senator Onésimo Sánchez, even more so in the film. Nothing is more wonderful than the ironic and figuratively grandiose empty promises that the politician makes: “we will have machines to make rain, we will distil oil of Happiness at home, and vegetables will grow in saltpetre!” Later, in the confidence of his workers, he blatantly discusses his corruption when he tells them, “my re-election is better for you than for me … you make your living from it”. But the most eloquent image is the magical realist paper butterflies, set in flight by the senator, that land and become imprinted on a wall. Eréndira sees the butterflies flying to the wall but when she inspects them, she finds that they have been painted on. The nearby guard confirms this when he notices her inspecting the butterflies. The magical realist image speaks of the disillusionment of the individual and the frustrated quest for continental freedom. Equally effective is another sequence where money bills are flying inside the private quarters of the senator, which alludes to the widespread corruption of politicians in Latin America.
Minta also explains the drug trade in Colombia in the 1970s. According to him, Colombia was the largest exporter of cocaine, and apparently, 80 percent of the consumption of cocaine and marijuana in North America comes from Colombia. But Colombia is one of the rare countries whose major export does not appear anywhere in the official statistics (2). This reality elucidates the implicit and explicit references to smuggling in *Eréndira*. At the beginning of the film, when the grandmother and Eréndira hitch a ride from a truck driver/smuggler, he denies any smuggling activities when the grandmother mentions it. However, in the back of the truck, Eréndira pulls out an endless string of watches from one of the sacks. In another instance, when the grandmother tries to recruit the help of a smuggler to smuggle Eréndira out of the convent, he ambiguously and sharply retorts: “if you think we can meddle in God’s business … you know shit about smuggling!” And finally, in the most blatant scene when the police, the grandmother and Ulises’s father are chasing Ulises and Eréndira, the policeman stops a truck and asks if they had seen a truck full of chickens, the truck driver replies, “We are not stool pigeons. We are smugglers!” The policeman laments in resignation: “have the decency to not do it in daylight!” But the most beautiful and succinct imagery of smuggling would be the oranges that Ulises’s father (a Dutch smuggler) grows—special oranges with diamonds in them, a compelling allegory of the drug trade of Colombia.

The postcolonial politics of magical realism is predominantly seen through the allegory of the church, but García Márquez also employs other metaphors to articulate the colonised and neocolonised predicament of Latin America, exposing the inherent corruption, and particularly the drug trade, in Colombia.
5. Conclusion

From the comparison between García Márquez’s short stories and films made in the context of New Latin American Cinema, it is apparent that Latin American magical realist films are distinct, varied and certainly do not subscribe to Spielbergian pyrotechnics, but are inherently entrenched in underdevelopment. They possess strong documentary features as documentary filmmaking has always been a strong influence in Latin American cinema and also because Latin American filmmakers are determined to capture Latin American reality in their films. Hence, magical realism is creatively and resourcefully realised without compromising the portrayal of Latin American underdevelopment, such as the string of watches uncovered by Eréndira in the back of the truck, butterflies that get imprinted on the wall or the money bills flying in the room. In fact, some of these magical realist moments even question reality, especially with *Old Man*. Thus in some ways, the initial viewing experiences of these films may be difficult and disappointing (as Martínez, discussed in Chapter One, has pointed out) compared to the rich magical realist worlds that words are able to conjure with our imagination. But as Jameson points out, it is the history-with-holes and the unique visceral viewing pleasures of experiencing the reality of these films, which are in contrast to commercial and bourgeois films, that make these films magical realist. The most significant feature that García Márquez has created with these short stories and films is the intrinsic internal and external wonder that gives life to the allegories and the fantasy (and supernatural) world that he is able to create—particularly the complex reflexive, self-referencing and intertextual nature of *The Saint* and *Miracle in Rome*.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Stam in his theorisation of magical realism astutely admits that magical realism is problematic because it serves as a shorthand for all
the transgressive and alternative aesthetics rooted in the multicultures and cultural relativism of Latin America, which is why a transtextual, Bakhtinian approach of multi-perspectivalism and polycentrism is essential (*Adaptation* 311):

These [magical realist] aesthetics are often rooted in non-realist, often non-Western cultural traditions featuring other historical rhythms, other narrative structures, other views of the body, sexuality, spirituality, and the collective life. Many incorporate non-modern traditions [are organised] into clearly modernizing or postmodernizing aesthetics, and thus problematize facile dichotomies such as traditional and modern, realist and modernist, modernist and postmodernist. (317)

Stam’s observation supports Jameson’s notion that magical realism is history-with-holes and an alternative to postmodernism because it captures the radical fragmentation of modern life and the destruction of older communities and collectivities—a reality that has been quite extensively discussed so far in regards to Latin America. Thus, the richness of magical realism lies in its historical and sociological precondition—magical realism as a new kind of relationship with history (*Magic Realism* 317-322). Hence, magical realism captures the ontology of reality, phenomenology of perception and the anthropological perspective of Latin American reality. Another pertinent observation made by Stam in his discussion of magical realist authors and directors is that most have emerged from the cultivated Latin American elite, yet their sympathies are with the marginalised masses or “the people” (minoritarian cosmopolitanism). Therefore, unlike the cosmopolitan anti-nationalist European avant-gardes (metropolitan cosmopolitanism), magical realism in Latin America is nationalist and, at the same time, pan-Latin-American in its struggle against imperialism, which I have argued with regard to Márquesian films (and
Macunaima) that have been forged by the New Latin American Cinema. As Stam has noted: “While deeply conversant with European culture and the avant-gardes, they [Latin Americans] also revitalise their art through contact with the popular and the oral, thus creating a new synthesis at once popular and erudite, native and European” (Adaptation 317). This is why I argue in this thesis, cosmopolitics is important in the exploration and understanding of magical realism as it opens up and provides new and different perspectives—particularly with minoritarian and metropolitan cosmopolitanism (which I will explore specifically in relation to Hollywood in the next chapter).

In Chapter Two, with the analysis of Macunaima, I began the tropicalist Brazilian Odyssey of minoritarian cosmopolitanism and in this chapter, I have continued the journey of magical realism, exploring specifically the Márquesian labyrinth of fantasy, allegory and internal and external wonder within the context of New Latin American Cinema. From the analysis of the films above, magical realism is clearly a strategy of postcolonial discourse, as Slemon argues—a quest to find its own voice, identity and heal the trauma of colonisation and neo-colonisation. Fantasy, allegory, internal and external wonder are skilfully deployed by García Márquez within New Latin American Cinema that collaborates with other Latin American filmmakers and artists. As demonstrated in this chapter, these films exemplify history-with-holes and the minoritarian cosmopolitics of Latin American postcolonialism. Jameson’s historical raw materials, colour and narrative can be seen in the Márquesian world of fantasy, allegory and internal and external wonder (as it was seen through tropicalism in Macunaima), particularly through the uneven development and underdevelopment, where smugglers and prostitutes are struggling for survival and trying to get ahead. The various magical realist films analysed thus far, articulate the predicament of chronic underdevelopment that recall Freudian and
Lacanian ideas of the uncanny (of home, the familiar and unfamiliar discussed in detail in Chapter Two with *Macunaima*) creating a visceral and ‘real’ viewing experience, which are also apparent and played out in the postcolonial politics of magical realism.

Evidently, García Márquez, Birri, Guerra and Duque Naranjo (as well as much of the Latin American intelligentsia), who are proponents of New Latin American Cinema, share the same cosmopolitical commitment to the common people of their individual countries and to Latin America as a continent. The notion of cosmopolitics has not been traditionally used in the discourse about New Latin American Cinema, magical realism (Márquesian or otherwise), nor postcolonialism, but this chapter has shown it is a useful and currently relevant framework to explore and understand magical realism, particularly in the international medium of film. García Márquez’s work skilfully and cosmopolitically synthesises the traditional world of myth, folktales, and autochthonous beliefs with the modern—although Jameson sees magical realism as an alternative to postmodernism, and Stam, as a form of proleptic postmodernism. These magical realist short stories and films creatively capture Latin American reality in the hope of instituting changes in subjectivity and reality, commencing the process of what Birri calls the poetics of the transformation of reality in New Latin American Cinema.
Chapter 4

Magical Realism and Hollywood – Metropolitan Cosmopolitanism

The next two chapters will explore the infiltration and permutations of magical realism in Hollywood by examining the forces and dynamics of globalisation within the framework of metropolitan cosmopolitanism. Gabriel García Márquez is responsible for popularising and “internationalising” magical realism, but it was Mexican filmmaker, Alfonso Arau with Like Water for Chocolate (1992) (adapted from Laura Esquivel’s magical realist book of the same title) who brought magical realism to Hollywood, the American audience, and subsequently to international audiences (in commercial arthouse form). It is the most popular magical realist film to date. It was a hit in Latin America, first screening continuously in Mexico for six months in six different movie theatres before it went abroad, to become a Hollywood blockbuster (Hart, Latin American Film 12). Arau probably did not anticipate the film’s phenomenal success as it has grossed over $21 million becoming the first foreign and Latin American film to have gained such a popular reception in the Hollywood-immersed North American market which commodified magical realism (Wu 183).¹

In this chapter, I will analyse the success and significance of Like Water and Woman on Top (Fina Torres, 2000), and Walter Salles’s Central do Brasil (1998) through the magical realist notions of determinism and destiny. Chapter Five will focus on the films of Mexican Alejandro González Iñárritu—Amores perros (2000) and 21

¹ According to Box Office Mojo, the film has grossed $21,665,468 to date. The commercial success of Like Water for Chocolate as a “foreign film” was only succeeded by Ang Lee’s Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), which to date has grossed $213,525,736.
Grams (2003), who has crossed the border into Hollywood. These films have been chosen because they facilitate an examination of the relationship between Latin America and Hollywood, a historically uncertain relationship often fraught with antagonism and suspicion (as discussed in the earlier chapters), particularly through Third Cinema and the New Latin American Cinema. But with the millennium, there has been a distinctive shift in the production values and marketing strategies of these films. With the growing importance and permeation of market capitalism and the diminishing significance of nationalism in the face of globalisation, production values and marketing strategies of films (in general) are becoming inherently different from the films discussed in the previous chapters. The films discussed in the previous chapters were largely state funded, making marketing strategies not relevant or necessary in the production process; hence many of these films have remained obscure. The films discussed in the next two chapters, however, are easily available in most local video stores and can be purchased online.

1. The Realities of Globalisation and Metropolitan Cosmopolitanism

   Indian takeaways now outnumber fish and chip shops across the British Isles, and Chinese food and pizza have become standard fare. What has happened to British taste? Who are you if that’s what you eat? (Howes 1)

   It is not just Britain’s taste that is changing, but globalisation is changing the whole world’s taste and shaping a lifestyle (especially in metropolises) that is more exposed not only to McDonalds but to different ethnic food and other cultures. Before the
analysis of the films, it is necessary to discuss some of the dynamics and cultural forces of globalisation. Increasingly, it is becoming fashionable to celebrate differences and enjoy the richness that other cultures have to offer—what does this mean? Has globalisation rendered decolonisation passé? The mediascape and ideoscapes of globalisation, capitalisation and democratisation more often than not, have portrayed these changes as positive, progressive and even humanitarian.

Leela Gandhi’s insightful article “After Colonialism” succinctly captures the predicament of the colonised psyche in the aftermath of colonialism. In the squabble over postcolonial terminology, she writes:

Whereas some critics invoke the hyphenated form ‘post-colonial’ as a decisive temporal marker of the decolonising process, others fiercely query the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath—on the grounds that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. Accordingly, it is argued that the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences. (Globalisation 351)

Hence, postcoloniality is a rather complex predicament. Gandhi writes that the emergence of “anti-colonial” and “independent nation-States” after colonialism is accompanied by the frequent tendency and desire to forget the colonial past—“to erase painful memories of colonial subordination” (352). But the legacy of colonialism is not so easily eradicated. As Said points out, there is the “dreadful secondariness” of
persisting colonial hierarchies of knowledge and value, and “the cosmetic veneer of national independence barely disguises the foundational economic, cultural and political damage inflicted by colonial occupation” (Gandhi, *Globalisation* 354). According to Gandhi, repressing and trying to forget the realities of the colonial encounter does not mitigate the problem. There is a need to engage in what she calls “postcolonial re-membering” (355-361) where re-membering is not simply remembering as the act of introspection or retrospection, but “a painful re-membering”—“a putting together of the dis-membered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (356). But what does this re-membering entail in our globalised world? And is colonialism perhaps dead?

David Howes, in “The Global Homogenization Paradigm” in *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, cites and explains the global presence of Coca-Cola through its mediascapes and ideoscapes. He describes Coca-Cola’s global presence as “Coca-colonisation” because it brings about global homogenisation, which he argues is the “process of colonisation (or re-colonisation) of the non-Western world through the institution of new regimes of consumption” (3). He shows how cultural differences throughout the world are eroded by the diffusion of the product with advertisements that sell ideas such as “one sight, one sound, one sell” or the image of teenagers of various ethnic groups congregating on a hilltop singing: “I’d like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company.” While Coca-Cola is promoting a universal and transcultural product, it is also selling the culture and ideals of the United States—the idea of the American dream and the ideal of living in a “consumer democracy”. Howes
also cites the example of the image of the collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe with the “irrepressible demands of the youth of those countries for Coke, blue jeans and all the other ‘good things’ of American consumer democracy” (3). He further suggests that this shows the internalisation of American political ideology and economic values—Coke offers a taste of “freedom”. And finally he uses the film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, to illustrate his argument: when the Coke bottle falls out of an airplane in the middle of the Kalahari Desert, it transforms !Kung society by introducing the idea of private property, shattering “primitive communism” and awakening cravings for other commodities (3-4).

Masao Miyoshi’s critical article *A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State* lends perspective to the finance- and technoscapes of the global configuration of economic power. He argues for the persistence of neocolonialism in the form of transnational corporations under the aegis of supposed “postcoloniality” and multiculturalism (369). According to Miyoshi, the political colonial domination that covered 85 percent of the earth ended with World War II, only to be overtaken by multinational corporations in the 1960s and transnational corporations in the 1970s that still oppress and exploit, continuing colonialism (369-386). He writes: “oppression and exploitation continue. Ours, I submit, is not an age of postcolonialism but of intensified colonialism, even though it is under an unfamiliar guise” (385). Miyoshi’s account of the development of transnational corporations indeed illustrates Said’s notion of “dreadful secondariness”—the still pervasive legacy of
colonial hierarchies of knowledge and value through an economic system that still breeds dependency (284-328).

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in “From the Imperial Family to the Transnational Imaginary: Media Spectatorship in the Age of Globalization” further illustrate forms of colonialism and imperialism. They write:

The old hegemonies, many argue, are now more “dispersed” and “scattered.” But even within the current situation of dispersed hegemonies, the historical thread or inertia of Western domination remains a powerful presence. Although direct colonial rule has largely come to an end, much of the world remains entangled in neo-colonialism […] Partially as a result of colonialism, the contemporary global scene is now dominated by a coterie of powerful nation-states, consisting basically of Western Europe, the United States, and Japan. This domination is economic (“the Group of Seven,” the IMF, the World Bank, GATT), political (the five veto-holding members of the UN Security Council), military (the new “unipolar” NATO), and technoinformational-cultural (Hollywood, UPI, Reuters, France Press, CNN). Neocolonial domination is enforced through deteriorating terms of trade and the “austerity programs” by which the World Bank and the IMF, often with the self-serving complicity of Third World elites, impose rules
that First World countries would themselves never tolerate. (in Wilson and Dissanayake, *Global/Local* 146-147)

Despite the imbrication of “First” and “Third” worlds, they demonstrate that the global distribution of power still privileges First World countries as cultural “transmitters” and reduces most Third World countries to the status of “receivers.” North American films, TV series, popular music and news programmes inundate the Third World, but the First World hardly receives “the vast cultural production of the Third World,” and even when it does, it is usually mediated by transnational corporations (146-148).

Specifically in the realm of mediascape and ideoscapes, Shohat and Stam (like Howes with “coca-colonisation”) show Hollywood’s hegemonic position. Hollywood only produces a small fraction of the annual worldwide production of feature films, while films from Africa, Asia and Latin America dominate the production of feature films.2 But this huge body of non-American films is not as easily accessible in the West—as Shohat and Stam point out they are “rarely featured in cinemas, video stores, or even in academic film courses” (148). And when they are, it is through “Hollywood’s arrogant provincialism” of the Oscar ceremony—where “the audience is global, yet the product promoted is almost always American, the ‘rest of the world’ being corralled into the restricted category of the ‘foreign film’” (148). Shohat and Stam argue that:

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2 Since the 1920s, India has produced more films than Great Britain. India is the leading producer of fiction films in the world, producing 700 to 1,000 feature films per year. Hong Kong was producing over 200 films a year by the 1950s; and Turkey, almost 300 a year in the early 1970s. These figures outnumber the annual film production in the United States (Shohat and Stam 147-148).
The continuing economic dependency of Third World cinemas makes them vulnerable to neocolonial pressures. When dependent countries try to strengthen their own film industries by setting up trade barriers to foreign films, for example, First World countries can threaten retaliation in some other economic area such as pricing or purchase of raw materials. Hollywood films, furthermore, often cover their costs in the domestic market and can therefore be profitably ‘dumped’ on Third World markets at very low prices. (148)

In John Tomlinson’s comprehensive and concise book, Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction, he ends with a conclusion entitled: “From Imperialism to Globalisation”, in which he optimistically suggests that imperialism is now being replaced by globalisation. He distinguishes globalisation from imperialism by the indirect and incoherent cultural process of globalisation, rightly pointing out that we cannot vote in or out multinational corporations or the international market system, but yet these have more influence on our lives than the national governments that we elect (175-176). He argues that imperialism contains a purposeful project: “the intended spread of a social system from one centre of power across the globe,” whereas globalisation happens in a less purposeful way of “interconnection and interdependency of all global areas”, which he argues weakens all individual nation-states, including the economically powerful “imperialist powers” (175). Therefore according to Tomlinson, with globalisation we enter a new cultural space—the global cultural space that is
constantly “referred” to, particularly by the mass media, and “one in which it is extremely difficult to locate our own personal experience” (177). Thus, we need to “map” this new cultural space of the global.

In his later work, Tomlinson further distinguishes cultural imperialism from globalisation, dispelling the fallacy that globalisation will bring about a single hegemonic and “homogenised” global capitalist monoculture (Globalization 81-83). He argues that culture does not transfer in a unilinear way, but that the “movement between culture/geographical areas always involve interpretation, translation, mutation, adaptation, and ‘indigenisation’ as the receiving culture brings its own cultural resources to bear, in dialectical fashion, upon cultural imports” (84). Therefore, as much as the example of the Coke bottle in The Gods Must be Crazy transforms !Kung society by introducing the idea of private property, shattering “primitive communism” and awakening cravings for other commodities, it also illustrates Tomlinson’s point as the !Kung people used the Coke bottle in ways that we would never imagine. No imported object is completely immune from creolisation. Even though Coke has colonised, it has also been “indigenised” by the creation of other drinks such as being mixed with rum in the Caribbean to create Cuba Libre or aguadiente and Ponche Negro in Bolivia (84). While exposing the flawed concept of culture that many theorists have assumed with cultural imperialism, Tomlinson does admit that capitalism has and is significantly shaping global culture—“there can be little doubt that a large proportion of cultural practices in modernity have been commodified – turned into things which are bought
and sold” (85). He points out that even a simple leisure activity such as walking has become a commodifiable practice, connected with the purchase of special equipment, guidebooks, magazines and so on (86). This idea of commodification will be later discussed with *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top*. But Tomlinson critically points out that we need to differentiate commodification from ideological incorporation that is simply assumed in the cultural-imperialist perspective, as the two often tightly overlap and are difficult to separate. He also acknowledges that there is a difference in the reception of advertisements in developed countries and the Third World, and that the spread of commodification often becomes a threat to the richness and diversity of Third World cultural practices (87). Thus he does not conflate but differentiates modernisation from cultural imperialism. He usefully separates cultural imperialism from the critique of modernity, which he encapsulates as industrialism, urbanism and the nation-state system that simply began in the West. He argues that although these things began in the West, they are no longer “Western”. He points out that many previously “Third World” parts of the world are now more technologically, industrially and economically advanced than some parts of the West, such as São Paulo, Mexico City, and the “Asian Tiger” economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia (89-93). Tomlinson asserts that “the installation of global modernity does not necessarily represent a continuing cultural domination of ‘the West’” (96) and that it is important to acknowledge this.

Although Miyoshi, Shohat and Stam, and even Said are not wrong in describing
that certain aspects of our current global modernity are “neocolonial,” there are limitations to the discourse of neocolonialism and we need to be aware of the danger in this insular perspective. Shohat and Stam have admittedly acknowledged that the “same multinational corporations that disseminate inane blockbusters and canned sitcoms also spread Afro-diasporic music such as reggae and rap around the globe” and argue that the media imperialism thesis requires retooling (149). First, it is simplistic to imagine the First World is simply forcing its products on a passive Third World; secondly, rather than global mass culture replacing local culture, it is actually providing a cultural lingua franca; thirdly, imported mass culture can also be indigenised, put to local use and given a local accent; and lastly, that there are powerful reverse currents in Third World countries, which dominate their own markets and even become cultural exporters. Some examples are the TV version of the *Mahabharata* that won 90 percent of domestic viewership in India; Brazil’s Rede Globo that exports its *telenovelas* to more than 80 countries in the world; and the Mexican soap opera *Los ricos tambien lloran* (*The Rich Also Cry*) is one of the biggest hits in Russia (149).

Wilson and Dissanayake quote Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatttari, who claim that “[c]apitalism is at the crossroads of all kinds of formation […] it invents, for the worst, its eastern face and its western face, and reshapes both” (*Global/Local* 1).³ According to them, global/local synergy both enliven and molest the textures of daily life and spaces of subjectivities, reshaping contemporary structures that “some culture

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³ The quote is not correctly referenced by Wilson and Dissanayake. They simply note it is “online” but do not provide URL information.
critics all too commonly banalise as “postmodern” or hypertextually consecrate as “postcolonial” resistance” (2). They have pointed out that,

if Coca-cola Incorporated can claim in the 1990s, “We are not a multinational, we are a multilocal,” cultural studies must enter a brave new world of stimulated and multimarketed locales/locals with the politics of resistance all but drained from the bottle. (*Global/Local* 2)

Arif Dirlik in “The Global in the Local” is particularly interested in the relationship between the emergence of a global capitalism and the concern with the local as a site of resistance and liberation (*Global/Local* 22). He coins the term “critical localism” which is the critical evaluation of past perspectives afforded by modernity (*Global/Local* 38), and provides an animated account of the rise of the local and how it has transformed capitalism (*Global/Local* 23-28). Ghandi’s notion of postcolonial re-membering, therefore, must be realised through the idea of critical localism.

Dirlik articulates the paradox of the global and local, demonstrating at the same time that globalisation is a contesting site:

the local is a site not of liberation but manipulation; stated differently, it is a site the inhabitants of which must be liberated from themselves (stripped of their identity) to be homogenized into the global culture of capital (their identities reconstructed accordingly). Ironically, even as it
seeks to homogenize populations globally, consuming their cultures,
global capitalism enhances awareness of the local, pointing to it also as
the site of resistance to capital. *(Global/Local 35)*

Appadurai explores a different facet of this paradox with his idea of the “repatriation of
difference.” He explains that global disjunctions bring forth two mutually supportive
descendents, which he describes as “production fetishism” and “fetishism of the
consumer.” He explains that production fetishism is:

> an illusion created by contemporary transnational production loci that
> masks translocal capital, transnational earning flows, global management
> and often faraway workers (engaged in various kinds of high-tech
> putting-out operations) in the idiom and spectacle of the local (sometimes
> even worker) control, national productivity, and territorial sovereignty.

*(57)*

Hence, production in modernity becomes ‘abstract’ and a fetish as it obscures not only
the social relations but also the relations of production. Locality, in the sense of the local
factory or site of production (which extends to the nation-state) also becomes a fetish as
it disguises the global dispersed forces that actually drive the production process.

