Cracks as Portals of Change: A Reading of Disasters in Juan Villoro's Novel *Materia dispuesta* (1997)

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> Una literatura nace siempre frente a una realidad histórica y, a menudo, contra esa realidad. La literatura hispanoamericana no es una excepción a esta regla.
>
> –Octavio Paz

In Juan Villoro's *Materia dispuesta* (1997), earthquakes, specifically, are portrayed as symbolic ruptures that have the potential to enable social catharsis. However, if characters do not opt for breaking free from prescriptive gender models after a moment of crisis occurs, a return to the status quo is reaffirmed. This novel eloquently displays how those who failed to reinvent themselves after cataclysms also failed to create communal spaces of transformation in the aftermath of disaster. As Fabio Morabito (2011) points out, "[social] tremors can help us create a sense of consciousness, and those who not are awakened by that symbolic cataclysm are lost."[1] I concur with his interpretation of earthquakes in the context of *Materia dispuesta* because the two earthquakes described, one at the beginning of the narration and the other at the end, are not only material—they are symbolic. They reveal social fractures that existed before the crack, a metaphor for a state in crisis that is made visible after a natural disaster.[2]

The seven chapters of this coming-of-age novel profile Mauricio, the main character and narrator, as he journeys through a life marked by disasters. His birth (and beginning of the story) coincides with his remembrance of the Mexico City earthquake of 1957, a moment looked upon as a moment of calamity, when he and his family are relocated to *Terminal progreso*, a "modern" housing project in the outskirts of Mexico City.[3]

The relocation marks a series of displacements and shifts in the narrative. For instance, Mauricio shifts from telling his life story in the first person in the opening three chapters to narrating in the third person—this fluctuation parallels a sense of inadequacy as he traverses

the city. His failure to adapt and embrace change is later signaled by the occurrence of a final earthquake (presumably that of 1985), an event that not only concludes the novel, but also highlights the moment Mauricio confronts embracing communality or being tied to the status quo and the performance of hegemonic masculinity.

It is then that, through moments of crisis, Mauricio is presented with alternatives to break free from prescriptive notions of machismo that, as Matthew Gutmann ([1996] 2006) mentions, are linked to the physical body. It follows that if the body enters a space affected by decadence, the meanings of the macho are also placed into question. Moments of crisis, hence, provide Mauricio with ways to question the nation and perceptions of masculinity. Because, as Robert Irwin (2003) reminds us, "[Mexican] nationhood is constructed as a 'virile' institution, a brotherhood of men, a key ideological factor to consider is the particular notion of sex and gender incorporated into texts that represent national culture" (xvii).

Drawing from Irwin, Gutmann, and others, this analysis proposes that Mexican masculinities described and examined in this novel present a practice of hierarchical homosociability; they work "as a means of strengthening power and of creating close bonds between men and between women to maintain and defend hegemony" (Hammarén and Johansson 1). The male characters do not practice a horizontal homosociability that "[would] point toward more inclusive relations between, for example, men that are based on emotional closeness, intimacy, and nonprofitable forms of friendship" (Hammarén and Johansson 1). Instead, male characters desire to practice a hegemonic masculinity—a performance of the *macho*—that ultimately becomes an obstacle for repairing a nation in ruins. This, I contend, becomes a barrier against embracing a praxis of solidarity and mutual care.

The main character's father represents the discourses of the past (a nation in decline), while Mauricio depicts the potential power that youths have to break free from imposed paternalistic patterns, recognizing that "everything that my father did tended to be pulsated by friction" (22).[4] Mauricio is aware of the tension that his father causes with his multiple affairs, yet decides to become a silent observer by obeying his father's mandates. Consequently, he is complicit; his masculinity is perceived as that of an observer who becomes involved in homosocial bonding, defined by Eve Sedgwick as a male-kinship bond created based on obligatory heterosexuality (3). In every exchange

between Mauricio and his father, homosociability is reaffirmed by the confirmation of masculinity. As Mauricio obeys and becomes an ally in his father's affairs, he reaffirms homosocial bonding. His observation exemplifies this relationship:

> I did not know the technique my father used to definitely breakup with women. I didn't see tears or spasms in those women. They all looked happy until the end and I came to think, with icy objectivity, that he cut them off in the most literal sense. The image of my father as a decapitator did not hinder me much: it corresponded to his Herculean power, to the circle of strength that would be valuable for me while I was part of it. (21)[5]

This statement characterizes Mauricio's ties with his father. On the one hand, he does not know how his father dissolves his relationships with women, and, on the other, he acknowledges that he will be protected by his father's circle as long as he is compliant with his father's hegemonic masculinity. By acknowledging this, Mauricio becomes conscious that his own identity is reduced to his sexual vigor and makes him aware of his own vulnerable character—that is, that he can enter a space of physical decline and become like his father, who loses his virility after a heart attack.

