

Margins of the negro and margins of society: when
postmodern mobility is hindered by hegemonic
chronology

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Abstract: This article brings forward the discourse of hegemonic temporality and spatiality as challenged by Nael through his representation of the Amazon in Milton Hatoum's novel *The Brothers* (2002). The transitory nature of postmodernism cannot be taken for granted since the mobility of marginalised regions like the Amazon is hindered by hegemonic notions of temporal and spatial linearity; such notions aim at imposing normative systems of behaviour whose agenda is to stop conceptual deviations from emerging. Therefore, deviating subjects are gradually forced to forsake both their present and past due to a future that never comes. Nevertheless, this investigation goal is to analyse if and how hegemonic chronology is unable to prevent the attitudes and positioning of *The Brothers'* marginalised characters from historicising not only the possibility of existing in the future and in the past but, more importantly, in a queer and postcolonial present.

Keywords: Mobility. Margin. Time. Space. Amazon.

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INTRODUCTION

The marginalisation of native populations and the imposition of normative temporal and spatial configurations in their daily existence has been systematically evaded by hegemonic discourses of progress which tend to reduce social impoverishment to a temporary by-product of development, thus reproducing it systematically. My overall context of investigation is, then, the Amazonian time and space as narrated by hegemonic discourses and questioned by marginalised ones. Bearing in mind that the “discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle” (FOUCAULT, 1970, p. 53) I want to rethink this conflict by analysing mainly Milton Hatoum’s literary treatments of Western discourses of progress and development in his portrait of the Amazon.

My general object of research is, therefore, the Amazon and its relationship with contemporary developmentalist enterprises both in the material and ideological level, whereas the specific one is the novel *The Brothers*, written by Hatoum—hence originally named *Dois Irmãos*—in 2000 and translated by John Gledson in 2002. I have chosen to work with the English translation as my main corpus inasmuch as my thesis proposes the dismantling of a hegemonic discourse—both colonial and neocolonial—which, as Mary Louise Pratt pinpoints and exemplifies in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), has been promoted mainly by the Anglophone culture—initially due to British expansionist objectives and later as a result of the dominant industrial capacity of the US during the post war period.

Hatoum’s translated text thus transgresses national boundaries as it becomes inserted in the Anglophone literary realm; that is, a counter-hegemonic text coming from the marginalised Amazon becomes, through translation, potentially able to debunk taken-for-granted reductive discourses uttered by hegemony.

This is because *The Brothers* reaches regions where more privileged discourses have already been institutionalised and deemed satisfactory, and peoples who would never be reached if the novel remained restricted to the artificial—but politically powerful—frontiers of its “original” country and language. If those frontiers already hamper the proliferation of marginalised discourses inside Brazil internationally this matter gets even worse.

Hence, and endorsing the interconnection between language and relations of power proposed by theorists such as Kanavillil Rajagopalan (2005) and Stuart Hall (2006), my purpose is to analyse if and how John Gledson’s translation allows Hatoum’s perspective to be retextualised in the gist of an Imperial tradition that entails a questionable spatial and temporal linearity. In this sense, if the contemporary notions of progress and development have been mainly constructed in English, it is in English too that they must be reconstructed. According to Edwin Gentzler (1999, p. 260) “Translation has been shown to be a marginal activity in the imperialistic phase of any given culture [...but...] translations are one of the primary means of introducing new ideas and stimulating cultural change”.

The background of *The Brothers* brings, among other things, the colonisation and neocolonisation of the Amazonian region, natives’ Westernisation, land exploitation, cultural suppression, the complex love/hate relationships in the family scope, and the needs and wills of Amazonian marginalised characters that are repressed by industrial interests which gradually overlap their once simple way of life. The dichotomy between industrialism and savagery is, ultimately, pivotal, and the novel’s narrator sees the two brothers as representatives of both realms and throughout most part of the novel hopes to find out he is Yaqub’s son, since his manners and posture are attractive and inviting whereas Omar’s odd habits, lack of prospects, and irresponsibility when compared to the main social patterns make him unappealing. One could say that the focalization preference and bias for the “civilised” brother, such as the future evidences that evince the inaccuracy of such preferences, already show that the novel’s purpose is not to endorse normative epistemologies and hegemonic discourses regarding patterns of identity; on the contrary,

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Hatoum seems to be trying to do the opposite.