Fetishism of the consumer, however, is the transformation of the consumer through
commodity flows into a sign, both in Baudrillard’s sense of a simulacrum and in the
sense of a mask for the real seat of agency (which is not the consumer but the producer
and the many forces that constitute production) particularly through the key technology
of global advertising. Appadurai argues that this complicated and disjunctive process is not the same as homogenisation, for globalisation involves a variety of instruments of homogenisation such as armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, clothing styles and so on that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies and are regurgitated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise and fundamentalism in which the state plays an increasingly delicate role. Appadurai terms these complicated processes as the “repatriation of difference” and points out that finding a balance in mitigating differences is often a hard juggling act—too much openness to global flows and the nation-state is threatened by revolt, as with China or terrorist acts; and if too little, the state exits the international stage, as with Burma and North Korea. According to Appadurai, this is the central feature of global/local culture today—to “cannibalise” one another, in what he describes as “the successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and resiliently particular” (58). This mutual cannibalisation shows its ugly face in riots, refugee flows, state-sponsored torture or ethnocide, with or without state support. On the other hand, it expands many individual horizons of hope and fantasy (56-58). These cosmopolitical dynamics are not new, as I have illustrated with Macunaíma in an earlier chapter; they are, however, just more apparent as globalisation intensifies.

To conclude this overview, I will discuss Katharyne Mitchell’s example of multiculturalism in Canada (particularly in the case of Vancouver) in her article, “In Whose Interest? Transnational Capital and the Production of Multiculturalism in
David Neo

Canada”. Mitchell investigates the appropriation of the liberal rhetoric of multiculturalism by Canadian business interests, which also illustrates Appadurai’s notion of the repatriation of difference. In the 1980s, 216 luxury condominiums on the south shore of False Creek in Vancouver were snapped up by Hong Kong buyers in three hours. This prompted an outcry among Vancouver residents and fuelled major anti-Hong Kong sentiments. The Committee of Progressive Electors councillor, Harry Rankin, whom Mitchell describes as “a progressive leftist” advocated that “the basic issue is to give Canadian residents the first and only chance to buy: that means Canadian residents or landed immigrants. No offshore people should be allowed to speculate in this market” (222). However, Michael Goldberg, the chairman of the Vancouver International Financial Centre responded to Rankin by dismissing his response as negative reactions fuelled by racism and the fear of change (221-222). Mitchell, then, maps out and discusses the racial tension between White Vancouverites and the Chinese. She writes that immigration numbers from Hong Kong increased in Canada from 338 in 1984 to 6,787 in 1990, and she estimates that a conservative figure of C$2.21 billion was transferred into the country by the business migration component (224). This is an interesting example where the tables were turned on (Western) localism. The intense racial tension of this situation shows that Appadurai’s notion of the repatriation of difference is a reality of globalisation. If the repatriation of difference is not carefully managed, it can spell catastrophe, what Appadurai calls mutual cannibalisation, and the terrorist threats and acts of Al Qaeda attest to this.
2. Global Hollywood and Metropolitan Cosmopolitanism

Janet Wasko in *How Hollywood Works* focuses on the commodity nature of Hollywood films—the process and manufacturing of raw materials and labour from different markets (the transnational, diversified entertainment conglomerates that are involved in a wide range of media activities) into feature films to be distributed as commodities at various different outlets (1). According to her, “the US film industry developed global marketing techniques as early as the 1920s and continues its dominant position in international media markets today” (13). Thus, since its early history, Hollywood has been global. Hollywood is known to “borrow creatively” from developments in World Cinema. Tony Williams in his article “From Hong Kong to Hollywood: John Woo and his Discontents” cites examples such as the incorporation of German expressionism, Soviet montage, the French New Wave, and the import of European directors such as Finnish Mauritz Stiller, Swedish Victor Sjöstrom and German Fritz Lang (40). Chung Pei-Chi, in her article, “Asian Filmmakers Moving into Hollywood: Genre Regulation and Auteur Aesthetics” has noted that Asian talents have infiltrated Hollywood with actors such as Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-Fat, Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh, and directors such as Tsui Hark and John Woo (33). One of the most recent successful commercial releases of a “foreign film blockbuster” (after *Like Water for Chocolate*’s exceptional success) is the Chinese martial arts film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000),\(^4\) which according to the *Variety*’s box office report

\(^4\) The commercial success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is tenfold that of *Like Water for Chocolate.*
has made over $209 million to date (refer to appendix). Many recent blockbuster films such as *The Matrix* series have incorporated Hong Kong martial arts choreography and editing style, and particularly Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* series borrows heavily from Asian cinema. Justin Wyatt, in his book *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*, has also noted that Hollywood is interested in penetrating particular ethnic groups such as the African-American and Hispanic markets (201).

Toby Miller, Nittin Govil, John McMurria, Richard Maxwell and Ting Wang in *Global Hollywood 2* provide one of the most extensive discussions on the complex network, workings and significance of contemporary global Hollywood. They discuss ownership and control, copyright, runaway production (with Canada, Australia, Italy, PRC, The Czech Republic, South Africa, India, Britain, Mexico and East Asia), which they term as New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL), and co-productions. They show that Hollywood “sells to virtually every nation, through a system of copyright, promotion and distribution that uses the NICL to minimise cost and maximise revenue” (362). Accordingly, Los-Angeles-New York culture and commerce dominate screen entertainment around the world. Since 1996, the cultural industry sales of film, music, television, software, journals and books have become US’s largest export and “Between 1977 and 1996, US copyright industries – as it likes to call them, overwriting the term ‘culture’ and ensuring comprehensive governmentalisation and commodification – grew three times as quickly as the overall economy” (9-10). Between 1980 and 1998, annual world trade of the US cultural industries increased from US$95.3
billion to US$387.9 billion (10). Thus the world market is crucial to the US. Miller et al. anticipate that by 2015, Asia could be responsible for 60 percent of Hollywood box-office revenue (20).

Tom Schatz provides a historical overview of the structural organisation of Hollywood from the classical Hollywood studio system to Conglomerate Hollywood (McDonald and Wasko 13-42). According to Schatz, from 1990-1995, New Hollywood (from the 1970s) rapidly transformed into Conglomerate Hollywood as the logic of synergy and tight diversification met the larger forces of globalisation, digitisation and US media deregulation. A new breed of media giants were formulated in the US film and television industries that became the dominant powers in the rapidly expanding global entertainment industry. This trend began with News Corporation acquiring 20th Century Fox in 1984-5 and by the early 2000s, Conglomerate Hollywood attained oligopoly status with six companies: Disney, General Electric, News Corporation, Sony, Time Warner and Viacom. Hollywood blockbusters are the prime movers in the global movie marketplace, but the emergence of the independent film movement is the paradoxical aspect of this conglomerate era. Miramax and New Line Cinema in the 1990s did exceptionally well with their independent (indie) film releases and these hits made them prime acquisition targets. In 1993, Disney bought Miramax and in 1994, Turner Broadcasting (Time Warner) acquired New Line Cinema. With the acquisition of these two successful independents, the other media conglomerates followed suit and

5 Films such as Sex, Lies and Videotape (Steven Soderbergh, 1989), My Left Foot (Jim Sheridan, 1989), Cinema Paradiso (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1989) and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Steve Barron, 1990).
began to launch their own indie divisions. By the mid-1990s, cable television became involved with the indie movement which capitalised on the success of *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001) and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002).

By the early 2000s, the conglomerates’ studio operations grew steadily more complex as the expanding indie market led to an increase in their subsidiaries. For example, Time Warner brought New Line, Fine Line and Castle Rock into the fold in 1995, but these companies operate separately from Warner Bros. Pictures; in the early 2000s, Warner Independent, HBO Films and Picturehouse were added to the independent group and they also enjoyed autonomy from their major-studio counterpart. Thus, the big budget blockbusters were Conglomerate Hollywood’s dominant products while the second class of Hollywood features included art films, specialty films and other niche market fare handled by the conglomerates’ indie subsidiaries. Focus Features’s hit *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004) is an example of this. Budgets on these indie subsidiary films averaged $40 million in the early 2000s, with US$10 – $15 million spent on marketing. The third class of film by Conglomerate Hollywood include genre and specialty films that are handled by independent producer-distributors with release campaigns of only a few dozen (possibly a few hundred) screens in select urban markets. These films usually make up about half of the features released in the US and cost from US$5 – $10 million, with miniscule marketing budgets that increase if and when a particular film performs (McDonald and Wasko 25-31). In 2004, it was reported by the Motion Picture Association of America that the Big Six
grossed US$7.4 billion in worldwide box-office receipts, but the marketing cost US$9.6 billion which resulted in net losses of US$2.2 billion in the worldwide theatrical sector; however, the conglomerates’ collective television and home-video/DVD revenues yielded net profits of US$16 billion and US$14 billion respectively (37). Aside from blockbusters and independent films, there is the corporate synergy of ancillary markets of television, video/DVD, video games, music/soundtracks and merchandising that further contribute to Conglomerate Hollywood’s revenue. *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989) is the best example of this as it was released just as the Time Warner merger took effect. The blockbuster was able to harness the vertical and horizontal integration of the company raking in US$5 billion in the domestic box-office for the first time ever (28). The sequel, *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005), included a novelisation, CD, DVD, videocassette, soundtrack, and comic book, feeding into Time Warner’s operations of book publishing, recorded music, home entertainment and comic book publishing (109). Thus, Conglomerate Hollywood functions according to complex structures and organisation—all six companies are not configured in the same way, neither are their conduct and performance in the global media marketplace consistent. The consistencies are: the studio with its emphasis on blockbusters and big-budget stars; the indie subsidiaries geared to low cost specialty and niche market films; and the television division, focused on high volume TV series output (37).

These complex vertical and horizontal integration and transnational dynamics of Conglomerate Hollywood can be encapsulated by metropolitan cosmopolitanism.
Metropolitan cosmopolitics is a useful framework to understand the cultural dynamics of global Hollywood. Metropolitan cosmopolitics are the opposite of minoritarian cosmopolitics because the former is motivated by capitalist and consumerist profit maximisation while the latter is motivated by egalitarian cultural politics. Metropolitan cosmopolitanism is a form of “elite transnationalism” that generates capital and fetishises localism for global consumption. Through the films that are analysed in this chapter and the next, we will explore the dynamics of metropolitan cosmopolitanism.

3. The Commodification of Magical Realism through Food

The great press baron Lord Northcliffe used to tell his journalists that crime, love, money and food are lasting interests with the public; but out of the four, food is the most fundamental and universal (Fernández-Armesto xiii). Anne L. Bower tells us that filmmakers often use food to communicate important aspects of film characters’ emotions, along with their personal and cultural identities; and that ethnic, religious, sexual and philosophical aspects of narratives are frequently communicated through food (Reel 1). This is evident in Like Water for Chocolate and Woman on Top, where food becomes a form of fetishised localism that is capitalised for global consumption. Sidney Mintz, an anthropologist, reiterates and explains the significance of food:

For us humans […] eating is never a ‘purely biological’ activity […] The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own.
Nor is food ever simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories. (7)

By focusing on a universal and gloriously palatable ‘commodity’ such as food, the Mexican film *Like Water for Chocolate* was able to break into Hollywood’s international distribution market, setting a precedent as a runaway hit and opening a space for *Woman on Top* to be made within the Hollywood system. Magical realism, the most recognised form of Latin American localism with these two films, was fetishised by Hollywood through the American distributor, Miramax, for capital gain.

John Gunders captures our globalised and postmodern preoccupation with food when he writes:

The kitchen, it seems, is no longer the functional, utilitarian area of the restaurant that no one wants to sit near. Once it was kept politely out of sight: the ‘off-camera’ area from which dishes appeared as if by magic, a space that no one really wanted to think about. Now in some trendy restaurants that have been described as ‘postmodern,’ such as those owned by Wolfgang Puck—Spago in West Hollywood, and Chinois on Main in Santa Monica—the kitchen is opened up to the dining-room, exposed in what Elizabeth Miles describes as a ‘staged authenticity’. Here, the food is prepared in full sight of the diners, the heat and bustle adding to the modern, stylish atmosphere of the restaurant. Further,
television cooking shows, from *The Two Fat Ladies* to *The Naked Chef* and the self-conscious camp of Ainsley Harriott’s programme, have turned the kitchen into the new site of young, urban hip. Food stylist, Donna Hay, believes that it has become the next thing in interior design. ‘Food,’ she says, ‘is the natural progression to complete a total concept in the home’. It is now where the cool people hang-out, swapping tips for making the perfect Bruschetta, or debating the finer points of Baba Ghanousch. (129)

Eating in postmodern culture is the most non-threatening way of experiencing other cultures. But the act and especially the staging of eating activities in our globalised and postmodern world are becoming increasingly complex. Diane Negra, in her perceptive article “Ethnic Food Fetishism, Whiteness, and Nostalgia in Recent Film and Television”, sheds light on some of these complexities. We are in an era where food is increasingly tied to the reconstruction of identity—a practice “that is not learned so much as it is recovered through heritage memory” (71). Negra observes that today’s globalising and commercial food television mines the past even as it invents the present (71). The significance of food and eating become even more complex and problematic when we deliberate Appadurai’s notion of production fetishism and the fetishism of the consumer through the notion of “staged authenticity” that is not just for immediate diners but also for the media.
Negra’s study is unfortunately hampered by limiting itself to white ethnicity. According to her, ethnic food did not hold a high status in the early twentieth century—immigrants were regarded with suspicion and considered signifiers of an inappropriate attachment to non-US homelands (64). Negra argues that the presentations of food and ethnic intimacy now seek to correct perceptions of cultural insufficiency related to a sense of “exhausted whiteness,” which she illustrates through the current American time-pressured lifestyle that have brought about prepared, precooked and pre-packaged meals that apparently occupy more space in the supermarket than fresh fruit and vegetables (62-63). Thus, food represented in the media is becoming a vehicle for representing and cementing familial bonds, playing out nostalgia, in which the household is undergoing structural, discursive, systematic and semiotic recombination in late capitalism. Food, according to Negra, is strongly linked to ethnic and/or national affiliation, especially given the current preoccupation with meticulous camerawork focused on carefully staging scenes of cooking and dining (exemplifying Gunders’s idea of staged authenticity). Negra explains that the fetishistic representation of food and food preparation work towards the recovery of the ethnic family, which is “endowed with an emotional expressivity lost in late-twentieth-century white U.S. culture” (62). She argues that the consumption, ingestion and incorporation of differences add life to white consumer subjectivity. But more importantly, Negra points out that the consumption of ethnic foods:
inspire fantasies of deassimilation in which Americans acquire ethnic identities fundamentally based upon nostalgia. Social bonds founded upon intimacy, community, and ethnicity as they are imagined to have existed in the past are strikingly established in all of these fictions. The films proffer spectators the pleasures of rediscovering ethnic heritage as “new ethnics,” those who come to redefine themselves as having an identity beyond whiteness. (62)

These explanations demonstrate our current preoccupation with food and the celebration of ethnic food is increasingly becoming a non-threatening and negotiating site to express and understand (even recreating) the Other. These dynamics are evident in numerous films such as *Eat Drink Man and Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994), *Big Night* (Stanley Tucci and Scott Campbell, 1996) and *A Touch of Spice* (Tassos Boulmetis, 2003) to name a few. *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top* certainly belong to this trend of mainstreaming ethnicity and difference through the medium of food.

But magical realism is also consumed problematically in *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top*. Miriam López-Rodríguez’s article “Cooking Mexicanness: Shaping National Identity in Alfonso Arau’s *Como agua para chocolate*” takes a feminist and postcolonial approach to the way the film represents food. She argues that the female characters’ relationship with food and the dishes presented define Mexican national identity by explaining their cultural traditions and historical significance (Bower, *Reel* 61-62). Although López-Rodríguez’s article, which poses a
feminist perspective, provides insight into the cultural significances and subtleties of Mexican cuisine, she does not address the subtler readings of other critics. Wu, Burton-Carvajal and Badikian argue that the film may re-image women’s roles (corresponding with more current conceptions), but the film is ultimately still patriarchal and misogynistic (Wu 179; Burton-Carvajal 226-227; Badikian 47).

The subtle patriarchy under the seeming cloak of feminism can also be seen in Woman on Top. Isabella (Penelope Cruz) suffers from motion sickness and needs to be in control whenever she is driving or having sex—a redefining representation of women, but she is never truly free from her love for Toninho (Murilo Benicio). She momentarily succeeds in beseeching the sea goddess, Yemanja, to free her from her love for Toninho, only to revoke that request later in the film. The couple is reunited at the end of the film and nothing comes of Isabella’s relationship with North American Cliff (Mark Feurstein), which can also be said to parallel the relationship of Tita and Dr. Brown in Like Water for Chocolate. Ultimately, Toninho and Isabella conveniently retreat back to where they come from—Brazil. The Other is comfortably and simplistically contained within the realm of food for mere tasting and sampling, and then safely shipped back to where s/he belongs (Brazil and Mexico with Like Water for Chocolate). Both films are examples of fetishistic localism. Although these films involved Latin American women in significant capacities (Mexican Laura Esquivel wrote the screenplay for Like Water for Chocolate), they ultimately do not fully challenge traditional cultural norms. The films, like the cuisine they celebrate, are reductively contained within their respective national boundaries and cultures.

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6 Harmony H. Wu’s “Consuming Tacos and Enchiladas: Gender and the Nation in Como agua para chocolate”, Julianne Burton-Carvajal’s “Mexican Melodramas of Patriarchy: Specificity of a Transcultural Form” and Beatriz Badikian’s “Food and Sex, That’s all We’re Good for: Images of Women in Like Water for Chocolate (1993)” all present opposing arguments.
for Chocolate, Venezuelan Fina Torres directed Woman on Top and Brazilian Vera Blasi wrote its screenplay), as Harmony Wu points out in “Consuming Tacos and Enchiladas: Gender and Nation in Como agua para chocolate”, they are not radical. They may have revised the roles of women to fit certain current ideas and are seemingly feminist on the surface, but deeper analyses reveal entrenched patriarchal and ethnocentric imaginings. Metropolitan cosmopolitics are often based on capital gain and frequently dictated by the mainstream, and in this case, Hollywood as a culture industry is sexist and ethnocentric. As discussed in Chapter Two, these two films fit into Brennan’s idea of how cosmopolitanism is really the surreptitious imaging of US values and illustrate how they become commodified into “American images-for-use”.

Wu argues the commodification of Like Water for Chocolate, describing the film as “eating magical Otherness”—where magical realism is reductively commodified to become identifiable markers of Latino cultural identity that obliterates national or cultural distinctions of Mexico, Colombia and Chile (186). The same can be argued with Woman on Top. Rita Kempley disparagingly describes the film as:

a skimpily scripted, hot-to-trotsy food/sex farce. The film is definitely a feast for the senses, what with the ceaseless samba music, bold color scheme and mingling of sweaty flesh. But the mind will be starved for subletly, wit and substance. (12)

Katy Wilkinson’s review of the film reminds us of Cliff’s (who is the TV producer in the film) description of Isabella: “Isabella is Brazil, and Brazil is Isabella” (57), which
clearly demonstrates the reductive stereotyping that the film focuses on, exoticising and fetishising Isabella and Brazil with lines such as “Brazil isn’t a country, it’s a sensation” (Hawker 4). But what is even more ironic and problematic is that Penelope Cruz is not Brazilian but Spanish, which only proves Brennan’s argument that cosmopolitanism now is the surreptitious imaging of American values. This is why these films have done so well—both have been packaged and sold as American cosmopolitanism (a form of metropolitan cosmopolitanism).

Beatriz Badikian in “Food and Sex, That’s All We Are good For: Images of Women in Like Water for Chocolate” looks at how the film capitalises on food and sex, appealing to stereotypical images and expectations of female Mexican characters that ultimately essentialise the Other. She quotes Ella Shohat and Robert Stam to support her argument: “They associate Latin America, and especially Latin American women, with verbal epithets evoking tropical heat, violence, passion, and spice” (47). She also points out the Mexican Tourist Board’s involvement in financing and assisting in its distribution by promoting the “national tradition” of Mexican cooking, which she argues echoes domestic servitude of pre-war Hollywood racism that draws the focus away from the contemporary social realities of Mexico (47).

Wu, on the other hand, exposes Miramax’s aggressive marketing tactics with Like Water for Chocolate. Mexican restaurants across the U.S. were persuaded to create dishes made in the film; a contest was held requesting “seductive recipes” to win a trip to Mexico; and there was a lavish party held in New York to celebrate the success of the
film with the attendance of Claudette Maille (Gertrudis), at which the same banquet spread as the wedding feast in the film was offered. Wu also highlights the pre-sold and cross-promotion of the best-selling novel (with the same title) by Laura Esquivel (who also wrote the screenplay of the film) that was sold at the movie theatres. Further commodifying the representation of Latin American identity were press descriptions such as:

The film, a lively family saga that is centred on forbidden love and spans several generations, relies so enchantingly upon fate, magic and a taste for the supernatural that suggests Gabriel García Márquez in a cookbook writing mode. (The best-selling Mexican novel by Laura Esquivel, who also writes the screenplay, interweaves the fanciful story of “Como...” with actual recipes.) Whether you approach this swift, eventful tale on the culinary or the cinematic level, prepare for a treat. (186)

Or “[T]he book, a Gabriel Garcia Marquez [sic] type story spiced with recipes, is really cooking” (187). Badikian also confirms similar American press coverage where the film was described as “magical realism a la Gabriel García Márquez” (47). This problematic commodified form of magical realism is quite different from both the fiction and films of García Márquez that were discussed in the previous chapter. Magical realism has been reduced to a mere cookbook writing mode simply to rake in profits. But both Like Water for Chocolate and Woman on Top could not be further away from the politics of García Márquez.
Wu further expands on the “core and margin/periphery” paradigm. She argues that the West is seen as the “core” with science and rationality, and magical realism representing the opposite to science and rationality, is locked in the periphery and marginal, representing cultures of Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean. Magical realism does not challenge but rather reaffirms Western rationality and scientific discourse in its hegemonic position of power, condemning magical realism and Latino identity into a cultural ghetto in the name of pluralism (188). Badikian reaffirms this argument by demonstrating how *Like Water for Chocolate* enacts the “mind-and-body” paradigm, with the West as the “mind” and the non-West relegated as the inferior carnal “body”. Hence, all theory is associated with the West, and the body and unrefined raw materials with the non-West. Dr. Brown steeped in scientific knowledge is always (and often unrealistically) reasonable—even when Tita confesses that she has been unfaithful to him, he calmly and magnanimously tells her that he loves her and only wants her true happiness, and that it is okay if she chooses Pedro over him if that makes her truly happy. This can also be said of Cliff who represents business rationality and is a successful executive in North America. Badikian argues that the narrative thread and visual imagery privilege the body of both women and men (to a lesser degree). *Woman on Top* is replete with lavish and steamy sex scenes of Latinos and ‘Latinas’ (as pointed out earlier, Cruz is Spanish). Penis size is constantly alluded to, and Cliff the North American remains ‘asexual’ throughout the film, only to be awakened to homosexual desires at the end of the film by a black ‘Latino’ transvestite, Monica (played
Interestingly by the North American Harold Perrineau Jr.). In both films, raw materials are used as ingredients for special Latin American recipes, and the food in the films constantly causes bodily reactions such as lust, flatulence, crying and vomiting.

Isabella’s television cooking show is appropriately called *Passion Food* (Senelmis 7) and Kempley writes: “Isabella’s cooking is inspired by her passions. One is chilli pepper, an ingredient of both her shrimp sauté and her imaginative foreplay” (12).

The kitchen has been noted by Badikian to be the most important place in *Like Water for Chocolate*, where the images are so beautifully composed that they fetishise and exoticise Mexican food and women showing the domestic servitude of pre-war Hollywood racism (47); the same can be said of *Woman on Top*. Both films banish women to the kitchen, perpetuating the idea that the kitchen is where a woman belongs.