The uncertainty that this realization produces in Mauricio causes him to be voluble, exemplified throughout the narrative. For instance, he narrates his puberty in the first and third person. This represents the fragmentation of Mauricio's character as he traverses the outskirts of Mexico City. There is a duality that Mauricio expresses throughout his narration, yet he does not embrace that heteroflexibility. He goes from using the first-person pronoun to refer to himself at the beginning of the narrative to using the third-person pronoun to refer to the person he has become, as if that condition were forced upon him. He even mentions that his first heterosexual opinions were forced on him by a "survey of heteronormativity" (54).[6] These narratives, Mauricio mentions, are the mandates of a hegemonic nation that maintains a hypermasculinity that, as Irwin (2003) notes, has been supported by the network of male homosocial bonding exploited by the Mexican state project.

Mauricio reinforces the network of homosociability in his relationship with his best friend Pancho. When Pancho reveals his sexual desire for a male mechanic called Vulcano, only Mauricio knows of his yearning and becomes complicit in Pancho's encounters with Vulcano.

However, as time passes, Mauricio states that Pancho breaks ties with Vulcano, or perhaps, Pancho does not inform Mauricio of further visits. When Mauricio recounts this, he acknowledges that Pancho might have gone back to Vulcano; however, Pancho will not admit it and maintains his performance of hegemonic masculinity. Irwin reminds us, "[Mexican] masculinity is achieved and bolstered through symbolic (or real) homosexual acts, which do not imply a homosexual identity" (xxvii). Therefore, after Pancho has oral sex with Vulcano, Mauricio comments that "Pancho did not want to return there [to the vulcanizer], at least he did not return to him in my company" (28), thus reaffirming Pancho's masculinity since there is a need within homosocial networks to confirm masculine virility at all times. Such mandates are also endorsed by static notions of thinking about identity as a fixed heteronormative construct, instead of accepting that it is a complex fluid space.

Another instance of Mauricio performing rigid Mexican masculinity is when he dresses as a *charro*.[7] Mauricio is forced to dress this way because this apparent father-son activity is what allows his father to get away with his infidelity. Mauricio has to lie to his mother and tell her that he takes "music lessons" when, in reality, his father is using this pretext to have his affairs. Little by little, Mauricio becomes complicit in his father's affairs. *Charro*, therefore, is described in the novel as a sort of mask that deceives, but one that is needed for the narrative of the macho to continue.

Mauricio recalls that his father assured him that *charro* ancestry ran through his veins because his mother's family came from the Jalisco Highlands. This assertion gave his father credibility, but it also revealed an impediment because, according to Mauricio, in the Jalisco Highlands there is French lineage that makes him too light skinned to be recognized as a true Mexican *charro* (48).[8] Mauricio soon realizes that his father tends to insert himself in the narrative of fixed notions regarding Mexicanness. His father, who believes himself to be a Jalisco Mexican, has a French bloodline passed on by his mother. This contradiction explains the inexactitude of what Mexicanness is because there is no monolithic Mexican.

In addition to Mauricio's performance of masculinity, his inability to cope with changes can also be traced to his birth in the same year as the Mexico City earthquake of 1957. After the quake, Mauricio and his family are forced to relocate to *Terminal progreso* (Progress Destination),

a fictional area in the outskirts of Mexico City near Xochimilco. Living in that area, particularly near Xochimilco, highlights the alienation the family endured due to relocation and accommodations of power from the periphery to the center. Ana Fernanda Canales emphasizes that during the 1980s in Mexico the distribution of social classes followed this pattern: "the privileged sectors inhabited the central areas, while the lower classes were displaced to the periphery" (38). The relocated communities lived with the promise that progress would, at some point, become part of their lives.

