

A CHAMELEON CRAWLING UP THE FUTURE: THE AMAZON AND ITS LITERATURE AS A COUNTER-REFLECTION OF DEVELOPMENTALIST TEMPORALITY

UM CAMALEÃO ESCALANDO O FUTURO: A AMAZÔNIA E SUA LITERATURA COMO UM ANTIRREFLEXO DA TEMPORALIDADE DESENVOLVIMENTISTA

Davi Silva Gonçalves
Mestre em Letras (UFSC)
goncalves.davi@hotmail.com

Abstract

Historically, categorical dichotomies have been problematised by queer perspectives emerging from instances such as Amazonian time and space, whose basic premises put into question such normative, objective, and homogeneous narratologies. Thinking of an interface with the Amerindians therein, as well as their epistemes, both effaced by globalisation, my purpose in the study is to, therefrom, analyse if and how the condition whereby the Amazon and Amazonians are constructed in *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) contributes to such discussion. Through the premises set forth by a postcolonial and queer approach on the matter of peripheral ontologies, I test the hypothesis that the Amazon is effective in its transformative epistemological endeavour.

Keywords: Amazon. Postcolonialism. Queer theory. *The Brothers*.

Resumo

Historicamente, dicotomias categóricas têm sido problematizadas por perspectivas *queer* que emergem de instâncias como o tempo e espaço amazônico, cujas premissas colocam em cheque narratologias normativas, objetivas e homogêneas. Pensando em uma interface com os Ameríndios lá presentes, assim como com seus epistemes, ambos apagados pela globalização, minha proposta nesse estudo é, a partir daí, analisar se e como a condição na qual a Amazônia e seus habitantes tais quais construídos em *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) contribui para tal discussão. Através das premissas oferecidas por uma abordagem pós-colonial e *queer* na questão das ontologias periféricas, testo a hipótese de que a Amazônia é efetiva em seu intento epistemológico transformativo.

Palavras-chave: Amazônia. Pós-colonialismo. Teoria *queer*. *The Brothers*.

Na viagem de regresso não seria já eu que voltava. Seria um quem não sei, sem minha infância. Culpa de nada. Só isto: sou árvore nascida em margem. Mais lá, no



adiante, sou canoa, a fugir pela corrente; mais próximo sou madeira incapaz de escapar do fogo. (Mia Couto, O Último Voo do Flamingo, 2000, p. 48)

Introduction: Disgusted with freedom

Historically, categorical dichotomies have been problematised by queer perspectives emerging from instances such as Amazonian time and space, whose basic premises put into question such normative, objective, and homogeneous narratologies. The well-known antipastoral critique elaborated by Frederick Douglass in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) – who tells his story as an ex U.S. slave from a postcolonial lens – as well as the one elaborated by Nael in *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002), invert the pastoral dialectic; it concerns the impressions of marginalised identities deprived of citizenship observing the structuring of Western ontologism as an anthropocentric and vicious attempt to animalise the margin and deify the centre. Moreover, inasmuch as generally “a primordial complicity with the world is supposed to be the foundation of our possibility of speaking of it, in it, of indicating and naming it, of judging it and ultimately of knowing in the form of truth” (FOUCAULT, 1981, p. 65), the fact that we have been able to give some credit to Douglass discourse, and that, perhaps, we might be able to do the same thing with what Hatoum wants to tell us, shows us that we are not necessarily doomed to keep believing in the fallacies of pastoralism – i.e. of this romanticisation of those temporal and spatial constraints that do not necessarily fit hegemonic narratology. The development of the Amazon, the insertion of its time and space into the epistemes of Western normativity, the institutionalisation of its inhabitants and the commodification of their cultures are not unavoidable processes that embody the natural course of things.

Globalisation is not a single story, and a region’s survival does not have pre-given ingredients – nor guarantees. The insertion of 3rd world places into 1st world ones have always been a singular, narrow-minded, iniquitous, egotistical, uninformed, bigoted, and suicidal episteme: Ours. That is: the “local” has been domesticated by an idealised “universal” – which, in the end, is as local as the former. Thinking of an interface with the Amerindians therein, as well as their



epistemes, both effaced by globalisation, my purpose in the study is to, therefrom, analyse if and how the Amazon and Amazonians as brought by Hatoum (2002) in the characterisation of his novel protagonists contribute to such discussion. This even though they are already inserted in the hegemonic system – i.e. these characters' stories and spaces are not in our past and their exploitation is not an attempt to insert them in the present. This is to say that the present does only exist because peripheral and unfitting subjects, like the ones Nael and Domingas seem to represent, exist and are utilised as to serve the interests of such system. They cannot be forgotten and “set free” to thrive in their particular space and time because such particularism does not exist; the Amazon is already playing a role in the global sphere and its inhabitants are, inevitably, already being engulfed by hegemonic needs. Through the premises set forth by a postcolonial and queer approach on the matter of peripheral ontologies, I shall test the hypothesis that the Amazon is effective in its transformative epistemological endeavour. Such ambition might sound a little bit self-centred, but I am pretty sure many people share this view. Whatever our contemporary existence makes us, there is still much to be made – regardless of the obstacles.