Badikian argues that the idea of the domesticated woman in the kitchen takes precedence over Gertrudis, who participates in the Mexican Revolution—she believes that if the film had focused on Gertrudis, it would not have become the highest-grossing foreign film in the United States (47). *Woman on Top* capitalises on similar patriarchal sentiments. Isabella makes her success in the US, but it is only through the kitchen by having a cooking show (ironically in real life Cruz is not much of a cook at all [Turner 7]), appropriately capturing what Badikian’s title and article articulates: food and sex, that’s all Third World women are good for. Kempley as pointed out earlier has also noted that the film is “skimpily scripted” and is simply a “food/sex farce” (12). As previously noted, Cruz is a Spaniard assuming the role of a Brazilian (and in reality not
much of a cook), Marco Leonardi is Italian acting as Tita’s Mexican lover and Perrineau Jr. is North American posing as a Brazilian. All these exemplify the reality of Appadurai’s notion of the repatriation of difference (production fetishism and the fetishism of the consumer), as well as staged authenticity, illustrating the complex web of our problematic and globalised consumption of these films. As noted by Wilkinson, Brazil is fetishised—sold not as a country but a sensation:

*Woman on Top*’s evocation of Brazilian culture also feels touristic. The film makes a link between gastronomic and sexual passion, hip-swivelling bossa nova music features heavily on the soundtrack, and there are even references to a local deity, Yemanja, Goddess of the Sea. (57)

All these carnal carnivalesque characteristics invoke the body and irrationality and, as Wu argues, magical realism and Latin identity are condemned to the cultural ghetto in the name of pluralism in both films. Therefore, selective emulation is played out in both these films, which capitalises on small truths enforcing stereotypical, sexist and ethnocentric ideas, demonstrating selective incorporation that essentialises the Other, and illustrating Brennan’s conception of cosmopolitanism now (a form of metropolitan cosmopolitanism). Hollywood, through the distribution of *Like Water for Chocolate* and by supporting a production like *Woman on Top*, surreptitiously promulgates US values, creating an “American image-for-use” by fetishising localism.

Badikian also highlights the absence and emasculation of Mexican men in *Like Water for Chocolate*, as she points out that all Mexican men are either dead or are the
object of desire (47). This concept can be extended to Brazilian men as well. In *Woman on Top*, Toninho is a slightly erring variation. He is an object of desire as he is in reality a Brazilian star (Kempley 12 and Turner 7)—he plays the character of a typical macho and passionate Latino whose masculinity is affronted and frustrated for not being sexually in control and becomes (stereotypically) unfaithful; thus Toninho is morally emasculated. The only positive male characters in both films are the North Americans: Dr. Brown who saves Tita; and Cliff who turns Isabella into an American success and a Brazilian sensation. As Badikian insightfully observes, these positive white images become “the perfect mirror for the American audience who are thus sutured into his [Dr. Brown and Cliff’s] perspective” (47). “First World spectators” therefore become saviours of “primitive and unrefined Third World women”, reiterating the hapless and infantilised image of the Third World (47-48).

Finally, I will examine the US-Latin American relationship in these films. Wu reads the marriage of Esperanza and Dr. Brown’s son as:

the foundations of “natural” family bonds between Mexico and the United States in the past and justifying appeals for aid and dependency in the present. The happy ending comes when the “hope,” Esperanza, trades in Mama Elena’s pre-Revolutionary patriarchy for Alex Brown’s and Uncle Sam’s late-capitalist patriarchy. (189)

Their marriage is a productive union between classes, races and nations. Esperanza symbolizing “hope” marries the son of North American Dr. Brown and the couple
moves to Harvard in the US, enforcing the idea of dependency; that Mexicans need to be saved from their impoverished country. These ideas undoubtedly contribute to the film’s exceptional reception in the North American market, making it the first commercially successful foreign film. As pointed out by Wu in her article, the feminism found in Like Water for Chocolate is problematic. The feminism found in both films is in sharp contrast to García Márquez’s work or his brand of feminism. In the unexpected ending of Eréndira, Eréndira runs off with the gold, alone and without a man (Ulises), taking her fate into her own hands and causing her the lines (destiny) to appear finally on her palms. Therefore, Wu is not wrong when she argues that watching Like Water for Chocolate, buying the book, and perhaps even going to a Mexican restaurant afterwards becomes a mechanical “ersatz multiculturalism” and a “problematic political correctness” (189). Woman on Top is no different: although Isabella was able to share her cuisine and culture nationally across the US, it is short-lived and problematic, soon to be ruined by avaricious executives with their profit-making agenda and ideas. In one scene, the marketing executives of Passion Food tell Isabella to look “less ethnic”. Isabella’s relationship with Cliff does not become a marriage of two cultures, instead she returns to Toninho and to Brazil. The cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism that the film promotes is skin-deep. It shows Brennan’s revelation of contemporary cosmopolitanism and (as Shohat and Stam points out) Hollywood’s arrogant provincialism—where the audience is global, yet the product promoted is almost always
American. These films, therefore, are still inherently patriarchal and problematically cosmopolitan as they clearly still depict, particularly, ethnic women as the Other, still stuck in the kitchen, whipping up ‘magical realist food’ to satisfy Hollywood’s stomach and warm Hollywood’s heart.

4. The Cosmetics of Faith – Destiny’s Child or Destiny’s Hunger?

_Central do Brasil_ is a contrast to _Like Water for Chocolate_ and _Woman on Top_. The film depicts the harsh realities of Brazil, mining the tradition of _Cinema Novo_ and New Latin American Cinema. Many critics have classified the film as a part of the renaissance of Brazilian film. Lúcia Nagib in _The New Brazilian Cinema_ explains that there is a return to national concerns with the New Brazilian Cinema (xx), and according to film academic, Ismail Xavier, the question of national identity persists as a vital force in recent Brazilian films (Nagib 41). In this section, I will explore the ‘cosmetics of faith’ through determinism and destiny (often seen as contradictory philosophies, but in fact compatible in Latin American reality and outlook) as a form of globalised magical realism.

The idea of the cosmetics of faith is derived from Ivana Bentes’s conception of “cosmetics of hunger”. In her useful and important article “The Sertão and the Favela in

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7 Torres’s previous film _Celestial Clockwork_ (1996), which can also be classified as magical realist, subscribes to the same cosmopolitanism that assumes the superiority of white/First World nations—in this case, France. The film denigrates the local through the illegal Venezuelan female protagonist who is determined to stay in Paris at all costs, refusing to return to Third World Caracas, in order to pursue her dream of becoming an opera singer.

8 Many of the essays in Lúcia Nagib’s edited book discuss _Central do Brasil_ in relation to this new movement; even Salles himself identifies with this movement (James 12, 14 and Kaufman 19).
Contemporary Brazilian Film”, she discusses the contemporary significance of the *sertão* and *favela*, providing a brief history in Brazilian cinema. She highlights the importance of Glauber Rocha’s key text “An Aesthetics of Hunger”, and his contribution to cinema. Rocha’s text and films gave voice to the phenomenon of Brazilian and Latin American hunger, poverty and misery and his vision was to harness these “major self-destructive forces” into a creative, mythical and oneiric impulse. According to Bentes, the issue of “hunger” has not been resolved or overcome in Brazilian Cinema, television or even international cinema and this is clearly seen in *Central do Brasil*. Bentes also maps out what she describes as the change from the “aesthetics of hunger” in Cinema Novo to the current globalised “cosmetics of hunger” with New Brazilian Cinema. She describes the “cosmetics of hunger” as:

a camera that surfs on reality, a narrative that values the beauty and the good quality of the image [...] often dominated by conventional techniques and narratives. The goal is a ‘popular’ and ‘globalised’ film industry, dealing with local, historic and traditional subjects wrapped in an ‘international’ aesthetics. (121-125)

*Central do Brasil* becomes an even richer film when cast in the light of the “cosmetics of hunger.” The film undoubtedly deals with the local in its dialogue with Brazilian cinematic tradition and history (particularly Cinema Novo and, on a continental level, New Latin America Cinema), which José Carlos Avellar discusses in his rather abstract, fluid and oneiric article “ImagiNation”: 
Once again Brazilians could tell stories in a language which belonged to all of them. They could rediscover their country and feel part of a specific space and time. The film includes scenes of landscapes and characters that left their mark on the cinema of the 1960s – the North-East, the sertão (backlands), those fleeing drought, pilgrims, ordinary workers from the poor suburbs of the big cities, and so on. It retraces the journey of migration of the characters of Barren Lives, but in the opposite direction. (255-256).

Central do Brasil is a response to the inhospitable and violent images created by Cinema Novo of the sertão and with the “cosmetics of hunger” moves in the opposite direction—returning back to the sertão (rather than escaping from it as occurs in Cinema Novo).

Luiz Zanin Oricchio merits Central do Brasil as a rare film that is able to delight both specialist critics and the general public (150), making it a somewhat “conventional,” “popular” and “globalised” film. In the commentary found in the DVD version of the film, Salles discloses that much of the film was improvised from Brazilian reality and little was staged, and during an interview he says, “somehow, the film was constantly transformed by its contact with reality” (Kaufman 19). This is not surprising considering that Salles’s earlier films are documentaries and that the documentary thread has also always been a thread in Latin American cinema since its inception (James 15). Salles, through his interviews, reveals that he is preoccupied with the physical and human
The geography of Brazil and also Latin America (James 14 and Kaufman 19-20).⁹ The scenes of the bustling Central Station in Rio de Janeiro were not staged but actually capture the daily traffic of 300,000 to 400,000 Brazilians who use the station (Kaufman 21), and Dora’s (Fernanda Montenegro) customers at the station were actual Brazilians who were filmed surreptitiously because Salles believes that these people were “camera-innocent” and he wanted to capture a more raw and honest quality about them, which he considers “poetry” (James 15). The letter writing in the film is significant because it indicates the high illiteracy rate of Brazil (which also extends to larger Latin America). Zanin Orrichio also explains that Dora writing letters in a railway station is synonymous with the forced migration caused by the huge disparities of development and unequal opportunities that exist in Brazil—people who are illiterate can pay her to write letters to their relatives who live far away. The execution of the petty and unarmed thief at Central Station was also based on a true incident that occurred in Brazil which serves not only to portray the harshness of Brazilian reality but is also a critique of the corruption of the law enforcement in Brazil. In the commentary of the film (from the DVD), Salles explains the horrific execution of the unarmed victim that was broadcast on Brazilian television and his purpose in inserting this scene was to remember and document the

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⁹ This is especially true of Salles’s recent film *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004). *The Motorcycle Diaries* is concerned with Latin America at large, sustaining the solidarity of Latin America and the continental project of New Latin American Cinema that was discussed in the previous chapter. In an interview, he says, “This idea of one continent, one people, seemed utopian… we [the production crew] all came from different countries: Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Brazil. But little by little we understood our frontiers were more porous than we imagined” (*Against the Current* 9).
injustice. Salles, through *Central do Brasil*, portrays a very real Brazilian people, reality and culture (and also Latin America).

Most of the scenes of the pilgrimage were also footage of the actual event. Salles used real pilgrims and not extras. He remarked that half an hour into the shoot it stopped being a re-enactment and became the thing itself and when editing the scene, he was careful to maintain a relationship with reality by trying to make it as “organic” as possible (James 15). Salles explains that religion to many Brazilians is a necessity (Kaufman 20)—which is why he has purposefully integrated that reality into the film. He explains:

> When I was location scouting I was struck by the relation between need and religion in the heart of Brazil. These communities have been abandoned for so long they don’t expect anything from earthly powers. They have to rely on something else, and this explains their incredible religiosity. As a sometime documentarist I forgot I was an atheist and tried instead to be faithful to what I was seeing and to integrate those elements into the film. The Virgin Mary of the Candlelight pilgrimage brings the possibility of a ray of light in the darkness which in a way is emblematic of cinema itself. (James 14)

Reality and film have a tradition of intermingling in Latin America. Salles’s filming techniques achieve the “poetics of the transformation of reality” that Biri conceives for the New Latin American Cinema. Salles’s observation of Brazilian religiosity also
verifies Carpentier’s belief that faith is fundamental to Latin American magical realism. It is this faith that marries the two philosophies of destiny and determinism.

Determinism and destiny can be seen in both the character of Josué and the real life of Vinícius De Oliveira (the actor who plays the role of Josué). De Oliveira in reality was a shoe-shine boy whom Salles chanced upon at a small airport. According to Salles, he “not only had never acted but had never been to a movie” (James 14). Salles met De Oliveira one day at the airport in the centre of Rio de Janeiro (where there were daily shuttles between various Brazilian cities) on a day when De Oliveira had no clients because it was raining. De Oliveira asked if Salles would buy him a sandwich and De Oliveira promised that he would pay Salles back when he returned to Sao Paulo that afternoon. De Oliveira made an impression on Salles:

I liked not only his face and the dignity of his look, but I also liked his approach and I thought that he definitely had something special. I asked him whether he would like to do a test for a film. He was nine and a half at that time and we all learned something from him, because he was a street kid that had the knowledge of what the street means and the difficulties of fighting for survival. But he had not lost his innocence in going through that phase. And therefore, he was very wise and yet still very innocent about everything. (Central do Brasil DVD leaflet)

The story and casting of De Oliveira in film, after he had competed with 1,500 other children who auditioned for the role (Kaufman 19), brings to mind Birri’s vision of a
nationalist, realist, critical and popular cinema. On many levels, *Central do Brasil* is similar to *Tire Dié* insofar as it engages in the poetics of the transformation of reality—where cinema generated within reality is represented on a screen and then returns again to reality, aspiring to transform it. With *Central do Brasil*, Salles employs the neorealist and *Cinema Novo*/New Latin American Cinema’s convention of using non-professional actors to capture reality, and it is both fascinating and inspiring to learn about the outcome of De Oliveira. According to Salles, De Oliveira understood his character so well that he fought to portray it from beginning to end—“he was the first on the set, the last to leave and he had an incredible capacity to memorise everyone’s lines including his own” (James 15). Salles was wise enough to realise that he had to deal with De Oliveira’s future, so when De Oliveira was invited to do the film, it was on the condition that he return to school afterwards. The production company would provide a scholarship until the end of university—Salles wanted to ensure that in eight years, should De Oliveira decide to be a doctor, engineer or a film critic, he would be fully equipped to make that choice. After the film, De Oliveira worked for the local PBS radio (while going to school), introducing a 20-minute daily show in which he talked about geography, history and maths for children who had abandoned school and do not have the chance that he had—“He’s making a decent amount of money and he’s supporting part of his family. For many Brazilians he’s the boy who managed to escape that deterministic future” (James 15). Both determinism and destiny are inextricably linked in the story of De Oliveira, who could have approached a hundred other people but he
happened to approach Salles, and that changed the course of his life. From Salles’s interviews and the commentary found on the DVD between Arthur Cohn (the producer), Montenegro and Salles, it is clear that Birri’s notion of the poetics of the transformation of reality is indeed at play and has affected not only those involved in making the film but also actual reality, especially De Oliveira’s reality. Both Montenegro and Salles also point out in the commentary that one of the elderly men who engaged Dora’s letter writing services in the film was reunited with his son because of the film—the man’s son, who had been looking for him and had no idea where he was, recognised his father on the film and they were later reunited. Thus Central do Brasil is a film of New Brazilian Cinema that is embedded in the ‘cosmetics of faith’ of Latin America, illustrating the filmic and even ‘real’ magical realism, which mines the tradition of New Latin American Cinema and has influenced and transformed reality.

In his article “Brazilian Cinema in the 1990s: the Unexpected Encounter and the Resentful Character”, Xavier analyses a number of films including Central do Brasil and argues that the main motifs of Brazilian films in the 1990s are the unexpected personal encounter, relating to different forms of migration, and the resentful character, relating to a sense of personal failure. Xavier frames his argument into a contemporary globalised sensibility that is shaped by the compression of space and time inherent to the world of high technology (Nagib 50). This globalised sensibility is better illustrated in the other examples of films that he provides, particularly Salles’s Terra estrangeira.

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10 Xavier does acknowledge that the unexpected encounter is not new to cinema (in Nagib 46) and is not only a significant feature of Brazilian cinema but current cinema in general (61).
(Foreign Land, 1995) where the protagonists find themselves displaced in Portugal and embroiled in the criminal world. Nonetheless, this sensibility is still evident in the different forms of migration found in *Central do Brasil*. Josué and his mother are separated from his father and other siblings who are living in the *sertão* due to economic necessity and complicated personal reasons. As the film unfolds, Josué and Dora travel into the badlands in search of his father and also to escape from the kidnappers that Dora had gotten entangled with. The compression of space is apparent. During an interview, Salles explains that Brazil is “a country of immigration, a country where Asian, African and European ethnic groups mingle” and lately it is becoming “a country of emigration” (Kaufman 19-20). In another instance, he expresses his preoccupation with exile and speaks about the internal exile found in *Central do Brasil* between people and their loved ones. The characters are separated by distance, hence the need and significance of letter writing in the film in order to communicate (James 14-15)—migration, travelling, displacement and exile are becoming a common reality in our post-industrial, globalised and mobile world of high technology, not just in Brazil. In many of Salles’s films, there is a preoccupation with migration, travelling, displacement and exile.

In the interviews, Salles tells us that exploring the unknown is a personal obsession with him (*Against the Current* 8, James 15 and Kaufman 21). He explains that his vision of the world and cinema is to explore what he does not understand (Kaufman 21). His affinity with road movies and unexpected personal encounters are opportunities to come into contact with the unknown:
When you do a ‘road movie’ you are constantly coming into contact with the unknown. I love road movies because they allow the characters to change as they are confronted with things they cannot control. They have to abandon their initial perception of the world and face up to things they don’t understand. When you are on the road you either accept what reality and destiny bring you or you fight against it, which is suicidal.

(James 15)

Destiny and determinism are, therefore, intrinsic to Salles’s outlook and his vision of cinema. These elements are central to *Central do Brasil* and the film is a road movie of sorts. Determinism and destiny can be seen in the motifs of the unknown, the unexpected personal encounter and the resentful character in *Central do Brasil*. The film starts out with Josué and his mother trying to establish contact with Josué’s father but the film soon turns into a road movie. Destiny (as described by Zanin Oricchio) is the “twist of fate” of the unexpected personal encounters between two “hard and long-suffering people” (*New Brazilian* 151) and in Salles’s words, “very disparate and desperate” people (Kaufman 20). Dora is the disenchanted middled-aged, rancorous, egotistical and cold-hearted character who is “drained by her fight for survival” (*New Brazilian* 151), and Josué, the precociously mature but “emblematic figure of innocence” (*Xavier Brazilian Cinema* 59-62), who is also the “transforming angel” in the film (Kaufman 20). Through their encounter both are transformed and Dora is redeemed (from possibly becoming a dealer in human organs). Salles explains that Dora
represents the old status quo, and the boy “the possibility of the new, of change through action” (Kaufman 20). Zanin Oricchio points out that the individualistic attitude of Dora is absolutely in tune with the times because now people no longer believe in collective solutions, which is a contrast to the attitudes of the 1960s and early 70s (New Brazilian 150-152), which casts more understanding to Xavier’s notion of the resentful character that is related to a sense of personal failure. Dora represents the old Brazil—the “culture of indifference and cynicism” arising from a deterministic blind ambition to become industrialised at all cost; and Josué the opposite of this, which is “the possibility of a certain innocence, of refusing a deterministic future and granting yourself another destiny” (James 14).

The cosmetics of faith culminates in the pilgrimage of the Virgin Mary of the Candlelight. Pushed to the edge with fatigue, hunger and desperation, a quarrel ensues between Josué and Dora, resulting in Josué running away from Dora. When she pursues him, Dora enters the House of Miracles and faints from the stifling heat, exhaustion and hunger, only to wake touchingly in Josué’s lap. Salles describes this very moving image as the “inverted pietà” where Josué “fathers” Dora and the whole episode becomes a deep spiritual awakening for her (James 14). This and the following sequences are one of the most beautiful and endearing sequences in the film, especially when Josué resourcefully capitalises on Dora’s literacy and peddles her writing skills in the middle of the badlands, making more than enough money for them to survive and even enabling him to buy Dora a dress. But this time, instead of callously mocking the contents of the
letters, the letters are posted. There is a very different treatment of capitalism in *Central do Brasil* compared with García Márquez’s work, which is heavily critical of capitalism. In *Central do Brasil*, capitalism is seen as necessary to survive but one must be governed by one’s conscience to do the right thing (shun people-smuggling and post the letters). The story of the unexpected personal encounter between Josué and Dora is one where destiny and determinism intertwine seamlessly to speak about faith. A faith not as in Christianity or any particular institutionalised religion but a faith that believes there is a higher realm that exists, which is beyond our comprehension. A faith that is born out of necessity—made necessary by the harsh realities that envelop Latin America. As Carpentier points out, faith is fundamental to magical realism and a part of the Latin American reality and sensibility that pervades many Latin American films.

By playing on the genre of road movies, *Central do Brasil* becomes a “popular” and “globalised” film that brings in local, historic and traditional subjects that are packaged in “international” aesthetics. Thus, it fetishises the local but creates better outcomes than what is contained in Ghosh’s disparaging conception of fetishistic localism. Perhaps Dirlik’s conception of critical localism is a more appropriate term because Salles recalls the international breakthrough of *Cinema Novo* in the 1960s, when Brazilian poverty and the *sertão* have been mythologised for political purposes. Thus, *Central do Brasil* of New Brazilian Cinema holds an interesting dialogue with *Cinema Novo* and, at the same time, engages with the international scene. *Central do Brasil*, therefore, is an example of Dirlik’s critical localism subscribing to the cosmetics of faith. As pointed out by Zanin
Oricchio, one of the most successful aspects of the film is the subtle politics that sets the film apart from the overtly political Cinema Novo, yet at the same time drawing inspiration from it, making Central do Brasil more accessible and popular to a larger globalised audience by offering them the cosmetics of faith (152).

Bentes illustrates the glamorisation of the sertão through the idea of the “romanticised sertão”, which differs from the sertão of Cinema Novo. The sertão in Central do Brasil is showcased as a place where modest friendships and re-encounters with humanism occur—the romantic and “rural scenery of lasting relationships, a world of exchanges and talk, where individual experiences are still worth something, a world of memory, sacred images, photographs and letters that record promises” (New Brazilian 125). This is contrasted to the violent urban world of broken relationships and ethical values, where a child tragically loses his mother through an accident and where children are sold for body parts. Thus, the film creates a romantic and “dignified misery” in an idealised return to the “origins,” to an utopian and even touristic sertão where we are shown beautiful images of the badlands, which is very different from the violent and inhospitable sertão of Cinema Novo:

The sertão emerges as a projection of lost dignity and the promised land of a reversed exodus from the seaside to the interior, a return of the failed and disinherited who were unable to survive in the big city. It is not a desired or politicized, but an emotional return, led by circumstances. Thus the sertão becomes a land of social reconciliation and pacification,
where the boy returns to the village with its humble houses to join a 
family of carpenters (Bentes 126).

So *Central do Brasil* is a celebration of the local. It does not derogatorily fetishise the local like *Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top*. Cohn and Salles in their commentary on the film explain that in exploring the local, the film actually also becomes universal. The local in *Central do Brasil* functions differently from the local in *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top* because it is honest and serious in portraying a “dignified misery” of Brazil (and Latin America) that has been forged by Rocha and other New Latin American Cinema directors.

Before I conclude this section, it is important to discuss Michael Jackson’s vaguely political 1998 music video of the *favela* of Rio de Janeiro, which has globalised the image of the *favela* and poverty into a form of “international” aesthetics, appropriately entitled *They Don’t Care about Us*. Bentes shows how a pop star like Jackson exploits the image of the *favela* by throwing it into the international circuit as something creative and original, which is problematic because he does nothing to alleviate the problem (*New Brazilian* 123).\(^\text{11}\) This “cool” video, therefore, similar to *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top*, is an example of fetishistic localism.

I will conclude this section by discussing identity in the context of postcoloniality. The father figure is a salient and recurring motif in *Central do Brasil*. Many characters in the film are searching for their fathers—Josué; his brothers, Isaías’s

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\(^{11}\) This was written before the untimely death of Jackson.
and Moisés’s; and Dora. But throughout the film we never get to see the fathers but only
catch glimpses of them—we only learn of Dora’s relationship with her father towards
the end of the film; and at the end, we only get to see a pictorial representation of the
boys’ father. It is not revealed in the film what actually happened to him—we are simply
told that he vanished. In the bus, Dora and Josué playfully discuss which of the men
might be fathers and the mistaken father that they find from the address given to Josué’s
mother only poignantly captures the longing for a father. But the father figure in the film
is far from ideal—he is the absent father, the irresponsible, lecherous and drunkard
father. Avellar in “ImagiNation” explains how the idea of the father and fatherland is
played out ambiguously in *Central do Brasil*:

He is at the same time the figure that Josué admires even though he does
not know him, that Moisés scorns for having destroyed himself with
drink and that Isaías hopes will come back home, to his family and his
carpentry. He is the rude and insensitive drunk, as Dora cannot forget,
who left his family and who one day tried it on with his own daughter
whom he did not recognise in the street. But he is also the affectionate
train driver, as Dora recalls, who one day lets his little daughter drive the
train that he operated. This reunion is also a rediscovery of a way of
observing whose purpose is to invent the country through cinema – or
vice-versa, for the invention of one implies the invention of the other.

