



O CONCERTO GLOBAL DO CAPITALISMO: A PÓS-MODERNIDADE QUEER E PÓS-COLONIAL EM *THE BROTHERS* (HATOUM, 2002)

THE GLOBAL CONCERT OF CAPITALISM: THE POSTCOLONIAL AND QUEER POSTMODERNITY OF *THE BROTHERS* (HATOUM, 2002)

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Resumo

Minha análise das perspectivas contra hegemônicas trazidas em *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002), bem como daquelas que potencializa, demonstra a importância de nossa busca por ontologias *queer* e pós-coloniais na Amazônia. É vital que entendamos como as perspectivas *queer* – inicialmente responsáveis por expor a falta de prospecto para aqueles cujas identidades sexuais são não normativas – e pós-coloniais – discutindo amplamente as temporalidades de raças e condições socioeconômicas desviantes – podem e devem ser vistas como completamente e profundamente interconectadas. Minha discussão então confirma a hipótese de que, no romance, os paralelos teóricos de pensamentos *queer* e pós-coloniais podem ser estabelecidos proficuamente. Essas lentes analíticas se complementam do princípio ao fim; em *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) o espaço pós-colonial se constrói também como um espaço de temporalidades *queer*.

Palavras-chave: Literatura pós-colonial. Milton Hatoum. Tempo. Espaço.

Abstract

My analysis of the counter-hegemonic perspectives brought forward in *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002), as well as of the ones it potentialises, evince the importance of our search for queer and postcolonial ontologies in the Amazon. It is vital for us to understand how queer perspectives – initially responsible for exposing the diminishing future of those whose sexual identities are non-normative – and postcolonial ones – which has broadly discussed those whose racial and socio-economic temporalities are non-normative – can and should be seen therein as thoroughly and deeply interconnected. My discussion has hitherto confirmed thus the working hypothesis that, in the novel, the theoretical parallels of queer and postcolonial thinking might be profitably drawn. These analytical lenses are thoroughly complemented; in *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) the postcolonial site is built through queer temporality.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature. Milton Hatoum. Time. Space.

Introduction: Time as a theory of wealth and production

Para o colonizador de outrora – e de hoje – apesar do intrincado, nenhuma dificuldade à posse. Ocupá-la, reinventá-la às custas da desfiguração e do apagamento de sua anterioridade milenar não foi fato contingente e acidental. Organizaram-se esquemas, estratégias, ao cumprimento de um projeto cultural, político e econômico acionado e supervisionado com mãos de ferro. (Tupiassú, 2005, p. 301).

In the postcolonial world where we have been living, Amazonian natives have been gradually brought in to hegemonic linearity – i.e. to a certain idea of temporal progression that is taken as universal, but, in the end, is thoroughly relative. As “savages” become “civilised” (inserted in a future that is supposedly more pertinent to a well-functioning society), the Amazonian region has also to be developed in order for them to fit in the present and, consequently, the future. This is to say, to put it bluntly: a new air requires another atmosphere. Through pastoralism, Western ideas on the environment have been credited and reinforced; exoticising and domesticating the nature of the Other we have convinced ourselves, as well as many other subjects, that the world must be urban, that nature needs to be mastered, that the absent must be brought in and that every landscape not controlled by civilized humans yet is doomed to disappear. Literature, luckily, plays a significant role to make us look at other directions. It is in this sense that the discourse articulated by *The Brothers’* (HATOUM, 2002) marginalised characters is here analysed, thus, through an antipastoral lens focusing on their own reconstructions of Amazonian linearity. The will to truth of hegemony has no inherent validity, and this is why every source of diverging epistemes is always valuable. The normative temporal and spatial constructions of the Amazon are only powerful because they are based on the financial interests of a capitalist agenda.

This is actually where the whole linearity of Western thinking resides, wherein it can successfully direct itself towards the path that brings most profit or at least that helps it be achieved. “Economic practices, codified as precepts or recipes and ultimately as morality, have sought since the sixteenth century to ground themselves, rationalise themselves, and justify themselves in a theory of wealth and production” (FOUCAULT, 1976, p. 55). Now everything that looks rational, obvious, clear, is actually what has been carefully, thoroughly, and methodically written and rewritten through Western conquest of every space and time—of even those that suffer



seemingly no impact of capitalism. In order to understand how time and space normativity has sought to “ground” and “rationalise” itself in the Amazon, it is important to take into account that this theory of wealth and production, criticised by Foucault (1976), has been imposing a linearity that has no congenital reliability whatsoever. In the words of Arturo Escobar (2009, p. 438), it is essential to acknowledge Western economy as an ensemble of systems of production, power, and signification “for understanding better the geo-cultural distribution of identity and difference and its implications in terms of the material and cultural relations among different peoples”. That is, economic rationalism, through this ensemble of systems, is not only worried about rearranging the financial organisation of the Amazon; this is because such arrangement depends intimately on an ideological shift, whereby the centre is overemphasised and the margin overlooked.

