

Cidade de Deus, Babel, and También la Lluvia. Towards a Global Film Language¹

Cidade de Deus, Babel y También la Lluvia. Hacia un lenguaje cinematográfico global

Maude Havenne
Georgetown University
mh1862@georgetown.edu

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Abstract

After decades of struggle against Western hegemony, the success of Third World cinema both from critics and at the box-office attests to a change in the center vs. periphery scheme of cinematic productions worldwide. The case of Ibero-American movies especially, with productions such as *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2003), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006) and *También la Lluvia* (Icíar Bollaín, 2010) provides an alternative to David Bordwell's confident statement in 1985 that "no absolute pure alternative to Hollywood exists" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 624). Building on recent film scholars' paradigms of a post-classical and more global cinema (such as Deborah Shaw, 2007 and Eleftheria Thanouli, 2009), this essay offers a close-reading of these three contemporary Ibero-American movies in terms of their similarities from a production, distribution, as well as aesthetic perspective. Through an analysis of shared collaborative strategies and patterns of creation (narratives in "network", preferences for multiple languages, shooting locations, and protagonists, etc.), the following article argues for a general intent both from Hispanic and Lusophone productions to

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fight *alongside* instead of *against* other cinematic currents in a joint effort to gather strength against multinational exploitation, inequality, exclusion, and other negative consequences of globalization.

Keywords: Contemporary Ibero-American cinema; Globalization; Decolonization of culture

Resumen

Después de décadas de luchar contra la hegemonía occidental, el éxito del cine producido al margen de la industria hollywoodense sugiere un cambio en la dinámica centro *versus* periferia que hasta hoy sigue rigiendo la producción cinematográfica mundial. El caso del cine iberoamericano, sobre todo con producciones como *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles y Kátia Lund, 2003), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006) y *También la lluvia* (Icíar Bollaín, 2010), llama la atención, ya que parece desafiar la opinión bien conocida de David Bordwell según quien «no absolute pure alternative to Hollywood exists» (1985, p. 624). Tomando como punto de partida esas tres producciones y los paradigmas establecidos por Deborah Shaw y Eleftheria Thanouli, quienes subrayan la existencia de un cine posclásico y global, este ensayo se propone resaltar similitudes estéticas y procesos de producción y difusión parecidos con el fin de entender el éxito reciente del cine iberoamericano en el mercado global. Mediante el análisis de patrones creativos y estrategias de colaboración similares (narrativas en *network*, multilingüismo, protagonistas y sitios de rodaje múltiples, etc.), el siguiente trabajo describe un intento, tanto por parte del cine hispánico como lusófono, de luchar *juntos* y no *en contra* de las demás corrientes cinematográficas, en un esfuerzo común contra la explotación de las multinacionales, la desigualdad, la exclusión, y otras consecuencias negativas de la globalización.

Palabras clave: Cine iberoamericano contemporáneo; Globalización; Descolonización de la cultura

World cinema is simply the cinema of the world. It has no centre. It is not the other, but it is us
Lúcia Nagib in *Remapping World Cinema* (35)

Global imaginary and global aesthetic

The rapid rise of communication technologies and the decline of nation-based ideologies in the last three decades have suggested a shift from what Benedict Anderson (2006) called “imagined communities” to the more recent notion of “global imaginary” (Manfred Steger, 2008). As Arjun

Appadurai observes in his notorious work *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), this change towards more intense forms of connectivity and integration is particularly patent in the cultural sphere. Since the 1990s, the global cultural situation is indeed not only more interactive than before, but the United States, instead of being the “puppeteer” of a world system of images, is now only one mode of a complex transnational construction of “imaginary landscapes” (Appadurai, 2001, p. 91 and in Shohat and Stam, 2014, p. 31).

In the particular case of cinema, these recent transformations render possible challenging David Bordwell’s confident statement in 1985 that “no absolute pure alternative to Hollywood exists” (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985, p. 624). As the last thirty years have shown, the media have become more heterogeneous than ever. Films now belong to a global multinational system constituted not only of the Hollywood industry but also of TV networks, new technologies of production and distribution, and the growth of international co-productions. In other words, to paraphrase Lúcia Nagib, Chris Perriam, and Rajinder Dudrah: cinema is an excellent example of the impacts of globalization on cultural productions since it both shapes and responds with peculiar intensity to the philosophical, cultural and political effects of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism in the age of the moving image (2012, p. xvii).