The creation of the image capable of capturing the essence of the country
implies creating both cinema and then the country in its own image:

imagiNation. (New Brazilian 256)

Hence, the deep message of the film is a quest for identity. Zanin Oricchio argues that with *Central do Brasil* Salles continues his search for identity, but this time focusing on the soul of the country, the *sertão*, the real Brazil—“this is when Josuê’s quest for his father and Dora’s quest for affection become blurred with the quest for a lost nation” (152). The relationship between the father and the characters in the film are ambivalent and ambiguous, and this is expressed through religion—specifically paternalistic Christianity, which also allegorically and metaphorically critiques colonialism (which is also discussed in the previous chapter). The close-up picture of the Virgin Mary and Jesus in the truck parallels the portrait of Josuê’s parents at the end of the film, who are both dead. Christianity can be seen as a dead legacy left over from colonialism and the fact that Josuê and his brothers are now without parents suggests that they need to forge their own identities and make their own lives—their own destinies. It is important to know one’s roots to enable one to move forward into the future. Likewise with Dora, she is finally able to come to terms with her father at the end of the film—she is able to recall fond memories of him and not just the bitter ones, for he has significantly contributed to who and what she is. This encapsulates the idea of postcolonial re-membering—“putting together of the dis-membered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Gandhi 356). Lastly, Dora is able to wear the colourful blue dress that Josuê gave her—symbolic of the loss of hope and innocence that he is able to restore in
her; and this time, she comfortably and even confidently dons lipstick and rouge (compared to when she sheepishly prettied herself to attract the evangelist earlier in the film). Dora then confidently strides into the dawn of a new day.

Jesus, being Josué’s father’s name, is also highly suggestive of the allegorical colonial Christian critique. In the concluding sequences of the film, when Dora and Josué knock on the door of the address that they have for Josué’s father, a man answers the door and tells them ironically that “Jesus does not live here anymore”—Brazil is no longer a colony and thus must determine its own destiny. Brazil, predetermined to be “born” as a colony of Portugal must now forge its own future. On another level, the film is also about New Brazilian Cinema in dialogue with its paternal Cinema Novo—as Xavier explains: “its [Central do Brasil’s] central journey becomes the locus of a reverse migration that establishes a dialogue with Cinema Novo films” (Brazilian Cinema 61).

Xavier’s analysis informs us that Central do Brasil is an allegory of hope and a rigorous counterpoint to the bitter experiences enacted in many Brazilian films of the 1980s and 1990s. The film employs the figure of the child as the only universal left, tapping from a kind of moral reservoir to generate compassion and embody ideal values and promises (Brazilian Cinema 60-62). Thus, Central do Brasil becomes a beacon of New Brazilian Cinema that offers hope. Central do Brasil, therefore, fashioned out of the cosmetics of hunger, is a story told in the cosmetics of faith through determinism and destiny (the necessity and resilience of faith that has been the mainstay in harsh Brazil and Latin America) that lends itself to a form of magical realism in our globalised and postcolonial
world. Through critical localism, *Central do Brasil* offers a variant metropolitan cosmopolitanism to that of *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top*.

**5. Conclusion**

Globalisation, therefore, is a complex phenomenon. It is difficult to trace how ideas are disseminated and assimilated, especially considering the complex media conglomerates that currently run Hollywood to maximise profits. The point really is how well an idea sells—in light of this, we can see how much magical realism has changed from García Márquez in the context of metropolitan cosmopolitanism to global Hollywood. Often American cosmopolitanism, through the surreptitious imaging of American values, is perpetuated, as in *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Woman on Top* where food is commodified. But local fetishistic Brazilian sentiments can function ambiguously as critical localism that can be co-opted by global Hollywood when packaged in a marketable way. The cosmetics of hunger and faith can be easily marketed by Hollywood. So the power dynamics between North (Hollywood) and South (Latin America) are ambiguous in these films. Through the notion of “eating of the Other” and perpetuating the underdevelopment image of Latin America, magical realism is problematic, yet at the same time it exposes America and the world to the Other, Latin America.
Chapter 5

The Metropolitan Cosmopolitics of Allegorical Fragments

This chapter will continue and conclude the examination of metropolitan cosmopolitics in global Hollywood through the films of Latin American and Mexican Alejandro González Iñárritu. After the success of his first film, *Amores perros* (2000), González Iñárritu was able to penetrate Hollywood and make his second film, *21 Grams* (2003), entirely funded by Hollywood’s Focus Features, the arthouse division of Universal Studios (Solórzano 12). His subsequent films have been mostly made in the US. González Iñárritu’s films have been received by and treated differently by global Hollywood compared to the films discussed in the previous chapter. This was partly due to the increasing popularity of network films (conceptualised by David Bordwell, who also discusses González Iñárritu’s films) and the space of Border Cinema in which González Iñárritu’s films have been spawned and thrive. González Iñárritu’s films have been able to challenge, stretch and transform the metropolitan cosmopolitanism of global Hollywood. This chapter will discuss this transformation through allegorical fragments.

Before I analyse the two films, it is necessary to outline Ismail Xavier’s concept of “historical allegory”—a concept that provides the theoretical backbone to this chapter. Defining “Historical Allegory” in *A Companion to Film Theory*, Xavier states that “The dynamics of allegory, with its typical dialectics of fragmentation and totalisation, is far from a closed system; rather it is a signifying practice deeply involved in, and formally
permeable to, the vicissitudes of historical change” (361). He argues that there is an essential connection between allegory and the vicissitudes of human experience in time. According to Xavier, “allegory has acquired its preeminence in criticism because the accumulation of historical evidence related to cultural shock, slavery, repression, and violence has shown its central role in the interaction of different cultural systems” (333). Xavier employs Walter Benjamin’s ideas on modernity that are grounded in the notion of disaster and historical time as a force of destruction and corrosion—the idea that modernity is haunted by a deep sense of crisis encapsulated by instability (333-346). Accordingly, history comprises suffering and permanent conflict—“not a purely logical chain of constructive events, but a directionless piling up of violence. There is no teleology, but only a collection of discontinuous, ephemeral configurations of culture” (345). Time, therefore, crystallises itself in emblematic ruins, understood allegorically as fragmentary and devitalised testimony of past experiences. Allegories crystallise in fragmentary utterances the action of time on culture, emphasising what remains incomplete. The allegorical impulse is paradoxically juxtaposed with our innate impulse to totalise in order to understand and create meaning. Xavier illustrates this with World War I, German Expressionism, the French avant-garde and Soviet constructivism, citing *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1928), Sergei Eisenstein’s films, and later filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Goddard, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Maya Deren (345-349).
David Neo

Xavier also argues that embedded in allegories, are ideas of nation and nationalism as a direct consequence of modernity, market culture and industrialisation (as argued by Benedict Anderson). Like Anderson, Xavier believes that the idea of the nation has replaced religious affiliation and nationalism in cinema in the first half of the twentieth century. Expression of national rivalries assisted in constructing and consolidating American hegemony after World War I. However, from post-World War II to the 1970s, nationalism manifested itself in Third World struggle for liberation. Film provided a channel for emerging national values and the construction of national identity (before television began to play a significant role in this). Xavier demonstrates that film and politics have been closely connected since film’s early history through Eisenstein’s *October* (1927) with the Bolshevik revolution (a good example of modern allegory that exemplifies the dialectics of fragmentation and totalisation, continuity and discontinuity), D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916). Other examples of national historical allegory in films are Leni Riefanstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1934) and Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*, which Xavier argues have become magnified visual spectacles that serve as a form of animated national monument or *tableau vivant*. Such films emerged in the first half of the twentieth century when nationalism was one of the forces shaping the history of Europe and the Americas (349-360).

In the 1980s, there was another shift with a technological increase in the speed of exchange, the expansion of the global market, the compression of space and time and the continuous displacement of people where the logic of lived experience has become more
abstract, riddled with discontinuities and connected by large-scale and invisible networks.

The increasing destabilisation of time and space in postmodernity (as opposed to modernity’s lesser degree of instability) has revised the question of allegory. The new configurations of space, time, economic exchange and political power have brought about multinational encounters of migrating characters and cross-border love affairs and international co-productions such as Wim Wender’s “planetary allegories” that transnationally connect Eastern Europe to Australia, America, Japan and Portugal.

Allegories, therefore according to Xavier, “emerge from controversies, conflicts of interpretation, confrontations related to struggles for hegemony in a world in which the shock of cultures and network of material interests and symbolic systems tend to produce instability in people’s lives” (360). It is against this postmodern backdrop of fracture, fragmentation and discontinuity that I will assess the metropolitan cosmopolitics of the magical realist films of González Iñárritu in global Hollywood.

1. Connecting Fragments

In “Mutual Friends and Chronologies of Chance”, David Bordwell explores a contemporary norm of storytelling that has become increasingly popular since the 1990s, which he describes as “network narratives” or “thread structure”, “interlocking lives”, “converging fates”, “the web of life” and “criss-crossers”. These films make distinctive use of causality, chance, parallelism and narration. Bordwell traces the network principle in Western fiction and drama to 19th century novels such as *Middlemarch, War and Peace* and *Our Mutual Friend*—multi-strand forms that have continued into the 20th
According to Bordwell, “Central to network narratives in any medium is the fundamental tension between realism (after all, we’re all connected to each other) and artifice (order must be imposed on all the potential connections we find)” (194). Bordwell proffers several reasons for the increasing popularity of network narratives: the rise of communitarian legal theory; the deepening awareness of human connectivity because of globalisation; the growing significance of the Internet which contributes to the idea of networking; the formal theory of networks and “small worlds” emerging in several sciences.¹ These ideas have slowly infiltrated popular culture, evident in the notion of “six degrees of separation” which soon became a catchphrase that eventually materialised into a play (by John Guare in 1990) and film (by Fred Schepisi in 1995). The butterfly effect (the idea that tiny actions in a person’s life have ripple effects and can trigger big consequences in another’s life) has also become popular in movies. Bordwell argues that the principal source and inspiration of network narratives is chance (198-199) and what makes them work is the manipulation of narration that reveals connections, anticipates connections and conceals connections (207). In his conclusion, he writes that the recent wave of network films owes a lot to the cultural saliency of Hollywood and Western European filmmaking, but he points out that not all innovative films come from the First World (244). Bordwell’s analysis of González Iñárritu’s films

¹ This was pioneered by mathematician Paul Erdős in the 1950s and 1960s; political scientist Ithiel de Sola Pool; the social psychologist in the late 1960s, Stanley Milgram who argued that US citizens were on average six steps away from one another; mathematical studies of how disease outbreaks hit critical levels depending on degrees of connectivity among infected individuals; sociologists suggesting that social groups could be understood by means of strong and weak ties among members; and chaos theory positing unexpected order in what appears to be random fluctuations.
does not discuss the source and inspiration of González Iñárritu’s film. In this chapter, I will argue that the source and inspiration of González Iñárritu’s films is magical realism and that his films are also magical realist. My use of the concept of network films will extend Xavier’s earlier work on historical allegory and Jameson’s allegorical conception of magical realism.

The idea of fracture, fragments and connection is very much a part of the magical realist sensibility. Bordwell, in explaining how network narratives manipulate narration techniques, brings to mind Chanady’s discussion of enunciative devices in magical realist literature, Xavier’s historical allegory and Jameson’s notion of history-with-holes, all of which attest to fracture, fragments and connections inherent in magical realism. González Iñárritu in the films analysed here, brings together a variety of characters from different backgrounds through the disastrous connecting event of a car accident, in ways that resonate with the shock, violence, repression and even slavery by recalling colonial and neocolonial struggles through postcolonial and postnational historical allegory that Xavier speaks about as historical material of national allegory.

However, before I begin the analysis of the films, it is necessary to contextualise Hollywood, Chicano and Mexico’s ‘fragmented’ cinema history in order to lend perspective to the complex, bitter-sweet and coloniser-colonised relationship between Hollywood and its neighbour, Mexico, and the dynamics and influences of globalisation.
The complex and paradoxical nature of fragments can be seen in the interaction of the fragments of Hollywood, Chicano and Mexican cinema in the current global (transnational) realities of filmmaking.\(^2\) As mentioned in Chapter Four, Hollywood, since its early history, has been known to “borrow creatively” from developments in World Cinema. To the south of Hollywood, a vexed history exists between Hollywood and Mexico. Mexican cinema’s dependency on Hollywood has always been a double-edged sword—it was Hollywood’s support of the Mexican film industry that built Mexican cinema and contributed to its golden age; and it was also Hollywood’s exploitation and withdrawal of support that led to its decline (Ramírez Berg 38-39).\(^3\) In “Authentically Mexican? Mi Querido Tom Mix and Cronos Reframe Critical Questions”, Ann Marie Stock articulates what she calls the “authenticity paradox” by questioning and reframing Mexican identity in recent films. The authenticity paradox is the “critical insistence on [the] authenticity” of Mexican identity despite the current transnational cultural praxis, which includes the migrancy of cultural practitioners and consumers, and the prevalence of textual hybridity (Stock 268). Hence, the authenticity paradox is intrinsic in all transnational products. This complex and convoluted paradox is made even more acute (in our ever increasingly transnational/global practice of filmmaking) by Mexico’s symbiotic relationship with the United States, simply because of Mexico’s proximity to

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\(^2\) González Iñárritu’s film after 21 Grams, Babel, best exemplifies the realities of globalisation: the film takes place in four different countries, across four different languages and most of the characters are connected by a rifle.

\(^3\) Seth Fein’s article, “From Collaboration to Containment: Hollywood and the International Political Economy of Mexican Cinema after the Second World War”, provides an excellent, detailed and comprehensive account of the collaboration between Hollywood and the Mexican film industry during the golden age of Mexican cinema.
the United States (which in many ways is also similar to the dynamics of Canada’s relationship with the United States). Stock illustrates this with Frida Kahlo’s 1932 prophetic painting—“Self-Portrait on the Borderline between Mexico and the United States” where Kahlo centers herself in the middle, conjoining and separating the two worlds. On the left is Mexico with a crumbling pyramid, prehistoric figurines and a maguey cactus; and on the right, a Ford factory smokestack, the starred and striped flag, and skyscrapers that represent the United States. It is from this borderline position that Kahlo finds a way to encapsulate the complex relationship between Mexico and the United States in the last 70 years (267). Another part of the convoluted relationship between these two countries is what Norma Iglesias calls “Border Cinema”—a phenomenon of popular culture between Mexico and the US. Border Cinema is “an example of the post-modern and mass-mediated definition of popular culture” and it is important because its major audience is the people from both these countries (235). González Iñárritu’s films—his first made in Mexico and second in Hollywood—can therefore be described as Border Cinema.

Francisco Athié points out that contemporary Mexican films tend to have global appeal and “slick finish”. With the increasing commercial demands of filmmaking and the reality of decreasing government funding, Latin American filmmakers are forced to conform and adapt to these forces of globalisation. Thus, when asked if the continental project of New Latin American Cinema still exists, Athié replies that in the 1970s the government supported filmmakers but those conditions no longer exist (Martin and
Moreover, Stock, in her exploration of the authenticity paradox in a globalised context, explains the current strategies of embracing rather than erasing contemporary culture:

In drawing upon and reshaping Mexican and U.S. film traditions, these movies urge us to look beyond the confines of strict geopolitical parameters; and in directing their gaze toward the viewer/critic, they illuminate our complicity in cultural production. By reflecting on our framing of expressive culture, we will be less intent on delineating the “Mexican” features of films and policing the borders of “Mexican cinema,” and better equipped to analyse the points of convergence between Mexico’s rich tradition and other cinemas heretofore constructed in geopolitical terms. It is only by removing our authenticity blinders and meeting the gaze of films like these that we will be poised to make sense of cinema in a global era. (Stock 268-269)

Thus, we can no longer view identity, authenticity and even nationalism in narrow and strict parameters in our globalised reality, but need to revise and broaden our perspective to postnational historical allegory.

Another significant component of the Mexican and US relationship is the Chicano community and identity. Christine List, in her comprehensive book *Chicano Images: Refiguring Ethnicity in Mainstream Film*, informs us that Latinos represent about 10% of the total US population—from 1970 to 1990, it grew from 9.1 million to over 20 million
Los Angeles is known to be the third largest Mexican metropolis in the world (Dever 37). However, List explains that Chicano participation in Hollywood “has always been limited by a pervasive racism which plagues the industry” (9). Prior to 1960, only one Chicano filmmaker has been documented—Eustacias Montoya. According to List, (Eurocentric) archivists refused to preserve his work, and so only a few still frames remain. It was not until the late 1960s that a body of Chicano films began to appear and strong community protests opened media outlets to Chicanos where talk show television programmes and family melodramas relating to the Chicano community began to be aired (9). In the 1980s, Hollywood seemed prepared to promote a “Latino Boom,” but List argues that statistical data does not verify this (11).

However, in *Desperately Seeking U.S. Distribution: Seven Foreign Contenders from Asia, Latin America* (2001), Robert Koehler notes the “new Asian and Latin rush”. This includes: Chicano Robert Rodriguez’s films such as *Desperado* (1995), *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003) and *Sin City* (2005); Mexican talents such as actress Salma Hayek; cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto; and a number of directors moving into Hollywood (similar to Asian talents), such as: Alfonso Cuarón with *Great Expectations* (1998) and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004); Guillermo Del Toro with *Mimic* (1997), *Blade II* (2002) and *Hellboy* (2004); Luis Mandoki with *White Palace* (1990), *Message in a Bottle* (1999) and *Angel Eyes* (2001); Walter Sales’s *Dark Water*.
(2005); and of course, González Iñárritu’s *21 Grams*, are all made within Hollywood.

Similar to the Brazilian film industry, the Mexican film industry is also currently experiencing a “renaissance” (Basoli 26) “after more than a decade of crisis” (García Tsao, *Mexican Tales* 30). According to filmmaker Cuarón:

> Mexican Cinema, right now, is going through a very healthy period, in part because of economic reasons. There are new theaters and the middle class is going back to the movies, and distributors have started trusting that some Mexican films can make money in Mexico. Even Fox and Buena Vista started distributing Mexican films in Mexico. That has never happened before. So that encouraged private producers who started producing more films. What is happening now is that there’s continuity. There was always great cinema in Mexico but there was no continuity. The company I created to make this film [*Y tu mamá también*] is going to stay in Mexico and continue to produce Mexican films. (Basoli 27)

The discontinuity in Mexican cinema was largely due to a wave of repressive governments that took over Latin America after the 1960s (Podalsky 292). After the collapse of the golden age of Mexican cinema in the 1940s to 1950s, Mexico’s *Nuevo Cine* (the New Mexican Cinema) was born under the socialist politician Luis Echeverría Alvarez in the early 1970s, who supported the finance and infrastructure of the Mexican
film industry. However, these initiatives were reversed when President José López Portillo came into power in 1976 (Ramírez Berg 29-30).

The recent creative and institutional growth of two leading film schools in Mexico, the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico; and the state-supported Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, are also contributing factors to the cinematic renaissance of Mexican cinema. In addition, the box office success of *Like Water for Chocolate* (the first foreign film to become an international box office hit) inaugurated a change in the Mexican film industry in the 1990s (Stock, *Framing* 195). The film’s success was largely due to the distribution of the film by a US distributor, Miramax. Although *Like Water for Chocolate* was totally funded and produced in Mexico, it provided a perfect opportunity for U.S. distributors to move into the Hispanic market.

The timely emergence of Mexico’s talented contemporary filmmakers brought a Mexican presence into the international filmmaking scene that harnessed a policy of co-productions (García Tsao, *Mexican Tales* 30 and Martin and Paddington 116-118). These contemporary Mexican filmmakers of the 1990s have been influenced by Hollywood and are commercially savvy. García Tsao argues that they “have been weaned on a heady mix

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of Hollywood movies, rock music, comic books, Looney Tunes, MTV and Walt Disney, combined with national fixtures drawn from Mexican film myths” (Mexican Tales 30). González Iñárritu’s films display these qualities and his background as a disc jockey, producer and director of radio stations, and founder of an advertising and production company, have obviously influenced his films. Contemporary Mexican filmmakers are more commercially minded and Hollywood-oriented than their predecessors of the 1970s, who were heavily influenced by European filmmaking and particularly inclined towards neorealism (García Tsao, Mexican Tales 30).

But despite the success of contemporary directors such as Francisco Athié, Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo Del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Luis Mandoki, most of whom have moved to the United States (Basoli 27), many film academics are still uncertain about the future of Mexican cinema (Martin and Paddington 115; Stock 287). The major theatre chains in Mexico are foreign-owned and the majority of Mexican audiences prefer Hollywood fare. The Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE) is also undercapitalised and the national film policy is determined by the cultural politics of the government of the day. These factors, together with the impact of television, video production, proliferation of VCRs/DVD players and the deployment of satellite and cable systems, compete with the box office and decrease the film industry’s profitability.

2. Fragrance of Love

One of the most distinctive features of González Iñárritu’s films are the time fractures and the use of fragmented narrative structure—a legacy from Latin America’s
magical realist writers that creates “timelessness”. Literary critic, Menton, describes García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as having this quality (which can also be said of other magical realist writers such as Borges) where the past and the future are employed in the absence of the present (*Historia* 62). The central event of *Amores perros* is the car accident, which links the different stories and characters in the film. The film opens with the car accident and follows with the first segment, “Octavio y Susana”. The first segment maps out Octavio (Gael García Bernal) and Susana’s (Vanessa Bauche) relationship leading into the accident. The film then takes us to (the past of) Valeria’s (Goya Toledo) television interview, which leads into the accident showing El Chivo (Emilio Echevarria) at the scene just before the second segment with the intertitle, “Daniel y Valeria”, begins. It is not until we see the accident according to Daniel and Valeria’s perspective that we begin to realise how the accident and dogs connect the characters. However, we will not understand El Chivo’s significance to the film until the last segment, “El Chivo y Maru”. And even in the last segment, the film crosscuts to the characters of the first segment/story to inform us of the outcome of their fates. The time fractures in the film, therefore, employ the past and future with the absence of the present because the present is caught up in the viewer’s present as s/he is deciphering the film. The timelessness is in the diegetic fragments of the film that captures the “fragrance of love”.

Postmodernism in the two cultures (Mexican and North American)—albeit both have different historical developments and different patterns of globalisation—has
brought about the inappropriate association of González Iñárritu with Quentin Tarantino. González Iñárritu has been patronizingly labelled a “Tarantino Latino” in many of the reviews of *Amores perros* (Chang 72 and Swart 1). Lawrenson and Pérez Soler ethnocentrically and unfoundedly conjectured that *Amores perros* invariably invites comparisons to Tarantino’s early films, showing indisputable similarities (28). Yet González Iñárritu in his interviews does not mention Tarantino as a conscious influence on his work. When specifically asked which filmmakers have influenced him, he lists Paul Auster, Lars von Trier, Wayne Wang and Wong Kar-Wai, and relates *Amores perros* to Wang’s *Blue in the Face* (1995). In addition, González Iñárritu plainly states:

I don’t think *Amores perros* belongs to any particular cinematic trend. In general it could be placed in the category of non-western cinema – certainly it has nothing to do with either Hollywood or what’s being made in Europe. I think western cinema has been in a state of crisis over the last 10 years. It’s been unable to find a way of renewing itself in terms of structure, form and narrative. It’s stagnated. (Romney 15)

Considering Latin America’s international influence of innovative and rich narrative structures with magical realism, together with González Iñárritu’s quote above, it would be more accurate to attribute González Iñárritu’s sophisticated narrative structures to a Latin American magical realist sensibility rather than Tarantino’s influence. Jonathan Romney more accurately relates the fragmented narrative structures of González
Iñárritu’s films to Argentine magical realist writer, Julio Cortázar, in whom González Iñárritu has expressly stated an interest (15).