The narrative is developed, therefore, through the observations of Nael, a narrator who realises the great differences between the twin brothers, Omar and Yaqub, who foreground the story. The specific topic of the thesis thus concerns the discourse of hegemonic temporality and spatiality as challenged by him through his representation of the differences between the brothers in the novel. While Yaqub, regarded by the narrator as the “educated” one, is in the process of “becoming more refined”, since he grows up personifying “everything that was modern” (HATOUM, 2003, p. 53), Omar, deemed as the “savage” one, does not really care about becoming more educated or civilised, he does not yearn for the “changes” that Yaqub so eagerly expects.

When Omar warns his mother that “everything’s changing in Manaus” she responds that ‘that’s true... only you hasn’t [*sic*] changed, Omar” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 222). In a way the latter’s obstinateness and unyielding reaction to the modern and postmodern foxy mirages devised by imperialism will be pivotal for him not to succumb to a future that never comes. Such promising future proves to be a meaningless hope that deceives those who surround him, but that is unable to elude his father, himself and, at least by the end of the novel, Nael. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the unquestionable supremacy of hegemonic chronologies devised by mainstream discourses of development in the Amazon, imperialism is unable to prevent the attitudes and positioning of *The Brothers’* marginalised characters from historicising not only the possibility of existing in the future and in the past but, more importantly, in a meaningful and evocative present.

1 DISENTANGLING BODIES AND ACTS FROM PRE-ASSIGNED MEANINGS

In order to make out how the postmodern condition of Latin America and the queer standpoints of Omar become entangled in the experience of the postcolonial subject, Stuart Hall’s interdisciplinary view on postcolonialism in his article “When was the Postcolonial?” provides tangible insights for this study’s

theoretical benefit in what concerns this specific matter. This article exposes the importance of rethinking the postcolonial as a broad and feasible possibility for the deconstruction and denaturalisation of fatuous dichotomies which are still being able to draw substantial lines separating, for instance, the modern from the postmodern, the colonial from the postcolonial, the superior from the inferior, and, alarmingly, the “goodies” from the “baddies”; According to Hall such a process no longer works, “these ‘lines’ may have been simple once (were they?) but they certainly are so no longer” (HALL, 1996, p. 244).

In this sense it is important to rethink the postcolonial for one might equivocally complain that the postcolonial moment would imply the death or dismissal of colonialism just because it is called “postcolonial”; that “post” meaning “after” would also entail the disappearance of what came previous to it; thus it is important to bear in mind that this is not the case whatsoever. As Hall himself has alerted his readers, such an assumption is mistaken and can be easily rebuked since “the postcolonial is no different from the other ‘posts’. It is not ‘after’ but ‘going beyond’ the colonial, as postmodernism is ‘going beyond’ modernism, and poststructuralism both follows chronologically and achieves its theoretical gains on the back of structuralism” (HALL, 1996, p. 253).

Hall’s insight seems to endorse the notion of a queer time and space since he problematises hermeneutic discourses regarding chronologies, single and Cartesian views on the past, present, and future. What came “before” does not disappear, it is just an illusion caused by hegemonic perceptions regarding the temporal construction of, not only the Amazon, but any of our epistemes. The binary divide between colonial and postcolonial, margin and centre, colonisers and colonised, black and white, is an oversimplified view of different regimes of reason, as usually all binarisms are. The assumption that there is always an opposition to the other side requires that there are definite spaces and times. These definite spaces end up being outlined more ideologically than spatially or temporally, and the imaginary boundaries that set their limits are bound to the subjectivity of the postmodern look as problematised by Colás.

