Transnationalism in *Biutiful*

Cinema of globalization, one of Deborah Shah’s categories for transnational Hispanic cinema, dictates that a film focuses on ideas regarding globalization, specifically the ways the power dynamics in character relationships are shown. The clip from *Biutiful* demonstrates many modes of transnationalism, however, this paper will focus on how globalization is addressed through Uxbal’s role and the representation of natives and immigrants living in Barcelona.

In the medium shot about fourteen seconds into the clip, Uxbal is seen seated at the bar of which primarily members from the Chinese community come to. The clip includes medium shots of several Chinese people enjoying themselves at the bar – for example, eleven seconds into the clip there are two Asian men singing along to a karaoke song. Right off the bat one can see the transnational elements through the intersection of different communities – Uxbal being a native to Barcelona and characters like Hai (mentioned in the clip) being immigrants from different countries. *Biutiful* as a whole includes several different cultures such as Chinese culture, Senegalese culture, and Latin American culture. These varied backgrounds create transnational friendships, family relationships, and business partnerships. This clip in particular fulfills two definitions of globalization, the first being “the goal of an interconnected marketplace that allows for the unimpeded flow of commerce capital.” This definition was introduced in a lecture and refers to Uxbal’s business endeavors as he engages with the police force, the Senegalese sellers, and the Chinese manufacturers. The film evidently tackles the topic of exchanging goods through the chain of command and product flow – the Chinese create the product and the Senegalese sell them.

The second definition of globalization the clip fulfills comes from Deborah Shah’s definitions. Shah states one facet of transnationalism stems from globalization, more particularly - “the ways in which relations of power between nations and people are played out on screen.” Through his interactions with the Senegalese, the Chinese, and the local Barcelona police, viewers are able to identify Uxbal’s role. Uxbal serves as a bridge between the inhabitants of Barcelona and the illegal immigrants that strive to make a living. A sort of transnational business model has formed and Uxbal is in the center of it all. Through these interactions, there are several character power dynamics at play. We can see that Uxbal is caught between his role as a businessman and his role as a provider. On one hand, he is using the abilities and labor of the illegal immigrants for his benefit. On the other hand, he cares for them and this is shown through many of his actions. Viewers see Lili, single mother and babysitter of Uxbal’s children, appear towards the end of the clip in a mid-long shot. Lili represents a good example of Uxbal caring for the people he is surrounded by. Despite the ending result of his actions, his intention of improving the living conditions of the factory workers showcase his morals. Cinema that addresses globalization is inherently included under the larger umbrella of transnationalism. *Biutiful* is able to exemplify different kinds of globalization through the inclusion of several different cultures and the deep-rooted power dynamics that exist amongst characters.