But in a postmodern and globalising market economy where fragmentation, mutual cannibalisation and the exchange of ideas happen at such an accelerated speed, traces of influence can be difficult to track. Perhaps the more important thing to note is the postmodern product of González Iñárritu’s films—a postmodernism that is both local and global, which also occupies the space of Border Cinema. Laura Podalsky, in “Affecting Legacies: Historical Memory and Contemporary Structures of Feeling in Madagascar and Amores Perros”, explains that Amores perros deals with contemporary urban life—it is about personal and social losses, about “young adults caught between the politically charged, if corrupt, legacy of the 1960s and postmodern ephemera” (280). This is clearly seen in the character of El Chivo, who leaves his wife and daughter in his youth to join the guerrilla, believing this to be the most important thing to do at that time so that his family will be able to live in a better world. His choices have led him to live the marginal life of a hobo and occasional hit man. When he finds out that his wife is dead he tries to reconcile with his daughter. El Chivo’s personal and social losses—fragrances of love—his wife and daughter, obviously speak of postmodern ephemera and the legacy of the 1960s. In the story of Octavio and Susana, young characters—Octavio, Susana, Ramiro (Marco Pérez) and Luis (Jorge Salinas) represent youth culture and the brutal world of dog-fighting in Mexico, which simultaneously employ both fetishistic and critical localism that contribute to the film’s success. All the characters in the film
experience some form of personal and social loss that exemplify allegorical fragments. Octavio loses his dog and his best friend (Luis), as well as his love (Susana), his money, and his family.

Even though *Amores perros* is local (to Mexico), it is at the same time decidedly global as well—otherwise it would not have become a worldwide commercial success, grossing over $20 million.\(^6\) González Iñárritu had 15 years of experience working in the commercial media arts of Mexico before making *Amores perros*. For five years (in radio) he had to keep two million people entertained for three hours using “musical narrative”; after which he moved into advertising, scripting and directing television advertisements. He, therefore, not only learned how to keep an audience engaged by creating complex narrative fragments in a variety of media forms, moods and states of mind but is well-versed in global aesthetics because he is commercially savvy (Lawrenson and Pérez Soler 30). The film has a distinctive style—in terms of how the music, visual and narrative elements come together. Shock and violence are clearly evident with the car accident (as well as the dog fights and killing jobs), and slavery is exemplified through the entrenched domination of capitalism in Mexico that alludes to colonisation and neocolonialism—the lasting economic hegemony of the US and Mexico’s dependency on the US. In the capitalist dog-eat-dog world of Mexico, the characters in the film betray each other—couples are unfaithful (and rob) each other and brothers fight and plot to kill each other

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\(^6\) According to Box Office Mojo, *Amores Perros* has grossed $20,908,467 worldwide to date.
for capital gains. We can see new configurations of space, time, economic exchange and political power.

Postmodern ephemera can be seen in the fragments or fragrance(s) of love stories. In the second segment, Daniel (Alvaro Guerrero) leaves his wife and family to move into an apartment that he has bought for his lover, Valeria. Valeria is the beautiful and glamorous model of “Enchant” (a scent campaign). But their extra-marital bliss is short-lived as she soon meets with a car accident that leaves her crippled. She then develops severe arterial thrombosis and her leg is amputated. The fragments of this segment function on multiple levels, employing semantic clusters, mental maps and spatial metaphors that organise comprehension and narrative transformation. The ubiquity of Valeria’s (capitalist) presence and modelling career is seen through the television interview, the montage of her studio shoot for the Enchant advertisement that is framed and dominates the living room of the apartment, and the unforgettable larger-than-life billboard advertisement of Enchant which is clearly and spectacularly visible from the apartment windows. But the most lasting *mise-en-abyme* and specular allegory is that of Valeria’s dog, Ritchie, who gets lost beneath the floorboards of the apartment. This image alludes to repression (also seen in the character of El Chivo as a guerrilla fighter and the way he describes himself to his daughter as a living ghost; and Octavio living out his repressed desire and obsession for his sister-in-law). González Iñárritu effectively uses off-screen space and sound that work our imagination. The only image that we are shown beneath the floorboards is that of the rats that Valeria and Daniel encounter as
they try to coax out and retrieve Ritchie. Throughout this segment, we only hear the faint noises of Ritchie’s footsteps and whimperings. The spatial metaphors (or lack of) of the labyrinth beneath the floorboards mentally map in our minds the horror of what might be happening to Ritchie. Ritchie’s alienation emphatically mirrors and undoubtedly speaks of (the protagonists of the film and particularly) Valeria’s tragic predicament of losing her limb, her beauty and her modelling career that captures the violent, illusory, alienating ruins of life in postmodernity. One of the most poignant moments in this segment is the image of the black, empty billboard space with the notice “disponible” (space available) after Valeria’s contract with Enchant has been terminated because of her tragic condition. The historical allegory of postmodern ruins (destabilisation) is quite stark—nothing lasts—neither Daniel’s marriage, nor Valeria’s fame and career.

Octavio’s affair with his sister-in-law, Susana, is the other love story in the film. Witnessing the abusive marriage between his brother, Ramiro, and Susana, Octavio tries to help and defend Susana. Soon Octavio and Susana begin an affair. Meanwhile, Octavio discovers that his dog is an exceptional fighter and gets on a winning streak from the dog fights. However, Octavio’s lucky streak is ephemeral. Susana runs off with Ramiro, taking all of Octavio’s winnings, and Octavio’s rival shoots his dog at the final fight on which Octavio has placed all his money. In retaliation, Octavio stabs his rival. As Octavio and Luis try to escape as well as save the dog, the accident occurs and Octavio loses everything. After his recovery, Octavio attempts to win Susana back (at Ramiro’s funeral, whose death he is responsible for), but Susana explicitly tells him that their
relationship is over. He replies that he will wait for her at the bus depot. Susana does not appear. Postmodern ephemera, destabilisation, and ruins are apparent. As with Valeria and El Chivo, love and everything is ephemeral like a lingering (fragmented) fragrance of Enchant which will not last forever.

Extraneous to the film are the three music videos that are included in the DVD entitled: *Me van a matar* by Julieta Venegas; *Avientame* by Café Tacuba; and *Amores perros (De perros amores)* by Control Machete y Ely Guerra that also connect and exemplify the postmodern allegory of fragments and ruins. With the exception of *Me van a matar* which features footage from *Amores perros*, the other two music videos bear no (visual) connection to the film other than songs being used in the film and depicting fragments of the theme of “love’s a bitch” by portraying passion and betrayal. *Avientame* is a panning montage of different characters (none from the film) involved in different relationships and betrayals—relationships between young couples and different aged couples (an older man and woman with younger counterparts). The music video ends with the camera closing in on a man bleeding from pulling his heart out—a very graphic allegory that speaks of the unstable relationships in postmodernity. The *Amores perros (De perros amores)* music video, on the other hand, shows characters (again none from the film) watching a couple of dogs copulating, interspersed with images of human couples making out. Although these music videos stand apart from the film, they are fragments that are inextricably linked and poetically connected to the idea of “amores
perros” or “love’s a bitch” which exemplify the allegory of postmodern ruins—
fragrances of love.

Since the 1950s, the entertainment industry has been catering to youth culture that has dominated much of the US and is currently taking over the urban landscape of the developed and developing world (Elsaesser 192). According to Martin and Paddington, contemporary Mexican cinema speaks directly to a youthful urban middle class (120). Athié explains that the working class is hampered by financial constraints and has a different political agenda—films for and about the working class are seldom successful with the middle class and are rarely exhibited abroad. They are occasionally exhibited at festivals and discussed by small and specialised audiences (Martin and Paddington 120). The inaccessibility of cinema to the working class holds true for much of Latin America. Thus, metropolitan cosmopolitanism becomes a middle class and often elite phenomenon that increasingly is catering to youth, which is one of the constant criticisms of cosmopolitanism.

The preoccupation with the youthful urban middle class is, therefore, a consequence of both globalisation and cosmopolitanism. Tomlinson warns about the danger of the demise of certain local cultures with globalisation, homogenising these cultures to a “predominantly white/First World take on things,” to a world of “fax senders and internet users,” where “transnational” cultures can become simply “occidental cultural enclaves” (Globalization 187-188). Hence, to a certain extent, it is the occidental cultural enclaves of the world that have made Amores perros an international success.
The film is also a global product of Border Cinema that appeals to the postmodern and mass-mediated definition of popular culture, which is essentially the youth market. Therefore, although Tomlinson’s assessment of globalisation is not entirely unconvincing, the cultural process is more complicated. As seen in the discussion of the authenticity paradox of Mexican identity and globalisation’s inextricable link to postcoloniality, globalisation can also be a contesting site. Therefore, as Tomlinson points out, the reality of cultural transfer is not unilinear but is often a “movement between culture/geographical areas [that] always involves interpretation, translation, mutation, adaptation, and ‘indigenisation’ as the receiving culture brings its own cultural resources to bear, in dialectical fashion, upon cultural imports” (Globalization 84). This, as I have established (albeit to a lesser degree of complexity), has been at play since Hollywood’s early history and is more complex now, particularly in shaping global Hollywood’s relationship with its neighbour, Mexico. These complex dynamics are inherent in González Iñárritu’s films, where mutual, selective emulation and incorporation occur with both Mexico and Hollywood. However, there are residues of fetishistic localism such as the barbaric dog fights, the savagery and passion of love, and brothers plotting against each other that tend to be associated with the third world. But paradoxically critical localism is also at play in the exploration of the universal allegory that love’s a bitch. González Iñárritu’s films are not entirely fetishised in comparison to Like Water for Chocolate and Woman on Top, especially considering 21 Grams which
David Neo

will not appear remotely Latin American to the undiscerning (which will be discussed in the next section).

*Amores perros* undoubtedly deals with local (Mexico) but it also deals with continental Latin American politics (with the exception of Cuba). González Iñárritu explains that the character of El Chivo/The Goat portrays the effects of seven decades of an extreme authoritarian political regime. Until 10 years ago people like El Chivo had no voice nor the legal platform to express their opinions—the left was brutally repressed and joined guerrilla movements (Lawrenson and Pérez Soler 30). Thus, El Chivo represents the lack of communication and freedom of expression, as well as the domination and effects of capitalism (in Mexico) as El Chivo is employed as a hit man by a businessman to murder his brother/business partner for capital gains. The allegory of El Chivo is a manifestation of postcolonial re-membering that also exemplifies postnational historical allegory, where the domination and effects of capitalism is critiqued, not only in Mexico and Latin America but also the rest of world. The exceptional and innovative non-Hollywood, Mexican creative team (rather than the film distribution infrastructure of global Hollywood) can also be read as postcolonial allegory that celebrates critical localism.

3. The Weight of Life

In conclusion, I will discuss *21 Grams* as a form of magical realism made within the infrastructure of global Hollywood where the space of Border Cinema enables
allegorical fragments to challenge, stretch and transform metropolitan cosmopolitanism
(from fetishistic localism discussed in the previous chapter). Romney writes that “while
21 Grams bears thematic and structural similarities to its predecessor, it by no means
offers the same material reshuffled, and is most certainly not Amores perros: Made in
USA” (12). Both films illustrate and explore González Iñárritu’s notion of fragments
which, as we can see from Xavier and Bordwell, is symptomatic of postmodernity—a
feature of allegorical composition. In Amores perros, three separate stories are connected
by a car accident and dogs. In 21 Grams, three separate lives become interestingly
entwined also through a car accident. Chance, destiny and determinism, the unknown and
a sense of mystery, are deftly crafted through the allegorical structure of fragments.

21 Grams is an intriguing magical realist idea that encapsulates life. At the end of
the film, and also in the trailer, when the protagonist Paul’s (Sean Penn) death is
imminent, he reflects: “They say we all lose 21 grams at the exact moment of our death—
everyone… The weight of a stack of nickels. The weight of a chocolate bar. The weight
of a hummingbird” (Romney 16). What exactly is 21 grams then—is it the weight of life?
The weight of a soul? Or the weight of death? Perhaps all three? The idea of 21 grams is
a creative, clever and effective marketing strategy in selling the film. On the DVD cover,
the marketing slogan and caption reads: “How much does life weigh? How can three
completely different lives become connected so powerfully, so devastatingly and so
irrevocably?” In the trailer, another set of questions are posed: “how much does love
weigh … how much does guilt weigh … how much does revenge weigh?” (DVD).
González Iñárritu employs the circular and specular idea that life and death is 21 grams, and uses it to explore intense human emotions and sentiments such as love, guilt and revenge. Romney points out that *21 Grams* possesses the qualities of a Latin American telenovela, but it is the sophisticated narrative structure (which is even more fragmented than the narrative of *Amores perros*) of the film that sets it apart from the Hispanic television genre (16). It is not until about 35 minutes into the film that we begin to realise what is going on as González Iñárritu splices fragments of the characters’ lives in a non-linear and non-chronological order. The Hollywood star-studded cast and the fact that it is in English also distinguish the film from a Latin American telenovela.

The characters in *21 Grams* seemingly lead deterministic lives. Paul is a mathematics college professor (Smith 70) who hunts down his dead donor’s (Michael) wife, Cristina (Naomi Watts), who has given him another chance at life and strikes up a relationship with her. In their confusion, pain and twisted love, Paul and Cristina plot to take revenge on the man, Jack, who is responsible for the death of her family. Jack’s (Benicio Del Toro) character is an ex-convict who has spent much of his life in and out of prison. Jack is obsessed with religion and tries to live his life according to the Bible, yet he cannot escape his destiny with the law. Despite his anger, frustration and bewilderment, he still profoundly and ambivalently hangs onto his faith.

In a short film that González Iñárritu made in response to the 9/11 event, he poses the transcendental question: “Does God blind us or guide us?” and in
*Amores perros*, Susana cynically tells Octavio, “To make God laugh, tell him your plans” (Lawrenson and Pérez Soler 29). González Iñárritu interestingly plays with the notions of fate and free will—he films express the idea that we are destined to make free choices but we are not free to control our own destiny. Like *Central do Brasil*, González Iñárritu’s films portray a certain magical realist faith in the incomprehensible and mystically higher spiritual realm that is beyond our control. Life is aleatory, puzzling and beyond Paul’s control: before he and Cristina can execute Cristina’s revenge plot to kill Jack, Paul’s body begins to reject his new transplanted heart—his second chance at life is all of a sudden inexplicably revoked. When Cristina attempts to kill Jack in the motel room, Paul bafflingly shoots himself in the chest instead. And in giving blood to save Paul, Cristina finds out that she is pregnant—when ironically Paul’s ex-girlfriend, Mary (Charlotte Gainsbourg) has been obsessed about having a baby with Paul, and this has become the bane of their relationship. Cristina’s pregnancy is an affirmation of life, a magical ray of hope and a certain muted optimism in the vortex of despair, guilt, confusion, anger and pain. Similar to *Central do Brasil*, the realities that are depicted in *21 Grams* are harsh and capricious—like Josué, Cristina in the blink of an eye loses her whole family—her husband and two daughters. She is bereft and left with absolutely nothing to live for, but then, just as capriciously, a new life forms within her, despite her despair.
21 Grams is the product of Latin American desperation and magical realism but set in an anonymous city (presumably in the United States as most of the characters in the film have an American accent with the exception of Mary, who plays a British character in the film). The film was apparently filmed in Memphis, Tennessee—“a city chosen not for its specificity but for its relative anonymity” (Heartbreak and Loss 44). The anonymous and unspecified locality of the film contributes to the universal idea of the weight of life with its many unnamed convolutions of guilt, emotions and attachments. These universal qualities give the film both global and local (North American and Mexican) appeal. The fragmented images of the film portray a specular mise-en-abyme, dream-like, and somewhat ethereal and introspective space. Prieto (the cinematographer of Amores perros and 21 Grams) divulges that Paul’s story was done in cool colours, generally white, whereas warmer colours were used for Jack, and Cristina’s story was done in neutral colours, something that is in between Paul’s and Jack’s story (Heartbreak and Loss 40). These different colours used in association with the different characters of the film create the sense of emblematic ruins of a fragmented dream.

The complex time fractures of 21 Grams are reminiscent of magical realist writing. The sophisticated, disjointed and fragmented narrative structure also creates and plays with the idea of a specular space working our corporeal perceptions to experience the weight of life in postmodernity. The juxtaposed fragmentary opening sequence (a style maintained throughout the film), where we are introduced to the characters, depicts the idea of remembering the future while dreaming of the past: the elliptical image of
naked Paul smoking and watching Cristina sleep after sex (in the future); then Michael (Danny Huston) and his daughters finishing a meal at a restaurant (in the past); Jack evangelising to a punk (in the past); birds flying against a sky at dusk (atemporal); and Paul in a maze of tubes and wires on a hospital bed connected to a life-supporting machine (ambiguous when this happens—could be present, past or “omnipresent”), which Paul describes as the “pre-corpse club”. Paul’s narrating voice in this sequence speaks in a speculative, introspective and self-referential fashion:

So, this is death’s waiting room. These ridiculous tubes. These needles swelling in my arms … I don’t know when anything began anymore. Or when it’s going to end.

There is no linear sense of time but a fragmentary and specular sense of time that is grounded in the notion of disaster or crisis: time is seen as a pile of ruins—the repetition of the piling up of destruction and corrosion. Is Paul, the narrator, dead or alive? Is he speaking as a ghost? Or is he an alter ego? The unreliable narrator is typical of magical realist fiction that recalls Chanady’s work on the narrator, implied reader, focaliser, implied author and authorial reticence, which functions similarly to Bordwell’s explanation of the manipulation of narration that reveals connections, anticipates connections and conceals connections. The audience is placed in a strange, uncomfortable and inexplicable ‘loop’, seemingly ‘suspended’; yet we are viscerally roped into the unrelenting whirlpool of the characters’ pain that is maintained throughout the film: Paul having to squarely and starkly face death; Cristina’s drug use and
bereavement at the loss of her family; Jack’s tenacious struggle to live a life pleasing to God; Paul’s devoted ex-girlfriend Mary’s unreciprocated love and need to have Paul’s baby; Jack’s wife, Claudia’s (Clea Duvall) and their children’s forbearance of Jack’s warped obsession with religion; and the confused teenage thug who has Christianity forced upon him. The characters are subjected to cultural shock, repression and violence—the shock and violence of car accidents which exemplify our increasingly fractured, fragmentary and alienating postmodernity; the characters’ enslavement to this type of life and reality; and their repressed needs. The fragments of the film connect us to the multiple protagonists who remember a future (in the case of 21 Grams, imminent death and disaster), while living in a past which is yet to happen by having the story told to us (through the idea of the weight of life). The film paradoxically suspends us in a space of ‘timelessness’ (with the universal and eternal contemplation of death and life) where the past and future are intertwined, with the absence of the present—a specular mise-en-abyme.

But each plot-strand is anchored in its own bubble of temporality, albeit the film’s non-linearity fragments classical Hollywood’s unity of time, space and action. 21 Grams is a sharp contrast to classical Hollywood’s temporal space. In the last ten minutes of the film, the editing style is no different to the opening sequence. Paul and Cristina are in her kitchen and Cristina expresses her intense anger, pain and anguish—she wants to kill Jack because he left Katie (one of her daughters) to die in the red shoelaces that Katie hated. Cristina has been meaning to buy and replace the red with the blue shoelaces that
Katie wanted but never got around to it. The next sequence projects us to the future when Paul has tracked down Jack—Paul scares Jack and attempts to shoot him, telling Jack that he deserves to die for what he has done. This is followed by another sequence that takes us further into the future when Paul is rushed to a hospital after being shot, and Cristina is awaiting the news of his condition. While she is waiting anxiously, the laboratory technician comes out to tell Cristina that they have found an illegal substance in her blood (after she has donated her blood to save Paul) because she is pregnant. Then we are brought back to the past in the bathroom of the motel where Paul and Cristina are staying. Cristina gets dressed and goes out to find Paul sitting by the dilapidated pool and he reveals he has found Jack. She asks if he has killed Jack, Paul says yes, and visibly becomes weaker as he stumbles back to the motel room. Presumably that same night, Jack comes looking for Paul. Jack kicks the door open demanding that Paul shoot him. Cristina in a moment of violence, repeatedly strikes Jack with a lamp, and this violent sequence is played out in complete silence until a gun shot breaks the silence. The next shot is of the twilight sky and birds in flight (ambiguous, unexplained temporality), juxtaposed with the next shot of Cristina cradling Paul’s head after he’s been shot in the motel room. Paul’s voice then appears as the (omnipresent) narrator asking: “How many lives do we live? How many times do we die?” Then we see a shot of Paul connected to medical implements in a hospital (in the future, past or present?). The narration continues: “They say we all lose 21 grams at the exact moment of our death. Everyone.” We then see a shot of the girls and Michael at a restaurant just before the accident. “How
much fits into 21 grams?” is then accompanied by a shot of Jack getting into his truck (presumably just before the accident occurs); while the narrator asks: “How much is lost?” Then we see (in the past) Cristina coming out of the swimming pool after racing with her sister and her sister calls out to her only to give her the finger for losing the race. “When do we lose 21 grams?” is heard with Cristina and Jack waiting at the hospital to receive news of Paul’s condition and “How much goes with them?” Next, we see a shot of Jack (in the past) who has decided to leave his family, and the narrator asks: “How much is gained?” Then, a close-up shot of Cristina opening her daughter’s bedroom door (in the past) is followed by a medium shot of Cristina (probably further in the past) when she is pregnant (or this could be in the future when she is pregnant with Paul’s baby). The narrator questions again: “How much is gained?” The next series of shots are of Paul and the life-supporting equipment in the hospital. Paul, the narrator muses: “21 grams ... the weight of a stack of five nickels ... the weight of a hummingbird ... a chocolate bar ... How much does 21 grams weigh?” The final shot is of the motel’s dilapidated swimming pool in winter. It is snowing. This image perfectly captures how time crystallises itself in ruins, giving fragmentary and devitalised testimony of past experience.

The dialectics of fragmentation and totalisation, continuity and discontinuity are apparent. The time fractures or the sense of time in 21 Grams are jumbled and confusing (especially on close analysis), but the film succinctly and poetically captures Benjamin’s dialectic of fragmentation and totalisation (it is less confusing when we allow our intuition to comprehend the film)—it is through the fragments that we bafflingly
understand the film (and life)—or not. The absent present creates timelessness in the jumbled fragments—this is the allegory of fragments or ruin that is so beautifully and masterfully realised under González Iñárritu’s directorial hand. Cultural shock, violence, slavery and repression are certainly evident and inherent in 21 Grams. The traumatic temporality of time and memory is seen through how the car accident has affected each of the protagonists’ lives and how Paul is determined to find out who the donor of his new heart is.

Unless you are aware of the background of González Iñárritu and the writer, Guillerme Arriaga, who both are Mexican, most people will not question beyond the fact that 21 Grams is a Hollywood film since it is in English and set in an anonymous (presumably American) city. Most will not relate the film to magical realism—it would more often than not, be classified as a network film rather than a magical realist film. But this globalised magical realist film certainly re-members postcoloniality as González Iñárritu and Arriaga mine their Latin American backgrounds by structuring the film in time fractures and fragments that are reminiscent of magical realist literature. In one instance in the film, Paul quotes a Venezuelan writer to Cristina while he courts her: “The earth turns to bring us closer. It turned on itself and in us until it finally brought us together in this dream.” The writer’s identity is not revealed in the film, which indicates traumatic and fractured re-membering in this (global) “American” and “Hollywood” film. Also, the casting of Benicio Del Toro, a Puerto Rican, in the role of Jack Jordan is part of the film’s neocolonial re-membering. Puerto Rico is a self-governing unincorporated
territory of the United States whose residents do not have any voting rights unless they live in the US. The situation of Puerto Rico can be seen as a form of neocolonialism. Furthermore, in many of Del Toro’s significant roles, he plays the Hispanic underdog—his most notable recent role is as Che Guevara. Jack’s oppressed impasse and his struggle with Christianity exemplifies the colonised predicament—trying to make Christianity work when it is not part of the culture; similarly, Paul’s body eventually rejects Michael’s implanted heart.