If the postcolonial Latin America is still doomed to exist in its colonial spatial and temporal constructed condition, therefore, the queer temporality and spatiality, present in Hatoum's novel, have proved to be attached to its colonial, neocolonial and postcolonial reality. Similarly, the queer time and space subversion proposed by the postcolonial subject represented mainly by Omar's development cannot be discussed undialogically, that is, if not as intermingled identitarian frames for this character's construction since "it is both the paradigm and the chronological moment of the colonial which the postcolonial claims to be superseding" (HALL, 1996, p. 253).

Hatoum's novel seems to go through such direction since it emphasises the fact that there has been no ending for colonialism; the colonial nature of the contemporary experience of Amazonian natives and *caboclos*—such as Nael and Domingas—does, in a way, show that postcolonialism is not at all what comes "after" the colonialism of the Amazon; it is, on the contrary, what stands for the institutionalisation of such colonialism in a hegemonic, however modern, episteme. In other words it feeds the system; it keeps it alive. The contemporary contextual moment might now be different, but the exploitation and animalisation of people like Domingas have not been left behind, it has only been re-systematised afresh in the terms of Latin American postmodernity. Domingas is still deemed a savage in the midst of a civilised forest; she is still a slave, though now in a more updated style:

I went out to do shopping at any time, and tried to help my mother, who never stopped for a minute. It was one thing on top of another. Zana invented thousands of tasks every day [...]. Also, there were the neighbours. They were a lazy bunch, and kept asking Zana to do little favours, and off I would go to buy flowers at a house out in the Vila Municipal, or a piece of organdy from the Casa Colombo, or take a message to the other side of the city. [...] To go into the Reinosos' kitchen I had to take off my sandals; that was the rule. In the house there were maids that Estelita always complained about to Zana. They were so clumsy, so careless, no use at all! There was no point in trying to educate these savages; they were all lost cases, an utter waste of time! (HATOUM, 2002, p. 74-75)

What makes the situation of Nael and his mother—the

former being a *caboclo* and the latter an Amerindian—even more problematic is their lack of what Robert Miles (1993) calls a “universal citizenship”. According to the author “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 per se that hinders the possibility of fighting against its inevitable exclusion during this process, but 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.

Living in the moment when the exploration of the Amazon starts assuming its most capitalised shape, the story of the novel’s narrator starts side by side with the Brazilian story of progress, side by side with ideas of modernisation and improvement, but that are happening in a society crammed with “half-slaves” who, just like Domingas, work to live and live to work, in a society where extreme poverty and lavish wealth are able to coexist in purportedly perfect harmony. It does not take long for Nael to discover that Yaqub, the symbol of future and modernisation, the educated engineer of this new society, is not the ideal man he imagined, but a cold, self-seeking, person, who is able to abandon his family and everything that had been valuable to him in the name of the progress and development promoted by the educated people of his future but hindered by the savages of his past.

For the hegemonic tradition it is difficult to accept that a slave is “almost a freeman” when he/she is in the city rather than in the country due to our ubiquitous romanticisation of nature, embedded in Western culture. During processes of (neo)colonisation those who carry progress to the specific new frontiers usually realise how pleasant it is to find a place wherein nature still thrives. Leo Marx suggests that this romantic image mesmerises the observers—although not enough to stop them from obliterating everything – mainly because they are aware of the many mistakes that have previously been made due to the Western self-destructive thirst for profit. Bearing these concepts in mind, Hatoum’s novel is contextualised specifically through the nar-

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rator's observations regarding Amazonian temporal and spatial configuration; the way Nael interprets the Amazonian space and its interaction with the socio-political reality of the narrative's background emphasises the fact that the westernisation of the rainforest does not occur devoid of unmerited relations of power; on the contrary, it is flooded with them.