The work of the film theorist Eleftheria Thanouli is, in that regard, particularly enlightening as it suggests the progressive establishment in the late 1990s (or the end of the Cold War) and upwards of a new “post-classical” cinema which challenges the “classical” norms of Hollywood and its hegemony stated thirty years ago by Bordwell. If Thanouli’s ambition is to define and prove the existence of post-classical cinema paradigms worldwide, or in her words, to demonstrate how “formal changes in a globalized world can emerge and develop on a global terrain in a simultaneous manner that makes it difficult for us to determine their origins offhandedly”, (28) the reader of her *Post-Classical Cinema. An International Poetics of Film Narration* (2009) regrets however the absence of Third World productions with the exception of the brief analysis of two movies. Yet, what better than the recent boom of World cinema to support the decentralization of the UTC-00 position of Hollywood on the Greenwich Meridian of Cinema in the era of globalization?²

Since its origins, what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino called “Third World Cinema” or “Third Cinema” has accounted for “the decolonization of culture” (Solanas and Getino, 1976, p. 44). In Brazil, for instance, even before Glauber Rocha’s manifesto for an

² This metaphor is inspired by the expression coined by Pascale Casanova (2013) in *The World Republic of Letters* (1999). In the same way that Casanova stresses the existence of a “Greenwich Meridian of Literature”, which regulates the relationship between the core and the periphery in the world literary space, World Cinema has often been defined by its differentiation from, as well as opposition to, norms of Hollywood.

“Esthetic of hunger”, cineastes such as Humberto Mauro (1897-1983) already called for alternatives to the Hollywood system. These attempts, however, by being too national-specific failed to engage not only with international, but also with local audiences. After decades of struggle against Western hegemony, the success both from the critics and at the box-office level of non-Western movies such as *Cidade de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2003), *Old Boy* (Park Chan-wook, 2005), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), or the more recent *Okja* (Bong Joon-ho, 2017) and *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho, 2017), to cite only a few, attest however to a change in the center vs. periphery scheme of cinematic productions worldwide.³

As the film scholar Deborah Shaw argues, the case of Ibero-American cinema is particularly striking in that regard since movies from Hispanic and Lusophone worlds have gained more visibility in the last thirty years than ever before, and she mentions, among others, the case of Walter Salles’ *Central do Brasil* (1998), González Iñárritu’s *Amores perros* (2000), and Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y tu mamá también* (2001) (2007, p. 3). Interestingly enough, the characteristics or “common points” (2007, p. 4) that she employs to highlight the break into the global market of these Ibero-American movies are similar to the paradigms used by Thanouli to define her model of a post-classical cinema. With recurrent patterns such as narratives in “network”, a preference for multiple languages, shooting locations, and protagonists, as well as the decision to trade the usual causal chain of events of the plotline for a more digital logic (or a non-linear logic), Shaw’s observations on somehow hybrid and multi-generic movies at the crossroads between commercial and independent productions seem to directly confirm Thanouli’s intuitions.

Building on this conjunction and on the belief that the 21st century is witnessing the emergence of a “global imaginary”, this essay suggests a reading of Thanouli and Shaw’s paradigms in terms of a “global aesthetic”.⁴ Envisioned less as a convergence between “non-Hollywood” or “post-classical” paradigms – both expressions defined by their comparison to Hollywood – but more as the marker of a global phenomenon, this global aesthetic will serve the argument of this paper in advocating the existence of what could be defined as a more

³ The case of Bong Joon-ho’s *Parasite* is particularly significant. Winner of the *Palme d’Or* in 2019, it also won a *César award* and the *Golden Globe award* for best foreign film, while receiving four *Academy Awards*, two of them being for both best picture and best international feature film, attesting therefore to a recent blurring of the frontier between “world” cinema and cinema understood as a worldwide phenomenon with no center.

⁴ Despite the fact that this “global aesthetic”, by referring to concepts such as cross-cultural identity, neocolonialism, and as we will see, intertextuality and parody, could account for the existence of a poetics of stylistic cousinhood associated with postmodernism, following the lead of Thanouli’s post-classical” model who deliberately avoids the notoriety of the ‘postmodern’ for being, in her view, a “blanket term that can account for nearly everything that happens in the cinema today” (2009, p. 23), this essay will not directly associate the existence of a more global cinema with postmodernism.