Proliferating the pastoral discourse helps the system to have some more control regarding its side effects; hence its interest in “giving” peripheral subjects some piece of this or that land (e.g. providing Amerindians with protected land and exploring the Amazon without overtly destroying its foundations. We are provided with some autonomy – but not too much; such as Amerindians are given a chance to make their culture keep existing: an attempt of central epistemes to convince us that they are being “taken care” of. Nevertheless, we do not have holidays for “celebrating the native” – for whatever that means – because hegemony is worried about Amerindians' culture, what hegemony is worried about is with the reactions that might arise if such culture is completely devastated at once. Therefore, the centre is getting rid of what disrupts it very gradually. Like the slaves who have been “disgusted with freedom”, according to Douglass (1845, p. 79), so have we(st). Brainwashed by capitalism through its productive agenda, by an obsession to



work much more than it is needed for the economic growth of “our” country and to ultimately think of our space as bound to be optimised and commoditised, the idea of experiencing time as not on a hurry to “get to the future” – a future we do not even know if exists – sounds crazy. Therefore, those who seemingly “choose” to remain living outside the boundaries of this pastoral episteme, like Douglass (1845) or *The Brothers’* (2002) narrator, Nael, are not supposed to speak; but, if it happens that they speak, one should try hard not to listen. That is, their discourse can exist, as long as no one takes it seriously.

Discussion: A rotting future

In a nutshell, the narrative brought in here as the object of my research consist in the story of two brothers, Yaqub and Omar, told from the point of view of Nael – the son of the twin’s maid with one of them; we do not really get to know until the end of the narrative. The impression left for the reader, mainly when Omar is arrested – after Yaqub’s “revenge” at the end of the novel, is that the Amazon Omar misses is not available any longer, he misses an Amazon that remains in what seems to be an unachievable past, beyond the chronologic line of Western progress and development: “Sometimes, in the small window in the wall, the frond of an assai palm moved, and he [Omar] imagined the sky and its colours, the river Negro, the vast horizon, freedom, life” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 260). By telling such story, Nael also tells us the story of the Amazon and of its growth, decline, urbanisation and insertion in the globalising world map – thereby bringing a vast array of issues pertinent to a postcolonial agenda. At the beginning of *The Brothers* (2002) Nael, the narrator, analyses the manner in which Omar interacts with the landscape. Such interaction is indeed peculiar enough to deserve attention, he seems to be aloof if compared to hegemonic values, nevertheless, his lack of connection with civilisation seems opposed to his deep connection with Manaus. The next excerpt concerns one day when Nael observers Omar working in the garden and, insightfully, shares with the reader the deconstruction of the prejudiced and self-interested character he had previously believed to belong to the brother.



From time to time he [Omar] dropped the rake and the machete to appreciate the beauties of our garden: the river Negro curassow that Domingas liked so much, roosting on a high branch of the old rubber-tree; a chameleon crawling up the trunk of the breadfruit tree, stopping near a nest of black-tailed trogons, where the hen-bird was sitting. On the ground near the fence, Omar grubbed for the rose-apples and red flowers that fell from the neighbouring garden. He filled his hands with the little pink fruits, and hungrily bit into the ripe ones, purple and fleshy. The children from the slum came to plague him: a grown man like him, on all fours, smelling the flowers, twisting the *ingás* and sucking their white berries. He would stop, too, to dig in the earth, just for the sake of it, perhaps to get the smell of the humidity, strong after the rain. He enjoyed this freedom, and even made you feel like doing the same [...]. He spent a good time this way. Sometimes he smiled, almost happy, when the intense light of the equatorial sun blazed in the garden. (HATOUM, 2002, p. 220).

The narrator's graduate but slowly-growing sympathy towards Omar indicates that he has finally learned to admire some features of his personality and behaviours, controversially especially those that make him so different from the other twin. Omar spatial and temporal bonds seem to be not with the future but with that time and space which surrounds him. He does not really take into account the vast possibilities of visiting distinct places or planning on profitable prospects given by the modernisation of Manaus, different from his brother—who embraces such a cause. The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now; and “while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 2). The brothers are immensely distinct and both have defects and qualities; nonetheless, in the end, the brother Omar, the father Halim and even Nael, notwithstanding his initial support on ideas of development and his first discrediting of Omar's “backward” and counter-hegemonic conduct, prefer to keep their distance from “the engineering and progress Yaquub aspired to” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 262). When the story is over the former is arrested, the second dead, and the latter dispassionate about the future, a future that he himself ends up describing as what it is indeed: a “never-ending fallacy” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 263).