The economic practices imposed in the Amazon as the process of globalization went on have indeed been codified as morality through pastoralism, whose main axiom is structured on the altruistic observer bringing his knowledge and experience to virgin and savage realms. Such thinking still survives in developmental enterprises; and developmentalism – the thirst for growing, improving, urbanising, and capitalising that *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) unmasks, according to my hypothesis – has been turned, by what we might call a contemporary pastoralism, also into a matter of moral code. Each agenda requires certain procedures, and transforming the Amazon into a region that is uncontrolled is precisely the first step for highlighting the need to adapt it vis-à-vis the needs of hegemonic policies. As a result those peoples’ and places’ whose queer spatialisation and temporalisation do not seem to fit in the preconditioned pattern dividing humanity into savages, half-savages, and civilised, are deemed “less” people if compared to those who greet progress and development with open arms. It would be right to say, then, that hegemonic linearity does not surface through the obliteration of what is savage, but through its creation and ultimate institutionalisation. Despite the unquestionable correlation between the colonial and the postcolonial Amazon, however, these two distinct periods, perspectives, and possibilities of transformation, albeit interdependent, cannot be understood as defining interchangeable historical moments.

While the former is thoroughly permeated by binary social, political, ecological, and racial notions, the latter is marked by an opportunity for a generally taken for granted relativisation of adapted hegemonic discourses, both created and nourished



by such dichotomies. Indeed, it is exactly “because the relations which characterised the colonial are no longer in the same place and relative position that we are able not simply to oppose them but to critique, to deconstruct and try to go beyond them” (HALL, 1996, p. 254). To oppose is important, but to critique is essential; in the postcolonial moment, the transverse, transnational, transcultural movements, which were always inscribed in the history of colonisation, but carefully overwritten by more binary forms of narrativisation surface. “They have, of course, emerged in new forms to disrupt the settled relations of domination and resistance inscribed in other ways of living” (HALL, 1996, p. 251). Pre-assigned meanings of domination, resistance, freedom, autonomy are all disrupted by the transverse, transnational, transcultural movements upheld by the ones who get marginalized in the process and are wisely given the status of protagonists of this postcolonial moment. In the following discussion, among other things, I shall test the hypothesis that, in *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002), if Yaqub is the protagonist of Western progress, Nael, Domingas, Halim, and Omar are all the protagonists of some sort of counter-progress. It is thereby that the peripheral subjects, whose lives deviate from the main theme performed by Yaqub, retell what has been told, inasmuch as the whole narrative becomes discombobulated by their version and experience of events.

Discussion: Slaves of progress

If there is something my object of analysis gives us an opportunity to rethink, I believe it is precisely the queer spatiality and temporality of the postcolonial subject. According to Hall “the postcolonial signals the proliferation of histories and temporalities, the intrusion of difference and specificity into the generalizing and Eurocentric post-enlightenment grand narratives” (1996, p. 247). Nevertheless, perhaps the postcolonial per se is not enough for us to (re)think about identity. One should also take into account other theoretical examples, “where the deconstruction of core concepts undertaken by the so-called ‘post’ discourses is followed, not by their abolition and disappearance but rather by their proliferation, only now in a decentred position in the discourse” (HALL, 1996, p. 248). Effectively decentralising such position(s), *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) tells the story of the twin brothers Omar and Yaqub, who do not get on well since their birth and never succeed in finding peace among them, regardless of the efforts of their parents, sister and the bastard son of



one of them, Nael. The story is told from the perspective of this child, who takes us alongside the development of an orphan Amazon, just like himself; both the region and narrator seem to be in search for an origin and a path for the future, but things do not happen as expected, for none of them. At first, Yaqub and Omar are described as a negative and positive pole, as completely different to one another – readers can even think of a villain and a hero, at first, only to find out that both are heroes and villains at the very same time.

Young, Yaqub travels to the Lebanon and to São Paulo, becomes an engineer, learns the marvelous teachings of metropolitan values, accept development and changes with open arms and becomes the pupil of capitalist and neoliberal enterprises. Omar, on the other hand, is unable to accept the fact that, as Galeano (1997, p. 247) puts it, “development is a banquet to which few are invited”. In one of his visits to Yaqub, he cunningly steals money from his brother and travels to the U.S.A. in order to see with his own eyes if this development is really worth it. But why does Omar have to go precisely to the U.S.? He could steal Yaqub’s money and go anywhere he wanted, but he has chosen to visit the United States, is there a reason for that? Well, I think so, especially for everything that the USA represents. The country symbolises the kernel of neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism, it is the contemporary image of domain and ideological control; if hegemony has a face, I am pretty sure that face is Uncle Sam’s. When Omar decides to undertake such adventure Yaqub, who so capitalistically learns to save all the money he makes instead of spending it as his father usually did, has to handle Omar sending postcards from every city he visits, making fun of Yaqub and his wife and ridiculing their habits and ambitions. Surprisingly, when Yaqub tells his father all that has happened, Halim becomes mad not at Omar’s behaviour, but when he realises what has happened to Yaqub: the consequences of his “glorious future”.