“global” or polycentered cinema.⁵ Such adjustment, supported by the analysis of three particularly successful Ibero-American movies, that is, *Cidade de Deus, Babel*, and the more recent *También la lluvia* (Iciar Bollain, 2010), will hopefully demonstrate that what Thanouli calls a new “coherent narrative model with specific system of causality, space and time” (2009, p. 29), besides being in force in contemporary cinema worldwide, also accounts for a new global or polycentered cinematic order. After decades of struggle, the “world” of “World cinema” which had almost become a derogatory term for presupposing its inferiority towards the privileged Hollywood film industry, is finally traded for the “globe”.⁶ And the globe, for being a sphere, has no choice than to en-globe (“englober” or include in French) all of us. As the French philosopher Blaise Pascal famously recalls, the world is actually a sphere, “an infinite sphere, the center of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere”.⁷

From the “world” to the “globe”

In a similar way that “Orientalism”, as Edward Said (1994) discusses, is a patronizing representation of the Orient by the Occident, the “world” in World Literature as well as in World Cinema and World Music is the world as it is viewed from the West. Present since the first occurrences of the word *Weltliteratur* is the notion that foreign cultures offer Westerners a window into foreign worlds. In Goethe’s terms, World Literature, or in other words, European Literature,⁸ will benefit from foreign works in a trade that “turns out to our advantage”, given that it will help Western thought not to “exhaust its vitality”, while being “refreshed” by the interests and contributions of foreign ones (1994, p. 12). In their attempts to criticize Western domination, scholarly works such as Goethe’s or Casanova’s more recent *The World Republic of*

⁵ The expression “polycentered” is inspired by the work of Lúcia Nagib. Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah who, building on Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s theory of multiculturalism and the media, use the term “polycentrism” and argue that defining the cinemas of the world negatively, or as non-Hollywood, always runs the risk of perpetuating a patronizing attitude by reducing “non-European life” to a “pathological response to Western penetration” (Nagib, Perriam and Dudrah, 2012, p. xxii; Shohat and Stam, 2014, p. 3).

⁶ Often used to distinguish itself as something “alternative” and “different” from the mainstream, the word “world” in World Cinema does usually not refer to a cinema made in the world, or spread worldwide, but commonly alludes to a “non-Hollywood” label. This connotation ensures that the American, or Western, views continue to prevail to the extent that one even wonders if World Cinema would have even existed if it were not for the staggering presence of Hollywood. As Glauber Rocha states: “every discussion of cinema made outside Hollywood must begin with Hollywood” (Rocha in Moretti, 2013, p. 93).

⁷ “C’est une sphère infinie dont le centre est partout, la circonférence nulle part” [the translation is mine] in *Au-delà des espaces imaginables* (document conserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

⁸ In the first version of *Scheme for Kunst und Ältertum, vol. 6, part 3*, 1829, Johann Wolfgang (von) Goethe wrote “World Literature”, which he rewrote in the Second Version: “European, in other words, World Literature” (2013, p. 14).

Letters often had the opposite effect, reifying the power of the dominator.⁹ Instead of letting “the World” in World Literature or Cinema speak by itself, these works actually “allow” other literature, film, or music to impose themselves on the main discourses of the centre, thus reducing their voices to a form of creolization, *métissage* or resistance. Even attempts to complicate the binary scheme, such as Franco Moretti’s addition of a third element in non-European writing (the “local narrative voice”) or Dudley Andrew’s “An Atlas of World Cinema”, which suggests a shift from the emphasis on Hollywood to “the regional interaction that is particularly visible when storytelling traditions are in focus” (Andrew, 2006, p. 24) seem to still be imbued with a preconception of the rest of the world as being “foreign” and “unfamiliar” (2006, p. 19).

Yet, in the last twenty years, the distinctions between dichotomies such as Western and non-Western, self and other, have started to dissolve. As a consequence of the movement of post-colonialism and the acceleration of exchanges of ideas and culture through the internet and an increasingly rapid migration, what was previously depicted as a “clash” between civilizations (in reference to Samuel Huntington’s work [2000]) is instead understood as the interconnectedness of hybrid and plural identities. In Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim’s words: “precisely because of the legacy of colonialism and neo-imperialism, essentialized notions of both the West and the non-West have become increasingly untenable as their histories, cultures and peoples become inextricably intertwined” (2006, p. 4).