Since the name of Halim has been mentioned, it is also worth taking a time to discuss his characterisation – especially in what concerns his



relationship to the brothers. While Halim “has never been bothered by leaks” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 123), for instance, Nael says that “thanks to Yaqub his room became habitable all year round, since the rainy months were no longer a menace” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 125): the same thing that was taken as a futility to Halim was seen as a menace by Nael. It is in this sense that the development offered by globalisation, and by everything Yaqub’s growth as an engineer represents, appears as salvation – and even Nael, half Amerindian and half coloniser, is entrapped by such discourse. This is justifiable; Nael was born in an Amazon where the system implied that leaks were not acceptable, if your house has leaks you must buy the necessary material or make the needed adjustments for them to stop. Halim, on the other hand, has been through worse situations and has, therefore, learned to be unconcerned about such minor issues. If for Nael leaks are a symbol of the financial decadence of a poor family through a discreditable and shameful portrait of their house filled with holes, for Halim leaks are a symbol of water getting in. Regardless of Halim’s nonchalance towards the leaks, and in order to move in the same speed as Manaus, eventually there have indeed been great changes and renovations in both physical spaces—the house and the store).

What matters here is that, if Yaqub is the one who embodies such narratives, a liquid reflection of development, gradually surfacing from under the river Negro to become more intelligible – closer to the concrete and objective ideals of Western thinking – Omar seems to be its monstrous counter-reflection, plunging into the Negro and unintelligibly deviating from the main course of the stream. This does not mean at all that, while Yaqub’s character is strongly influenced by development, Omar is unaffected by it. He, like Yaqub, is also a consequence of progress, even though an unexpected one. In the medicalisation of the Amazon, while its disease is invented by the west, people like Yaqub are the medicine, and the ones like Omar the collateral effect. Ambivalences do serve a purpose, even in postmodern moments such as ours. In this sense, what the dichotomised characterisation of the brothers seems to imply is that, notwithstanding the transitory nature of postmodernism per se, Latin American regions’ engagement as acknowledged, noted and/or acclaimed



participants might be disabled by hegemonic tradition. In *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) it is as if the Amazon did not belong anywhere, since the Amazonians are gradually forced to forsake both their present and past due to a future that is not theirs at all. When Omar walks through the streets of Manaus he stares “shocked and sad, at the city which was maiming itself as it grew, distancing itself from the port and the river, refusing to come to terms with its past” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 264).

This point is raised by Colás (1994, p. 6) when he argues that “since we cannot recall the past out of which our present was shaped, we lose our sense of the present as changeable. We therefore weaken our capacity to formulate projects for new futures. We are left immobile as political subjects”. Omar’s “weakened future” is, perhaps, a token of his unfitness in time and space if not in a queer one since, according to Judith Halberstam, “queer uses of time and space [...] develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification” (2005, p. 1). This is maybe why for the narrator it is so difficult to understand Omar’s “excessive hostility to everything and everyone in this world” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 263), since, fitting in or out in “this world” is not optional, at least not “logically” – this is why, while Omar seems to have no reason to welcome the future, Yaqub seems always to be looking forward to it. In this future money reaches soaring proportions not only in Yaqub’s life but also concerning his relationship with others; when the brother returns to Manaus he is able to remain detached from the city and its people, even though he is able to coexist pacifically with them: “Yaqub was almost formal in his behaviour; his attitude to the neighbours was humble, friendly without being effusive” (HATOUM, 2002, 110). Nael notices that there is some air of superiority on the brother’s aloofness (in this civil, trained, education), his rich and developed life was far more important than that of a mortal *caboclo* like Nael and his mother – in Yaqub’s idea of future, many would not fit in.

Indeed, the narrator realises that Yaqub’s condition is pretty privileged if compared to several other people. The brother would say nothing about engineering or about his own feats as if to pump up his pride. “There was no need: everything in his life went so smoothly that the upsets and the purgatory



of daily existence only happened to other people. ‘Other people’ meant us: us and the rest of humanity” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 112). Yaqub’s life was so busy, his financial worries so imperative, that the purgatory of daily existence did not deserve any of his attention. Existing was only a problem to be addressed when it concerned the “other people”, those who, like Nael, are not centralised; not a few “minority” but actually “the rest of humanity”. Sold to normative discourses, Yaqub is oblivious to the place where he belongs and to the role it plays for restraining the tentacles of development. What this normative discourses suggest is that if “development” reached those lands things would improve for their “abandoned” populations. Is that so? In the opinion of Galeano, “[t]he growing relative backwardness of the great hinterlands, submerged in poverty, is not, as some maintain, due to their isolation, but on the contrary to their direct or indirect exploitation” (1997, p. 250). Studies endorse what Galeano (1997) poses: poverty, as I have already suggested, is a necessary means for richness to exist.