Therefore, for this study to be effectively constructed and for us to rethink the temporalisation and otherisation of the marginalised Amazonian peoples, the specific theoretical frame of my analysis also relies on material concerning queer theory insofar as queer perspectives "enact the possibility of disentangling bodies and acts from pre-assigned meanings [...] anew from the recycled scraps of dominant cultures" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 338). Juana María Rodríguez (2010), articulating an astute critique demonstrating how the future of queer marginalised peoples has no chance of becoming the present of hegemony, seems to not only endorse but also to help contemporary perspectives regarding the Amazonian condition to become less bound to be romanticised; that is, Rodríguez's theoretical contributions, strongly connected to the postcolonial discussion, allow this research to analyse Amazonian time and space as both queer and postcolonial.

Queer theory is not limited to sexuality; it is embedded in conceptualisations of identity as a whole, both the identity of people and the identity of space. What the author implies is that directing nonnormative behaviours and standpoints to a hegemonic pattern and wishing that those who have been marginalised by the system become ultimately embraced by it—such as the Amazon and Amazonians—is inadequate. Her argument is that this is so because, in the contemporary world, for those who are not part of a select few "any sense of the future is tied discursively to a moment of current sacrifice, a perpetual spiral that spins us back to a present moment of further repression, discipline, and control" (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 331).

For Nael's insightful observations during the development of the novel to be successfully analysed by this study, the main axioms of queer studies that I'll be relying on concern the idea of queer time and space as provided in Halberstam's "Queer Tempo-

rality and Postmodern Geographies”. Judith Halberstam argues that “a ‘queer’ adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space; by articulating and elaborating a concept of queer time, I suggest new ways of understanding nonnormative behaviours” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 6). Omar’s behaviours are, indeed, far from normative, and his intense attachment to Amazonian “past” and lack of belongingness to the structured temporal inevitability of Amazonian “future” allows us to scrutinise the conflicting nature of Amazonian “present”. Nael too, as a narrator, does not belong to a structured time narratology, that is, his non anachronic position characterises him as a more abstract than chronotopic viewer.

For many years Western civilisation has given shape to a developmental structure, whose designed path has preconditioned time to pass in a singular manner for every globalised country—implying that time must behave according to human desire. Johannes Fabian poses that time, much like language or money, is a carrier of significance: “a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and the Other. Moreover, [...] time may give form to relations of power and inequality under the conditions of capitalist industrial production” (FABIAN, 1983, p. ix). The development of the Amazon, in this sense, 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. They are the result of one single, narrow-minded, iniquitous, egotistical, uninformed, bigoted, and suicidal episteme: Ours.

The chronological order of these “preconceived” procedures that structure such suicidal episteme, thus, and which happen to function as the central tenet of international commercial intercourses of globalised economy—which are also to be undertaken by the so-called Third World nations—have no other option rather than to respect practically immutable steps: steps that have already been taken by the “developed” countries and, thus, shall fit perfectly to everyone. As Eduardo Galeano wisely puts it: “Sovereignty is mortgaged because ‘there’s no other way’; the

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oligarchies' cynical alibis confuse the impotence of a social class with the presumed empty destinies of their countries" (GALEANO, 1997, p. 4). Consequently, the manner in which we define how time must direct our future decisions to be taken has been granted the genius of a hegemonic model; the ultimate status of a developed country being the greatest ambition that developing ones aim at achieving.

Regarding my analysis of Amazonian time and space as deviant and, accordingly, queer, Juana María Rodríguez, in her lecture named "Queer Sociality and Sexual Fantasies", thus effectively demoralise acclaimed discourses regarding the future of the margin and its insertion in the global narratologies at the same time that Judith Halberstam, in the article "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies", assumes that, even though it has often put unilateral notions regarding several other realms into question, the postmodern world has not been able to confront hegemonic chronologies and come up with new conceptions of space.

Johannes Fabian's main point, in the book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, is that time and space are not universal concepts but abstract notions, notwithstanding Western attempts to impose one single chronology and geography to all temporal and spatial settings, and the critique raised by the author has much to do with Eduardo Galeano, in his masterpiece *Open Veins of Latin America*, when he shows how hegemony succeeds in convincing the whole world that the future of all regions are predestined to be the same, no matter how iniquitous such future might be.