For Mauricio and his family, however, progress did not become a reality. As he grows up, he hopes to move away from *Terminal progreso* and even attempts to relocate to a better neighborhood. However, he finds it hard to improve his lot because his position at the margins of the Mexican capital makes him aware of the allegorical similarities that he has with the *axolotl* that he encounters at Xochimilco Lake. In Mexico, the *axolotl* is the Mexican amphibian that cannot mutate. This inability to transform symbolizes, as Roger Bartra (1987) mentions, an allegory of Mexican postmodernity that he describes as *desmodernidad*, a condition that suggests that Mexicans cannot be postmodern because they truly never experienced modernity. They are instead an excess of modernity because they have always been excluded from it (26). Mauricio sees these animals and thinks that "*axolotls* brought memories of an era of active volcanoes and fabulous saurians; and now, unfortunately, their habitat was reduced to the damned water of Xochimilco, the only thing that is left of the Aztecs" (29).[9] Clearly, Mauricio parallels himself with the image of the *axolotl* because he too feels in danger of becoming a figure that cannot transform.[10] For him to live away from the dreamed modern city causes him and his family to feel in discord with the narratives of progress, as he recalls:

> To live in the outskirts was to grow against nature; I longed for the day when the cornfields would be replaced by cinemas and shopping centers. We were on the uncertain frontier of families recently harmed or who barely improved enough to leave a decrepit neighborhood in the center. *Terminal Progreso* was a succession of houses made in series . . . that only served to emphasize that they were not mansions. (29)[11]

For Mauricio, the modern city is that unreachable place where amenities are located, presumably at hand; the periphery where he lives, however, feels like a forgotten planet of its own.

Mauricio's mother also yearns for the modern city, as she recalls the events before the family's relocation to *Terminal progreso* with a touch of melancholy. During dinner conversations, she points out that Mexico City was founded on a volcanic basin (33) and that the area was always prone to tectonic mobility (33).[12] Subsequently, she remembers that the earthquake of 1957 was the cause of her family's disgrace, and this sequence of unchained memories from the mother-figure gives Mauricio the impression that he was the real originator of the family's disgrace:

> This sequence of events meant that the real spoiler of the family was me; I was born the year in which the tectonic plates moved a few centimeters and the heart of the city suffered a cataclysm that, although it was not fatal, had its symbolic meaning; in Reforma Avenue, the Angel of Independence lost its orientation and flew into a tailspin, as a foretaste of the celestial inversion that occurred in the next few years (on smoggy nights, the Angel would understand that the stars were below). (31)[13]

Here Mauricio describes his feelings of guilt as well as the symbolically charged impact that the cataclysm of 1957 had on him and his family. The correlation between that earthquake and the fall of the iconic figure of the Angel of Independence (a real-life event that occurred then in Mexico City) is fused into *Materia dispuesta* with the purpose of emphasizing not only the material account of the damage that an earthquake caused, but also the symbolic nature of natural disasters when it comes to exposing the state's cracks.

The reference to the fall of the Angel of Independence, erected during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz in 1910 when the Mexican Revolution erupted, has a symbolic component. It is not coincidental that it is mentioned at the beginning of novel, since it is described as an outcome of moments of tension as well as a premonition linked to the fall of Díaz, whose promises failed to incorporate all civilians to modernization, and even displaced some of them to the peripheries.

As Mauricio conjures these memories of a personal and national past, he melancholically recalls the similarities between his encounters with the *axolotls* since he too feels out of place and in a different era. His family lives on the periphery because it has been cast out, and his refusal to embrace change or fluidity, or to see an opportunity in the spaces that open up between the cracks, condemns him to mimic hegemonic models of masculinity. Even when Mauricio does not fit

into that mold, he longs to become like his father; he thus comments that "there was nothing better than growing up, even if that meant that he will be contaminated by it" (64).[14] His desires also become his fears because, towards the end of the novel, the figure of the father is displayed in total decay: "I lost my virility. I can't get an erection" (291).[15] His father's virile decline initiates a chain of decadent events that foreshadow the imminent collapse of the macho-figure narratives as women-led groups arise.