As I think *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) is able to show, hegemonic discourses might be strong, but they are not deterministic; novels like this one may potentialise the meanings by which developmentalist discourses, whose goal is to master Amazonian time and space, might be ultimately challenged. What one cannot do is ignore them, since, according to Carolyn Merchant, “[n]aming the narrative gives people the power to change it, to move outside it, and to reconstruct it. People as material actors living in a real world can organize that world and their behaviors to bring about change and to break out of the confines of a particular storyline” (2003, p. 36). This particular storyline that places Amerindians, their traditions, culture, and milieu in the past of our “evolved, educated, civilised” and urban society has become a proven fallacy, and if we want to think of possibilities it is from places like the Amazon and from peoples like its inhabitants that the answer may arise. The same is true for *The Brothers*’ (2002) marginalised characters, and, as such, they do not need hegemony to take them “back to the past”, they need hegemony to redefine its present as a whole and, as a result, allow distinct possibilities of future to be



brought forward. Just to leave Amerindians and *caboclos* “where they are”, is, in a way, a synonym for silencing them.

Pratt (1992, p. 7) poses that, by putting into practice the logical juggling whereby nature is romanticised and “saved” at the same that it is explored and obliterated, “European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony”. Hegemonic inclusive policies, which try to “secure their innocence” and lack of bias, supposedly give people freedom for them to live as they will, ironically after being convinced that their lives, culture, religion, and tradition are not worth a picayune, and when they decide to go to the city people will gossip: “See? It was their choice”. This is what happens to Brazilian Amerindians who are taken from their lands, given no prospects, and end up getting only prostitution, drugs, and alcohol as a gift from Western culture. Imperialism needs these euphemisms in order not to raise too many questions, in order to envelop its interests with less nasty coverings; as a discourse, it reproduces regimes of unaccountability; there is just one single past, present, and future, and they are clearly divided into closed boxes. The confusing situation in which today marginalised subjects find themselves takes place directly due to the fact that the imperial system has obliterated the possibility of deviating behaviours, and those who disagree with what they were supposed to be giving their backing to are either ignored or ridiculed by such system.

In a way our narrator symbolises a common Brazilian, who carries in his/her veins the blood of both the colonisers and the colonised and who has his/her conceptualisation of time and space reinforced everyday by a Western tradition that tries to mitigate the huge controversies hidden in its core. Even though they are twins, Omar is generally described as much more “animal”, closer to nature, even if we take into account the few physical differences between Yaqub and him—the brothers “were born at home, Omar a few minutes later. [...] he was a little darker, and had more hair” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 59). The fact that since Omar was born he was “darker” and “had more hair” than Yaqub, somehow already foreshadows the identitarian frontier that would separate the brothers throughout their whole lives; Omar always closer to the



land, to the river, to the nature, always presenting more “animalised” features when compared to Yaqub. In this sense, as well represented by Omar’s impersonation of the region, the Amazon surfaces at this moment of temporal commotion as the “Queer space”, that Halberstam (2005, p. 6) describes as that which “refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics”. To think of this queer postmodernism in Latin America is not a simple task whatsoever since the Imperialist geo and sociopolitical construction of westernised spaces tend to become a major hindrance for its entrance in postmodernity as potential postmodern discursive contributors.

It is second-nature for one to think of postmodernism as a synonym for fragmented identities, hybridity, transition, and mobility and to believe that, in the contemporaneity, these features apply to everyone. But when we(st) discuss such issues it is important to be aware that there are certain difficulties faced by some who cannot be so easily acknowledged as exactly inserted in what we understand as a postmodern moment; “some” people—those who are marginalised for their deviating character—are not given the opportunity to “realise” that they are in a postmodern time and space because there are external factors hindering such a process. Stein & Stein (1970, p. 177) imply that this transitory hypothesis is difficultly taken from the centre to the margin of time and space, since “for Indians and most mestizoes socio-economic disadvantages represented great barriers to mobility”. Even though none of the novel’s main characters are Amerindians, in many occasions the narrator observes them in their attempt at keep breathing in the darkest corners of the Amazon. It is difficult for Nael to make out where these vegetating people, “who had to improvise everything to survive” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 67) in this “other world” which coexists with a very different world, came from if Manaus is “developing”, or why his mother was sold to Zana’s family (Zana is the brothers’ mother and Halim’s wife) if slavery had already been abolished.

