Journal of American Studies of Turkey
30 (2009): 89-110

L.A. and T.J.: Immigration, Globalization, and Environmental Justice in *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer*

Yanoula Athanassakis

all 2,000 miles of the frontier
stretched across from Tijuana on the Pacific,
. . .
to the end of its tail
on the Gulf of México.
It waited with seismic sensors and thermal imaging,
with la pinche migra,
. . . with coyotes, pateros, cholos,
steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars,
INS detention centers, border patrols, rape,
. . .
the deportation of 400,000 Mexican
citizens in 1932,
coaxing back of 2.2 million
braceros in 1942
only to exile the same 2.2 million
wetbacks in 1953.

—Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (197-98)

In the epigraph above from Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997), the narrator dramatizes the past and present tension between the United States and Mexico and depicts the US-Mexico divide as a threat of "barbed wire" and "thermal imaging" lying in wait to detain and violate illegal immigrants. The 2,000 miles of the "frontier" are a combination of land, water, and air—yet the narrator focuses on the "steel structures" of "barbed wire" that have now become synonymous with media images of the border region. Multinational corporations in search of cheap labor have long looked to Tijuana as a source of profit and

unregulated business practices.[1] By putting Alex Rivera's sci-fi film *Sleep Dealer* (2008) in dialogue with Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, I examine literary and visual manifestations of natural resources and the manner in which national and cultural boundaries are violently mapped onto them.[2] In the connective tissue between *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer* there is a shift in concern over how environmental degradation and corporate greed manifest themselves on the US-Mexico border regions.

Filmic and literary representations of nature against the backdrop of post-9/11 US politics of national security and globalization reveal that the fluid mediums of water and air defy the logic of "uniform" borders and corporatization. Taken together, *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer* confront the very real issues of such things as NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) and the Department of Homeland Security's continued efforts to build a US-Mexico wall. Founded in 2002, the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was established as a response to September 11th and one of the stated purposes of "Operation Gatekeeper" is to enhance the militarization and materiality of the US-Mexico border; it serves as a further recourse to what former President G. W. Bush referred to as the "confusing patchwork" of US governmental structures and aims to both metaphorically and tangibly construct a "uniform" barrier.[3] Although Operation Gatekeeper was created under the Clinton administration

1 A recent film of interest addressing the infamous labor practices of the maquiladora factories in Tijuana is *Maquilapolis* (2006). Based on principles of community-driven activism and environmental justice, this film addresses many of the issues broached in both *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange*.

2 I thank Carl Gutiérrez-Jones for pointing me towards *Sleep Dealer*.

3 One of the DHS's main aims is to "protect our homeland" by restructuring governmental agencies from a "confusing patchwork" to a uniform entity (Bush). US-based Global Security claims to be the "leading" source of non-government sponsored information on US security. Its experts point to forty tunnels discovered after 9/11 running underneath US-Mexico fences as a major threat to national security: "Large-scale smuggling of drugs, weapons, and immigrants takes place today through these tunnels" ("Homeland Security"). Particularly interesting is the conflation of America's global "War on Terror" with the issue of illegal immigration. Global Security describes one such half-mile tunnel from San Diego to Tijuana of "inordinate sophistication," purportedly 60-80 feet deep: "It was wired for electricity . . . a very modern warehouse . . . there was a hatch in the floor . . . like the hatch which Saddam had secreted himself in." US legislation reflects the crescendo of anxiety as both opponents and supporters of immigrant rights officially express a fear of vulnerable and unsurveyable borderlands. Global Security is by no means an unbiased source of information but its prominence as an influential media outlet is undeniable. Founded by John Pike in 2000, it survives on advertising income and caters to news reporters. Most important for my purposes is that it presents Operation Gatekeeper as a necessary recourse to ease anxieties over terrorism.

by the Immunization and Naturalization Service (INS) in 1994, the Department of Homeland Security's stated reasons for its maintenance is to protect American citizens from illegal "aliens" and anti-American "terrorists."[4] In *Sleep Dealer's* post-9/11 future, the imbalance of power in transnational exchanges is symbolized by a dam but the battle over pollution and water rights is cloaked in the garb of US national security and anti-immigration policy.

Environmental justice activism has long pointed to the absurdity of national boundaries as they alternately claim and mine resources while disclaiming and disowning the resulting issues of human rights violations and toxic dumping. Immediately preceding the epigraph at the beginning of this article Yamashita's narrator describes how Arcangel—the 500-year-old pseudo-mythological figure fighting against past and present oppressions south of the border—drags a broken-down bus on his back and with it the Tropic of Cancer. The cables hook into his battered flesh, he bleeds into the earth, and he slowly pulls the bus along like "the burden of gigantic wings, too heavy to fly" (197). The narrator states that this "superhuman" feat, as sensational as it is, can only be understood by those present: "The virtually real could not accommodate the magical. Digital memory failed to translate imaginary memory . . . it could not be recognized on a tube, no matter how big or how highly defined. In other words, to see it, you had to be there yourself." The text then shifts to the italicized free verse previously excerpted: "*all 2,000 miles of the frontier / stretched across from Tijuana on the Pacific . . .*" (197). The self-anointed messiah of the oppressed, Arcangel's thoughts may very well be those expressed in the free verse interrupting the prose but Yamashita's narrative strategy leaves it ambiguous as to whether these are collective or singular musings in speech or thought.