Omar sent the first postcard from Miami; later he sent others, from Tampa, Mobile and New Orleans, recounting the fun and games he’d had in each city [...]. ‘Dear brother and sister-in-law, Louisiana is America in the raw, really rough, and the Mississippi is the local version of the Amazon. Why not take a little trip here? [...] If you come, be sure you dye your hair blonde: that way you’ll be one of the elite. Brother: your wife, who’s been pretty in her time, might look really young with toasted-blonde hair. And you can make a lot of money here in America. Cheers from your brother, Omar’ [...]. ‘He stole my passport and went to the United States. My passport, a silk tie and two Irish linen shirts!’ [...] What’s the best thing to do when a son, a relative or anyone else makes a fuss over money? Do you know? [...] For heaven’ sake, all I



want to do was to forget all this garbage, the eight hundred and twenty dollars, the passport, the tie, the shirts and bloody Louisiana (HATOUM, 2002, p. 118).

Omar's sarcasm unnerves his brother, he takes everything that is deified by Yaqub and turns it into a joke: his money, his efforts to succeed, his pride, and his marriage. Even the appearance of the couple is turned into a mockery; according to him, Yaqub and his wife should dye their hair blonde when they go to the U.S. for them to be one of the elite. What seems to be implied by such comment is the ultimate superficiality of Western values since, in the end, even with all its supposed technological, ideological, and commercial superiority, all its significance, the fake armour that purports to protect its legitimacy, can be reduced to superficialities. Omar is, therefore, enjoying his superficial happiness in a place that was not meant for him. Certainly Omar's attitude is taken as contemptible by his father – who could praise a son that steals money from his own brother? – but what actually bothers him is Yaqub's obsession with materialism – what becomes clear by his fuming reaction after the event. Like Omar usually did in Manaus when he lived with his parents so he does in Sao Paulo living with Yaqub, he finds money and he spends it, as simply as that. Stealing and spending money that does not belong to one is not something to be praised whatsoever, but the logic of capital accumulation does not fit in Omar's or Halim's manner of understanding life, and Yaqub would never be able to understand that. Yaqub, as most of us, is not the villain, he is also a victim, a huge victim of the system. These binarisms (victim/villain, savage/civilised, past/future), as I hope to be showing, become difficult when one tries to ponder upon such facts carefully since, mostly, conclusive dichotomies do not seem to be fairly accurate.

But what the reader might ask himself after reading this excerpt is: Would Yaqub ever travel to the U.S.? Would he ever have the time, or interest? Would he ever “waste” money with a tourist trip? I do not know, but do not think so. It is interesting, but the fact that Omar is not meant to do what he did is exactly what allowed him to have done it; the capitalist way of life, so inserted in Yaqub's mind, convinces people that they must earn money, save money and, after that, enjoy life. But even when people have money they must earn much more, endlessly more, in order to save more to, after that, enjoy life “better”. This last step is nonetheless never reached, it is not meant to be; Yaqub is the kind of person who is sentenced to work his whole life without ever asking himself the purpose, without ever trying to enjoy one single moment. For Omar it is much simpler. Son and father are already living in what seems a distinct

temporal condition. The temporal condition of Hatoum's characters, hence, can be understood to be neither distinct nor inevitable; even though normativity poses they belong to different temporal spheres. When he goes to the U.S. and becoming inserted in "the future" Omar shows the readers that one can travel through the gaps of time and space, belonging to the past, the present, and the future and to none at the same time. Yaqub is obviously benefiting from his hard work, from capitalism, and he cannot accept the actions of his brother.

Omar's obstinate antipastoralism emerging from his unyielding reaction to the modern foxy mirages devised by Imperialism are pivotal for him not to become the slave of a future that never comes. Such misleading hope in the future appears to deceive those who surround him, but does not prevent him from positioning and historicising a more meaningful and evocative present. His living status is an affirmation of a more believable possibility of existing in the future and in the past, for, as we have seen, it is attained to personal convictions derived from experience rather than from the hegemonic discourses. In fact, and just like Omar decides to do, it is by acknowledging the present that one might be able to dream about a winsome but reasonable future. The Amazon is one of the "seemingly eliminated space(s)" (COLÁS, 1994, p. 8), and it is only by allowing its survival – not as a source of profit but of meaning – that what now is defined by hegemonic culture as a pastoral "utopian future" might have any chance of thriving in an antipastoral tangible futurity. What we see as utopia is, in the end, what the system wants us to see as such, for hegemony is interested in making us give up; it depends on our resignation to endure, its imposition of values that we actually do not need depends on our cynicism and abandonment of other less dreary prospects. Apropos, characters like Domingas – Nael's mother, who is raped by one of the brothers and, thereby, gives birth to our narrator – has to deal with the fact that marginalised characters are not only being enslaved by such system but also being given the opportunity of watching the ones who are unfairly making the most of it:

She [Domingas] pointed to the hoatzins nestling in the twisted branches of the aturiás, and jacamins uttering strange cries as they cut across the magnificent sky, heavy with clouds. My mother had not forgotten these birds: she recognised their sounds and names, and looked eagerly at the vast horizon up the river, recalling the place where she had been born, near the village of São João, on the banks of the Jurubaxi, an arm of the Negro, far away from there. 'My place', Domingas remembered. She didn't want to leave São João, or her father and brother [...]. She never forgot the morning when she left for

the orphanage in Manaus, accompanied by a nun [...]. She would never see her brother again; she could never go back to jurubaxi. The nuns wouldn't let her; nobody could leave the orphanage. The sisters were on guard all the time. She watched the girls from the Normal School walking in the square, free, in groups [...]. The stink of the bathrooms, the smell of disinfectant, and the nuns' sweaty, greasy clothes: Domingas could bear it no longer. (HATOUM, 2002, p. 68).

Domingas would die before she got to grips with her life; her place has long been gone, alongside her childhood. A life of freedom is turned into a life of bathroom stink; she survives because of her child, as long as she is able to do so. After she dies, Nael looks at the only picture of his mother that he has, in the same way you look at a picture of yours. He knows that it is not actually his mother in the paper, but a sole representation; he relates and ponders upon that symbol so much that the memories he has of her mix with the feelings and turns that photograph into an icon, into some part of his mother that might be tangible anew. Isn't that the functioning of all photographs? Channels to a forgotten temporal and spatial construct, where we get in touch with subjects who have only existed as they are there for the brief second when the picture was taken? When one looks at the past, through images or historic reports, he/she also tends to feel homesick of a time that does not exist any longer, of a time long gone. Even when one looks at a picture of oneself, the person in the photograph does not exist, the reality that surrounds him/her becomes fictional, and you do not recognise yourself there because temporal and spatial constructions are not stable, and so are not any identities. A picture of a war is not the war, a picture of our mother is not our mother, the face Nael cuts out is not Domingas'. Only his memories are real, only his recollection of the "few occasions she laughed" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 81), of her eyes "lost in some place in the past" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 82), are going to accompany him.

That is the only thing that remains when a beloved person leaves us; but, since we are constituted by memories, this single thing might mean quite a lot. I make this use of the photograph as a metaphor for it represents rather well the idea of a queer space and time, the notion of a subject who is unable to see him/herself as fitting into a certain temporal and spatial condition. One can only occupy the spaces offered by developmentalist linearity provided that s/he has the necessary social and physical tools to do such. The problem is that Nael and Domingas, our main peripheral characters, lack one of the most pivotal of these tools: a hegemonic race. Race ends up working as one of the several tools that "effect the re-dimensioning of meanings



and resources to those who can be seen as legitimate citizens by this new order dictated by capitalism” (MILES, 1993, p. 23). It is not the race of the margin represented by Domingas, Nael, and “the maids that the neighbours always complained about” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 55) per se that hinders the possibility of fighting against their inevitable exclusion during this process. It is the specific instances that mark its impossibility of acquiring the universal citizenship that hegemony seems not only to propagate, but especially to merchandise – both for the ones who can get it as well as for the ones who never will.

The hierarchy formed by the Reinosos’ family, the neighbours of *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) protagonists, as masters of “useless savages” grants them more possibilities of articulation of a more delineated citizenship. Continually asking Nael and Domingas for this or that “favour” is a way for both reaffirming their own label and for labeling those who are supposedly incapable of defining themselves by themselves; this sense of belonging to a community or people actually enacts the very definition by which they are known. The universalisation of citizenship, or the identity of a people as a whole, comes to pass when the imposition of discourses of power establishes an idealised pattern for citizenship that can only be reached when one modulates his/her singularities. That is, the pastoral development of the Amazon and its temporal insertion in a less savage moment, even though coming from an identifiable and relative locale, is able to universalise a single notion of citizenship that no Amerindian can ever be capable of sharing with a cherry-picked elite. Ironically, this apparent impossibility of universalised citizenship is caused by the very same system that advocates its obliteration. Colás (1994, p. 15) is right when he poses that “Latin American society must be understood as the ‘crystallisation’ of social practices”.

The notion of historical echoes that emerges from Nael’s observation of “women whose faces and gestures reminded [him] of [his] mother’s, children who one day would be taken to the orphanage Domingas hated” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 209) indeed deserves some credibility, while the one of postmodern democratic mobility are worthy of a more skeptical and relativistic approach. Such mobility proves to be problematic in the terms of both their physical and ideological positions, since these girls who descend from Amerindians are doomed by pastoralism to have the same future that was given to Domingas (in which they shall be sold and live their whole lives as servants of more important people). These are people whose resistance against developmentalism as a system of dominance is automatically imprinted in both their

marginalised bodies and antipastoral perspectives regarding their pre-given teleology. However, if it is their future which is at stake, why can't they decide what direction it shall follow? Well, because in their paths the only direction available is the one that has already been pre-established – peripheral subjects have no idea to decide upon their future, only to guide those who are summoning them here or there. This is why, when he attempts at coming up with the most remarkable landmark of Manaus Nael is unable to choose anything other than the harbour; visiting the place successively, instead of endeavouring to reach the fixity of a destiny, he kept with the certainty of eternal mobility.