In the words of Fabian (1983, p. 24), as soon as culture is no longer primarily conceived as a set of rules to be enacted by individual members of



distinct groups, “but as the specific way in which actors create and produce beliefs, values, and other means of social life, it has to be recognized that Time is a constitutive dimension of social reality”. When Omar goes to the U.S. with Yaqub’s passport he disrespects this “set of rules”, he disrespects time “as a constitutive dimension of social reality” since he was not allowed by the system to do what he did; the benefits of capitalism he enjoys are not meant for people like him. Hatoum seems to play with this idea of not belonging to where or when his characters are when Halim tries to evade his temporal condition by starrng at the Amazon’s nature in an attempt to ignore his existence in what is normatively deemed as the future of what he observes. Sometimes Rânia, the twin brothers’ sister, invited two acquaintances to play in the little upstairs room, just so that her father would not stick his nose into her business, this “although he took practically no interest in the fate of the shop [...]. [H]e soon turned his face away to the bay of the Negro, looking for calm in its waters and the huge white clouds mirrored in them” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 181). Adapted to fit in a developed and futuristic Manaus, Halim’s store is no longer the same – at the same time as Rânia and Yaqub helped for its financial survival they have paradoxically also killed the very spirit that made it valuable. It is not their fault; life is what it is.

In a capitalist, developed and mature future, this spirit is not necessary – what the contemporary subjects need is nothing but layers, superficial layers luxurious enough to stop us from thinking of what they hide beneath. A good metaphor for us to understand such process is provided by the car of one of Omar’s friends, something that had never been seen before in Manaus. “Children from the neighbourhood were touching the convertible, marveling at such a wonderful car; like a machine from another world. Stunted, rickety, but still seductive” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 157). Development, just like this convertible, just like Yaqub, has already shown us how beautiful its façade must be in order to keep functioning, hiding its “stunted, rickety” kernel. Interestingly enough, we have actually been deceived, we have actually been seduced like the children who touch the convertible. As it is shown in Hatoum’s novel, the fact that the doors for the Amazon have indeed been opened, and the impact of Western



society on the lives of the Amazonians, have both been decisive for their future. We can ponder upon the symbology of the car as a modern tool which, like the system, makes the driver a slave, always in need of money for its maintenance. This maintenance, and its high costs, are somehow seen as if they were worth it for the benefit of the illusion of conquest, of victory, power, superiority, progress, and, ultimately freedom. Ironically, freedom is the first thing that the car takes from you since you will always need money in order to “deserve” it.

Taking the metaphor even further, pondering upon the futility and status that are involved with the acquisition of a car, might also take us to an interesting discussion. The character Quelé, the owner of the mentioned car, descending from Germans, represents very well many westernised values—not from a romantic perspective but a “realistic” one. Just like it happens in our modern society, his car is not a means of transportation but a tool for giving him status and power; Quelé himself admits that he “adapted the engine, the wheels, the windows and the bumpers from another car. From the shell he made a kind of stunted convertible” (2002, p. 158) in order to manufacture a monster, simply intended to impress. One can see how hybrid Quelé’s car is, there is hybridity also in the relations of power the car seems to represent; the systems are converted, resignified, and such conversion is not dictated by tradition or history but solely by hegemonic interests, by the need to come up with a profitable piece. Quelé is a smuggler whose interests are divided between money and prostitutes—*caboclas* or Amerindians whose stupefaction by the glamour of civilisation is enough for them to sell their bodies to those who can give them a glimpse of it. The girls at a certain point leave their clients in the middle of the room, ran to the car, and “right there, on the sand, Quelé handed bottles of perfume, sweets, blouses and kisses. He got fresh with the girls on the edge of the jungle, among the wet caladiums; they caressed him and begged him to take them for a spin the Oldsmobile” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 155).

Therefore, and just like it happens with *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) prostitutes, the system does with us like Quelé’s car does with them; it seduces us to, afterwards, rape us, take from us our freedom, our autonomy, our right to



live and be. Different from these girls, but no less victims than they are, Domingas and Nael represent the vast margin of the Amazon that has not been benefited by development but only institutionalised by it. And even though “inserted” in the future, the racism and prejudice these people suffer, and the maintenance of the colonial nature of their participation in the construction of Amazonian future unfortunately accompany their whole lives: “Zana trusted her [Domingas], but sometimes the neighbours’ comments gave her a fright. These Indian girls cast a spell on the children: hadn’t there been cases of strangulation, vampirism, poisoning, and even worse?” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 61) Such preoccupation is preposterous, of course, but provide us with an evidence that, living in-between her colonial and neocolonial status, there is nowhere Domingas really fits – no shelter for her to recur to. Apropos, Manaus harbor, appearing now and then in the novel, is an inverted metaphor for normative perceptions regarding single temporal and spatial configurations since, in the end, they draw together distinct times and spaces in a single place, just like the foreign ships getting to Manaus. At the end of the narrative, Nael seems to get scared by this temporal conflict, or perhaps he feels indeed guilty for considering leaving his mother – the only person who has ever deserved his love and admiration – to rot alone in her masters’ house.