Given this shift, and in a very similar way as to how Said uses Raymond Williams’ expression at the end of the introduction of *Orientalism* to invite his readers to engage in the process of the “unlearning” of the “inherent dominant mode” (1994, p. 28), some scholars have called for a new understanding of World Cinema in the era of globalization, not only in terms of the binary distinction between the West vs. the Rest, but also in relation to notions such as border crossing, fluidity, hybridity, transculturation, etc. This new emphasis on a world always in movement has driven attempts of “remapping” (*Remapping World Cinema* by Dennison and Hwee Lim), “rethinking” (*Rethinking Third Cinema* by Guneratne, 2003) and “unthinking” (*Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam) World Cinema in order to suggest a new definition which, as Lúcia Nagib argues, “highlights the global aspect of film production” (2012, p. 30).

⁹ When describing the dynamic of the world literary space in *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova seems indeed to fall into a similar form of dichotomy as Goethe between Western and non-Western literatures (or central and peripheric) as she uses the metaphor of “astigmatism” to describe the effects that the lack of revitalization through alien literatures may have had on national literatures (2013, p. 280).

Following the lead of these works and building on Thanouli's coherent narrative model and Shaw's similarities, the next section consists of an analysis of three recent successful Ibero-American movies,¹⁰ two of which have been directly associated with World cinema (*Cidade de Deus* and *Babel*), while the more recent one (*También la Lluvia*) is usually considered as an independent movie from the First or Second world. If it could be argued that Film studies have been concerned with the emergence of a potential global film industry for several decades already and that the argument of this paper is therefore reminiscent of debates in the 1980s, these examples will demonstrate instead that a true dialogue between peripheric cinema and Hollywood has only started to fructify fairly recently and particularly in Ibero-American productions. Indeed, besides illustrating how a different categorization between Third, Second or First world movies or the West vs. Rest is no longer pertinent since these movies share similar paradigms, the following comparison will hopefully also "highlight the global aspects" of what could be considered a "global aesthetic" of recent cinematic production, which seems to be particularly salient in Ibero-American films. As Susan Martin-Márquez observes in *Disorientations* (2008), being at the crossroads between Western heritage, Arabic influences of the Islamic "other", and, we could add, the traditions of the New World, Hispanic culture (and the same could be said about Lusophone culture) is by definition "orientalized" and "orientalizing" (p. 9). This singular duality, which led Said to omit Spain as a case study for his work on *Orientalism* (Martin-Márquez, 2008, p. 8), places Ibero-American cultural productions in a leading position in terms of the progressive development of a global aesthetic. Through a close-reading of *Cidade de Deus, Babel* and *También la Lluvia* the following sections hope to demonstrate how a still vibrant debate surrounding the dichotomy of Hollywood *versus* Third World cinema and the overlooked singularity of Ibero-American productions have played a crucial role in the emergence of a global aesthetic.

1./ Accented narration¹¹

With no main character, but various personages sharing the narration far beyond the conventional ways described by Gérard Genette (1983) in his *Narrative Discourse*, the storylines of these movies depict individuals always out of place. According to Thanouli, this constant perspective of displacement or marginality is rooted in a preference "for multiple protagonists whose actions diverge and converge in a more episodic narrative structure that often takes the

¹⁰ Even if these movies are international coproductions, they often remain broadly adherent to the concepts of "Latin American", "Spanish", or "Hispanic" cultures, as Dolores Tierney observes in her work about *Babel*: "Alejandro González Iñárritu: Mexican Director Without Borders" (2009).

¹¹ This section is named after Hamid Naficy's notorious work *Accented Cinema* (2001), devoted to the study of the filmmaking of postcolonial, Third World, and other displaced individuals living in the West.

form of forking-paths or spliced plots” (2009, p. 75). The case of *Babel* is particularly enlightening in this regard since the plotline responds to a construction in “network”. If this technique was already used in previous polyphonic or *choral* movies, Iñárritu pushes the limits of the network further into what could be called a “hyperlink cinematic system”. Like the infinite ramifications of the internet, *Babel’s* plotlines evolve through the multiplication and acceleration of connections between more than five individual stories located all around the globe.