Veronica, Mauricio's friend, becomes the embodiment of female empowerment. Minutes after a final earthquake, Mauricio sees her, a previously shy girl, become a brigade member, "with her hands on her horn, screaming in a voice she thought would make it to the fourth floor" (305).[16] Initially described as a woman who lost her voice, she suddenly rises, like the phoenix, from the ruins of the earthquake. Her image may also be linked to those of women-led movements that emerged as a response to the Mexico City earthquake of 1985. Along with other brigade members, Veronica represents the vital and positive force of disaster embodied in renovation and collective empowerment – Mauricio does not join the brigade. As everyone helps rebuild the city, Mauricio "[first listens to the] the sound of shovels; [while] work continued" (310).[17] He stares from afar and reflects on his circumstances and describes society as the two sides of a towel, with a rough side for those who want to build a future and the soft side for those who collect the pieces (311).[18] By dividing society into binaries, he does not acknowledge that the towel's rough side and the soft side are but one. Consequently, by rejecting this singularity, he allegorically transforms into an *axolotl,* the Mexican amphibian that cannot transform.

Mauricio's inaction causes him to become immobile. He thereby asserts no agency about his destiny as an agent of the nation. After the last earthquake, which he witnessed from afar, he returns to the vicious cycle that his father induced him to follow—that of the macho who stares at chaos without offering aid. To assist is to perform emotional labor, and the macho is not guided by emotions or solidarity, but by safeguarding his own security and no one else's. Mauricio's only move is to turn on the radio to hear the president's announcement urging people to remain calm and that Mexico is not in need of public assistance. Meanwhile, a radio announcer contradicts him by announcing that the Red Cross needs volunteers:

> [Mauricio's family] listened to the news on the radio: the president said that Mexico did not need help, an announcer accustomed to speaking with an uncontrolled joy said that the Red Cross asked for volunteers and recommended boiling water for twenty minutes and report gas leaks. (306)[19]

There is contradiction between what the head of state is telling civilians and what the radio announcer is conveying. The president's declaration is similar to that voiced by Miguel de la Madrid, president at the time of the 1985 earthquake. De la Madrid urged citizens to remain calm in the face of the catastrophe as he negated the state of disaster the nation was enduring. Therefore, this episode exposes the attempt by the government to anesthetize the community, while the radio announcer calls people into action and to remain alert due to the gravity of the quake and its aftermath.

Mauricio, however, does not act. His male-centered attitude impedes his personal development because he is unable to change. For him, transformation parallels disruption and chaos. His family circle induced him into this attitude: the mother became the corroborator of moral values, while his father became the embodiment of a patriarchal state that later entered a state of crisis.[20] As Mauricio learned from his father's behavior, he embraced narratives aligned with hypermasculinity because he feared instability and the unknown. This, in turn, guided him towards the path of a masculinity that is neither transformative nor positive.

As a result, Mauricio does not change, but instead links moments of tension like betrayal, confusion, sexual identification, and displacement with ruptures. This leads him to think about the crack (that space left open after the destabilization of order occurs) as a threat to his stability, when in reality the crack can become the fissure that allows him to see the fractures of the system. Thus, as he figuratively blinds himself, he becomes a victim of the mandates of masculinity since, as Rita Segato (2016) reminds us, the first victims of these mandates are men because patriarchy kills and consumes those who adhere to its terms.

Materia dispuesta reminds us that disasters are an opportunity to break the bonds of imposed narratives; otherwise, a return to the status quo is imminent. Mauricio's refusal to cooperate in the rebuilding of the city and to participate in the brigades places him as an ally of a world that has already collapsed. When stares from afar after the earthquake strikes, he figuratively becomes an *axolotl* because he does

not change. This image of muteness has been allegorized with the fatalist nature of what it entails to be monolithically Mexican. Mauricio thereby fails to understand that Mexicanity is not embodied in a single voice but in multiple ones, and his lack of understanding places him at risk since he belongs to a world that is disappearing. To embrace possibility and change, he must join the communal and break free from imposed notions of masculinity.

The novel contributes to the depiction of those vices of the hegemonic class that perpetuate practices of hegemonic masculinity. These vices, as described in the work, are real obstacles to a nation that aims to rebuild itself after a disaster. It is not until those fixed identity constructs are dissolved that we can begin to envision not a single form, but multiple ones for reconfiguring identities. Thus, Villoro signals that without communal alliance—regardless of gender, class, or social status—a social transformation cannot occur. Historically rooted events like the Mexico City earthquakes of 1957 and 1985 reinforce this point by representing the hegemonically masculine responses that complied with government narratives.

Unlike the nineteenth-century Latin American novel, which portrays the family as an allegory of the nation (Sommer 1991), *Materia dispuesta* builds on the same family allegory to critique the failure of the modern state and its hegemonic models of masculinity and utilizes allegory to represent the vices of hegemonic narratives as obstacles to rebuilding a nation in ruins. This characteristic is overtly portrayed in the novel to criticize the inaction of male characters who, instead of joining the community, decide to remain unmoved by their society's changes.