Final remarks

The Brothers (HATOUM, 2002) raises several issues and makes the readers ask themselves many questions, one of these regarding how institutionalised in the capitalist world the Amerindians are, and how they shall be thenceforth. Is there such a thing as segregation in contemporaneity? Is there such a thing as integration? The Amerindian society of our times does not exist in a vacuum, outside the general framework of the Latin American economy. There are, it is true, Brazilian tribes still sealed within the jungle, totally isolated from the world; but, in general, natives are “incorporated into the system of production and the consumer market, even if indirectly. They participate in an economic and social order which assigns them the role of



victim – the most exploited of the exploited (GALEANO, 1997, p. 49). Even those tribes sealed within the jungle are thus, somehow, already interconnected with everyone else. Just the fact that there are people writing about them, discussing their existence, already implies that “isolation” is a very tricky word for us to use in a globalised planet. In a globalised society, when successfully institutionalised, the Brazilian tribes still sealed within the jungle become an exotic product: the otherised and idealised reflection of those who have isolated them. Moreover, besides these groups, there are also the other native communities like those wherefrom Nael and Domingas emerge: those who, incorporated into the system of production and the consumer market, are simply inserted within an economic and social order which assigns them the role of victim.

Natives and *caboclos* become part of the largest class of people generated by “development”: The poorest and most explored by a self-destructive neoliberalism that we insist to endorse, notwithstanding its evident drawbacks. Galeano (1997, p. 103) then asks a witty question that serves us well: “Is the prosperity of a class really identifiable with the well-being of a country”? Is the well-being of a few privileged regions and peoples of Brazil really identifiable with the well-being of them all? Neoliberal societies are filled with those regions like the Amazon and those subjects like Nael and his mother, that function both as agents and products of development; they are needed for money to flow not for their benefit but for the benefit of others. They are given the illusion of hope that development is democratic, they are institutionalised and made believe that they are to be “equally” integrated, that they are going to belong to a system which belongs to others. Locked by invisible chains, the periphery remains enslaved by the centre. Apropos, and back to the novel, if there are no physical manacles impeding Domingas free will, restraining her personal choices concerning her expectations, if she is really desperate to be free why doesn’t she escape with Nael? Well, because the concepts of social hierarchy and the scale of social inferiority have been a deeply rooted part of the colonial heritage. “The elite continued the colonial heritage of racial



discrimination, only now it was buttressed by the sociology of capitalism and imperialism” (STEIN & STEIN, 1970, p. 184).

Accordingly, the future of those who have been so deeply marginalised has no possibility of being disentangled from the scars of their past. Discrimination and the inequality emerging from it are not only able to thrive in the neoliberal contemporaneity but have actually become an important characteristic for its maintenance. Luckily, a labyrinth of uncertainties is formed by the structure of development, which turns this whole process into a maze hard to find the way out. In this sense it is not easy to simply separate Domingas’ life into blocks of pleasant and unpleasant moments since cruelty has permeated her past, present, and will probably permeate her future. Her family is dead, her tribe annihilated, her history destabilised. She has nowhere to go; she has nothing but her son waiting for her to wake up every morning. Perhaps this is one of the basic principles for such unfair and self-destructive system to effectively feed itself: it makes marginalised people like Domingas keep moving due to their need to take care of someone else – in this case Nael. In this sense if these “ex-natives” – since not only their temporal condition has been altered but even their space cannot be really called theirs any longer – just like Domingas, are hopelessly working for their whole lives as domestic slaves in the present free, democratic, independent, and liberal society, perhaps things were not so worse in their “past” as the readers have learned in school.

When normative education and media address matters such as the “discovery” of Brazil, its independence and abolition of slavery, certain things are taken for granted, and Nael’s insights seem to expose what media advertisement repeatedly conceals. For the humblest of the natives, especially those of settled habits, the fact is that, from the beginning, independence made life on the whole even more difficult (yes, that is possible). Thereby, “they were deprived of most of their lands, and debt serfdom in various parts had only replaced the related systems of colonial days” (WILLIAMS, 1930, p. 806). This is why maybe it is unfair to conclude that Domingas’ dreams do not occur due to her laziness or ignorance for not trying to change her life concretely, materially; actually there is nothing triggering her actions, her will, she has nowhere to go,



no time or place for her to feel comfortable in. The narrator's mother proves then not to be living after, during, or before colonialism, but in the three periods at the same time; the Amazon is still being colonised, in a world where colonialism, postcolonialism, and neocolonialism are all interwoven; however, Nael is there with his mother, safe and sound; and if she does not want him to suffer as she has suffered why bother trying to find happiness if she knows such happiness is not meant for people like them? Why should she take risks for something she is not sure that exists?