The "New World Border" (the narrator's play on "New World Order") and Arcangel's superhuman strength cannot be recorded into anything but human memory in the immediate proximity; yet Yamashita's splicing of digitally-inspired prose, poetry, and the manner in which she organizes the "grid" of her novel all contribute to the reader's experience of disorientation and thorough blurring of fiction and fact. "In other words," to quote Yamashita, you—the reader—*are* there experiencing the catastrophic effects of free trade and globalization, you are there trying to keep track of "the frontier" and the "end of its tail" and the "deportation" of human flesh in 1932 (under Depression-era anti-immigration raids) and the "coaxing back" in 1942 (the "Bracero Program") and the "exile"

4 Please see George W. Bush's posted statement, "Proposal to Create the Department of Homeland Security."

of the "same 2.2 million / wetbacks in 1953" (INS's "Operation Wetback").[5] Moral ambiguities abound as the reader is also coaxed back and forth between the familiar and the bizarre, the "real" and the surreal. Yamashita creates a discursive space in which one can begin to imagine the ethical complexities of border control. Just as the "frontier" snakes back and forth as a terrible animal of biometric tools and violence, so too Yamashita presents her characters in such diverse ways that it becomes impossible to define them as one thing or another; through both form and content she pushes the borders of the reader's imagination to *re*-imagine his ideas of citizenship and human rights. *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* effectively challenge Yamashita's narrator's statement that experiential knowledge is the only effective mode of knowledge acquisition; in fact, "the virtually real" scopic regime of *Sleep Dealer* and the textual pastiche of *Tropic of Orange* deftly confront issues of biopolitical violence and environmental injustices on the US-Mexico border. Rivera's post-9/11 discourse on US security reveals the "steel structures, barbed wire" and "infrared binoculars" in Yamashita to be the thinly-veiled machinations of corporate greed as it divvies up natural resources in contested territory.

Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism

The gendered and nationally-inflected war over the natural resources of water (in *Sleep Dealer*), fruit, and human organs (in *Tropic of Orange)* is synecdochic of the ecological destruction inherent in rampant—markedly American—global capitalism. Gendered violence traverses borders as a result of rapid economic growth and encapsulates contested geopolitical issues of ownership, immigration, and "Third World" labor rights. *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* foreground the biopolitical violence that accompanies contemporary restrictions of global capital; not only its appropriation of natural resources, but also the expropriation of bodies, organs, blood, and tissue. Environmental justice activists would argue, as does Vandana Shiva, that the "enclosure of the commons" benefits the rich and harms the poor (53). The "commons" as Shiva terms them are those things which should belong to all people equally: the earth's resources. Ecocriticism, or the study of literature of the environment and of literature linking humans to their physical surroundings, is increasingly overlapping with issues of environmental justice. Spurred by the civil rights movement and Rachel Carson's foundational *Silent Spring* (1962), environmental justice activism draws attention to the often concurrent exploitation of nature

5 For more on immigration law please see Calavita's "U.S. Immigration and Policy Responses," and Massey, Durand, and Malone, "System Assembly: A History of Mexico-US Migration."

and humans and to the accompanying intersections of race, class, and gender.[6] The interlocking nature of ecocriticism and environmental justice has become so prominent that environmental critic Lawrence Buell refers to it as part of the "second wave" of interest from the field. The first wave, offers Buell, was more narrow-minded and hierarchical in its extension of romanticized idealizations of true natural beauty; the revisionist second wave draws attention to the manner in which urban decay and sprawling technopoles have forced us to face the socially-constructed and permeable membranes between man and nature (22-23). In part responding to the work of international activism and grassroots movements like those led by Vandana Shiva and Ken Saro-Wiwa, second wave ecocriticism has expanded and further explored, as Buell notes, the "organicist models" of the environment (21).[7]

Although the importance of nature and place to the construction of multi-ethnic identity is fundamental, within the United States the green movement has by and large been received as virtually white.[8] In a prescient and galvanizing call for inquiry, Cheryll Glotfelty wonders, "Where are the other voices?" (xxv). Second-wave ecocriticism—with its increased attention to environmental justice—works against monolithic configurations of nature and, Buell adds, stands as a "critique of the demographic homogeneity of traditional environmental movements and academic environmental studies" (115).[9] Indeed, Buell's breakdown of first and second wave ecocriticism implicitly suggests that there might be more waves to come.

---

6 Please see the co-authored introduction to *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (Adamson, Evans, and Stein). For the connection between ecocriticism and race please refer to Joan Martínez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (172).

7 Please see Susan Comfort on Ken Saro-Wiwa and Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism." For more on the intersections between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, see Dominic Head's "The (im)possibility of Ecocriticism."

8 Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy's *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World* (2002) has seventeen personal essays by multiethnic American authors explaining how the natural world was fundamental to the shaping of their identities. Please also see Greta Gaard, "Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach" (especially pages 160-64).

9 To be clear the "green movement" has taken different forms around the world. Because the two works I treat here are in large part focused on US-Mexico relations and US attitudes I am speaking of the environmental justice movement within the United States. Please see Ursula Heise's cogent critique of the lack of a "transnational" turn in environmental studies and US environmental justice; also see Greg Garrard on the localism of ecocriticism as a field (178).

In response to Glotfelty's call in 1996 for the evolution of ecocriticism into "a multi-ethnic movement" with a "diversity of voices," we can say that this work has already begun (xxv). In fact, the Spring 2009 issue of *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US* (*MELUS*), taking as its subject "Ethnicity and Ecocriticism" directly addresses such concerns. Co-editors Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic propose a "*third* wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries" (6). Perhaps there is a third wave, or perhaps what we are seeing is a renewed acknowledgement of the inherently *trans*-national and global dimensions of the natural. It existed in Buell's first wave, it is certainly there in the second, and critics are now looking to the relationship between literature and the environment to narrativize and clarify much of what is currently taking place in the United States. In both *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* "natural" elements of the borderlands and land formations function as metaphors for issues of globalization and environmental justice and their attendant gendered implications. The border is portrayed as a US-run entity that absorbs what it needs and rejects what it does not want.