In many ways, *21 Grams* and *Amores perros* (particularly through the creative Mexican team that produced the film) illustrates the violence and repression of colonialism and neocolonialism, revealing the traumatic temporality of a fractured subjectivity that is seen throughout magical realism. *21 Grams* re-membering engages in critical localism (of both Mexico/Latin America and the US) and the Mexican authenticity paradox that challenges, stretches and transforms magical realist cosmopolitics into metropolitan cosmopolitanism. González Iñárritu’s films are globalised magical realist films that are marketed, distributed and produced (with the exception of *Amores perros*) by global Hollywood. They are also postmodern and mass-mediated definitions of popular culture, which are a part of Border Cinema that not only caters to Americans, the Chicano community and Mexicans, but also to an international arthouse audience. These historical allegorical films of ruins are a collection of discontinuous and ephemeral configurations of cultures.
4. Conclusion

The themes of the fragrance of love in *Amores perros* and the weight of life in *21 Grams*, through the current popularity of network narratives, are able to transform, disguise or minimise magical realism (if one believes that American cosmopolitanism is still prevalent and unchanging) and push the limits of global Hollywood with borderline cosmopolitics of Border Cinema that seemingly shatters all differences, all histories, and all cultures into easily marketable commodities (be it the blockbuster, high concept film or independent arthouse feature). González Iñárritu achieves this through allegorical fragments where the shock of cultures (seen through fragments-of-time and the breakdown of the unity of time and space through the accident) engage in metropolitan and borderline cosmopolitics (a place of crisis, catastrophe and ruins) to challenge, stretch and transform magical realism and metropolitan cosmopolitanism into globalised and marketable products that also attest to postcolonial and postnational historical allegory that dissipates borders. Thus, González Iñárritu’s films function differently from the films analysed in the previous chapter where fetishistic localism is the means of acknowledgement and exposure of the Other. González Iñárritu’s globalised films truly engage critical localism in the postcolonial contesting site created by globalisation.
Chapter Six

Case Study: Emir Kusturica

Magical Realism and the Cosmopolitics of Balkanisation

1. Kusturica, Magical Realism and the Balkan Cosmopolite

Emir Kusturica is the contemporary filmmaker who has been most associated with magical realism internationally. Film critics and scholars such as Pat Anderson,1 Katherine Dieckmann,2 Goran Gocić,3 Daniel J. Goulding,4 Andrew Horton5 and Dina Iordanova6 have described his work as magical realist. Kusturica himself has acknowledged that Gabriel García Márquez has significantly influenced his views on storytelling (Iordanova, Kusturica 111). Gocić writes: “The fictional vision of Latin American history, baptised ‘magic realist’ (real maravilloso) by Alejo Carpentier, is a term unsurprisingly used when Kusturica’s work is described” (171). According to Iordanova, who specialises in Balkan cinema, Kusturica seems neither interested in nor influenced by Yugoslav magical realism (where there is a well-developed branch of this

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1 Anderson, in a film review of Time of the Gypsies, describes Kusturica’s work as “spurious Gabriel Marquez [sic] mysticism” (Time 304).
2 Dieckmann, in an article on Kusturica in Film Comment, describes his aesthetics as a “brand of magical whimsy and frank realism” (44).
4 Goulding, who has spent more than the last two decades studying Yugoslav cinema, in Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945-2001 writes: “Kusturica moves even further in the direction of blending veristic filmic evocations of Gypsy life with magical realism and illusion. His narrative structure is more experimental and poetic in form—influenced, in part, by such South American writers as Marquez [sic], Llosa, Cortazar [sic], and Borges” (160).
5 Horton, a film scholar on the Balkan area, in “The Cinema of Emir Kusturica: Notes from the Underground and Emir Kusturica”, writes that “even cinephiles unfamiliar with Balkan cinema have been impressed with Kusturica’s powerful and often playful mixture of ‘magic realism’ and gritty melodrama” (65).
6 Iordanova in a number of instances in her book, Emir Kusturica, describes and aligns Kusturica’s work with magical realism (67-70, 87, 97-99, 114, 129-130).
in literature), and has instead only acknowledged Latin American magical realism. She notes that it is difficult to ascertain to what extent García Márquez has defined Kusturica’s magical realism. Although Latin American magical realist writing was extremely popular in the Balkans, it would be misleading to describe the presence of fantasy quirks as a Latin American import. Both Iordanova and Kusturica concede the similarity in Latin American and Balkan mentality, attitudes to rationality, morality, literature and history (Iordanova, *Kusturica* 129-130). Dušan I. Bjelić in the introduction to *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalisation and Fragmentation* concedes that the Balkans and South America have different histories, but he writes that “neither history can be understood without recognising the impact of a colonialism that helped shaped both regions’ cultures, identities, and corresponding regimes of signification” (Bjelić and Savić 2). He argues that the Balkans and South America are arbitrarily constructed through a discourse that associates modernity and progress with “the West” and “the North”. Thus, what they share in common is their nomination as “the South” which is “viewed as a backward, seething pit of racial and sexual violence against ... the liberal and enlightened North” (Bjelić and Savić 2-3). Iordanova, on the other hand, also writes that Kusturica’s alignment with García Márquez and Latin American magical realism probably stems from Kusturica’s desire to communicate with Western interviewers, who would be more familiar with the internationally known Latin American literary tradition of magical realism than the Slavic one (Iordanova *Kusturica* 129-130). Leaving aside the issue of influence, this chapter on Kusturica and his films will examine the phenomenon of contemporary magical realism in the Balkans, specifically exploring new and
different cosmopolitical extensions of magical realism. Kusturica’s films exemplify the
cosmopolitics of minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity.

Kusturica has been described as the most celebrated and controversial
“Yugoslav” director working today (Gocić 1), however, since Yugoslavia no longer
exists, “Balkan” would perhaps be a more appropriate adjective to use. He is currently
revered in the non-anglophone world as the most popular contemporary cineaste
(Iordanova, Kusturica 2). He has won two Palme d’Or awards at the Cannes Film
Festival—in 1985 for When Father Was Away on Business and 1995 for Underground—
and numerous other prestigious awards. His work is highly original and not easy to
classify under existing genres or theories, and he has been praised for his extraordinary
imagination and exuberant creativity (Gocić 3). He is also a controversial auteur, and
critics are split in their opinions of him. Iordanova aptly describes him as “charming and
tactless, loyal and naïve, inspiring and ambitious, resilient and malleable, generous and
petty, funny and narcissistic” (Kusturica 3). Gocić aptly summarises the contradictions
in Kusturica’s persona:

The whole of Kusturica’s public appearance, consciously or not, hits the
bull’s eye – if indeed the intent has been to provoke. The film-maker’s
biography does not only hide a simple rebellion; it actually represents a
series of spiritual, aesthetic, and political mutinies – sometimes
unexpected ones. In its eradication of the given ‘centre’ it is marked by
uncompromising transgression. By origin a Bosnian Muslim, he refused
to support the Bosnian Muslim government during the wars for Yugoslav
succession, and was accused politically of defecting to the Serbs. He was
born into a respectable, well-adjusted, and well-positioned family – yet
he sought the companionship of petty criminals. His well-placed
connections and early prominence were partly due to the Communist
pedigree – however he denounced Communism in his work. He became a
well-known Yugoslav film director – then emigrated to France, where he
resides today. (11-12)

Kusturica’s rebellion and commitment to marginality echo García Márquez’s in many
ways. He was born on November 24, 1954, in Sarajevo, Bosnia, which is a city reputed
to be a “dynamic cosmopolitan location” (Iordanova, Flames 235). His ancestors
converted to Islam and changed their names in the Middle Ages, but his family is one of
mixed marriages (they have Serbian, Montenegrin, Slovenian and Croatian ancestry) and
found themselves particularly vulnerable when the country was divided along ethnic
lines. Murat, his father, renounced his Muslim faith to become a Communist and was a
deputy of the Minister of Information in Bosnia-Herzegovina.7 Emir Kusturica, then,
renounced Communism (Gocić 10-14). Gocić appropriately describes Kusturica’s family
as:

[suffering] a collapse of central identity three times in their history,
Kusturica’s family is a perfect case of trans-national and secular
detachment – his children have Serbian, Montenegrin, Slovenian and
Croatian ancestry. ‘Yugoslav’ became a good way of summarising this –
of course, only as long as Yugoslavia was there. (11)

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7 Do you Remember Dolly Bell? (1981) deals with Kusturica’s relationship with his father.
At eighteen, he was dispatched to study at the renowned film school, Fakulta Akademie Múzických Umění (FAMU) in Prague, to solve the problem of his association with petty criminals, and he graduated in 1978. He then returned to his native city to pursue a filmmaking career (Gocić 14-15). Kusturica is loosely considered part of the “Czech school” or “Czech group” of Yugoslav directors as he graduated from FAMU a few years after a group of Yugoslav talents such as Srdjan Karanović, Goran Paskaljević, Goran Marković, Rajko Grlić, Lordan Zafranović, Živko Zalar and Vilko Filač (Goulding, Liberated 145). However, Iordanova puts him in a category of his own and considers him to be “an international film-maker” because, other than his early films, a large part of his film career solidified outside of Bosnia and Yugoslavia. In addition, the artistic influences on his films come from world or international cinema where intertextuality features very strongly (Kusturica 35-36; Gocić 137-142). His first full-length feature film, Do You Remember Dolly Bell? (1981), won the best debut feature at the Venice International Film Festival and his second feature film, When Father Was Away on Business (1985), won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes International Film Festival and brought him international recognition (Gocić 3). His next film, Time of the Gypsies (1989), won the Best Director award at Cannes. After the success of When Father is Away on Business, Kusturica enjoyed greater freedom as he had access to the support of Western production and distribution, and was no longer subjected to the approval of local authorities for his projects. His success also gave him the choice to stay in Bosnia or go abroad (Iordanova, Kusturica 29).

In 1988 Kusturica left Sarajevo for New York and has since lived away from Bosnia. He initially taught at Columbia University, a temporary appointment that Miloš
Forman, then chair of the Film Studies programme, had arranged for him. Kusturica had intended to return to Bosnia, but he grew increasingly estranged from the nationalistic developments in Yugoslavia. Soon his family joined him in New York, but Kusturica never felt at home in the United States. Yet he made a film there, *Arizona Dream* (1993), which was followed by serious disagreements with the US producers. Unwilling to compromise with the attitudes of commercial American filmmaking, Kusturica moved to France, where he has found the filmmaking climate more suitable (Iordanova, *Kusturica* 29-31). Although *Arizona Dream* won the Silver Bear award at the Berlin International Film Festival, it was only well-received, even acquiring “cult status” in Europe. The American audience could not appreciate it and wrote it off as a “slapstick psychodrama with a heavy dash of magic realism” (75). Unlike the Latin American filmmakers’ successful ventures in Hollywood, Kusturica’s experience in the US and the Hollywood system was not a savoury one—he became an outspoken opponent of the Hollywood system and resented how the American media portrayed the Yugoslav conflict (28-38).

Kusturica’s fifth film, *Underground* (made outside of the US), brought him yet another Palme d’Or at Cannes. The success of the film, however, was mired by controversy. *Underground* tarnished Kusturica’s reputation with mixed reviews from critics. The film was accused by some of being Serbian propaganda, most prominently by French intellectual Alain Finkielkraut, who wrote in *Le Monde* that Kusturica had betrayed his Sarajevan roots and put himself in the service of Belgrade (Iordanova, *Flames* 111).8 In retaliation, Kusturica impulsively swore to withdraw from filmmaking, only to break this resolve by releasing *Black Cat, White Cat* three years later in 1998.

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8 Iordanova in *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* provides a detailed discussion whether the film is Serbian propaganda or historical allegory (111-135).
(Iordanova, *Kusturica* 5-6). Kusturica’s response feeds into the image of the volatile Balkan (which Gocić describes as “Dionysiac”) and Gocić aptly observes that:

> He [Kusturica] completely identifies his work with this imaginary Balkan Other. Exploiting and emphasising the difference he manages to make a viewer envious of Balkan colourfulness, freedom, temperament, passion and beauty. He thus single-handedly inverts the racist dismissal into an envy: compared with Western anaemia, the Bosnian, Gypsy or Serbian lust for life symbolises some sort of nostalgic reminder of a distant – but alas – lost vitality. (84)

In another instance, Gocić writes that Kusturica is “forever condemned to talk about Balkans and Balkanisation, about Yugoslavs and Yugoslavia, about small ethnic groups which easily get offended – even when he is addressing universal issues” (40). Thus Kusturica’s international reputation does rest on his treatment of the Balkans and balkanisation in his work.

Gocić also classifies Kusturica’s films under “ethno” cinema and according to Gocić, ethno cinema started in the 1950s when films by Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray and Japanese director Akira Kurosawa received international recognition for presenting local (Indian and Japanese) colours through a consciously Western art cinema style. Gocić notes that these types of films were often received with indifference or even open hostility in their home countries. Gocić’s idea of ethno is not just confined to film but literature, music and the fine arts, and he includes García Márquez’s literary work in this ethno category. Thus, ethno draws inspiration from the original countries of artists whose work tends to be fairly “Westernised”. These works show a mastery of Western
expressive codes, which opens up dialogue with the West—where national and racial differences are defined as the Other (119-120). Ethno, therefore, is a form of cosmopolitanism that Timothy Brennan and Danilo Zolo are critical of—as a subtle disguise for American or Western imperialism (discussed in Chapter Two). Gocić’s conception of ethno adds another aspect to fetishistic localism in an increasingly globalised context because it demonstrates that it is not simply confined to metropolitan cosmopolitanism (as discussed in Chapters Four and Five), but can also be found in Kusturica’s films, entangled with minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity.

Although Gocić’s categorisation of Kusturica’s films is problematic (which I will discuss later in the chapter), his framing discussion of Kusturica is useful in examining cosmopolitics. The minoritarian cosmopolitics of early Latin American magical realist films were not so much about fetishistic localism as it was about consuming the West and other cultures to create its own identity. But Kusturica’s brand of magical realism, which is couched in minoritarian modernity, plays on fetishistic localism—on the stereotypical ideas of the Balkans and balkanisation. Kusturica’s brand of magical realism (unlike the earlier Latin American form) is not free from the tentacles of capitalism and commodification (seen in the opportunities that his success at Cannes has brought) that have given it currency and marketability as a global phenomenon—he is currently the single auteur who is most associated with magical realism. Gocić’s classification of García Márquez as ethno is problematic. When García Márquez popularised magical realism fifty years ago, magical realism was untainted by capitalism and commodification as it presently is (and this includes the films that were analysed in Chapter Three that have been adapted from García Márquez’s work and belong to Third Cinema). As pointed out earlier, Kusturica is narcissistic and shrewd—he is known to
walk out of interviews when he is unhappy with the direction that they are taking and has openly confessed at Cannes that he makes films to be loved (Kusturica 41-43). Therefore, self-interest and commodification are inextricable from Kusturica’s work.

Since 2001 Kusturica has resided in Normandy, France, and, according to Iordanova, Kusturica is conscious of his diasporic condition—thus, she classifies him as a diasporic filmmaker (Iordanova, Kusturica 26-31). He currently maintains several residences and spends most of his time travelling for his work. Kusturica’s background and life truly exemplify cosmopolitanism as Iordanova fittingly describes him as part of “the class of cosmopolitan commuters to which the most prominent film-makers belong” (31). Kusturica has long been branded “Yugonostalgic” and since multi-cultural Yugoslavia no longer exists, Iordanova rightly concludes that “it has become clear by now, one can be a ‘Yugoslav’ only in diaspora” (32). Cosmopolitics, therefore, is intrinsic to Kusturica’s work and worldview.

My analysis of magical realism in this chapter will focus on the cosmopolitics of balkanisation in two of Kusturica’s films—Underground and Life is a Miracle (2004), which I will argue exemplify the cosmopolitics of minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity. The allegory of balkanisation and cosmopolitan war will be explored within four magical realist spaces of allegorical fragments in Underground: the war, cellar, film set and heaven; and the allegory of stubborn love in Life is a Miracle through the allegorical trope of the donkey and allegorical space of the train line. Kusturica’s brand of magical realism differs from the Latin American strand (discussed in the earlier chapters). The cosmopolitics surrounding Kusturica and his films are fascinating because it is his commitment to minoritarian cosmopolitics that makes him resistant to
American culture, which also makes his work less accessible to the American audience, but it has earned him international fame. Kusturica’s brand of magical realism and popularity differs from the recent Latin American filmmakers’ success in America (discussed in chapters four and five), achieved through metropolitan cosmopolitanism that is undoubtedly less confronting and threatening and more receptive to the entertainment industry in America.

2. The Ideoscape and Cosmopolitics of Balkanisation

It is necessary to sketch a brief account of the complex history of the Balkans to understand the current ideoscape and cosmopolitics of balkanisation. Gocić in his discussion of Kusturica’s work provides a sketchy history of the Balkans from the 7th century when Slavic tribes came to the Balkans. By the 9th century, the Balkans was Christianised, and the Church schism of the 11th century notably split the Slavs into two opposing poles. Initially the split was due to theological differences; however with time the rift became cultural and political until Orthodox Europe became a separate “civilisation”. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the Orthodox territories fell to Turkish invasion and it was not until the 19th century that the Serbs were able to restore their state; meanwhile, Islam became entrenched in the Balkans. Bosnia was Islamised en masse partly due to the fact that it was never really Christianised. Another distinguishing feature of Bosnia-Herzegovina is its significant history of guerrilla resistance, frequent mutinies and violent abuse of power—even today indigenous Bosnian outlaws are celebrated as romantic heroes and this is manifested in some of Kusturica’s films (satirised in the character of Crni in Underground). By the turn of the 20th century, two vast empires shared Eastern Europe: Austro-Hungary in the west and the Ottoman in the
east. Russia intervened and challenged Turkish dominance over the Orthodox Slavs, and after two Balkan wars the Turks withdrew from Europe. After the withdrawal, many of these nations began to purify their language and toponymy from “Turkism”; however, Bosnia was resistant to this, retaining both “Turkism” and Islam. In the twentieth century, nationalist movements brought about the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian crown prince, Franz Ferdinand, which led to the outbreak of World War I. The war gave birth to new Slavic states (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) that later became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which fulfilled the pan-Slavic dream but this soon turned into disunity. The religious split between the Slavs, especially between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs produced many political differences and bloody conflicts. Bosnia-Herzegovina was particularly vulnerable, always torn between different religious, political and cultural influences, and these conflicts escalated to the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s (7-9).

Maria Todorova in her seminal book, *Imagining the Balkans*, charts the conceptualisation of the Balkans. According to her, the term “Balkan” was used as early as the 15th century to ascribe the mountains that divide Bulgaria from the rest of Western Europe but she also points out that the term “Balkan” is really a *nomen nudum* with no clear definition (22-37). Gocić appropriately writes: “Where do the Balkans dwell, except in our imagination?” (83), an idea Todorova similarly poses in *Imagining the Balkans*. Misha Glenny affirms that any consideration of the Balkan peninsular “runs up against the unanswerable question of borders” (xxii). Along similar lines, international academic celebrity Slavoj Žižek facetiously explains that the Balkans are:
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portrayed in the liberal Western media as a vortex of ethnic passion – a multiculturalist dream turned into a nightmare. The standard reaction of a Slovene (I am one myself) is to say: ‘yes, this is how it is in the Balkans, but Slovenia is not part of the Balkans; it is part of Mitteleuropa; the Balkans begin in Croatia or in Bosnia; we Slovenes are the last bulwark of European civilization against the Balkan madness’. If you ask ‘Where do the Balkans begin?’ you will always be told that they begin down there, towards the south-east. For Serbs, they begin in Kosovo or in Bosnia where Serbia is trying to defend civilised Christian Europe against the encroachments of this Other. For the Croats, the Balkans begin in the Orthodox, despotic and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values. For many Italians and Austrians, they begin in Slovenia, the Western outpost of the Slavic hordes. For many Germans, Austria is tainted with Balkan corruption and inefficiency; for many Northern Germans, Catholic Bavaria is not free of Balkan contamination. Many arrogant Frenchmen associate Germany with Eastern Balkan brutality – it lacks French finesse. Finally, to some British opponents of the European Union, Continental Europe is a new version of the Turkish Empire with Brussels as the new Istanbul – a voracious despotism threatening British freedom and sovereignty. (Žižek qtd. in Gocić 83)

Vesna Goldsworthy in “Invention and In(ter)vention: the Rhetoric of Balkanization” describes the general perception of the Balkans as a fracture zone of
“ancient hatreds”, a clashing point of religions and civilisations. She writes: “as is often the case, the Balkans are thus defined not by identity traits of their own but by their position on the fault line, their fate predetermined by their explosive “in-betweenness”” (in Bjelić and Savić 25). The curse (paradoxically one could see it as a blessing because of its multi-cultural mix) of the Balkans is its uncertain geographical location that borders and straddles the East and West. The Balkans has an indisputably complex history that through time has inextricably been influenced by both the Occident and Orient and because of this the Balkans has often been thought of as the “Other” of Europe, which as one can see from the quotes above is clearly stigmatised. Todorova traces the etymology of the word “Balkan” and shows that it was really the Balkan wars that gave the word political connotations after World War I. The stigmatisation is further illustrated by the pejorative term “balkanisation” that denotes “the process of nationalist fragmentation of former geographic and political units into new and problematically viable small states” (32) and that this “not only has come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but has also become a synonym for a reversion of the tribal, the backward, the primitive, [and] the barbarian” (3). After World War II, the pejorative idea of balkanisation was further reinforced when it was applied to the fragmentation of West Africa. Todorova explains that balkanisation, according to American reading, is the antithesis of the melting pot idea and that “multiculturalism has been equated with balkanisation, it is the name for excessive specialisation, a metaphor for postmodernism and postcommunism” (35-37).

Ernest Gellner, Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson have argued that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, and John B. Allcock, in explaining Yugoslavia,
reiterates this argument. Allcock’s key concepts in his comprehensive sociological study of modern Yugoslavia, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, are modernisation and globalisation. He sees the process of modernisation as incorporating and developing patterns of a truly global character under the auspices of capitalism (6-7). He explains that the complex problem of nationalism in Yugoslavia should be understood as manipulated ideology harnessed by the cynical legatees of the bankrupt League of Communists and those who were opportunistically seeking to displace them. For Allcock:

> it [nationalism] flourished not because it is deeply rooted in the culture of the people, but because, under conditions of economic collapse, political disorientation and direct terrorism, there is little else left to individuals by way of material from which to construct an understanding of their world and what has befallen it. (312)

In other words, nationalism became a form of displaced hope in the face of failed modernisation in Yugoslavia. This is not to say that the ancient hatreds and convoluted history of the Balkans did not come into play but that the real catalysts are the problems of modernity. Allcock particularly attributes the problem of nationalism to the failure of political modernisation through democracy, civil society and citizenship (245-310). He argues that the development of participatory democracy is usually accompanied by a civil society and the right of citizenship, but in Yugoslavia the failure of political modernisation was due to the retarded character of representative institutions and its failure to look beyond populist collectivism to manage a form of participatory democracy (277). Hence, Yugoslavia suffered from an “underdevelopment of civil society” as it failed to develop and institutionalise a sense of citizenship. He astutely
observes that a “civil society without citizenship is a recipe for fragmentation and unregulated conflict between groups” (251). It is predominantly this “unevenness of development” or failure that has led to the development of weak states with ambiguous identities and incompletely formed nations, which is a form of minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity (251, 310).

Paul Mojzes in *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* argues that the single most important reason for the disintegration of Yugoslavia was its inability to solve its national question. He describes Serb nationalism as hegemonistic while the nationalism of the other groups tended to be separatist. Serb nationalism was inclusive, absorbing, embracing and unself-conscious whereas the other Yugoslav nationalism had a sharper edge that tended to be exclusive, bitter, antagonistic, confrontational and self-conscious. Josip Broz-Tito after World War II was able to forge a federal state where he carefully balanced all national claims and conflicts, sometimes to the point of artificiality and visible injustice. Tito gave the illusion of self-management by involving direct participation at the local level, creating the myth that problems were solved in a democratic manner, but this entire system was subverted by his unitary, centrally governed state in which a single charismatic leader monopolised all decision making, masking the unresolved national question. After Tito’s death, the eight factions of the League of Communist Party increasingly identified themselves with the different national interests of their region and were unable to find effective common solutions to the disparate problems, increasing the conflicts and power struggles. According to Mojzes, the disintegration of Yugoslavia was largely caused by the
political elites of these different factions who could no longer agree on how to share power (71-86).