Domingas can handle living in the dreadful conditions where she finds herself, she is just trying to adapt and learn how to deal more properly with the fact that there is such a thing called poverty and richness—new epistemes brought by development which were previously unknown to her—and, more importantly, that she is an important part of the former and must eagerly aspire her transition to the latter. From such analysis and remarks, one can say Domingas and Nael are not part of Brazilian promising future; they are only a curiosity related to its savage past. Usually, we do not tend to address the Amerindian as a producer. Or, to put it in another manner, “in comparing ourselves to the primitive we do not pronounce judgment on what he thinks and does, we merely classify the ways in which he thinks and acts” (FABIAN, 1983, p. 62). This is why it is so difficult to insert those who deviate from normative patterns into the system, for their classification entails a condition wherein they are supposed to remain no matter their opinion. Those who are not “part of the future”, in this sense, are doomed to be forever trying to reach it, being discredited or ridiculed in the process especially by those who created such imaginary temporal cage. Temporal cages are the ones that have taught us to believe, for instance, that indigenous peoples are savage and that nature represents a pristine world because we must also be convinced that they are nothing more than the initial phase of a progressive process

Prefigured in the Christian tradition, but crucially transformed in the Age of Enlightenment, the idea of a knowledge of time has become an integral part of Western intellectual equipment. The posited authenticity of a past, supposedly savage, tribal and peasant, serves to denounce an inauthentic



present, of the uprooted, evolved, acculturated. This is a biased anthropological assessment of the other, “inasmuch as it exposes counterimages to the pristine wholeness of primitive life, was in an obvious sense the byproduct of an advanced stage of colonization abroad and an advanced stage of urban decay at home” (FABIAN, 1983, p. 11). However, Western attempt at imposing this authentic past and inauthentic present does not inform us is that in, this knowledge of time, the future of some is not the same future of others. “Futurity has never been given to queers of color, children of color, or other marginalized communities that live under the violence of state and social erasure” (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 333). As previously analysed, this is exactly what Nael growingly perceives as he walks through the streets of Manaus, questioning if this “development” is really something desirable for the Amazon. This shift in the narrator’s perspective happens especially when Yaqub starts returning to Manaus for some visits after spending many years in Sao Paulo, the city that Nael understood once as the model for Manaus to follow, which allowed him to compare and contrast the two sides of the same coin.

For the periphery, those who – like Nael and his mother – simply fit nowhere, time and space are limned by risks they are forced to take. These are subjects “living without financial safety nets, without steady jobs, outside the organisations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 10). The time and space of most of *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) characters are living is indeed limned by risks they are willing to take, for they seem to be become rather aware that only the rich few – like Yaqub – reckoning on their financial safety nets, are protected. However, Yaqub is not a villain, at least not as we know it. He is a token, a symbol of development, a victim of its discourse and a perpetrator of its maintenance. As such, just like it happens to Rânia during the renovation of the family shop, we are all guided and supervised by the same normative discourses, we are also submitted to the “Yaqubs” of our times. Our opinions, values, desires, end up all being modulated by such discourses and every deviance from them are suppressed, ignored, or vilipended by the norm. In this sense, Omar and Halim are not trying to change the “natural” course of



things, but are only questioning an unnatural course of things that has been naturalised by hegemony and, thus, taken as universal truth. Since it is successful and fairly based on objective statistic, there is the common belief that “making money” is a science – a symbol of “higher knowledge” – and that, as a science, its tenets should not be put into question.

That would be a mistake; postmodernism justifiably advocates for the recognition of both science and knowledge’s bias, we can and should put them into question; and, contemporary, it is pretty surprising that the self-destructive process of making use of whatever resources one has at hand in order to make as much money as possible is still deemed as something based on “scientific knowledge” when it is nothing but stupidity. Previous to the renovation of the establishment, Halim’s daily life in his shop was not connected only to his job for its commercial importance, it went much beyond that. In Halim’s perspective, one is first a person, and later he/she becomes a customer, but for the consumerist society of our times we are all customers; our condition as people is completely irrelevant. Halim is an old man and the novel implies that he represents what Halberstam calls a “queer time”, since his attitudes do not fit in the “formulaic responses to time and temporal logics” which end up determining “our sense of time as ‘natural’” (2005, p. 7). Nevertheless, Rânia would manage Halim’s small shop as the project of her life; her intention is to lead that specific modernisation contributing, consequently, to the general picture; she wants to take part in the narrative of developmentalism. Halim’s objects, which gradually disappear from the store, are the symbols of disposable past; in order to receive modernisation one must dispose of those things that, no matter how affectively important or valuable they might be, do not fit in this new era where affection is only valued when it has use for profit.

After the renovation, Yaqub goes to Rio de Janeiro and asks Nael if he wants to accompany him; the brother does more than that, he tries to convince him by saying he would take him to the beach, where he had never been yet. The fact that the narrator “had no urge to see the sea” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 262) shows us that, for him, the river Negro is quite enough. Here the image of the sea as associated to “the progress Yaqub aspired to” is quite interesting, for



one tends to think of the sea as an analogy for greatness, resembling a notion of immeasurable freedom since it is practically devoid of physical boundaries; but nothing is devoid of physical boundaries. Leaving the river and “moving” to the sea, nonetheless, Yaqub seems to go from one stage to another, from the short to the large, from the limited to the unlimited, overcoming the apparently restricted reality of the Amazon to become part of a greater project. On the other hand, if the river might connote the sense of a liquid and intangible Amazonian time and space, so can the sea. Moreover, wanting “to keep his distance from the future, that never-ending fallacy” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 263), Nael seems to be too tired to dream of a better future; maybe tired of occupying a position wherein he cannot be the owner of his life, where he cannot say anything, and where if he did no one would listen to it.