The filmic and literary representations of the border region and its resources focus on the unsustainable model of bartering with nature and the violence involved in the purchase and sale of it (water, oranges, bodies, etc.) The sale of nature is directly and inextricably linked to the rape and death of the most disenfranchised and particularly to the fate of women. In Julie Sze's cogent analysis of environmental justice literature she suggests that *Tropic of Orange* serves as a "case study of how to 'read' environmental justice perspectives" because the "novel's insights about globalization, immigration, and labor highlight how contemporary struggles are linked to the historical exploitation of nature and people of color" ("From Environmental Justice Literature" 163). Sze further highlights Yamashita's linkage between past and present exploitation of natural and human resources by proposing that the abrupt and frequent temporal shifts in *Tropic of Orange* function as a reminder that present-day "corporate domination cannot be separated from historical colonialism" (171). In Yamashita's postindustrial Los Angeles the perils of globalization directly reference a genealogy of colonial violence and exploitation.

L.A., T.J. and Empire

Tropic of Orange takes place over the span of seven days and revolves around the lives of seven characters. At the beginning of the novel Yamashita provides a grid, called "HyperContexts," that maps the characters and events into chapters,

days, and names, mirroring the grid of traffic and flow of products in and out of Los Angeles. Yamashita's choice to entitle her grid "HyperContexts" self-reflexively points to the central role that new forms of media play in a developing global order. The list of characters includes Gabriel Balboa, a Pulitzer-prize seeking newspaper reporter dating Emi, an Asian-American news reporter who continually pushes Gabriel towards new media and whose homeless grandfather (Manzanar) becomes a leading figure as he conducts a symphony of sound amidst the pandemonium of Los Angeles. Gabriel purchases a home in Mexico in an effort to reconnect to his roots and find solace from the fast pace of L.A.; when he finds it difficult to care for the home he lets Rafaela move in with her young son. Rafaela's estranged Chinese-Singaporean husband, Bobby, continues to work in L.A. The two remaining characters are Buzzworm, an African-American grassroots activist and "Arcangel," the symbolic archangel of the people.

Tropic of Orange begins with the image of Rafaela sweeping Gabriel's home in Mexico, trying to cleanse it of the plant and animal life that invades it daily. The natural world in *Tropic of Orange* seems at first displaced in the uber-urban landscape of Los Angeles but it is an unstoppable force in Mexico. Gabriel's house is situated on the Tropic of Cancer, the northernmost point latitudanally reached by the sun. While the Tropic of Cancer is a line that people have understood as separating the North from the South, Yamashita toys with notions of hemispheric lines. Picked from Gabriel's backyard in Mexico, a single orange harbors the loose end of the Tropic of Cancer. As the orange travels north through Mazatlán, it pulls the line with it, and North and South no longer apply as descriptive terms for Mexico and North America. With this change in vocabulary come a whole slew of changes. Arriving in Los Angeles, the Tropic of Cancer brings the warmth, the sun, and the very basics of the hemispheric south that steadily follow the orange's path. In Molly Wallace's trenchant analysis of how the rhetoric of NAFTA touts eventual economic union between the US and Mexico she points to the metaphoric employment of the weather as a rhetorical device to "naturalize capitalism" (145). In her discussion of the *Tropic of Orange* Wallace cites Yamashita as somebody that is not only engaging with the politics of globalization and free trade, but as someone that is looking to the "politics of the discourses" surrounding such phenomena (148). Yamashita's portrayal of Gabriel as a do-gooder is complicated by his relationship to Mexico and the exact politics of discourse to which Wallace refers. As a member of the media Gabriel tries to sort out truth from fiction and he becomes aware of his role in disseminating half-truths—to himself and others—about the state of affairs in Los Angeles and the relationship of California to Mexico.

The irony of Gabriel's colonialist attitudes towards Mexico is only underscored by his family's and friends' suggestion that he buy a house in his real homeland, "East L.A." (224). Describing Gabriel's impulsive desire to buy a house on the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico, the narrator states: "It had begun one summer when Gabriel felt a spontaneous, sudden passion for the acquisition of land, the sensation of a timeless vacation, the erotic tastes of chili pepper and salty breezes, and for Mexico" (5). Although Gabriel is aware of his "romantic" notions of Mexico and what it would mean for him to build a home and decorate it in an "old-fashioned" style, it is not until the end of Yamashita's novel that he begins to synthesize the series of events and his own responsibility in them. When Rafaela barely survives a severe beating and sexual assault, Gabriel returns to Mexico to find her in tatters: "I thought she might fall in love with me but she was only fixing up my house, and I was part of a net of favors and subtle harassments that unconsciously set her up. And she had taken this beating for me. It was my story" (225). Gabriel grows conscious of the "net" of the world, the interwoven manner in which one's actions affect and change the course of events. Similar to the series of events in *Sleep Dealer*, the power of (*super*)natural elements is what ultimately awakens Gabriel's understanding of his global responsibility reaching across national borders.[10]