Therefore, the equation of multiculturalism with balkanisation is not entirely inaccurate—multiculturalism is a paradox and requires moderation. It is this paradoxical nature that has turned the dream of multicultural Yugoslavia into its nightmare of ethnic cleansing and political fragmentation. This same paradox is evident in Zolo’s understanding of multiculturalism and his assessment of cosmopolitanism (discussed in chapter two) that has made him describe the Gulf War as the “first cosmopolitan war” fought under the aegis of “Eurocentric cosmopolitanism”, which he argues is promulgated under the hegemony of the United States through the mobilisation of the United Nations and Western media. Zolo is critical of cosmopolitanism and argues that cosmopolitanism negates diversity and pluralism. As an alternative, he proposes “weak pacifism” and “weak interventionism” to encourage and preserve the “plurality of regimes”. Zolo’s idealistic proposal for multiculturalism is difficult to moderate and not easily achievable, but this is the message that Kusturica preaches in his films. Tito’s dictatorial multiculturalism, however, is an easier and viable alternative. Cosmopolitics is the assessment and mediation of such complex, often contradictory dynamics. Davorka Ljubisic, in *A Politics of Sorrow: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia*, points out that the Balkan conflict ultimately boils down to (particularly in Bosnia) the goal of avoiding national minority status that would ultimately mean expulsion or treatment as second-class citizens (xxi).

Finally, the discussion of the ideoscape and cosmopolitics of balkanisation would not be complete without the discussion of the city of Sarajevo and the media. Iordanova,
in Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media, explores the significance of Sarajevo. She writes:

As Sarajevo was systematically destroyed, the suffering of the city was systematically re-created in all conceivable art forms. Film-makers and visual artists played a major part in the project of keeping Sarajevo alive. Like Beirut, Sarajevo became a city-martyr, rediscovered numerous times and replicated as rubble. The city’s doomed reputation of having started World War I, thus making it a sort of jinxed originator of apocalypse, was soon forgotten and replaced by the image of a dynamic cosmopolitan location that had now fallen to dark forces. (235)

Before the siege, Sarajevo was a simple provincial town but Iordanova argues that the city’s suffering gave it the exposure it would otherwise not have received—which is the bitter irony of the mediascape of Sarajevo. As a result of the siege and its destruction, Sarajevo became a cosmopolitan city. Its martyrdom made it cosmopolitan because it came to embody tolerance and multiculturalism (235-237). According to Iordanova, the image and the perception of Sarajevo have been shaped by Western interpretations of the siege of Sarajevo and the Balkans. Since the 1990s, it has become the subject of extensive cinematic interest, becoming “a truly international project” (10). The Bosnian War has been explored in nearly 40 feature films and over 200 documentaries made worldwide to become “the event that occupied the minds of the largest number of film-makers since 1989” (10). International film festivals became popular and ideal venues for films on Bosnia (14) and the international media focus on the Balkans spawned many transnational productions, such as the widely distributed US-UK co-production
Welcome to Sarajevo (Michael Winterbottom 1997), which, according to Iordanova, remains the definitive image of Sarajevo (237). Kusturica’s Underground, a co-production between France, Germany and Hungary and numerous other documentaries made by internationally renowned documentarians such as Chris Marker, Marcel Ophuls and Helga Reidemeister are examples of this (10-13). Iordanova observes that:

Hundreds of intellectuals engaged in public support for the cause of ending the war in ex-Yugoslavia. The most visible expression of solidarity came from the international community of film-makers.

Gathering in the Balkans from many different countries around the world – the UK, USA, Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Norway, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Greece, Australia, New Zealand and Russia – they engaged in a truly transnational cinematic project. Unlike Spain, in Bosnia the cameras had firmly taken over from arms, giving a clear indication that, with time, media had acquired an equal combat power. (11)

Iordanova shows that during the siege the cultural life of Sarajevo intensified and diversified with events such as: the staging of Waiting for Godot by Susan Sontag, which received international publicity; anti-war art exhibitions held in and outside Sarajevo; and the widely exposed media documented footage of the 1994 ‘Miss Sarajevo’ pageant that happened amidst mortar fire (240-241). Iordanova highlights how, with new technology of modern media, intellectuals did not take up arms but fought with their art, and it was creativity that stood up against destruction (239). The extensive media coverage of the war resulted in the appreciation and respect for
Sarajevo’s martyred citizens. The city’s European looks and oriental character, with its diverse architectural landscapes of mosques and churches, came to embody its paradoxical “contested multiculturalism”; but it was precisely this paradoxical nature of multiculturalism that caused the city’s destruction. Sarajevo became the spotlight of international filmmaking with the siege (the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare). But the cultural activities decreased and the cosmopolitan spirit dissolved soon after the war. Once the media focus was gone, the city was left to its own devices to restore its multicultural harmony; however, the city remained cosmopolitan as long as it was a topic of discussion by international crowds (241). The deep-seated provincialism of the Balkans can be seen in many of Kusturica’s films. In the reception of Kusturica’s films, the ideoscape and cosmopolitics surrounding the Balkans, as discussed above, continues to inform our knowledge and perception of the Balkans.

The other deep irony of the international media focus is that the films made by outside observers enjoyed a much wider exposure than the ones local people made about themselves (245). In Kusturica’s case, capitalising on the Balkan Other (particularly with *Underground*) brought him international fame. The problem according to Iordanova was not so much the production opportunities but the politics of exposure. Footage shot and edited by Sarajevan filmmakers was considered potential propaganda material (as it was with the controversy over *Underground*). However, films made and footage used by Westerners were perceived as devoid of propaganda. Iordanova cites the example of the film, *Sarajevo: Ground Zero* (Sarajevo Group of Authors [SaGA] 1993), which was offered to a number of international networks but was rejected by all, and the reason given for its rejection was that it was not “suitable” for their format. Unable to
find exposure, many Sarajevan filmmakers were therefore willing to give up their footage to be used by people whose “format” was appropriate. This resulted in SaGA’s material being widely used by many Western documentarians making films about the city. The additional problem is that many of the films made by Sarajevan filmmakers are virtually inaccessible and are only available through personal arrangements, rare screenings at ethnic community meetings, or talks organised by enthusiasts at universities (246-247). Compounding the problem is the fact that many accounts by Sarajevans of the war are not entertaining but require demanding reading and viewing—they are depressing and repetitive. Iordanova explains that “they require continuous identification and compassion – an attitude which today’s audiences are not prepared to offer, and a commitment which goes beyond the straightforward habits of cultural consumption” (255). Kusturica’s parodies of the Balkans are, however, successful and well received because they capture the reality of the Balkan situation yet distance the audience from its depressing reality through the use of black or satirical humour. They are also complex narratives that capture the frenetic energy and absurdity of human desires.

3. *Underground* – An Allegory of Balkanisation and Cosmopolitan War

Xavier in his article “Historical Allegory” (whose theoretical framework was used in the analysis of González Iñárritu’s films in the previous chapter) cites Emir Kusturica’s *Underground* as an example of historical allegory (350). In her detailed evaluation of whether *Underground* is historical allegory or propaganda, Iordanova also builds a strong argument that the film is historical allegory and writes: “*Underground* is a historical film which offers a framework for interpreting the current violent state of
affairs in the Balkans” (Flames 112). The film is clearly set in a defined period of
Yugoslav history that spans over five decades, highlighting particular moments that take
place in the 1940s, 1960s and 1990s, where real events are referred to by their actual
names and are woven into fictional encounters and occurrences. The film revolves
around three main protagonists, Marko (Miki Manojlović), Crni (Lazar Ristovski) and
Natalija (Mirjana Joković).

The narrative is organised into three parts: War, Cold War and War. According
to Sean Homer in his article “Retrieving Emir Kusturica’s Underground as a Critique of
Ethnic Nationalism”, each of these dates is a key moment in Yugoslav history: 1941 –
the dismemberment of the old Yugoslav state and the beginning of the Partisan
resistance; 1961 – the first formal meeting of the Non-Aligned movement in Belgrade
and the opening up of Yugoslavia to the West; and 1992 – the Bosnian conflict and
effectively the end of the Yugoslav state (1). Both Iordanova and Homer argue that the
film is not propaganda. According to Iordanova, it is difficult to prove that Underground
contains carefully planned pro-Serbian propaganda (Flames 118) and Homer affirms this
when he identifies the difference between the two: political propaganda works through a
process of reduction, asserting a single unambiguous meaning whereas historical
allegory is open to multiple and contradictory readings (2). Underground is certainly the
latter, however the concern here is not to engage in the debate as to whether the film is
propaganda but to examine the cosmopolitics of historical allegory in Underground. The
film explores four spaces as allegorical fragments—the war, cellar, film set and the
afterlife/heaven. These magical realist spaces of the film exemplify the malign reality of
(global) cosmopolitan war(s) and balkanisation.
Zolo (as discussed earlier) argues that the Gulf War was the first global and cosmopolitan war (and later cites the Bosnian War as another example). He argues that international institutions for the first time were able to legitimise a cosmopolitan action, sanctioned by the United Nations (UN), which involved the US military and also became a media event witnessed by the world (19-52). The Balkans, therefore, with its long and complex history of ethnic, cultural and political conflict, ideoscape and mediascape (discussed in the previous section) exemplifies malign and multi-faceted cosmopolitan conflict or wars. This is particularly true of the recent balkanisation that culminated in ethnic cleansing and intervention by the UN. This global media event (seen in the martyred city of Sarajevo) deployed a typically skewed western perception of the Balkans, deeply resented by Kusturica.

The film begins in 1941 at the outbreak of World War II and this allegorical space of war is emblematised by the zoo which clearly refers to Yugoslavia as we learn that Ivan (Slavko Štimac), Marko’s brother, is a zoo keeper. The main protagonists of the film resort to different means of survival during the war—Natalija panders to Franz (Ernst Stötzner), a German officer, in order to sustain herself, her invalid brother and her interest in a theatrical career; while Marko and Crni deal in weapons and rob to survive. Crni, who is in love with Natalija, (in a highly ambivalent act which exemplifies the complexity and convolution of the Balkans) rescues/kidnaps Natalija to marry him. But during the (first) unofficiated wedding celebration (as the priest never shows up), Marko also tries to seduce Natalija, and before long, Franz and his Nazi troops appear. The

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9 Gocić explains that the significance of animals and nature in Kusturica’s films comes from a different tradition from Hollywood, which tends to use animals for a functional purpose that often drives a narrative. Yugoslav cinema, following more of an Eastern cinema tradition, uses animals in the symbolic order (70).
Germans capture Crni but Marko manages to escape and later devises a rescue plan. He rescues Natalija and Crni and then tricks Crni into hiding and running an underground cellar producing arms, while sustaining an on-going illusion that the war is raging above. Meanwhile Marko successfully seduces Natalija.

The destruction of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia is parodied by the bombs dropped on the zoo in this first section, where different varieties of animals are living in a common location. The most enduring image is that of a duck preening a tiger, defying the reality of the predator and prey relationship all too familiar in the animal kingdom. The bombing of the zoo alludes to the malign, nightmarish paradox of multiculturalism that plagues the long and complicated history of the Balkans. The intricate and convoluted plot of the film portrays the chaos and unrestrained behaviour of the characters and human beings which exemplify the Balkan situation that plays on the metaphor of a mad zoo where best friends and brothers exploit and betray each other, illustrating the convoluted minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity of the Balkans.10

Balkanisation and cosmopolitan war are best allegorised in the third part of the film that refers to the 1992 Bosnian conflict and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Marko negotiates a deal with an arms dealer or Kusturica (himself), who reflexively plays a cameo role. In bargaining with Marko, the arms dealer/Kusturica tells Marko that Marko

10 The soccer match in *Life is a Miracle* functions similarly to the metaphor of the zoo in *Underground*. Milos, Luka’s son is the star of the match. But Milos’s uncle and mother try to manipulate the situation to propel Milos to the national team, illustrating the politicking that goes on as the different parties, states and nationalist groups contest for power in Yugoslavia. A fog engulfs the stadium, making it hard to distinguish the players and also hides the sinister plots that are hatching, thus satirising the convoluted Balkan situation. During the match, Filipovic sends his henchmen to distract the goal keeper, Eso (one of Milos’ best buddies who happens to be Muslim), by comically pissing on Eso through a pipe in hope of gaining scores for the opposition team. This is an intentional allegory of the underhanded corruption and dealings in Yugoslavia and the divided political and economic interests of the ruling class. This soon breaks out into a fight and mayhem ensues.
no longer understands the Balkan situation as Marko has been away all these years—self-reflexively referring to Kusturica himself as a diasporic filmmaker. Through his cameo role, Kusturica questions the idea of home, recalling the familiar and unfamiliar—particularly the pain of seeing his home razed to the ground and his country disintegrating right before his eyes. The most poignant scene is probably when Natalija (in her old age) comes looking for Marko in war-ravaged Bosnia (after his arms deal negotiation with Kusturica) and Marko laments that “No war is a war until a brother kills a brother”—not only referring to his brother, Ivan, who has just tried to kill him but also the people of the Balkans caught up in the senseless ethnic cleansing. A soldier reports to Crni that he has found two profiteers and Crni orders them to be killed only to realise later that they are his friends—Marko and Natalija. The ravaged scene depicts the church in the background and the cross in the centre of the shot with an inverted Christ that has fallen off the cross. Marko’s wheelchair is ablaze, with him and Natalija in it circling the cross. This scene poignantly speaks of the “mad zoo” of the cosmopolitan Bosnian War.11

Levi, in his discussion of the question of responsibility for the war, argues that the film blames all sides—the ethno-nationalism found in Yugoslavia (101-105). But the presence of the UN and Ivan’s German doctor can be interpreted as Kusturica

11 The idea and longing for home is further illustrated in the character of Ivan, who, since the destruction of the underground cellar, has been in a German asylum, deprived of a home (after the dissolution of Tito/Marko’s Yugoslavia that also speaks of Kusturica’s homelessness). Ivan’s doctor, in his attempt to verify the information he learns from Ivan, discovers that Marko and Natalija are wanted by Interpol for arms dealing. He eventually reveals this to Ivan and the upset Ivan heads for a manhole to try and return to Yugoslavia. Lost in the underground tunnels, Ivan seeks direction to Yugoslavia (home) from an UN vehicle that has just come from Bosnia. The driver laughs at Ivan’s ignorance as Yugoslavia no longer exists. Ivan’s doctor, who is no longer able to take the journey, asks to be taken to Italy and abandons Ivan. The UN driver tells the doctor this is only possible if he, like the others, pays a fee, suggesting the corruption and counter productivity (even uselessness) of the UN.
implicating the whole world in not doing enough to prevent this cosmopolitan war since it became an international media event. Lost in the underground tunnels, Ivan finds his long lost (familiar) monkey, Soni, and, as they approach the cellar, the walls of the tunnel are horrifyingly dripping with blood. Above the cellar, Ivan finds Marko negotiating an arms deal. As Marko wheels himself away, Ivan comes after him and beats him with his cane from behind for his treachery. Marko tries to stop him by saying it is the greatest sin to kill one’s brother and pleads with Ivan since he had saved Ivan’s life three times before. But unrelenting Ivan only stops when he thinks that Marko is dead. Marko feigns death to stop Ivan’s beating and the distraught Ivan goes into the church and hangs himself. The tragic, mad zoo situation of the Bosnian War speaks keenly of displacement and the deep longing for home.

The underground cellar is the second allegorical space of the film (strongly alluded to in the title of the film), which is mostly represented by the second section of the film, “The Cold War”. Taking a Freudian and Lacanian approach, the allegory of the underground cellar can be read as representing repressed desires and Lacanian misrecognition—the film’s treatment of Yugoslavia’s unresolved national question can be interpreted as misrecognition, which also plays on the idea of home and homelessness recalling the uncanny—the familiar and unfamiliar. Pavle Levi’s (and Homer’s uptake of the) “genitofugal libido” aesthetics further develops these Freudian and Lacanian ideas.

Twenty years later, after the outbreak of World War II, we are told that Marko has become a close collaborator of Tito, and Marko pays his debt to Crni by turning Crni into a war hero. A film, Spring Comes on a White Horse, is then made in honour of Crni, based on Marko’s memoirs. The deep irony is that Crni is still alive and producing arms in the cellar (contributing to Marko’s wealth) because Crni is led to believe that the war is still raging on—surely if Marko is truly sincere, he would confess to deceiving Crni for the last 20 years. The sequence only reveals Marko’s
ruthless intention to continue exploiting Crni and containing him underground. The underground cellar is an obvious historical allegory of Yugoslavia under Tito. Marko in many ways is a satire of Tito, Yugoslavia’s great dictator, with his grand scheme of deception that runs the underground business of manufacturing arms. Tito in the last half of the twentieth century managed to unify Yugoslavia with his unique brand of socialism that has been labelled “Titoism” (he was the only successful socialist leader who defied Stalin), and he also opened Yugoslavia to the West (and was able to create an independent economy). As discussed above, Tito carefully moderated all national claims and conflicts and gave the illusion that all national claims were solved in a democratic manner (hence the national question of Yugoslavia was never really resolved). Tito was so effective that in 1974 he was elected to be the President of Yugoslavia for life.

Marko’s heavy surveillance of the underground cellar, the fake radio reports and air raid warnings that he stages are sardonic parodies of Titoism. Marko’s most cunning ploy is when he plans and stages Natalija’s appearance in the cellar. When Natalija reads the script of how things are to play out, she is disgusted at the lies that Marko has conceived, but Marko cleverly manipulates the situation (which attests to Tito’s crafty political manipulation) and convinces Natalija that no text contains truth—all art is a big lie—truth is only found in real life. Seduced by their own cunning, the couple make love in a way that hints of sado-masochism, thus alluding to fascism—Natalija hits Marko with the heel of her stiletto and in the next scene she appears all beaten up, wearing the very same dress in the cellar. Once in the underground cellar, Natalija in her supposed delirium renews Crni’s affection by telling him she loves him and the underground inhabitants are led to believe that she has been tortured by the Gestapo.
The significance and implications of Titoism are further evident in Jovan (Srdjan Todorović), Crni’s son who is born in the underground cellar. Jovan is a product of his environment and when he eventually leaves the cellar, he is both excited and scared of the new outside world (representing the world outside of Yugoslavia) that he is seeing, experiencing and discovering for the first time. Jovan is more scared than excited as he thinks pheasants are dangerous and mistakes the moon for the sun. Crni tries to teach Jovan to swim but sadly Crni’s hunger for war and nationalism are greater than his love for his son. When a shooting helicopter flies over them, he leaves his son to drown in pursuit of the chopper. When Crni returns Jovan is nowhere to be found; he dives into the Danube in search of his son, only to find himself caught in a net—a graphic metaphor that speaks of the entrapment by his own madness and hunger for war and nationalism.

The cosmopolitical parody of the mad and uncritical nationalism of the Balkans, and the unresolved national question of Yugoslavia under Titoism, can be seen in the characters of Crni, Jovan, and the filmmaker (and also the allegorical space of the cellar). Crni, deceived into believing that the war has gone on for the last 20 years, is hungry for war and wants to eliminate the German fascists; Jovan, his son, believes and trusts his father unquestioningly and follows him to war (which references Tito); and the self-absorbed filmmaker, obsessed with capturing reality and creating art, represents the (insane) key players responsible for the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Yugoslavia. Steven K. Pavlowitch, in his assessment of communism in Yugoslavia in *Tito: Yugoslavia’s Great Dictator*, argues that Tito’s system failed to create free individuals capable of critical thought, instead creating “subjects without ideas who are quick to
embrace uncritically the nationalisms that had been preserved in their most primitive form beneath the monolithic structure of Communism” (108). What Kusturica tries to show in the film is that there is not one clear reason for the tragic state of affairs in the Balkans but a mixture of complex circumstances, personal ambitions and needs in the last 50 years that have created the zoo situation of the Balkans that we know (through the mediascape and ideoscape) today.

The third allegorical space of Underground is the film set of Spring Comes on a White Horse. Kusturica plays with the reflexive, specular mise-en-abyme idea of a play within a film and a film within a film. In the first section of Underground, Crni walks into a play that Natalija is performing and rescues/kidnaps her. Natalija’s role as an actor is both reflexive and lends itself to the idea of deception and illusion. Staging her role in the underground cellar as discussed above (where she plays the role of a tortured victim of the Gestapo) is another example of how Kusturica cleverly uses this device. But the ultimate ludicrous (ironically funny but not when we think of what Kusturica is trying to portray) and keen example is on the film set of Spring Comes on a White Horse. Crni and Jovan, after escaping the underground cellar, stumble onto the film set but mistake it for World War II because the actors playing the roles of Marko, Crni, Natalija and Franz are played by the same actors: Manojlović, Ristovski, Joković and Stötzner. So Crni shoots the actor acting as Franz, thinking he has shot the fascist Nazi officer (Franz); while the director, excited at the reality and spontaneity of the action, dementedly spurs them on. The set of Spring Comes on a White Horse, a film that ironically celebrates Crni’s heroism and martyrdom, is not only hilarious but self-reflexive, playing on the
mise en abyme idea of a film within a film (together with the earlier play within a film) that cleverly further allegorises the mad zoo situation of the Balkans.

The final allegorical space in *Underground* is in the afterlife or heaven. In the last section of the film, all the characters are seen swimming to shore (seemingly ‘heaven’ and home) where they celebrate the reprise of Jovan and Jelena’s wedding outside the underground cellar—this time organised by Vera (Mirjana Karanović), Jovan’s mother who dies (in the cellar) early in the film giving birth to Jovan. Both Gocić and Iordanova explain that weddings are centrepieces of Balkan films and Kusturica, himself, admits to his obsession with weddings.13 Iordanova explains that weddings show the multiple layers of interpersonal discomfort, gender inequality and controversial social dynamics. Conflicts inevitably erupt as passion heats up after a few drinks during a wedding as part of the normal course of events where animosities and jealousies become visible (*Kusturica* 121). There are three weddings in the film: the unofficial wedding between Crni and Natalija at the beginning of the film, Jovan and Jelena’s wedding in the cellar, and the final reprise of Jovan and Jelena’s wedding in heaven. According to Iordanova, the wedding is also a metaphor for coming of age and is equated with maturity (*Kusturica* 121). Hence, during Jovan’s first wedding, Crni promises his son that after the wedding they will break out of the cellar to fight the war above. Gocić, in explaining the cult of the wedding in the Balkans relates it to *jouissance* and the Bosnian musical genre of the *sevdalinka*, which dates back to the times of Turkish rule. The *sevdah*, according to Gocić is a recurring motif in Serbian cinema (88-

13 Although there is not a wedding in *Life is a Miracle*, Milos’s farewell and acceptance into the Partizan (reference to Tito/Titoism) football team functions very much like a wedding as it marks his entry into adulthood.
It contains a sad tone (to the Western ear), often wailing about life and lost love. 

*Sevdah*, which is derived from *sevdalinka*, is a generalisation to denote a type of emotional reaction to music—this is often accompanied by drinking (a Slavic tradition) and remembering something to be sorry about. The *sevdah* is a strange state of extreme exaltation and, at the same time, deep sadness that Slavs fall into while listening to music, usually with live performers. It is a synthesis of pain and pleasure and, in an extreme form of *sevdah*, one tends to physically hurt oneself in order to feel the pain and spill blood. *Sevdah* is evident in the second wedding, when Crni, after discovering Marko’s deep betrayal, ends their friendship and Marko, in his frustration and guilt, shoots his own knee and cripples himself. The wedding culminates with Soni (Ivan’s monkey) launching a missile from a tank which blows up the cellar. Soni’s monkeying around and the wedding turning into a fiasco serve to illustrate Kusturica’s comment on the mad zoo situation of the Balkans.\(^\text{14}\)

But during the final wedding, the characters are reunited and reconciled, free from their shortcomings and all is forgiven. Bato (Davor Dujmović), Natalija’s invalid brother is no longer confined to a wheelchair and is able to dance; and Ivan, not dead nor old, but youthful and no longer stuttering, tells us:

> Here we built new houses with red roofs and chimneys, where storks will rest. With wide-open doors for dear guests, we’ll thank the soil for feeding us and the sun for warming us. And the fields for reminding us of

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\(^{14}\) Levi discusses the “aesthetics of nationalist pleasure” particularly with Kusturica’s films in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav cinema in terms of “genitofugal libido”. He conceives genitofugal libido as the expenditure of libidinal energy—energies in *jouissance*, libidinal exuberance and heightened scopic gratification that form a centrifugal effect of circular motions seen in Kusturica’s camera work (85-108). Thus, *sevdah* is part of genitofugal libido. Homer reiterates Levi’s aesthetic of genitofugal libido in *Underground* and describes it as “the libidinal economy of ethnonationalism” (2).
the green grass of home. With pain, sorrow and joy, we shall remember
our country, as we tell our children stories that start like fairytales: Once
upon a time there was a country...