Juan Villoro's *Materia dispuesta* illustrates how disasters narrated through the novel of formation require a reformulation of concepts of nation and masculinity because disaster prioritizes the communal experience as an event that promotes a subjective turn from an individual stand to a shared account unified by a politics of solidarity. The work also proposes a change in optics of representation that challenges gender roles, public spheres, national narratives, and the discourse of self-made men aligned with the slowly emerging neoliberal agenda of the 1980s, an agenda that sees catastrophe as an individualized experience and not as a collective struggle.

My analysis stresses how natural disasters are represented in fiction as portals that enable awareness of latent disparities in the distribution

of power that the modern Mexican state has reinforced. The space of catastrophe is, therefore, the site where what is latent remains hidden, segregated, and abused; this is why the crack (the space that opens up after a disaster) exhibits the fractures and marginalization experienced by those who are divided and not incorporated into the promise of the state.

Undeniably, disaster narration, whether it is about the Coronavirus pandemic, the social awakenings of last year, the long-standing immigration crisis, or dictatorial regimes, always directs us to one specific theme of historical wounds. The study of disaster narration in *Materia dispuesta* offers new ways to examine how disasters are articulated through the novel of formation in fragmentary, journalistic, and testimonial forms that distinguish the tectonic tropes in connection to political motifs. Indeed, Villoro connects the tectonic tropes to the writing of disaster and links them to the process of reconstruction. This explains why he took more than a decade to write this book. In an interview for the newspaper *El Cultural* (2011), he admits that when the Mexico City earthquake of 1985 struck, the catastrophe was so recent that it required more reflection. This distancing from that event indicates that there is a correlation between the time individuals take to articulate the wounds of the past and the time it takes them to explore the depths of trauma.

However, exactly thirty-two years after the deadly Mexico City earthquake of September 19, 1985, Mexico felt the earth shake again on the evening of September 19, 2017. This time Villoro acted immediately and wrote the poem "*El puño en alto*," which appeared in the newspaper *Reforma* three days after the 2017 quake. The poem remits to the historical wound of colonization linked to the present precarious conditions some forgotten citizens faced even before the occurrence of a natural disaster. The poem's lyric voice reminds us that it is precisely those forgotten by society that emerge in solidarity when all collapses.

Now, for instance, as the whole world faces the Coronavirus pandemic, another type of disaster, people around the globe are making sense of the wounds that this disaster is helping to illuminate. Those wounds indicate systematic inequalities, embedded racism, sexism, and the continual exploitation of underprivileged bodies and of our planet. Disaster may function as a ghost that haunts us and exposes our fears and desires. Yet, being haunted is not necessarily negative

because "being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as a cold knowledge, but a transformative recognition" (Gordon 8). Thus, writing about disaster and analyzing its articulations brings us closer to understanding how communities arise for change and equity because they have experienced a transformative recognition of their wounds.

Materia dispuesta displays the abrasions that disasters cause by portraying catastrophe as a magnifying portal of hope through which characters who rise with the communal have the opportunity to transform and innovate, while those who inscribe themselves in past narratives are described as fueled by obsolete values. In other words, those who wish to look at discourses of the past as the ultimate goal for progress insert themselves in narratives that do not yield access to the emergence of the communal or to futurity. Neglecting the communal distances them from creating a shared account, whereas those who belong to the nation are connected by a sense of belonging to an emotional community. Disaster, therefore, strikes to remind us that *all that is solid melts into the air*, and that all that binds us is, after all, a shared experience of despair that transforms itself into the drive for systematic change.[21]

Notes

[1] "Solo los temblores nos pueden ayudar, y aquel que no sabe coger su temblor a tiempo, se pierde" (96). All English translations are by me.

[2] Likewise, for Vilas (2011) and Carneiro (2007), earthquakes place into question the foundations of modernity and the collapse of the national.

[3] Connell ([1993] 2005) describes hegemonic masculinity as a dominant form of masculinity that displays traits valued in our society.

[4] "todo en él tendía a la fricción" (22).

[5] "No vi llantos ni espasmos. Todas lucían contentas hasta el final y llegué a pensar, con helada objetividad, que las cortaba en el más literal de los sentidos. La imagen de mi padre como decapitador múltiple no me estorbaba gran cosa: correspondía a su hercúleo poderío, al círculo de fuerza que sería bueno mientras yo estuviese dentro" (21).