2 DENOUNCING AN INAUTHENTIC PRESENT

An important piece of the novel is especially when Omar is well-dressed with fashionable clothes that belong to the hegemonic system, after he finds a job, and Nael cannot help but feeling that such garments and Omar have nothing in common. This is because Omar's body, which is technically "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). What the reader seems to experience here is an analogy between Omar and underdevelopment since we are taught to believe that underdeveloped countries are in the past of developing ones which, in their turn, are in the past of developed ones; we learn that indigenous peoples are savage and that nature represents a pristine world because we must also learn 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 anthropology’s intellectual equipment. The posited authenticity of a past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present (the uprooted, évolués, acculturated). “Urban anthropology,” 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. 10-11).

However, what Western tradition does not inform us is that in this “knowledge of Time” the future of some is not the same future of others. According to Rodríguez (2010, p 333) “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”. This is exactly what Nael 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 returns to Manaus for a visit after spending many years in Sao Paulo, the city that Nael understands as the model for Manaus to follow.

Initially he had no doubts about how beneficial it would be for someone like Yaqub to leave a primitive place like the Amazon in order to construct a career in the Brazilian greatest metropolis, but when Yaqub visits his family he ends up not being so sure about that: “Yaqub’s visit, though it was only short, let me get to know him a little. Something in his behaviour escaped me” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 107). What happened was that Yaqub “left a mixed impression on me, of someone hard, resolute

and proud, but marked, at the same time, by an eagerness that was like a kind of affection. This uncertainty left me confused” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 108). Nael’s uncanny and ever-growing feeling that Yaqub’s character might not be as clear-cut as it superficially seems to be suspends certainty even in the reader most closely identified with the civilised brother.

For the first time, thus, Nael considers the possibility that perhaps he has been biased when he chose Yaqub as the father he would like to have and Omar as the one he would not bear if he were. His admiration and respect towards Yaqub are, somehow, predetermined by the permeating discourses that emphasise, for instance, the importance of working hard to become a successful professional rather than nourishing a healthy social life and an attachment to “underdeveloped” places: “In those days, what impressed me most was Yaqub’s obstinate dedication to his work; and his courage.” His “courage” had to do with the fact that he “spent a good part of the night working, with the table in the living room covered with graph paper, full of numbers and drawings. He got up at five, when only Domingas and I were up” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 195).

Certainly Nael’s bias, holding Yaqub in great esteem and disdaining Omar’s attitudes, is explainable since that is how he learned things shall be, that is how he sees things happening everywhere, and that is what the “development” of the Amazon has been so promptly reinforcing. But according to Halberstam (2005, p. 108): “Our bias is a matter of cultural choice rather than universal validity”. When Nael and Halim judge Omar for sleeping in a boat “in the open air on deserted beaches [...] laying his net near the boat, gathering the fish before dawn.”, criticising his “clandestine existence” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 167) this nonstandard behaviour implies, their bias is due exactly to their initial belief that the Western capitalist and “civilised” way of living is not a simple repercussive feature of a cultural fortitude, but a posture code of “universal validity”.

The biased determination of what we are and what we must become, how we behave and how we should behave, what is savage and what is civilised, does only exist because we let it by allowing the system to blind us. Nevertheless, this transitory pro-

cess of “becoming” is not only controversial but excruciating for people like Omar, Halim, and Domingas, as an Amerindian; for the narrator this is perhaps even more complicated due to his status as a *caboclo*. If Domingas can escape to a secret past hidden in her memories when her present betrays her, Nael does not have anywhere to go. The narrator does not belong to the past neither to the present, and he observes these two realms impinging upon one another without being able to place himself in other side if not between them:

How many times I thought of running away! Once I went onto an Italian ship and hid – I’d made up my mind: I was going away, two weeks later I’d get off in Genoa, when all I knew was that it was a port in Italy. I had sudden urges to go, maybe to Santarém or Belém; that would be easier. I looked at all the boats and ships moored in Manaus Harbour and put the journey off. I pictured my mother; I didn’t want to leave her there at the back of the house, couldn’t face it... She never wanted to take the risk. ‘Are you mad? It gives me the shakes just to think about it, you have to be patient [...]’ (HATOUM, 2002, p. 82-83).