Although the violence against Rafaela's body is most extreme, migrant and immigrant bodies in *Tropic of Orange* all exhibit the fleshly wounds of imperialism. Bobby's body is paid special attention in the novel; it is constantly in motion and he is presented as a cyborgian entity. The description of his flesh is a machinated amalgamation of movement, ceaselessly toiling to make ends meet: "Ever since he's been here, never stopped working. Always working. Washing dishes. Chopping vegetables. Cleaning floors. Cooking hamburgers. Painting walls . . . Recycling aluminum. Recycling cans and glass. Drilling asphalt. Pouring cement. Building up. Tearing down. Fixing up. Cleaning up. Keeping up" (79). The country that offers him political asylum contemporaneously enslaves him into a drone-like existence. In Chapter 34, "Visa Card—Final Destination," Bobby goes to rescue the little girl (Xiayue) who some criminals claim is his niece or distant relative. When Bobby meets her in Mexico he buys two fake passports and tells her to act as his daughter. In order to successfully smuggle her into the US he changes her look: "Get rid of the Chinagirl look . . . Now get her a T-shirt and some jeans and some tennis shoes. Jeans say Levi's. Shoes say Nike. T-shirt

10 Just as Rudy Ramírez realizes that he is responsible for the death of somebody whose life tells a story similar to that of his immigrant parents, so too Gabriel realizes that Rafaela fights for survival against actions like his.

says Malibu. That's it" (203). Treating her like a blank text Bobby encodes her as a little American girl; the "Chinagirl" look signifies production of labor while the American girl look connotes the mindless purchase and consumption of that labor. Bobby and Xiayu "Drag themselves through the slits jus' like any Americanos. Just like Visa cards" (204). Their bodies act as plastic passports to belonging within US borders, and American citizenship is attained through buying power—at the expense of Bobby's humanity. Symbolically completing his transformation from flesh to a worker drone, Bobby becomes the plastic Visa/visa card and is waived through the border by INS officers.

Tropic of Orange concerns the global trade of people, bodies, and products as "goods" and underscores the resulting *by*products of the trade of nature and biology when treated as "goods"—especially as they travel into the United States. The commodification of immigrants as laboring bodies, of women as factory workers and sex slaves, and of peripheral characters as wasted members of traditional conceptualizations of American citizenship naturally lead to critiques like that of Julie Sze who argues that Yamashita's work is a commentary on neoliberalism and free trade: "Yamashita's text reveals that women of color, along with transportation networks, embody how production and consumption work . . ." ("Not by Politics Alone" 30). I look within the people and "women of color" to the immigrant and migrant workers in Yamashita's text and the trade of "natural" resources. Valuable resources from Mexico, Central, and South America cross the border in the form of fruit, water, human tissue and organs, drugs, and labor, and they are symbolized by a single orange. In addition to the flow of goods, in the following sections I examine the moments of disjuncture when "free trade" is symbolically or tangibly blocked—when capital aggrandizes resources. The visual and literary representations of these moments reveal a subversive voice that denies ownership of nature to corporate and national entities.

Bartering with Bodies

Even among the motility of Yamashita's borders old habits of ethnoracial biases and violence die hard. Arcangel's self-proclaimed "manifest destiny" is to "go North," to be a "Conquistador of the North" (132, 198). Fighting for the Third World, Arcangel uses the stage name "El Gran Mojado" (or "The Great Wetback") while his enemy symbolizes the First World and is called "SUPERNAFTA," or "SUPERSCUMNAFTA." The two symbols of North and South, First and Third Worlds face off in a large arena in Los Angeles replete with all the vestiges of a WWF pro-wrestling match. Arcangel announces the match to the stadium: "Ladies and Gentlemen! Welcome to the Pacific Rim Auditorium here at the very Borders. (And you thought it was a giant bookstore. Ha!) (256)."

The "very Borders" to which Arcangel refers are not only those marking the land of the US-Mexico border, but also the liquid borders extending out to the Pacific Rim. His planetary conceptualization of borders further implicates capitalism as an enemy of the planet.[11] Or, following Ruth Hsu's argument that SUPERNAFTA symbolizes whiteness, Arcangel then represents all that works against subjugation and injustice (78). Even as Arcangel is certain of his destiny to conquer "the North" and rectify centuries of injustices, he is stopped at the US-Mexico border by officers of the Immigration and Nationalization Services. As the borders of economic trade come down, US immigration laws become increasingly stringent, thus highlighting the dichotomy between American attitudes towards products versus people.

"Free trade" takes on a whole new meaning when the borders are warped across space and time as Arcangel pulls the thread of hemispheric divides with him; furthermore, Yamashita's portrayal of trade is troubling because of the kind of "things" we see traded: little girls, organs, labor, and drugs. The trade of laboring bodies and products is underlined when the sale of human organs becomes a major plot twist and weds the various narratives together. Rafaela mistakenly gets mixed up in an organ smuggling operation spanning South, Central and North America, and run by Doña Maria's son, Hernando (151). Certain that Hernando is after her son's kidneys, Rafaela flees to the border but is eventually confronted by Hernando and an epic battle ensues. Unfolding in a violent scene of transmutation and sexual violence, Rafaela's body becomes symbolic of ethnically marked and gendered bodies globally:

> Two tremendous beasts wailed and groaned, momentarily stunned by their transformations, yet poised for war. Battles passed as memories: massacred men and women, their bloated and twisted bodies black with blood, stacked in ruined buildings and floating in canals; one million more decaying with smallpox . . . But that was only the human massacre; what of the ravaged thousands of birds once cultivated to garnish the tress of a plumed potentate, the bleeding silver treasure of Cerro Rico de Potosí, the exhausted gold of Ouro Preto, the scorched land that followed the sweet stuff called white gold and the crude stuff called black gold, and the coffee, cacao and bananas, and the human slavery that dug and slashed and pushed and jammed it all out and away forever. (220)