Similarly, *También la lluvia* juxtaposes three metadiegetic levels in one single movie: the filming of an intradiegetic movie in what could be considered as the present time of the movie, that, we, spectators, are watching; the making-of of that movie in present time Bolivia; and the viewing of the rush, or the results of the images filmed in the level 1. In other words, *También la lluvia* narrates the journey of a Spanish-American film crew (1st level) shooting a historical movie about Columbus (3rd level) in the midst of an uprising against water privatization in Cochabamba, Bolivia (2nd level). Such construction, even if not strictly speaking in “network”, also follows a logic of hyperlink as each metadiegetic level is inserted within another metadiegetic level, participating thus in the creation of an “hypertext system”.

Likewise, the narration of *Cidade de Deus* refuses to commit to a particular story or to a single point of view for following what Sophia McClennen calls an “aesthetic technique of layering, parataxis, and juxtaposition, where images only make sense when compared and connected to other” (2011, p. 101). Taken alone, the images of *Cidade de Deus*, such as the opening scene of a chicken running away (figure 1), lack significance, until the end of the movie when the same image of a running chicken (figure 2) is screened again, enabling the spectator to connect all the images together.



(Figure 1: running chicken at 3:28min)



(Figure 2: same image of a running chicken at 1h51:37min)

Analogous to the viewing experiences of *Babel* and *También la Lluvia*, the spectator is thus confronted to the creation of a “system” or “hyper system” where all the elements refer to each other in a circular or “global” way.

2./ Placelessness and ubiquity

As a direct response to the recent acceleration and intensification of social exchanges, activities, and connections in the era of globalization, as well as the development of computer technologies and digital logic, *Cidade de Deus, Babel, and También la lluvia* present images that coexist in the same frame, blurring, in Thanouli’s words “the distinction between the space ‘in frame’ and ‘out of frame’” (2009, p. 177) and surpassing the logic of one image/one screen/one place. This confusion of frame and space is particularly striking in *Cidade de Deus*. Figure 3, for instance, represents a discussion in the larger part of the screen between Sandro Cenoura (Matheus Nachtergaele) and Mané Galinha (Seu Jorge), two drug dealers in a Brazilian slum, while the smaller rectangle tries to frame the pursuit of little boys somewhere else in the slum.



(Figure 3: example of a split-screen)

Such construction, besides responding to the recent necessity of acceding various types of information simultaneously, also advocates for the possibility of being simultaneously “here and there”.¹² *Babel* is particularly exemplifying of that logic since the movie has no starting place but interweaves images occurring simultaneously in more than four locations and languages, all connected by one accident caused by the mistake of a young boy in Morocco. Such “placelessness”¹³ and ubiquity permits linking a scene such as the slitting of the chicken witnessed by a child in Mexico (figure 4), followed by an injured woman in Morocco (figure 5),

¹² This famous sentence has been used and reused on various occasion to describe the possibility of being simultaneously in a place, while being physically in another, either due to modern technologies, or to the increasingly rapid migration that characterizes the era of globalization. See, for instance, the use that Clifford Geertz does of the expression while talking about Edward Said in *Works and Lives* (1988).

¹³ Terms borrowed from Edward Relph’s book *Place and Placelessness* (1976/2008).

which happens to be the mother of the child, suggesting in this way that the child is metaphorically staring at his bleeding mother from Mexico.



(Figure 4: slitting of a chicken witnessed by a child at 35:32min)



(Figure 5: image of the bleeding mother at 35:47min after being shot accidentally by a young Moroccan boy)

In a similar way, several scenes in *También la lluvia* present more than one image, shot in more than one location. Whether these images come from Bollaín's camera, an intradiegetic camera (figure 6), or an intradiegetic screen (figure 7), their juxtaposition creates a confusion regarding the "transmitter" and "receiver", especially for the spectator who accesses all of these images emanating from different metadiegetic levels at once. The movie set of the intradiegetic film becomes thus the place of the protest against the privatization of the water in Cochabamba, as well as the land that Columbus discovered five centuries ago.