The existence of “ships moored in Manaus Harbour” is a temptation for Nael; the narrator sees the possibility of mobility embodied nearby, a possibility that is not accessible for him. That is what Amazonian development has been doing with natives, *caboclos*, and all other marginalised Amazonians; it loudly advertises several paths and opportunities, even though most of them are unable to see themselves as part of this grand new Era represented by such advertisements. The ships, like the future, can be watched, witnessed, observed, desired; but that does not mean at all that they can be actually reached, let alone by people like Nael and Domingas.

This matter embroils the Imperialist ideological argument which wants to convince us that marginalised people like the narrator do not look for new temporal and spatial possibilities because it is easier and more comfortable for them to stay where they are. In this excerpt Nael shows Hatoum’s readers that this could not be further from the truth. In the fragile condition of having no clear past or future, the only thing the narrator has is his mother; running away, then, would mean giving up on the

only thing the world has given him. By the same token Nael cannot stop thinking of escaping from the appalling condition of being a slave for that family, of how unfair it is for him not to be able to struggle for the better future which sound ubiquitous for a few but foggy for the vast majority of Amazonians.

The dichotomised designation of only two possible paths for Nael—staying or leaving—is what allows Imperialism to be instituted through the illusion that those who are not satisfied are free to try a different thing. Such freedom is an illusion, and the postcolonial subject plays an essential role for us to learn how to look beyond the discourses of hegemony regarding this elusive autonomy. Somehow the perpetuation of Nael’s character as a *caboclo* lies less in his attachment to a concrete idealised hybrid identity than to the temporality to which the Amazon space has been forced in; that is, in the Amazonian postcolonial moment, the “race” of the narrator cannot be deemed responsible for his insights without taking into account the queer positioning it entails.

Like Omar, then, the postcolonial subject represented by the narrator seems to occupy a queer position. One might find it difficult to build a concrete bridge between postcolonialism and queer theory, but, just like Hall emphasises the necessity of thinking about the postcolonial subject not as narrowly related to a specific geopolitical and racial frame (HALL, 1996, p. 251), Rodríguez (2010, p. 336) avers that queer perspectives must not be limited to what regards sex, gender, and/or desire. The categorisation of female, indigenous, disabled, black, gender-queer and many other marginalised subjects as belonging to specific and isolated realms of analysis blur the attributes shared by them; in the end what they aim at confronting is normativity, and it is perhaps exactly through their interactive contributions that normativity might, in the end, be discredited. According to the author:

[I]t has been racialized women and the disabled, along with indigenous populations, slave societies, immigrant groups, welfare recipients, prisoners, gender-queer subjects, and other bodies marked as deviant that have been affected most forcefully by pernicious ideologies of ‘perversion, victimization and protection’ [...].

Women and people of color have been hailed by these discourses of liberation through sexual sacrifice, disciplined through public shame and censure and the disciplinary power of pathology and criminalization (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 336).

Separating groups makes them weaker and much easier to be handled; putting them together is what hegemony is afraid of since representing such a select group of privileged subjects it would lose its mighty status. In the end if the hegemonic tradition does not represent the majority, only Interdisciplinarity, for allowing the minority versus majority ambivalence to be inverted, is able to expose this hypothesis which I dare to say is a pretty obvious fact. Hence my connection of nonnormative conceptualisations regarding Western linearity with the postcolonial subject. The confusing situation in which the narrator finds himself is pretty similar to the one faced by every other marginalised subject: 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 eventually find themselves in a blind alley.