11 For a full engagement with this important scene in the novel please see Sue-Im Lee.

As the "tremendous beasts" battle, Rafaela's body channels the long history of mythical, imperial, and colonial violence against women, or what Julie Sze terms the "environmental cost of colonialism" ("Not by Politics Alone" 39). Mixing fantasy and reality, violence and love (they were "copulating in rage, destroying and creating at once . . . blood and semen commingling"), Yamashita suggests how difficult it is to separate fact from fiction, especially when the acknowledgement of truth brings personal responsibility. Yamashita extends this violence to nonhuman victims. The human "massacre" is also the rape of the land, of the "birds" and of precious metals, "bleeding silver" and "black gold," of fruit and vegetable products cultivated by forced "human slavery." Yamashita draws a parallel between the violent attack against Rafaela and the forgotten and repeated rape and pillaging of whole bodies of people and species. When Rafaela at last consumes her enemy, relief comes in the form of celestial birds pulling away the blanket of night: "Suddenly the sky was a chorus of heavenly chanting, a terrible blessing, and a great fluttering of millions of wings withdrawing nightfall away" (222). The battle symbolizes a crisis in definition between human and animal, male and female. The boundaries of the human and the natural are pushed to their extreme when spatiotemporal laws as we understand them unravel and disintegrate.

As much as laboring bodies are shown to be those of immigrants in Yamashita women's bodies are particularly susceptible to the ills and perils of globalization. Rafaela's experience as a young mother moving between Mexico and America is clearly meant to speak to an assemblage of issues facing immigrant and low-wage workers, and particularly women within migrant and immigrant communities. It is the body of her two lead female characters that endure life-threatening gruesome violence (Emi and Rafaela), and it is the laboring bodies and hands of women that are a major theme in the text. With increased economic freedom comes decreased corporeal safety: from violence, from toxins, from malnourishment and poverty. The chaos and destruction in Los Angeles can be traced to the organ-smuggling trade from South to North, from the Third World to the First, to the drug trade, to the trafficking of women and "goods" in which one space is forcefully mined for the economic prosperity of another. When the malleable thread that is the Tropic of Cancer shifts, the harm done to another place also shifts. Because there are no national borders in a natural landscape, the "laws" of pollution and toxic dumping do not apply. In *Tropic of Orange* it is as if the destructive pollution caused by overconsumption comes to haunt Los Angeles, thereby suggesting that the sovereignty of the body, like that of that nation, is a shared responsibility.

The interconnectivity of Yamashita's novel is significantly technological and media-driven. To describe the relationship between people instead of the "web of life" Yamashita might offer the "grid" of life.[12] Yamashita's grid integrates the technological with the biological and pushes the limits of what defines "life." Towards the end of *Tropic of Orange*, Emi's estranged and homeless father, Manzanar Murakami, takes on a significant role in challenging traditional schematizations of human existence and he reconfigures Yamashita's "grid." Manzanar, a former surgeon who has by all accounts disgraced the Japanese-American community of Los Angeles becomes a conductor of freeway symphonies: "Little by little, Manzanar began to sense a new kind of grid, this one defined not by inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him. He found himself at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor" (238). Manzanar conceives of the new "grid" of life as having multiple agents at the helm conducting the music of movement and life but ones that are not defined solely by human direction and traditional forms of "living things" as he calls them. Yamashita ambiguously positions him and others like him (the "expanding symphony") as the rhizomatic agency of a new model of community and organization.

Operation Gatekeeper and the Net of NAFTA

I follow the thread of environmental degradation and im-/migrant subjectivity from Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* to *Sleep Dealer* where virtual border-crossing extends from sea to land, liquid to solid, for noncitizens and green-card holders alike. While *Tropic of Orange* takes place in Los Angeles and the borderlands in it are those of tangible land *Sleep Dealer* is focused on Mexican and Chicano subjectivity and the experience of escaping *from* the U.S. Yamashita's irony and humor succeed in making *Tropic of Orange* a quick, even fun read while *Sleep Dealer's* darker edge forcefully leads viewers to consider the ramifications of unbridled industry and our relationship to the natural world. *Sleep Dealer* (2008), the directing debut of Alex Rivera (who also co-authored the screenplay with David Riker), is a futuristic sci-fi movie set mostly in the Mexican border town of Tijuana. Rivera admits that his modest budget would not allow for the "biggest" sci-fi film but his goal was to make the "'truest' sci-

12 Although in an interview Yamashita shares that the grid called "Hypertexts" at the beginning of the novel was at first used for her own organizational purposes, she admits that it can be read "on many levels." Yamashita elaborates: "As I said, the hypercontext at the beginning of the book was a spreadsheet that I initially used to map out the book . . . I hope that the book can be read on several levels. Every reader takes away a different read, a different book" (Interview with Elizabeth Glixman).

fi ever" by making a film that "seriously imagines where our world might go" (Director's Statement).

The world has already reached a breaking point at the US-Mexico border as rising tensions over human rights and toxic poisoning are coming to a head. Rivera's futuristic rendering of current issues adds urgency to issues of environmental justice which can sometimes become overshadowed. The long and tumultuous history between the United States and Mexico often focuses on the borderlands between the two countries. Part of the United States Department of Homeland Security's effort to secure US borders is the US-Mexico "wall" that continues to be built and reinforced to stave off illegal immigration;[13] the rhetoric used to justify budgetary commitments from the US government is largely based on an economy of fear—fear of terrorism, fear of illegal immigration, and fear of increased trade in weapons, prostitution, human slavery, and drugs. Often the boundaries between these discrete fields of anxiety blur and overlap.