(Figure 6: intradiegetic camera)



(Figure 7: intradiegetic screen)

3./ Spherical time

To support the relation of simultaneity between the different images, the timing of *Cidade de Deus*, *Babel* and *También la lluvia* is constructed in a non-linear manner. This temporal organization, which recalls digital and video-game logic, has the effect of loosening the traditional causal chain between the different scenes and creates in Thanouli's words an

“illusion of linearity” (2009, p. 180). The already mentioned scenes of the chicken in both *Cidade de Deus* and *Babel* are in that regard particularly enlightening. While in *Cidade de Deus*, the opening image of the chicken (figure 1) only becomes intelligible at the end of the movie (figure 2), when the spectator understands that it was a flashforward, *Babel* pushes the logic of flashback, flashforward, and ellipse even further as the spectator realizes, at the end of the movie, that the scenes of the chicken and the mother (figures 4 and 5) actually happened in a reverse chronological order. González Iñárritu thus tricked his audience in suggesting that the child is metaphorically staring at his bleeding mother by juxtaposing the image of the slitting of chicken and the injured woman, whereas placed on a chronological line, the accident of the mother actually happened before the slitting of the chicken. The spectator only becomes aware of that subterfuge when one of the characters recounts the misadventure of the mother, placing the accident before the scene of the chicken, and confessing, consequently, that the linearity of the movie was only an illusion. As Nagib argues in her analysis of *Cidade de Deus*, time was either “shrunk”, “condensed”, or “fragmented”, but in any way strictly linear.

This complex and multifaceted system of time, characteristic of the new natural progression of time within a world ruled by numerous technical devices and intense forms of connectivity and integration, is intensified in *También la Lluvia* by the presence of three metadiegetic levels. In addition to preventing the establishment of a linear progression, this triple metadiegetic level creates a feeling of simultaneity between the shooting of the Spanish-American film crew (1st level), their actual movie about Columbus (3rd level), and the protest against the water privatization in Cochabamba (2nd level). The colonial power of Columbus in the 16th century (figure 8) enters thus in confrontation with the neocolonial exploitation of Indigenous people during the Cochabamba water war in contemporary Bolivia, and the shooting of a Hollywood blockbuster with Bolivian actors in the present time of the movie (figure 9).



(Figure 8: Antón asking the waitress “Where is the gold” as if she were the Indigenous woman Columbus encountered)



(Figure 9: Bolivian waitress organizing the buffet for the Spanish film crew, while being asked by the fictitious Columbus where the gold of her earring comes from)

This confusion is particularly obvious in *figures 8 and 9*, which represent Antón (Karra Elejalde), one of the intradiegetic Spanish actors, rehearsing the scene of the discovery of America, in front of a Bolivian waitress, who is serving water to the Spanish crew, in the midst of an uprising against water privatization in Cochabamba.

Alliances and connections

Shot from different locations, in several languages, and from the point of view of several characters, all of them challenging the “illusion of linearity”, *Cidade de Deus*, *Babel*, and *También la lluvia*, in addition to confirming Thanouli’s and Shaw’s paradigms, attest to a constant mobility. Just like our globalized world, these movies are constantly changing (character, place, and time). This mobility or hybridity already patent in the content of the movies can also be found directly in their processes of creation and distribution. Co-productions, with directors, actors, and film crews from a range of countries as diverse as Bolivia, Brazil, the United States, France, Mexico, Morocco, and Spain, these movies participate in what Shohat and Stam call the “dissolution of [...] a stable connection between a film’s place of production and/or setting and the nationality of its makers and performers” (2014, p. 29). On the other hand, for being distributed through similar channels as blockbusters and mainstream productions (Miramax for *Cidade de Deus*; Paramount Vantage for *Babel*; and Warner Bros for *También la lluvia*), *Cidade de Deus*, *Babel*, and *También la lluvia* also attest to a possible reconciliation between art and commerce. In Peter Biskind’s words:

Not only did the Weinsteins transform distribution, they brokered a marriage of indie and mainstream that resulted in a novel kind of picture that did more than just cross over; it exchanged DNA with commercial movies. An amalgam of difference and sameness, personal and commercial, genre and voice, these films played like Hollywood movies while retaining the indie spirit, however vague and hard to define that may be (2004, p. 470).

The marriage between indie, commercial, Third, Second and First World movies, and more broadly the hybridity of recent cultural productions, even if proof of a positive change toward a more global film industry, have given rise to several issues among the critics. Joseba Gabilondo (2009), for instance, argues in his essay *Genealogía de la “Raza Latina”*, that concepts such as “hybridity” (García Canclini, 2005), or “transculturation” (Ortiz, 1995), despite having the advantage of advocating for a world without borders, also run the risk of erasing

local differences. In the case of *Cidade de Deus*, it is true that the critic Ivana Bentes coined the expression “cosmetic of hunger” to stress the new tendency in Brazilian cinema to use images of Brazilian suffering to create a cosmetic, slick, an artificial spectacle for public consumption, betraying thus the original identity of Cinema Novo and Glauber Rocha’s “esthetic of hunger”. Other critics have also argued that *Cidade de Deus* only owes its success to the fact that the movie could be read from within the Western conventions of the gangster film genre, neglecting consequently the “Brazilianity” of the movie.¹⁴