[6] "mis primeras opiniones heterosexuales fueron forzadas por un plebiscito" (54).

[7] Since the 1920s, and with more emphasis on the 1930s, the figure of the *charro*, whether accompanied by his *china poblana* dancing a *tapatío* song, or as a solitary image, was considered an emblem of swagger and machismo. This mold was imposed over other regionalist representations —the *jarocho*, the *huasteco*, the *norteño,* etc.—as one of the preferred stereotypes for indicating "the Mexican" (Carreño King 25). "A partir de los años veintes y con mayor énfasis en los treintas, la figura del charro, ya fuera acompañado de su china poblana bailando un jarabe tapatío o como imagen solitaria, emblema de su fanfarronería y machismo, se fue imponiendo sobre las otras representaciones regionalistas – el jarocho, el huasteco, el norteño, etc.- como uno de los estereotipos preferidos para indicar "lo mexicano" (Carreño King 25).

[8] "Mi padre aseguró que llevaba la charrería en las venas: su familia maternal provenía de los Altos de Jalisco. Esto le daba cierta prosapia a su nueva afición, pero también revelaba un impedimento: en los Altos hay sangre francesa y él era demasiado rubio para convencer como charro" (48).

[9] "Los axolotls recordaban una era de volcanes activos y saurios fabulosos; por desgracia, su hábitat se reducía al agua castigada de Xochimilco, lo único que quedaba de los Aztecas" (29).

[10] The axolotl remains a powerful image in the narratives of the Mexican nation. The Mesoamerican myths describe the axolotl as a semi-salamander that does not reach its potential and cannot become a salamander because it refuses to change. This refusal to transform prevents it from reaching full development and averts it from changing.

[11] "Vivir en las afueras equivalía a crecer contra la naturaleza; anhelaba el día en que las milpas donde verdeaba el maíz fueran sustituidas por cines y centros comerciales. Estábamos en la incierta frontera de las familias recién perjudicadas o que mejoraron apenas lo suficiente para salir de una decrépita vecindad en el centro. Terminal Progreso era un suceso de casas hechas en serie que sólo servían para enfatizar que no eran mansiones" (29).

[12] "Mamá nos vio como si la piedra se transformara en un blando ajolote. Su mente siguió una cadena más o menos de este estilo: la ciudad de México se fundó en una cuenca volcánica, en las regiones rodeadas de volcanes hay terremotos, el temblor de 1957 era la causa de nuestra desgracia" (33).

[13] "Esta secuencia significaba que el auténtico aguafiestas de la familia era yo; nací en el año que las placas telúricas se desplazaron unos centímetros y el corazón de la ciudad padeció un cataclismo que, aunque no fue fatal, tuvo su carga simbólica; en Paseo de la reforma el Ángel de la independencia perdió la orientación y voló en picada, como un anticipo de la inversión celeste que ocurriría en los próximos años (en las noches de esmog, el Ángel entendería que las estrellas estaban abajo"(31).

[14] "Nada me parecía mejor que crecer, aunque fuera para contagiarme" (64).

[15] "No tengo verga. No se me para" (291).

[16] "Verónica estaba de espaldas, las manos en bocina, gritando con una voz que creía capaz de llegar al cuarto piso" (305).

[17] "Escuchó el rumor de las palas allá fueras; los trabajos proseguían" (310).

[18] "Mauricio entendió lo que significaba el otro lado de la toalla: el lado áspero para quienes construían y se adelantaban al destino; el lado suave para los testigos que recogían las porciones dispersas, rotas" (311).

[19] "Escucharon las noticias en un radio de transistores: el presidente decía que México no necesitaba ayuda, un locutor acostumbrado a hablar con una alegría desconsolada dijo que la Cruz roja pedía voluntarios y recomendó hervir veinte minutos el agua y reportar las fugas de gas" (306).

[20] The mother reads "Selecciones" (*Reader's Digest*) (41), an American-inspired magazine well-known for its conservative and traditional content. It is not coincidental that she reads this magazine since she is described as a character who is conservative and "the guardian of good morals." This quality is reminiscent of the president at the time of the earthquake of 1985, whose political slogan was "moral renovation."

[21] Reference to Berman's (1988) book, *All That is Solid Melts Into the Air*.

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