The militarization of US borders and the agenda to increasingly incarcerate illegal aliens crossing the border flies in the face of a US declaration of "free" trade and open borders, of a global connectivity between Canada, the USA, and Mexico. In 1994, the United States officially began the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While David Nevins suggests that the US-Mexico border "is today more part of Americans' geographical imagination" than ever before, the rhetoric behind the creation of NAFTA was meant to demonstrate the increasingly borderless nature of North America and the positive—economic—benefits of "free" trade between Canada, the US, and Mexico (13).[14] Even as concerns grew over NAFTA's negative impact on illegal immigration, migrant workers, women, the environment, and American workers, NAFTA's critics are frequently silenced by accusations that their concerns are

13 The US-Mexico "wall" is not a true wall but a series of barriers from various time periods and constructed from a variety of materials. Joseph Nevins writes: "At the beginning of the 1990s, what existed there [the San Diego borderlands] in terms of a boundary fence in the area had gaping holes" (6). See pages 6-14 and 211-18 of *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond* (Nevins).

14 Legislation and campaigning for the North American Free Trade Agreement began under George Bush and continued under Bill Clinton. Signed by Clinton on September 14th, 1993, it was implemented on January 1st, 1994. Please see the United States Department of Agriculture's description under "North American Free Trade Agreement" and the Justice Department's report entitled: "Background to the Office of the Inspector General Investigation."

invalid or exaggerated.[15] What does it mean that NAFTA was signed within a year of the launch of Operation Gatekeeper? While the United States and Mexico were politically aligned in the purported dismantling of economic borders, the United States Congress was debating the border wall and the feasibility of something like Operation Gatekeeper.[16] And while the "border wall" is arguably more of a patchwork of fencing and outposts, what sits irrefutably at the center of interest regarding both NAFTA and Gatekeeper are the rich, sprawling array of natural resources; whole ecosystems surround the "shared" watershed on the US-Mexico border and experts estimate that between 70-75 percent of the Tijuana River basin is located in Mexico.[17]

The narrative of *Sleep Dealer* involves three main characters: Memo Cruz, Luz Martinez, and Rudy Ramírez. Memo is from the small village of Santa Ana del Rio and his father is "mistaken" for an aqua-terrorist and killed by a privately-sponsored US drone. Santa Ana's water supply—and thus the livelihood of its people—is controlled by a militarized dam complex (a subsidiary of Del Rio Water) whose surveillance includes hunting and killing "aqua-terrorists" live on a gladiatorial-style US television show. Memo's passion in life is technology and he voyeuristically listens in on the lives of others through his homemade transmitter. One evening he mistakenly overhears a conversation from the San Diego corporate headquarters of "Del Rio Security" and his signal is identified by the security company as a frequency intercept; they lock onto his coordinates and later flash images of people vaguely resembling 9/11 terrorists as they broadcast the attack on Memo's home by the drone pilot for Del Rio Water. The pilot, Rudy, is himself a second-generation American from immigrant parents who begins to suspect that he was given faulty information in the killing of Memo's father. Because Memo blames himself for the drone attack and because his father's income is now lost, he travels north in search of work in Tijuana. En route, Memo meets the mysterious and beautiful Luz, a fledgling writer who posts what you might call "mindblogs" for a pay-for-memories market called "Trunode."

15 Please see the "Overview" section of *NAFTA Revisited*. In reference to the environmental and human cost of NAFTA, economists Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Jeffrey J. Schott write that "critics grossly exaggerated their magnitude" (4).

16 For more on opponents of NAFTA, please refer to the March 2000 NAFTA report "Five Years after NAFTA" by the Center for Immigration Studies (page 3; page 17 end note 1).

17 Please see Lawrence Herzog who estimates 70 percent (201), and the United States Department of Commerce press release regarding the Tijuana River estuary (estimating 75 percent, contact given as David Hall).

In the future of *Sleep Dealer* a person can connect to a network through her "nodes" and directly input her thoughts into blog or diary entries. These entries are Luz's livelihood, and when a client becomes interested in Memo's story Luz's motivations for helping Memo are questionable at best. The nodes also function as gateways to enhanced somatic and psychological experiences wherein a person can "plug in" to a range of sexual, drug-induced fantasies—but Memo's goal in acquiring nodes is to be able to work in large factories that outsource laboring Mexican bodies to US corporations. When Memo plugs in at work he is actually operating machinery in San Diego, CA. The poor labor conditions, the "undocumented" and unregistered node implants, the high risk of electrical shortages (and thus death), all contribute to the term "sleep dealer." Workers are lulled into deep states of exhaustion when they are plugged in. US corporations are in effect bartering with the sleep of Mexican workers.

In the post-9/11 future of *Sleep Dealer* US border security is used to further corporate interests and to dominate and control natural resources. For this reason *Sleep Dealer's* "rookie drone pilot" Rudy begins to wonder about the boundaries of the human and the place of ethics in drone attacks. In a scene in San Diego, CA, Rudy's identity is revealed as the man purchasing Luz's stories. After the attack on Memo's father, "the aqua-terrorist," Rudy asks his father—a decorated US military veteran with a noticeable accent—if he ever had any "doubt" about what "he did in the war."[18] Rudy's American accent contrasts with that of his parents when his father assures him that he does not regret his actions and that he remains a proud member of the US military. Although Rudy is not clearly a part of the US military, the boundaries between the militarization of the dam and anti-terrorist precautions—and thus those of nature, technology, and politics—are blurred beyond recognition.