The uncertain nature of his life is also something that Nael seems to share with his mother, whose vegetative psychological condition makes us wonder why people like her and her son need to be forced into life anyways – people who shall endure the overwhelming circumstances that have for instance haunted so many Amerindians and mestizos, like them, in the Amazon. As a matter of fact, nothing can characterise better the uncertain nature of Domingas, the family's "faithful slave" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 26), than the uncertainty of her inner feelings, the uncertainty of someone who was deprived of his/her past and is now being forced into a temporality wherein he/she does not seem to fit. Just like it does with everyone else, the system has modeled her uncertainty; the walls of hegemonic temporality make it impossible for her to see her "dreams as all there" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 27) or anywhere else. She has been tamed not to have any dreams, or at least to hide them as well as possible from society when they insist to come. This is why Rodríguez (2010) introduces the necessity of our thinking about a queer sociality. This queer sociality that she conjures is at its core an attempt at recognition, an endeavour to be accepted according to one's own terms, to force in distinct temporal and spatial constraints. "It is a utopian space that both performs a critique of existing social relations of difference and enacts a commitment to the creative critical work of imagining collective possibilities" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 332). Only then can the temporal and spatial situation of distinct cultural productions and epistemes be understood as part of our present(s), and not of our past(s).

Of course, as usual, in the master narrative of development, many stories are left aside. In *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002), the stories of subjects such as Nael and Omar, as well as the twins' father, Halim, are all incapable of allowing the system to integrate them; but Domingas, for better or for worse, becomes a crucial tool for its ultimate functioning. Are we responsible for our reality? We have access to various

cultural frameworks, and such cultural frameworks are determined by our ideological choices or beliefs – what is going to happen with society, based on the histories of civilisation, is that everyone shall follow a similar path when we think of this narrative narrated by Nael. It has always been exploitation the key for hegemony to decide what is to be “transported from the past” – why should it remain there? In a time long passed? What is the purpose of insisting in the “past” if the “future” needs those resources? That is the argument, and such argument is still applied. It does take some time, but ultimately Nael learns that Yaqub is endorsing this model that one has to follow in order to become civilised, educated, or simply to become anyone; initially unable to question such judgments, he does what everyone else does when narrating the events: reproduces it until he gains sensibility enough to understand them. In the end of the novel, we find out that Omar’s future is much more execrable than his father’s; Halim’s future is Omar’s present, and if the present is unpleasant for one, the future prospect is much worse for the other. This is the moment of the novel when Yaqub’s revenge becomes inevitable, he waits for his parents to die and collect all the evidence he has against his brother, using his influence and power to carry out the actions to which he has eagerly longed:

Rânia soon realised that her brother, in São Paulo, had engaged lawyers and was coordinating Omar’s persecution. [...] Little by little, she discovered that her distant brother had calculated the right moment to act. Then, like a panther, he pounced. [...] Some years later, one day early in April, [...] it was already spitting rain when Rânia caught sight of him [Omar] in the Praça das Acácias. [...] There were three police men, then five, then a lot more. It was a hunt. [...] Did they want to kill him or just give him a fright? [...] The rifle-butt he got in the face was the beginning of his entry into hell. He fell back and was pulled, dragged to the van. [...] The morning he came into court, escorted by the police in plain clothes, [...] she [Rânia] heard him recount a sudden decent into hell. The days were the same as the nights, and every day a darker prolongation of the night. [...] Sometimes, in the small window in the wall, the frond of an assai palm moved, and he imagined the sky and its colours, the river Negro, the vast horizon, freedom, life [...]. [I]n the solitude so essential to her [Rânia], in her old maid’s permanent seclusion, she wrote to Yaqub what no one dared to say. She reminded him that vengeance is more contemptible than forgiveness. [...] Yaqub, rejected and resentful, was also the most brutish and violent of the two, and would be judged for that [...]. Yaqub calculated that silence would be more effective than a written reply [...]. In the end the madness of Omar’s passion, his excessive hostility to everything and everyone in this world were no less harmful than Yaqub’s plans: the danger and the sordid underside of his calculating ambition (HATOUM, 2002, p. 260).

Herein the picture is clear, readers are given the image of a “hunt”: it is the system, embodied by Yaqub, hunting the unfitting Omar, who has not learned not to

disrespect the epistemes of progress and development. The free, unrestrained, unregimented, and unimpeded brother has to handle experiencing the Amazon – to which he has always been so attached – through a “small window in the wall”. Nevertheless, even though being in this condition Omar was able to imagine or to remember “the sky and its colours, the river Negro” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 260) and everything else that Yaqub has so early forgotten. Interestingly enough, ideologically even arrested Omar sounds more unhampered than Yaqub. This hunt is not different from what hegemony does with the marginalised Amazon and its marginalised inhabitants – nothing but open game for developmentalism. Omar has to be arrested for he represents a danger; he is, like the Amazon, a representative of what Halberstam (2005) calls the time of the other. Rânia, after believing in the tales told by Yaqub, becomes controversially desperate to evade the future. She grows up and realises that things would be far more complicated than she once had thought; the future of the Amazon had much more to take from her than to actually give her, and she would have to handle it. Eventually, Rânia leaves home and buys a bungalow in one of the districts built on the deforested areas north of Manaus. “She wanted to live far away from there, and from the racket of the centre of Manaus. When there was heavy rain, there was total chaos at the Escadaria harbour and in the Rua dos Barés” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 245).