If normativity disregards those who, like Nael, “fail” to fit within the hegemonic system, “and because recognition always risks failure, queer sociality also remains stubbornly attached to deploying failure as an opportunity for new critical interventions” (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 332). Queer deconstructions of normative, thus problematic, determinisms about time and space are going to be further addressed during my analysis of the novel, and, due to the temporal/spatial turmoil when/wherein we live, such discussion is of paramount importance since Amerindians’ marginalisation, their “constantly diminishing future [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 2). Still according to the latter, normative linearity is generally taken for granted: “because we experience time as some form of natural progression, we fail to realise or notice its construction” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 7).

At the same time, in the outskirts of development and progress, Nael becomes unworried about defying concepts which do not make sense for him; different from his mother he is not afraid of considering deviating from his place in Western expansionist

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plan. As reported by Halberstam for some queer subjects, time and space are limned by risks they are willing to take inasmuch as they are living without financial safety nets, without steady jobs, and “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). Nael becomes gradually rather aware that indeed only “the rich few”, reckoning on their “financial safety nets”, are protected; listening to the gossips of the neighbourhood he learns that, although some people deserve the attention and shelter given by the system, others are completely forgotten by it: “the son of that big-wig in the law had raped an Indian girl—news that never got into the paper” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 245). Yes, Nael; and they never will.

FINAL REMARKS: HAVE WE LOST OUR SENSE OF THE PRESENT AS CHANGEABLE?

It became second-nature for one to think of postmodernism as a synonym for fragmented identities, hybridity, transition, and mobility. As a result it also became second nature for the contemporary reader to believe that, today, fluidity applies to everyone. But when West discusses 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”.

That is, notwithstanding the transitory nature of postmodernism per se, the fluidity of marginalised regions’ identity might be obstructed by neo-colonial processes. In *The Brothers* 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, 2000, p. 264). A similar point is raised by Colás (1994, p. 6), who seems to be endorsing such critique, 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”.

Most characters in Hatoum’s novel—whose greatest will is to categorise everything within the temporal and spatial frame imposed by hegemony—are, indeed, immobile; they have accepted to regard their temporal and spatial interactions the way they are normatively supposed to; in their view, anything or person that goes against such an order must be reinserted in the system. Watching the behaviour of Halim—the brothers’ father, who is never saving a penny, who is “not stinting on food, on presents for Zana [his wife, and the brothers’ mother], on things children asked for” the narrator asks himself: “How was he going to get rich? He invited friends over for games of *tabule*, and it was a real feast, nights that went on into the early morning, with endless food” (HATOUM, 2000, p. 49).

Postmodernism does, indeed, allow mobility to take place, but such mobility is encompassed by numberless variations, and this is why Halim and Yaqub experience it in distinct ways. Yaqub’s disregarding both Omar’s and Halim’s ability to be part of progress in the Amazon. Even though Yaqub seems to disregard both Omar’s and Halim’s ability to take part in the Amazonian “transition”—from savage to civilised—, he gives readers that impression that he sees somehow the possibility of remission for his father even though he does not when it goes to Omar.

It is not that his father is a good prototype of that subject responsible for helping Amazonian development, but perhaps he could adapt enough not to be engulfed and forgotten by development, he just needs to remodel his “backward” epistemes. Omar, on the other hand, has no chance of being reinserted in the new Amazon which is about to come. The fact that he is knowledgeable about who he is ends up obstructing his capability of al-

lowing development to rebuild his character in this new Era of constructions of novelties through the destruction of traditions.

However, if we are to understand and try to reposition the Amazon in the postmodern globalising world, it is not Yaqub who has the answer. Abandoning his past, his history, and his culture—in his quest for a superior and previously discussed “universal citizenship”—the brother’s ability to contribute with a distinct view, a conflicting perspective, becomes growingly remote. In a way, he can only understand the notions of revolution, development, growth, and progress in the terms of economics, but culturally and socio-politically he has fallen into the trap set by Neo-Imperialism: alienation.

If social transformation is to be retraced and re-projected for a more democratic postmodernism to take place, this must be done by 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. In the words of Colás 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).