A piece of land resembling Yugoslavia, on which the characters are celebrating, breaks
off and floats into the Danube as the celebration continues and the film ends with: “This
story has no end.” This final magical realist, allegorical fragment of heaven speaks
pointedly of the need for a cosmopolitics of tolerance and forgiveness. Kusturica’s films
have been unflatteringly described as “Yugonostalgic” but this sentiment is perfectly
understandable when we consider his passionate dream of a multicultural Yugoslavia. In
the analysis of Life is a Miracle in the next section, the allegory of weak pacifism will
further extend the cosmopolitics of multiculturalism.

4. Life is a Miracle – An Allegory of Weak Pacifism

While Underground covers the history of Yugoslavia, Life is a Miracle (2004)
poignantly deals with the reality of intolerance and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia
(particularly in 1992 as the film indicates at the opening). As seen in Underground, Life
is a Miracle continues to use animals in the symbolic order. In one of the opening
scenes, the hatching of chicken eggs in a cage is juxtaposed with Luka (Slavko Štimac)
sucking on a fresh egg to convey the harsh reality and order of life—life’s paradoxical
wonder and terror as one of the characters muses that life is a miracle—this sentiment is
again evoked later in the film when Sabaha (Nataša Šolak) delivers a baby in the midst
of the Bosnian war. The reality and terror of ethnic cleansing is seen when the town’s
postman, Veljo (Aleksandar Berček) stumbles upon bears rummaging in a Bosnian
home and he discovers that the inhabitant has been slaughtered and hangs on a tree.
Veljo runs to Luka to inform him that the “beasts” are coming from Croatia, referring to the *Ustashas*. These metaphors point to the reality of the ethnic strife in the Balkans, which is also seen in the animals found on Luka’s property—chickens, birds, cat and dog (a miniature “zoo” of sorts in comparison to *Underground*) that represent multi-ethnic Yugoslavia—the animal fights (that happen throughout the film) all symbolically illustrate the cruel and grim realities of the senseless Bosnian War.

But the ultimate allegorical emblem of the film is the magical realist weeping, lovesick donkey, Milica. This donkey best exemplifies the allegory of weak pacifism by preaching the message of stubborn love. Milica, Vujan’s (Obrad Burović) donkey is trying to commit suicide because she has lost her love and is repeatedly found standing on the train tracks refusing to budge and “crying”. Milica is a stubborn donkey, especially stubborn in love. Her refusal to move from the train tracks exemplifies weak pacifism because all rail vehicles are forced to stop for her (as she is weeping and lovesick). Hence the film purveys the message of weak pacifism, in order to explore the cosmopolitics of ethical co-existence. This message is allegorised in the central story of a Serb’s (Luka’s) forbidden love for a Muslim girl (Sabaha).

Luka, an engineer, and his family have moved from Belgrade to a rural Bosnian town so that he can build a railway line to Belgrade which serves as a metaphor for building and improving communication between the various ethnic groups in the Balkans. But the characters’ lives are thrown into turmoil, particularly Luka’s family,

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15 According to Morris Helmig and Sybil E. Sewell (who are co-editors of the *Canadian Donkey and Mule Handbook*) the donkey’s intelligence is often mistaken for stubbornness. The donkey is more intelligent than the horse. A frightened donkey is more likely to stop and carefully assess the situation before determining the best course of action, whereas a horse is more likely to bolt in panic.
when war breaks out. Luka’s wife, Jadranka (Vesna Trivalić) runs off with a musician from Hungary and his son, Milos’s (Vuk Kostić) naive dream of playing soccer is foiled when he is enlisted to fight the war. Milos becomes a war prisoner and Sabaha is used as a scapegoat to retrieve Milos—she is mistakenly assumed to come from an influential Muslim family and is under house arrest at Luka’s residence, to be later exchanged for Milos. But despite their incompatible religious, ethnic backgrounds and age, Luka and Sabaha inadvertently fall in love. As with *Underground*, *Life is a Miracle* is also historical allegory (history-with-holes) as both films mine the raw materials of Yugoslav culture.16

The Balkan situation is likened to Luka and Jadranka’s marriage, which is far from ideal. Jadranka runs away with a musician to Hungary presumably because of the war and provincialism of a small Bosnian town. Missing love and his family (Jadranka and Milos), Luka soon falls in love with Sabaha. When the extramarital couple escapes to Luka’s late father’s (Vujan) cabin in the Balkan countryside, an interesting allegorical space is created. The intensity of their love magically resurrects Vujan (supposedly dead for five years) who tells them of the magical time when he fell in love. This allegorical space portrays the couple’s blissful love through the “genitofugal libido” aesthetic of the film where the bed levitates and flies in a rotating manner across the beautiful Balkan fall landscape.17 As the bed flies over the Balkan landscape we see happier times of

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16 Iordanova discusses this in terms of prosthetic memory in *Underground*, also clearly evident in *Life is a Miracle*.
17 Levi argues specifically in *Underground* that Kusturica’s cinematic choreographies of enjoyment reinforces ethnic narcissism and prevents the issue of responsibility for war crimes from escaping the collectivist mentality through the aesthetic of genitofugal libido, which he conceives as part of the aesthetic of nationalist pleasure. This is even more evident in *Life is a Miracle* as Luka and Sabaha’s relationship preaches the need for ethnic co-existence and the couple rolling down a hill, moving in a circle and the camera’s circular movements capturing their lovemaking, all exemplify the aesthetic of
Luka and his son felling trees in the Balkan forest, but it is unclear whether the sequence occurs before or after the war—regardless it is a pacifist image of the beautiful, rustic and idyllic Balkans untouched by war.

The drama of Luka and Sabaha’s love illustrates the complexities of the ethnic and religious strife of the Balkans. Towards the end of the film, Sabaha is ironically shot by a Muslim (Sabaha is Muslim herself) who mistakes her for a Čeknik and she is coerced with the involvement of the UN into returning to the Muslims when she has no desire to do so—as they carry her on a stretcher across the bridge, she protests that she does not want to go home. Apart from finding love with Luka, it appears that Sabaha is well settled in the Bosnian town. From the beginning of the film, Sabaha has a stable nursing job at the hospital and gets on well with her colleagues. When she notices Luka from a distance for the first time, she is immediately infatuated with him and in a conversation, her colleague remarks that she would not get involved with non-Muslim men, but Sabaha dismissively responds, “As if it mattered!” In the extramarital couple’s pillow talk, the idea of emigration to Australia surfaces to escape the madness of the Balkans, and when Sabaha is in a critical medical condition being treated for her gun shot wound, Luka uses their dream of Australia to inspire her to hang on. But ultimately Luka fails in preventing the exchange. It is deeply ironic that as Luka runs after Sabaha on the bridge where the exchange takes place, Milos walks towards him from the opposite direction and Luka is obligated to hug his son. Arrested with torn loyalties, tears fill his eyes (of joy or sadness or perhaps a convolution of the two) as he watches his love disappear. His love affair with Sabaha is very much like their first encounter in

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genitofugal libido. The sequence of the couple on the hospital stretcher, flying bed and Filipovic’s sexual episodes are further examples.
the hospital when the pair is circumstantially forced into a perilous (genitofugal libidinal) ride on the stretcher. At the end of the film, the last image magically shows the couple’s (imaginary) reunification on the lovesick donkey (Milica) as they ride out of the tunnel (to Australia perhaps). The drama of their love born out of the madness of ethnic strife speaks of weak pacifism and the need for love and tolerance. After the exchange, distraught Luka tries to commit suicide by lying across the train tracks but he is intercepted and saved by the magical realist lovesick, weeping Milica who refuses to allow the train to pass. The stubborn love of a donkey is the most conspicuous allegorical trope in the film preaching the message of love as a form of weak pacifism.

The most significant allegorical space created in the film is Luka’s project of building the railway line which elucidates Yugoslavia’s problems of underdevelopment, corruption and failed modernisation. The railway line was implemented to lure tourism and develop rural Bosnia, but instead it becomes a vehicle for the illegal activities of smuggling under the new corrupt mayor, Filipovic (Nikola Kojo), which further exacerbates Yugoslavia’s underdevelopment. In a particular burlesque scene, Filipovic and his Mafia are shown cavorting and snorting coke lines on the train tracks. This is a parody of how capitalism and modern technology pervert and corrupt when used for personal gratification and illegal profits (smuggling oil and cigarettes rather than transporting basic necessities, such as food required during the war). Filipovic’s sexual perversion and corrupt capitalistic exploitations are eventually literally blown away—similar to Marko and Natalija’s end in Underground, portraying the destructive consequences of the genitofugal libido’s compounding greed, political profiteering and power struggle (Levi 96).
The precarious predicament of Yugoslavia is further compounded by the mounting nationalism that soon breaks out into war. This is witnessed through the media reports that also criticise how the Western media misrepresents the Balkans—in response, Luka throws out the television set and shoots it; and later, when a Western reporter tries to interview Milos after his release, he belligerently burps into her microphone. The parody of Balkan nationalism is best depicted in Tomo’s (Davor Janjić) military garb when Milos, Eso (Adnan Omerović) and Tomo go out binge drinking. Tomo in his drunkenness gets Eso (who is a Muslim) to sit a beer bottle on his head and shoots the bottle—in his drunkenness he admits that he actually aimed at Eso’s head; Eso, wanting to get even, does the same to Tomo. No one gets hurt but Kusturica effectively communicates the inanity of Balkan nationalism. As well as this, nationalism is not explicitly but implicitly portrayed in the film—the characters are cognisant of each other’s ethnic backgrounds and, like it or not, soon become embroiled in ethnic cleansing, which can be seen in the parody of the soccer match early in the film. The many plots hatched during the match capture the complicated social, economic and political interests of the many players in Yugoslavia who caused its collapse. The underdevelopment of a civil society and the lack of equal citizenship (the unresolved national question) in Yugoslavia make it impossible for Luka and Sabaha’s love to survive, and thus both Sabaha and Milos become easy targets as political hostages. The country is torn apart by their different ethnic, religious and nationalistic affiliations.

In the thick of all this, the film also questions the idea of home. Milos and Jadranka pine for Belgrade (the film seems to suggest that this is home for them) and Sabaha does not want to return home to the Muslims. It should also be noted that
although Kusturica’s films are preoccupied with Balkan themes, he no longer resides in Bosnia but France. Therefore, as discussed earlier he is a diasporic or cosmopolitan filmmaker—his evocation of Australia and the penguins in the film are a testament to his commitment to cosmopolitanism. Although Kusturica is self-exiled, he is a Bosnian Muslim who stresses the Serbian line of his origin (Iordanova, Kusturica 6). He has explicitly expressed: “I was against the selective humanism. I cannot stand the ethnic cleansing [carried out] by the Bosnian Serb, but neither can I stand the ethnic cleansing [carried out] by the Croats”’ (Iordanova, Flames 117). Both Underground and Life is a Miracle envision a greater humanity where as human beings we need to learn to live in peace with each other despite our differences—seen in the broken piece of land in Underground where everyone is reconciled, and the stubborn love of a donkey and Luka and Sabaha’s love, who are able to transcend ethnic differences. Thus, the unresolved national question and the question of home are difficult and complex issues for the Balkans. The ethnic strife—the clashing point, the fault line, the fracture zone, the explosive “in-betweenness” of the Balkans played out in the terrifying reality of ethnic cleansing plays on the paradox of multiculturalism as well as the familiar and unfamiliar notions of home, which explains the minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism of the Balkans that is similar to Third World economic disorder that Jameson theorises. Gocić, in his classification of Kusturica’s films under ethno and “Third Worldism” explains that these categories are a novel and self-conscious synthesis of three components: the “primitive” Third-World environment, advanced Western production values, and the transposition that is consciously attuned to a dialogue with contemporary art (157). Gocić’s categorisation is problematic because Yugoslavia is not Third World but Second World and postcommunist. Thus, Kusturica’s work more accurately belongs to Second
Cinema. However, one can see why Gocić and Jameson, in focusing on minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism, align it with the Third World because as Bjelić points out, the Balkans in many ways have similar problems to Latin America and many Third World countries (Bjelić and Savić 2).

Thus, the film shows that the people of Yugoslavia are victims of uneven modernisation and have been failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, depriving them of the comforts and customs of national belonging, of a home. The cosmopolitics of balkanisation and belonging (as in Underground) is a strong message in the film. Participatory democracy is non-existent and a stable civil society and the right of citizenship are clearly retarded in Yugoslavia. Corruption, weak infrastructure and uneven development make Yugoslavia particularly vulnerable to nationalism. Ethnic cleansing, therefore, becomes one of the horrors of failed modernisation in Yugoslavia, which is another form of minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism. But balkanisation and ethnic cleansing are clearly not the solutions—weak pacifism is—where better understanding and communication become imperative through the metaphor of the need for connection and unity in the allegorical space of a train line.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to discuss the relevance of Jameson’s theoretical framework in relation to Kusturica’s magical realist films. Jameson’s theory was useful and relevant in considering the early magical realist films that came out of Latin America but as this dissertation has demonstrated, it is becoming increasingly obsolete, with capitalism penetrating our world at a fast rate through globalisation. This has profoundly affected the production and distribution process and values of films with
transnational collaboration becoming an increasing reality. Although outdated, Jameson’s theory is still useful; it provides a basis to think about magical realist films, especially Kusturica’s films. Many elements that Jameson explored are evident in the two films analysed in this chapter because of the cosmopolitics of minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity that Kusturica deals with through balkanisation.

In terms of Jameson’s theory, both *Underground* and *Life is a Miracle* are generational and not. In *Underground* the history of Yugoslavia is explored in the last 50 years through prosthetic memory,¹⁸ and the use of actual footage of World War II and Tito’s funeral literally make the film history-with-holes, at the same time recreating and contributing to the ideoscape and mediascape of the Balkans, which is a form of simulacra through the allegorical space of the war, cellar, film set and heaven. Similarly, simulacra is evident in the allegory of the stubborn and insistent love of a donkey in spite of ethnic differences and the allegorical space of the train line in *Life is a Miracle* with the recreation of some of the (metaphoric) horrors of the Bosnian War (such as the corpse hanging on the tree) and the rustic, idyllic and touristic images of the Balkan landscapes. Kusturica’s films are, therefore, generational, yet at the same time there is an overlap, coexistence and simulacra of the past, present and even future vision (of the broken piece, stubborn donkey or train line) of Yugoslavia (which contain precapitalist, capitalist and technological features) through the creation of subjective histories of the characters. At the same time, the films are also glossy because of the subjective histories

¹⁸ In her discussion of history and memory in Kusturica’s films, Iordanova describes prosthetic memory as personal memory that is privileged in an effort to disengage cultural memory from public history, thus creating subjective connections to the national past (*Kusturica* 160).
(simulacra) recreated with prosthetic memory through “Yugonostalgia”, making the films both nostalgia films and not (because it is history-with-holes). Moreover, these films contribute strongly to the ideoscape and cosmopolitics of balkanisation where Kusturica exploits the Otherness of the Balkans that can be understood as Jameson’s notion of colour (through sevdah and genitofugal libido) which has built and maintained his international reputation, commodifying his films with balkanisation and magical realism (also sometimes described as “ethno” films).

The production process and values of Kusturica’s films also do not belong to Third Cinema. Kusturica can currently easily raise money internationally to make his films based on his international reputation, so it is problematic to consider his films as part of Third Cinema (as Jameson theorises magical realist films). With globalisation showing no signs of abating, the idea of Third Cinema is fast disappearing, especially since capitalism and transnational film practices are becoming increasingly entrenched in our world. Kusturica’s films are more accurately steeped and spawned out of Second Cinema, especially considering his background (training at FAMU and Europe) and the fact that he works out of the French film industry.¹⁹

Finally, Kusturica’s films are consciously attuned to a dialogue with contemporary art. The two films analysed here celebrate marginality and Balkan identity. Kusturica cleverly and interestingly employs fetishistic localism and the cosmopolitics of balkanisation and belonging (which is a unique tactic and combination not seen in the other films analysed in this dissertation, yet he is extremely successful

¹⁹ Although some may argue that the low budgets of Kusturica’s early films and his commitment to the minoritarian cosmopolitanism and modernity of Yugoslavia align his work with Third Cinema.
internationally), which are also in line with postmodernism.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, Kusturica’s films are not an alternative to postmodernism (as Jameson suggests that magical realist films are) but are indeed postmodern. In addition, they are postmodern precisely because, as Xavier postulates, they are historical allegories. Kusturica’s unique cultural situation as a diasporic and cosmopolitan filmmaker places him in an advantageous position to facilitate dialogue on cultural differences, multiculturalism and cultural displacement. \textit{Underground} and \textit{Life is a Miracle} reveal the cosmopolitics of another variant form of minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism (different from Latin America)—the cosmopolitics of balkanisation and belonging that specifically illustrates Yugoslavia’s failed political modernisation through the lack of democracy, a civil society and citizenship. These films question nationalism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism by focusing on the human right of citizenship and preaching a stubborn love that is exemplified in the stubborn donkey, Milica. This is humourously seen in \textit{Life is a Miracle} when the UN soldiers are comically unable to move Milica or stop her from disrupting the exchange between Sabaha and Milos. We witness the stubborn love of a donkey—to be tolerant of one’s neighbour, advocating pacifism and a conciliatory form of minoritarian cosmopolitanism in former Yugoslavia and Kusturica’s greater vision is to realise this for all of humanity.

Magical realism, therefore, in Kusturica’s films is clearly a cosmopolitical phenomenon that explores and articulates minoritarian modernity and cosmopolitanism.

\textsuperscript{20} Gocić argues that ethno and Third Worldism are postmodern phenomena (157). However, Gocić’s categorisation is problematic, and it is preferable to see Kusturica’s films as historical allegories and postcommunist products, and it is this that makes them postmodern.
as it deeply engages with the powerful forces at play in our contemporary world of nationalism, multiculturalism and globalisation. While Jameson’s theory of historical raw material, narrative and colour are still somewhat useful constituents to understand filmic magical realism, his theory has become obsolete due to the changing production process and values of filmmaking. But as Jameson points out, magical realist films contain both historical and sociological preconditions, hence we benefit not only from seeing or looking into the filmic present, but in Kusturica’s case, the past, present and future as well or through the notion of prosthetic memory, which are the subjective connections to the national past. Thus, magical realism creates a new allegorical relationship with history which captures the ruins and radical fragmentation of modern life that often involves remnants or residues of older communities and collectivities. Such images are prevalent in Life is a Miracle where we see the aging Vujan carrying the coffin on his back, beckoning his donkey, contrasted with the train as a new form of transportation. It is imperative to recognise here, the entrenched cultural colonialism that has been noted by Bjelić and Savić in the Balkans (and Latin America).
Chapter 7

Conclusion

The magical realist films analysed in this dissertation are constructed in resistance to a dominating colonial discourse that associates modernity and progress with “the West” and “the North”. Latin America and the Balkans have been deemed “the backward South”, which often connotes a seething pit of racial and sexual violence compared to the liberal North. In Chapter One, I surveyed and evaluated the literature on magical realism, and mapped its development from painting to cinema, noting the paucity of writing on magical realist cinema. Examining the various (often confusing and convoluted) permutations and definitions of magical realism, I divided the field into two main strands: European and Latin American. I argued that the postcolonial significance of the literary criticism of magical realism (developed from the Latin American strand) is gaining currency and increasing prominence as a strategy for decolonisation. As Hart and Ouyang have noted, magical realism’s resistance, subversion and reconfiguration of modern Western epistemology are often manifested in its preoccupation with imperialism and nationalism (16-19; 153). The increasing globalisation of magical realism not only enforces a postcolonial and postmodern agenda dictated by capitalist consumption, it also exposes the importance of cosmopolitics. Because of its salient characteristics (such as transculturalism, hybridity and cosmopolitanism), I have argued, throughout this dissertation, that cosmopolitics is crucial to understanding magical realist cinema in the contemporary world.
In Chapter Two, I defined, demonstrated and established the relevance of cosmopolitics, particularly in a globalised context. I argued that cosmopolitanism is the result of the dynamics and power struggle between the colonised and coloniser, demonstrating and exploring the growing importance of the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship. One of the earliest films described as magical realist, *Macunaima*, was analysed in this chapter. I argued that this canonical film exemplifies minoritarian cosmopolitics, illustrating displaced modernity and its conflicts in Brazil (which also extends to Latin America as the film is part of New Latin American Cinema).

*Macunaima* was an early example of cosmopolitanism and the quest for Brazilian (and Latin American) identity through magical realism. In Chapter Three, the significance of minoritarian cosmopolitics in Latin America was explored in terms of Márquesian magical realism and New Latin American Cinema (also described as Third Cinema). Gabriel García Márquez’s work is pivotal to magical realism in cinema. This chapter examined the films that have been adapted from García Márquez’s literary work and many of these films have also involved García Márquez in the production process. I argued that the collaborative nature of these films, across national boundaries, not only constituted New Latin American Cinema, but also articulated Latin American realities and sensibilities. They also consolidate the pan-Latin-American film movement by asserting a decolonising, cosmopolitan Latin American identity.

Expanding the geographical horizons of “Latin America”, Chapters Four and Five examined the treatment of magical realism in Hollywood. I discussed its reception and co-option in terms of metropolitan cosmopolitanism, specifically in the context of global Hollywood. In Chapter Four, I demonstrated the extent to which magical realism
has been commodified through fetishistic localism (of food and the Other), particularly with the magical realist blockbuster hit, *Like Water for Chocolate*. Metropolitan cosmopolitics is determined by capital gain and frequently dictated by the mainstream; hence, I have argued that (as Brennan points out) global Hollywood’s particular brand of cosmopolitanism is essentially the surreptitious imaging of American values that are commodified into “American images-for-use”. The consumption of this problematic (metropolitan) cosmopolitanism has been described by Wu as “eating magical Otherness”—where magical realism is reductively commodified into markers of Latino cultural identity that obliterate national or cultural specificities (186). I have demonstrated the extent to which the marketing and distribution of foreign films by global Hollywood, such as *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Woman on Top* and *Central do Brasil*, perpetuate this problematic and ersatz cosmopolitanism. However, the quandary raised by the consumption of these films is that although (metropolitan/American) cosmopolitanism is problematic, these films do begin to give more visibility to the Latino Other, which (in terms of migration and media globalisation) has the capacity to challenge the power imbalance between the North and Latin America.

In Chapter Five, I focused on the metropolitan cosmopolitics of allegorical fragments, where I argued that network narratives and magical realism become indistinguishable and are melded together to become truly globalised products. A case in point is Alejandro González Iñárritu’s films, which help constitute Border Cinema. This argument is illustrated through the examples of *Amores perros* and *21 Grams*. Both were marketed and distributed as indie and arthouse film(s) by global Hollywood that
celebrate artistic merits and hybridity where true cosmopolitanism can be fully realised (regardless of whether in reality it is or not realised by its viewers).

Finally, in Chapter Six, the films of Emir Kusturica were analysed as a case study to explore the growing significance of magical realist films in the contemporary international scene by focusing on the cosmopolitical situation of the Balkans. Kusturica’s films expose the obsolescence of Jameson’s theory of magical realism in film. And they extend magical realism outside Latin America. Departing from the metropolitan cosmopolitics of global Hollywood discussed in Chapters Four and Five, I explored the ideoscape and mediascape of the Balkans and demonstrated the extent to which the minoritarian cosmopolitics of Kusturica’s films commodify the Balkan Other so successfully that Kusturica has enjoyed international fame as a unique “universal artist” in a class of his own, laying claim to the throne of European cinema that has remained vacant since the death of Tarkovsky (Iordanova, Kusturica 36-39). In the case of Kusturica’s cosmopolitan and cosmopolitical films, fetishistic localism has been less problematic, in comparison with Like Water for Chocolate and Woman on Top.

This dissertation has argued the importance of cosmopolitics for a contemporary understanding of magical realism in cinema. Since the international boom in Latin American magical realist fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, this aesthetic category has become increasingly popular in cinema, yet little research has been done on this global phenomenon. The confoundingly vague, narrow and ahistorical definition of magical realism has often been casually misappropriated by many film critics. Thus, cosmopolitics as I have proposed and demonstrated, provides a fertile and original
approach through which to understand magical realist films, particularly in considering the increasingly market-oriented nature of cinema as part of our globalised reality.
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