As many subjects, Rânia is deceived by the future; she accepts the renovation of the family shop, she applauds every move of his brother and sees the transformation of Manaus into a busy metropolitan centre as commendable at first. What happens to her is an evidence that she should have been a little bit more careful with such discourses. The reader remembers when Yaqub said that “Manaus is ripe for growth” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 121), but he does not see this growth being beneficial to the region and to its peripheral inhabitants. Destruction has already taken place in “the deforested areas north of Manaus” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 244), and practically everywhere else; so, if capitalist construction depends on destruction, these processes have set the groundwork for construction to happen. But is it happening? Why was there total chaos when there was heavy rain? These events take place because, gradually, they start to affect only an unimportant marginalised population of the city; this is a natural consequence of development, the elevation of hegemony, and even stronger marginalisation of the margin. Rânia, therefore, who was once so metropolitan, decides to live far away from the racket of the centre of Manaus. For her, worse than



dealing with the margin of the Negro became to deal with the margin of society, and, abandoned by her brothers, she has to learn how to do it with the help of Nael, who is only able to leave her by the end of the novel. At the denouement of the narrative, a relentless and unflappable rain floods the novel's background, perhaps a metaphor to the idea that development effectively washes out the past of Manaus and, wiping off its present, lays the groundwork for its future.

Rânia, desperate with the water that is carrying on the shop goods away, calls Nael to help her save what they can. While he gets up on to the roof to cover it with tarpaulin, Rânia tries to save the goods that are still there in the storeroom. "On the pavements, people who had just come in from upriver ate the leftovers from the Adolpho Lisboa Market. She gave them a few coins to keep away from the shop, but others came back and slept nearby" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 246). If time does not pass for these people – a reminder that there are many more peripheral subjects than the novel's main characters in the city – water surely does. The family that guides the narrative has much in common with many other families of adventurers who try their luck in the North; but, still, some of them are quite remarkable in their resistance to the process of developmentalism. The father of Omar, Yaqub and Rânia, is never misled by the neoliberal agenda; the tales told by Yaqub and instantaneously accepted by Rânia are ineffective to Halim, there is rather distinct about this character. In this sense, and notwithstanding the similarity of Halim's story and the story of all his family with several others' if it is compared to the context of all immigrants who came to the Amazon at that period, there is something that makes Halim less amenable to fit in the future. In a future of business, movement, noise and growth, "his belief in ecstatic, passionate love" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 230) would not have any place to hide. In the family shop, after the changes resulting from Yaqub's financing and Rânia's involvement, making business became exactly that: a financial enterprise. This is precisely the reason why Halim, the owner of the store, the one who had created it and lived most of his life therein, gradually becomes less and less involved with the place – eventually leaving it for good.

This is why Rânia's role in the enterprise is enhanced; she assumes the lead and turns her father into a secondary character, occupying a space in the shop that prevented him from bothering its functioning. Halim, on his turn, keeps living, even after he stopped being useful; Domingas, on the other hand, would never be able to do that because her usefulness was part of her identity since she was born. Domingas, the

modern slave, different from Halim did not have to deal with distinct situations, if Halim died suffering the consequences of development, she was one of these consequences, and would never stop to wonder upon them, this kind of thing was not meant for “people like her”. Perhaps the problem lies between “stop believing” and “stop being”; one can continue to live, being dragged by the flows of the water streams of the Negro, but one can also stop being what s/he is, losing his/her identity as s/he controversially tries to find it. Halim never stops believing in ecstatic, passionate love, and he never learns to behave like a capitalist to make his business thrive. “Halim never saved a penny” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 231) even though all respectable businessperson needed to save; one has always to want more than is needed, this is “the always of the rules of the game. After all, how was he going to get rich?” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 232) All having been said, sacrificing Halim is a necessary move of development; for the progress advertised by developmentalism there is no construction without destruction. Development needs people with “Rânia’s fierce determination” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 235) to do what is required.