It seems controversial, though, that when Omar, well-dressed with fashionable clothes that belong to the civilised world, the narrator ends up reinforcing those perspectives that he is generally problematising. When the brother tries to amplify the imaginary cages that divide temporal and spatial conditions even Nael himself cannot avoid the feeling that such garments and Omar have nothing in common, since Omar’s body, which is seemingly “in the past”, should also be dressed in old-fashioned clothing: “It was truly impressive! Impeccable clothes, chrome-capped shoes, and important car. It all seemed like the reverse of Omar; nothing seemed like him” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 133). This excerpt allows an analogy between Omar and underdevelopment since subjects are taught by hegemonic temporalities through pastoralism to believe that underdeveloped countries are in the past of developing ones which, in their turn, are in the past of developed ones. In this sense, Omar represents “the past” in the eyes of the narrator, and, therefore, the brother should wear the costumes that characterize such moment. Looking at both Omar and Yaqub, Nael knows he is very distinct from both of them. The narrator finds himself unable to belong either to the past or to the present especially when he observes these two realms impinging upon one another without being able to place himself in another stand if not between them, for his present is always also “lost in some place in the past” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 263).



Nael is never willing to leave his mother, who denies to struggle against her condition, even though he knows she would never conceive the idea of going away with him. Staying or leaving, none of these options work for the narrator. But his mother had not always been so dispassionate, as a kid she still dreamed of running away, of being free, she and the other native maids. It is hard to describe Domingas and the other maids, dreaming of freedom, that Nael watches everyday as ever independent, as in their way to becoming ultimately autonomous; their condition, as it is observed by the narrator, makes the reader stop and think about such an issue. Such thinking requires some level of deep reflection, though, since the Imperialist media, developmentalist advertising, biased information, perfunctory literature, together with the uncritical habits of the contemporaneity do not want the reader to ponder upon abstract ideas such as “independence” – actually it does not want the reader to ponder upon anything that deviate from the hegemonic linearity of development. Like Domingas’ “dead words” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 160), we are living surrounded by several of them: independence, autonomy, democracy, equality, “free” market, development, etc.

These words, concepts, and epistemes would require an ideological shift that has happened only superficially from the colonial Amazon to the postcolonial one; like Domingas, many of us are also “overtaken by inertia” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 161). The analysed excerpt baffles readers’ historical perception regarding Amerindians independence before, during, and after colonisation; for those who promised to show natives and *caboclos* the road to paradise have actually given them a lift to hell. In the future of the Amazon there is nothing for Nael and Domingas to do other than accepting being overtaken by inertia; they might sleep with their dreams of freedom, but shall never wake up in a free world. Nevertheless, curiously, if their space and time belong to a future that does not acknowledge them, that makes Nael and Domingas spaceless and timeless in the terms of hegemonic temporality and spatiality. Interestingly, this strong and mighty woman, of deep feelings and severe attitudes dies “almost as shriveled-up as when she came to the house. Actually, into the world” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 164). Rehumanising the figure of



his mother, Nael describes her, in the moment of her death, as not only fragile, but as fragile as anyone else. His mother was forced to become strong; but her strength did not make her devoid of her humanity. What the end of Domingas' story tell is that, at least when we are born and when we die, we can be sure we are equal to everyone else – it is a pity we spend the whole life believing otherwise.

Reference list

COLÁS, Santiago. *Postmodernity in Latin America: The Argentine Paradigm*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994.

COUTO, Mia. *O Último Vôo do Flamingo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000.

DOUGLASS, Frederick. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. The anti-slavery office. Boston: Cornhill, 1845.

FABIAN, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. Columbia University Press: 1983.

FOUCAULT, Michel. "The Order of Discourse". 1970. Young, Robert. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.

GALEANO, Eduardo. *Open Veins of Latin America*. 1978. Trans. Cedric Belfrage. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997.

HALBERSTAM, Judith. "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies." In *A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. 1-21. New York: NYU Press, 2005.

HATOUM, Milton. *The Brothers*. 2000. Trans. John Gledson. Bloomsbury Publishing: 2002.

MERCHANT, Carolyn. *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2003.



PRATT, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

RODRÍGUEZ, Juana María. “Queer Sociality and other Sexual Fantasies.” Lecture at Center for Study of Sexual Cultures. February 8, 2010. (331-348). Berkeley, University of California.

STEIN, Stanley J; STEIN, Barbara H. *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence*. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1970.

WILLIAMS, Mary W. *The people and politics of Latin America*. Boston: Ginn, 1930.