The visual representations of corporeal communication and of wires running into veins suggest that in *Sleep Dealer's* "future" the reliance on technology has overtaken humanity. The environmental justice movement was mostly explored in the sciences and social sciences, but of late the humanities have been indispensable to opening up questions about the nature/culture divide. Raymond Williams astutely argues that "the idea of nature is the idea of man" (50). Man constructs nature, Williams continues, and all "that was not man," became nature—it had to be fundamentally separate and unspoiled to be "natural" (56). While experts debate the statistical evidence of the troubling intersections of discriminatory policies concerning women and minorities, none

18 Although the flash of an image featuring Rudy's father at war is ambiguous the desert setting makes strong overtures to the US occupations of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

will deny that in the crossover between toxicity and humans we are not only at fault but adversely effected. *Sleep Dealer* weds the image of man, nature, and machine in ways that do not allow one to clearly discern one from the other.

The *Drones* episode that features the killing of Memo's father is one such example that demonstrates how accelerated economic development driven by technology can lead to imbricated layers of dehumanization. The scene preceding the drone attack begins with a short montage of images of evidenced insurgency demonstrating why "companies fight back." Agitated crowds of Mexicans in Del Rio are said to be in "constant crisis" and the "Mayan Army of Water Liberation" is represented by black-masked individuals on grainy film resembling footage of ransom and beheading videos from the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Del Rio area is carefully billed as the "southern sector water supply" and not part of Mexico's territory. Putting aside the incongruities of national borders being transposed onto natural resources of liquid and air, the erasure of any acknowledgement that the watershed is firmly on the Mexican side points to the dangers of a "future" that uses national security to do as it pleases.

In *Sleep Dealer* multinational corporations have taken control of the "southern sector" of the globe and continue the long history of embodied violence. *Tropic of Orange* also focuses on the various bodies most impacted by globalization and colonial rule. As Julie Sze notes, Yamashita's magical realism and postmodern narratological approach push the boundaries of truth and reality in ways that challenge the reader to "understand the contemporary politics around free trade and globalization in an ideological and historical context" ("From Environmental Justice Literature" 171). *Sleep Dealer* offers a narrative of disembodied as well as embodied violence and explodes the barrier between the colonization of bodies and ideologies; in the future of Trunode, Luz's thoughts can be bought and sold through the virtual reality network and their commodification implicitly acknowledges surveillance. Rapid economic development and an increased scarcity of natural resources lead to a future of outright domination of the poorest by the richest and the weakest by the strongest. In the geography of post-NAFTA "free trade" human rights are eclipsed by capitalist-driven greed.

The struggle over water rights and trade agreements unveils the imbalance of power in US-Mexico relations. A moment of levity in *Sleep Dealer* occurs when Luz takes Memo to the beach. Surveying the Pacific Ocean for the first time in his life, Memo asks about the tall black bars extending out into the water. Luz laughs and replies that the US has put them up to keep out the "terrorist surfers" because it is "where the border wall ends." As absurd an image

as that is, enmeshing the iconic global image of a laid-back Californian surfer with that of an anti-American terrorist, it exposes the raw—racialized—nerve at the center of *Sleep Dealer*.

American Studies and True Sci-Fi

In the *Drones* episode featuring the murder of Memo's father the white, garishly American announcer pits Rudy against Memo's father and uses the banner of the American flag to cloak the extreme violence needed to continue mining natural resources in contested territory. The announcer makes sure to point out that Rudy is flanked by advanced flying cameras, the "fly-eyes." The level of surveillance is weighted equally with the impact of the drone and the viewer is given a split second of insight into how power manifests itself. The irony of the director's hope to make the "'truest' sci-fi film" is that for those scholars looking to American Studies from an ecocritical perspective, *Sleep Dealer* brings current and past issues to the forefront of ongoing debates on water rights, trade agreements, and human rights on the US-Mexico borderlands.

In the ebb and flow of globalization and technological advances lie the human and nonhuman bodies of evidence. As these tides of change sweep in and recede, they pull back to reveal the aftermath of human choices—often the most negatively impacted entities are those with the least amount of agency and visibility. It is this delicate balance of systems that American Studies has only recently begun to fully question and explore. When looking at cultural productions from an ecocritical perspective, we must not only consider the balance of the ecosystem but how that system is written about and what it reveals about US attitudes and in turn attitudes *towards* the U.S. The environmental justice movement began as an attempt to redress the tacit complicity of the government and its people in inappropriate land use, toxic dumping, dangerous labor conditions, and the denial of a voice to the—often ethnically marked—poor and working classes most impacted, but as the movement continues to grow its concerns are being recognized as universal.

It is this very universality translated into "globalization" that can sometimes lead to a blanketing over of issues or a sense of paralysis to the everyday individual hoping to make a difference. The narrative pastiche of *Tropic of Orange* weaves together an intricate portrait of present-day Los Angeles with all of its flaws and beauty and draws the reader into the story of each character. *Sleep Dealer* picks up the thread of the exploitation of human labor and natural resources and presents a narrative of multinational corporations taking ownership of the bodies and land of Mexico. One widespread view of ecocriticism, here expressed

by Richard Kerridge, is that it "seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (5). Yet in looking to *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* one might suggest that they are both responding and entering into new dialogues with their audiences about the very *in*coherency of the world. In her work on *Tropic of Orange*, Ruth Hsu convincingly suggests that part of Yamashita's narrative strategy is to "decenter" readers' notions of Los Angeles and to disorient them in terms of their spatiotemporal imaginaries (77). Far from romanticized idealizations of man's connection to earth, the artists at hand are disseminating images of increased distance from nature while also pushing audiences to think of the ways in which humans are ever more reliant on technology. *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* are a chorus of voices in answer to calls like those of Usula Heise for "environmental literature and ecocriticism . . . to engage more fully with the insights of recent theories of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism" (383). Cultural productions of the environmental justice movement are more and more demonstrating the relevancy and importance of the field of ecocriticism outside of academia. Taken together *Tropic of Orange* and *Sleep Dealer* add urgency and weight to Adamson and Slovic's proposed "third wave" of ecocriticism which "transcends ethnic and national boundaries" while respecting "ethnic and national particularities" and to Heise's call for a transnational turn within ecocriticism. In tackling issues of globalization and international commerce *Sleep Dealer* and *Tropic of Orange* foreground the biopolitical violence that accompanies the corporate-driven parsing up of global capital on the US-Mexico border; where Yamashita leaves off (pre-9/11) Rivera picks up and through his direction of *Sleep Dealer* he offers a powerful commentary on US anti-terrorist policies cloaking continued colonial and corporate interests.