In the overall picture, nonetheless, and notwithstanding the efforts of other characters like Rânia herself, it is only for the “Yaqubs” that this consumerist configuration of temporal and spatial normativity serves well. This to the detriment of any other subjects who, like Halim, “romantically believe trade is an exchange of words” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 240) rather than a simple exchange of goods, money, or interests. Such idea of commerce is no longer acceptable in a future where even relationships themselves must be commoditised. Apropos, the only way to rethink about such controversial concepts created and reinforced by a haphazard idea of a temporal progress and development—wherein money represents richness although its only consequences are destruction—is to understand how the queer space and time of the Amazon operate. Its epistemological deviance surface as an opportunity for us to question Western positioning, for us to start anew an ideological search for how not to make the same mistakes we have been making for thousands of years. “Queer time and space are useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (both what has changed and what must change)” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 4). Time and space are, indeed, still the same, but Halberstam (2005) is right when she says we need new frameworks for assessing them, new lenses for understanding and effectively addressing what has changed and what must change. Our selfish manner of managing the temporalisation and



spatialisation of the places where we settle and the peoples who we(st) institutionalise is exactly what puts them in the queer time and space where they are now.

Back to the family store, as she believes in the need to remodel the place and adapt its functioning into something more “capitalist”, Rânia manifests her ingenuity and lack of critical abilities to look beyond what her brother offers her. I would say there is a high level of dogmatic faith endorsing her developmentalist prospects. I use the word faith because faith has no basis on evidence, and this has been exactly the case if one stops to think about underdeveloped countries in Latin America, whose processes of development are much more intricate than is generally perceived. The transformation of the shop from something supposedly sentenced to oblivion into something perfectly plausible to a neoliberal context might also serve as a metaphor for us to think of 3rd world countries being brought into the conditions of 1st world ones. The numbers “3” and “1” help us out to build a certain linear idea of progress, for us to prescribe time to function in a certain direction, for us to enforce a narrow notion of temporal and spatial designing. Social transformation needs to be retraced and re-projected for a more democratic postmodern opportunity to materialize. This must not only invite but give the microphones to people like Omar, Nael, or Halim, who are – perhaps unconsciously – able to see beyond economics, able to understand and embody the cultural and political contributions that, coming from the margin that they stand for, might finally disrupt the engrossing centre responsible for subjugating them. Interestingly, although both the radical geographers and Latin American theorists of postmodernity depart from the description of economic phenomena, “both show an increasing valorisation of political and cultural practices—as opposed to the seizing of the economic means of production—as fundamental to social transformation” (COLÁS, 1994, p. 14).

To finish my analysis, I lay hand on a final metaphor for discussing the Amazonian condition. Against the credited and recognised means for financial enterprises, effectively incorporated by Yaqub, Omar gets involved with smuggling – and, as such, does the same thing that he does when he robs his brother, which is to appreciate the leftovers of development, to reside in the peripheral corners of neoliberal centre. Bringing goods illegally to Brazil through the North Rivers, temporal and spatial constraints are confused, and the normal order of events are blurred and intermingled. Such smuggling is one more evidence that the Amazon cannot be defined in the terms of hegemonic chronology as if it were in the “past” of developed



milieus. That is, foreign products coexisting with the supposedly “drawback” background of the Amazon show that the region does not develop as permeated by one single temporal setting but actually constituted by a confluence of diverse times and spaces that interfere in one another. This trade pattern, wherefrom Wickham (Omar’s friend and employer) emerges as a protagonist, is the channel whereby developed countries provide underdeveloped ones with the “future”. As such, smuggling allows hierarchies, enforced during colonisation, to be reinforced in a process that imposes consumerism as the only possibility for social relations and autonomous independence. Moreover, it not only brings discourses of linear temporality and hierarchic spatiality but actually serve to maintain them (seemingly “illegally”). Subjects’ “thirst for novelty and for consumption” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 199) is daily embedded in people’s heads through capitalist advertisement in an extremely neoliberal culture where self-satisfaction exists but only for those willing to buy it—and there is always a high price to pay. The smuggled goods from the future, as mentioned, come from developed countries and are inserted in a region that does not need them at all; they are only “welcome because of their spellbinding power” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 200). Nothing more, nothing less.

Final Remarks: Holdovers of the colonial regime

My analysis of the counter-hegemonic perspectives brought forward by *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002), as well as of the ones it potentialises, evince the importance of our search for queer and postcolonial ontologies in the Amazon. It is vital for us to understand how queer perspectives – initially responsible for exposing the diminishing future of those whose sexual identities are non-normative – and postcolonial ones – which has broadly discussed those whose racial and socio-economic temporalities are nonnormative – can and should be seen therein as thoroughly and deeply interconnected. My discussion has hitherto confirmed thus the hypothesis that, in the novel, the theoretical parallels of queer and postcolonial thinking might be profitably drawn. These analytical lenses are thoroughly complemented; in the novel the postcolonial site can also be seen as one of queer temporality. As a matter of fact, in a way, if we compare Omar’s lifestyle, Nael’s confusion and Halim’s despondency to the social reality of Manaus in this postcolonial moment we can easily notice how controversial the whole atmosphere of Western progress surrounding these

characters indeed is. In fact, there are several events wherein it becomes clear that the peripheral subjects of *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) are filled with reasons not to believe in the tales told by the hegemonic culture, which is gradually being inserted in Manaus. Keeping up to this argumentation, “we are not experiencing the primitive infancy of capitalism but its vicious senility. Underdevelopment isn't a stage of development, but its consequence” (GALEANO, 1997, p. 283). Underlying the idea that the developed countries are willing to “help” the underdeveloped ones is hidden a much more ambitious project, with the long-term consequences that can be—at least for those who are able to evade hegemonic preconceptions—effortlessly seen today:

The aim of all the countries that emerged with this new status [underdeveloped] in the global concert of nations was invariably the same: the creation of a society equipped with the material and organisational factors required to pave the way for rapid access to the forms of life created by industrial civilisation. Articulated around a fictitious construct (“underdevelopment”), a discourse was produced that instilled in all countries the need to pursue this goal, and provided for them the necessary categories and techniques to do so. This discourse emerged and took definite shape [...], drastically altering the character and scope of the relations between rich and poor countries and, in general, the very perception of what governments and societies were to do. (ESCOBAR, 2009, p. 429).

Omar does not seem to be as optimistic about the melody composed by this global concert of nations, notwithstanding the fact that he does not clearly manifests such an opinion—and if he does the reader cannot really tell since Nael is, at first, much worried about narrating the adventures of the other brother. As a matter of fact, especially after Yaqub’s trip to Sao Paulo the narrator starts highlighting the brothers’ distinction at every opportunity he has, their difference becomes evident since “the engineer was getting more important, making money; and the other twin had no need of money to be what he was” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 121). What Omar was did not entail getting more important or making money, for his existence to be satisfied those processes have never been inherently required, just like they are not for any other subjects. Yaqub, on the other hand, grows up hopeful about the opportunities brought by Western notions of progress, development, and improvement; he passively and uncritically accepts his condition (and of all the other marginalized subjects) as one of a savage struggling to be civilised and educated in order to fit into the pattern against which no one can (nor should) fight, learning to think about the Amazon as a brute uncultured land running out of time to become the metropolis it should be. Question is: Shall we share his point of view? As *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) suggest,



development is still explained in terms of giving people equal rights. This would mean that the institutionalisation of those who do not seem to belong to the system, like Domingas, Nael, and Omar, aims at providing them with the same tools, opportunities, and prospects that neoliberal enterprises so often allege that they are the only ones which can supply.

Domingas' institutionalisation, then, would mean her access to better quality of life, education, healthcare systems, and all the other assets that our capitalist contemporaneity is so pompous about—and that expansionist discourses are so sure to exist only within the Western Imperial tradition. She would, therefore, no longer be isolated in her inferiority, she would become part of a globalised reality where selflessness reigns, and everything she once said to just a few would now be heard by a much larger number of people. Domingas and Nael show us what happens to those who are, theoretically, so smoothly and receptively incorporated by Imperialism. However, the historical analysis carried out by Stein and Stein (1970, p. 162) exposes the fallacious nature of this fairy tale: “The inherent promise of equality or citizenship in the new polity, was to legislate out of existence wherever possible what were considered holdovers of the colonial regime of protected enclaves of privilege”. After colonialism, natives who found themselves in a similar condition as that of Domingas would now have no special taxes or courts; in theory they would participate as citizens with full political rights and responsibilities. No longer would there be a difference between an Amerindian and an European descendant, but only between the rich and the poor. Laudable objectives, but to Amerindian communities this equally threatened the mechanisms that protected them against the skills of those better prepared for the competitive individualism of a Liberal economy and polity. Let us not forget that the poverty and richness we are talking about are not concepts common to these natives, but brought in by an Eurocentric approach on the trades that are established between subjects.

Those reared in the tradition of “enclave” polities are ill-prepared for juridical equality – to enter the future, do not forget that one must have the keys to stay in. Colonial processes have changed their name, but are still there, live and kicking. Amerindians who abandoned their communities were incorporated as wage labourers; as illiterates or domestics, as Domingas and Nael, they were conveniently disenfranchised by the new constitutions. “Those who remained in their communities sought protection in further isolation, or reacted in hopeless revolt [...]. In any event,

the political participation of Amerindians was minimized” (STEIN & STEIN, 1970, p. 162). Domingas, thus, once embraced by Western society is no longer only an Amerindian, but also, and more importantly, a poor Amerindian. She has been giving a financial status by colonialism, and now has to pay for her sin to have been born poor, regardless of her inability to choose or to even understand such concept. In the future where both Domingas and Nael already find themselves there would no longer be Indians and non-Indians, but only rich and poor. Her role is determined by the Western expansionist enterprise based – like most of the things in a neoliberal society – on a hierarchical model that needs to be respected. Nael and his mother represent the most important class of capitalism: the poorest ones, those who are most needed – in a system which depends desperately on the accumulation of capital, on a small bourgeois centre encapsulated by a vast peripheral destitution. Development is ultimately to be carried through time and space on the backs of those who do not get its benefits, benefits reserved for those better prepared for the competitive individualism of a Liberal economy and polity. *The Brothers* (HATOUM, 2002) is one of the several messages literature sends us about that, and it is high time we stopped ignoring them.

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