Likewise, *Babel* and *También la Lluvia* also present several elements that could directly favor a reading of the movies in Hollywood terms, such as the final action/race scene in *También la Lluvia* which depicts the only Caucasian male of the movie saving a young Indigenous girl at the risk of his own life. In a similar way, even if *Babel* pretends to be building a movie without a main character, one could argue that the screen-time of the American actors is greater than that of the Japanese, Moroccan, and Mexican actors. This observation can also be supported by the cover of the DVD which gives more importance to the American figures (figure 10):



(Figure 10: cover of the DVD of *Babel*)

Finally, the constant reminder of American industries is also striking in both movies through the presence of brands such as Coca-Cola (figure 11) and McDonald’s (figure 12):



(Figure 11: Coca-Cola in *También la Lluvia*)



(Figure 12: McDonald’s in *Babel*)

¹⁴ See for instance Elsa Viera’s analysis of *Cidade de Deus* and the Gangster genre in Shaw (2007).

In her essay “Towards a positive definition of World Cinema”, Lúcia Nagib questions however the overwhelming presence of North American culture in cinema around the world in these terms: “Can one really isolate foreign from local components of an art work? Could not the imported form itself be the result of multiple influences, often originating in the same regions that now import them back?” (2006, p. 33). In other words, why should every use or deviation from the well-established norms and patterns of the Hollywood industry always be reduced, as in David Bordwell’s view, to a “stylistic assimilation”? (2003, p. 373) Is a work that relies on its similarity with others always inferior for presenting, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue, a “surrogate identity?” (1993). What if these references to North American culture were not assimilated but “cannibalized”, to use the Brazilian metaphor, before being reinvented? As Jesús Martín-Barbero observes, it would be a mistake to understand the consumption of US mainstream culture in Latin America as a “straightforward case of ideological indoctrination” since media consumers always consume “according to local practices” (Martín-Barbero in Mc Clennen, 2011, p. 103).

Building on that statement and on Nagib’s remark, the use of foreign references in *Cidade de Deus*, *Babel*, and *También la lluvia*, rather than being understood as a mere copy or imitation of Hollywood influence with no local savor could instead be analyzed in terms of a pastiche or blank parody. As Homi Bhabha (2004) observes in *The Location of Culture*, the mimicry of hegemonic culture is actually a powerful form of resistance. By referring to previous codes and conventions, while also giving their own perspectives on these parodic references, *Cidade de Deus*, *Babel*, and *También la lluvia* generate a third space, or in-between space, not only of resistance, but of discussion.

The reference to Hollywood cinema in *También la lluvia*, for instance, enables Bollaín to liken the colonial exploitation of the Indigenous tribes by Columbus and the neocolonial exploitation of Bolivian actors by an American film crew, which has the consequence of generating a comparison between Spanish imperialism in the 16th century and inequalities of the 21st century. More flagrant even, the network construction in *Babel* generates a reflection about how people manage to communicate around the world from different locations and languages, while the Westerner always speaks louder. Finally, the artificiality of the cosmetic representation of the Brazilian slum enables Meirelles and Lund to recall that tensions still remain between a superficially “modernized” or “globalized” Brazil and the still archaic slum that is often excluded from the benefits of globalization.

After answering affirmatively to Gayatri Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern speak?", movies such as *Cidade de Deus* and *Babel*, are now claiming the right to participate in a dialogue or collective speech alongside *También la lluvia* and other First or Second world productions. Present as *allies* and not *subalterns*, these movies, whether considered as "Third World cinema", "indie movies", or "commercially-oriented postcolonial movies" share the same struggles in our globalized world. As Teshome Gabriel argues in his critical theory of Third World Films, after a first phase in which Western images were impressed in an alienating fashion on cinema around the world and their audience, World cinema has now entered a new phase in which the "recognition of 'consciousness of oneself' serves as the essential antecedent for national and, more significantly, international consciousness" (s.d.). While World Cinema of the 1960s was often thought of as a political weapon used against Hollywood, contemporary World Cinema is now fighting *alongside* instead of *against* other cinematic currents in a joint effort to gather strength against multinational exploitation, inequality, exclusion, and other negative impacts of globalization.¹⁵