Works Cited

Adamson, Joni, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona P, 2002.

Adamson, Joni and Scott Slovic. "The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism." *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 34.2 (2009): 5-24.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Bush, George W. "Proposal to Create the Department of Homeland Security." United States Department of Homeland Security. George W. Bush, 2002. Web. 16 Jan. 2010. <http://www.dhs.gov/xabout/history/publication_0015.shtm>

Calavita, Kitty. "U.S. Immigration and Policy Responses: The Limits of Legislation." *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*. Eds. Wayne A. Cornelius, Philip L. Martin, and James Frank Hollifield. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994. 55-82.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

Center for Immigration Studies. "Five Years after NAFTA: Rhetoric and Reality of Mexican Immigration in the 21st Century." March 2000. Web. <http://www.cis.org/articles/2000/naftareport.pdf>

Comfort, Susan. "Struggle in Ogoniland : Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Cultural Politics of Environmental Justice." *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Eds. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona P, 2002. 229-46.

Deming, Alison H. and Lauret E. Savoy, eds. *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World.* Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2002.

Gaard, Greta. "Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach." *Organization and the Environment* 14.2 (2001): 157-72.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Glotfelty, Cheryll. Introduction. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1996. xv-xxxvii.

Head, Dominic. "The (im)possibility of ecocriticism." *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. Eds. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells. London: Zed, 1998. 27–39.

Heise, Ursula K. "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies." *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (2008): 381-404.

Herzog, Lawrence A. *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space and Politics on the US-Mexico Border*. Austin, TX: Centre for Mexican American Studies/U of Texas P, 1990.

"Homeland Security: US-Mexico Border Fence / Great Wall of Mexico Secure Fence." Global Security. GlobalSecurity.org , 2010. Web. 15 March, 2010. <http:// www.globalsecurity.org/security/systems/mexico-wall.htm>

Hsu, Ruth Y. "The Cartography of Justice and Truthful Refractions in Karen Tei Yamashita's Tropic of Orange." *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*. Eds. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, John Blair Gamber, Stephen Hong Sohn, and Gina Valentino. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2006.

Hufbauer, Gary Clyde and Jeffrey J. Schott. Overview. *NAFTA Revisited*. Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2005. 1-78.

Kerridge, Richard and Neil Sammells, eds. *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. London: Zed Books, 1998.

Lee, Sue-Im. "'We Are Not the World': Global Village, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.3 (2007). 501-527.

Maquilapolis. Dir. Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre. CineMamás Film, 2006. DVD.

Martínez-Alier, Joan. *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*. Cheltenham, UK; Northhampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2002.

Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand and Nolan J. Malone. "System Assembly: A History of Mexico-U.S. Migration." *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. 24-51.

Nevins, Joseph. *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: the War on "Illegals" and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2010.

---. *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Border*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Nixon, Rob. "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism." *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Eds. Ania Loomba et. al. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. 133-51.

Rivera, Alex. Director's Statement. *Sleep Dealer*. Sleep Dealer, 2008. Web. 20 Jan. 2010. <http://www.sleepdealer.com/synopsis.html>

Shiva, Vandana. *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*. Cambridge, MA: South End P, 2005.

Sleep Dealer. Dir. Alex River. Perf. Luis Fernando Peña, Leonor Varela, and Jacob Vargas. Starlight Film Finance, 2009. DVD.

Sze, Julie. "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice." *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Eds. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona P, 2002. 163-80.

---. "'Not by Politics Alone': Gender and Environmental Justice in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*." *Bucknell Review* 44.1 (2000): 29-42.

United States. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service. "North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)." USDA. n.d. Web. 18 Jan. 2010. <http://www.fas.usda.gov/itp/Policy/nafta/nafta.asp>

---. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). "NOAA, State Officials Dedicate $1.2 Million in New and Renovated Facilities for Tijuana River National Estuarine Reserve." NOAA. August 2007. Web. 25 April 2010. <http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/releases2007/aug07/noaa07-r430.html>

---. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General. "Background to the Office of the Inspector General Investigation." USDOJ. July 1998. Web. 1 May 2010. <http://www.justice.gov/oig/special/9807/gkp01.htm>

Wallace, Molly. "Tropics of Globalization: Reading the New North America." *symplokē* 9.1-2 (2001): 145-60.

Williams, Raymond. "Ideas of Nature." *Nature: Thinking the Natural*. Eds. David Inglis, John Bone and Rhoda Wilkie. London: Routledge, 2005. 47-62.

Yamashita, Karen Tei. Interview by Elizabeth Glixman. "An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita." *Eclectica Magazine* 11.4 (2007). Web. 10 Nov. 2009. <http://www.eclectica.org/v11n4/glixman_yamashita.html>

---. *Tropic of Orange*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House P, 1997.