Toward an International Film Language

In 1988, the Venezuelan filmmaker Carlos Rebollo said: "we cannot continue deceiving ourselves with an alternative, sporadic, and unequally national cinema. Either we definitively enter the world of the Spectacle, or we are stuck lagging behind in a trivial farce" (1988, p. 78). In response to that call, recent movies such as *Cidade de Deus, Babel, and También la lluvia* advocate for the progressive joining of the cinemas of the world into the globe, not as a mere copy, or *métissage* of Hollywood movies, but as an active and productive ally that shares the same struggle for a common globalized world.

Through the use of similar paradigms of what could account for a "global aesthetic", *Cidade de Deus, Babel, and También la lluvia* demonstrated that a remapping of world film production, free of the binary distinction between the Western and the Rest, is now possible. The prior conception of Hollywood in terms of a *language* in relation to which all other forms were not but *dialectal variants* is therefore challenged as the cinemas of the globe, or "Global cinema", have created a sort of cultural *lingua franca* through the use of a similar aesthetic. Building on Christian Metz's notion of "visual Esperanto" (1974), the cineaste James Potts already predicted this change in 1979 when signaling the possible development of an

¹⁵ Note: the notion of fighting "with" and living "alongside" has also been used more recently by scholars in Environment and Animal studies. Cynthia Willet, for instance, in her *Interspecies Ethics* (2014), highlights the necessity of learning how to live "with" and "alongside" other species, while Michael Marder uses the expression "living-with" (2013, p. 50) in *Plant-Thinking*.

international film language in terms of a universal speech able to link “all individuals and communities”, by setting up “its own average in terms of understanding and interpretation” (1979, p. 8). As studies such as Thanouli’s “model of a post-classical cinema” and Shaw’s account of “common points” between contemporary Ibero-American movies confirm his intuition forty years later, they also recall similar issues already stated in moving toward Noam Chomsky’s theory of a universal grammar (2001).

By penetrating the core as well as the periphery worldwide, “Global cinema” puts the nation directly at risk since it implies that the same movie, by appealing to global paradigms, can be thought, produced, diffused, as well as received and understood from any point of the globe. In a similar way that Chomsky’s argument has been criticized by various linguists around the world holding forth the specificities of their particular language, the idea of a global imaginary supported by global cultural productions is still perceived as a threat toward national identity by some countries who work on reinforcing their borders.¹⁶

Bearing in mind that our society remains asymmetrical, and that forces will always fight against the “polycentrism” of a more “global cinema”, movies such as *Cidade de Deus*, *Babel*, and *También la lluvia* are already powerful alternative tools to Goethe’s necessity for revitalization. By proving that the globe has no core, since its core is plural, these movies advocate for those obliged to negotiate with both “margins” and “center”, or what W. B. DuBois called “double consciousness”. If a more “global cinema” has still a long way to go before en-globing all of us, not only from the First, Second, and Third world, but taking class, gender, and sexuality into account,¹⁷ its first productions already suggest however that Carlos Fuentes was not so much of a “multiculturalist enthusia[st]”¹⁸ but a lucid visionary when observing that “we live in Pascal’s globe, where the circumference is everywhere, and the center nowhere. And if we are all in the periphery, then we are also all in the center” (1993, p. 173).¹⁹

¹⁶ A quick look at the current increase in populism across the world is enough to remind us how fragile the concept of “open-borders” can be. However, if aesthetic affinities can cross national borders, how can thus a nation defend the idea that the “national”, and the traditions valorized by the community are not just “imagined?” (Benedict Anderson in Shohat and Stam, 2014, p. 286).

¹⁷ See, for instance, the allegations of sexual harassment against Harvey Weinstein, one of the founders of the above-mentioned Miramax production and distribution company (p. 11).

¹⁸ In her essay “Literature as a World”, Pascale Casanova states as a form of “multiculturalist enthusiasm” reactions such as Carlos Fuentes’ belief in a “single word, with numerous voices” (2013, p. 285).

¹⁹ In Fuentes words: “vivimos en el círculo de Pascal, donde la circunferencia está en todas partes, y el centro en ninguna. Pero si todos somos excéntricos, entonces todos somos centrales” (1993, p. 173) [the translation is mine].

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