Worried about money, materialisms, physicalities, numbers, and the future, but disregarding more subjective facts of the present, Yaqub is infatuated with the idea of progress; he does not look around, he does not see what Nael sees—and slowly starts to ponder upon—when he walks through the outskirts of Manaus. The boundaries separating the centre of the Amazonian capital and its outskirts as observed by Nael can be thought of as an analogy for the centre of progress—developed countries—and its margins—developing ones. Although the hegemonic view on the matter of development emphasise only its assets whilst it ignores its drawbacks, the developed centre needs the underdeveloped margins such as the centre of Manaus needs its outskirts to sustain itself; that is, one cannot exist without the maintenance of the

other.

Moreover, if people like Yaqub can decide whether or not to look at what surrounds the centre of the city and the assets of progress, people like Nael have no choice whatsoever: “He’d [Halim] taken me to a small bar at the very end of the Floating City”. Before getting to this bar Nael and Halim “could see the shanties of the Educandos, and the huge creek separating this amphibious neighbourhood from the centre of Manaus. It was the busy time of day” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 114). The “amphibious existence” of these people that Nael observes can be interpreted as a metaphor for the postmodern and postcolonial existence of the marginalised Amazonians.

Amphibians are not defined nor restricted by the water as they are not by the land. They are not going from one place to the other but, as amphibians, they are defined by their gooey transitory nature per se, never belonging anywhere. We can think of this in almost Darwinian terms: both the amphibians and the margin of the Amazon are deemed as in the process of “evolving”, “adapting”, but they are still far from the homestretch; and, since for capitalism it is not the survival of the fittest but the survival of the richest that defines our society, I dare to say they will never be able at all:

The labyrinth of houses built on wooden posts was humming; a swarm of canoes wound their way between the floating houses as the inhabitants returned from work, walking in single file along the narrow planks that allow people to circulate in this labyrinth. The more daring carried a large flagon, a child, or sacks of manioc-flour; they had to be acrobats not to fall into the Negro. From time to time, one would disappear into the darkness of the river and turn into a news item (HATOUM, 2002, p. 115).

The fact that these people— whose lives are here watched and reflected upon by both Nael and Halim— live in “houses built on wooden posts” on the river can be interpreted as an allegory; they have lost their ground and are now on a liquid surface, situation that emphasises their non-spatial and non-temporal condition. One could say that there is a lack of “chronological sense” in the water, such as the chronological sense of the lives of the

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marginalised Amazonians observed by the narrator is also puzzling. That is, the water is always the same but it is also always different; these new “floors” for the houses of Amazonians are almost never-ending whilst it is also ever-changing.

The chronological instability of these peoples’ floor is just like the chronological instability of their past, present, and future, which seem to be interwoven in a hybrid space and time and not in impermeable closed boxes as we are generally made believe. Their liquid floor is a continuation of their fluid selves, their identity is not going through a transition; their identity is transition itself. In this sense, the “artificial linearity” that dismisses such transition while placing the Amazon in the past and more urbanised regions in the future implies that slaves and Amerindians belong to the wilderness, to the rural landscapes, to a place uncorrupted by developmentalist intercourses; but how meaningful can this experience be if they do not enter the hegemonic systems of meaning? Otherwise how can they change such systems, how can we?

Many readers may be asking “Why can’t we just leave the Amazon, Amerindians, and *caboclos*, over there where ‘they belong’ and just ignore them?” But no Amazonian Amerindian or *caboclo* would be satisfied simply with escaping from the institutionalisation of their societies and obliteration of the space wherein they live per se. The same is true for *The Brothers’* marginalised characters, 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.

They do not need us only to stop questioning their beliefs, they need us to start questioning ours. 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” (PRATT, 1992, p. 7). 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, cul-

ture, 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; supposedly there is just one single past, present, and future, and they are clearly divided into closed boxes.

When the Amazon goes through development and is inserted into its appropriate “temporal box” it is not its conditions that are enhanced, but the tentacles of the social dominance which determine its destiny; the effects of Westernisation are mesmerising insomuch as certain types of social dominance may be analysed as the product of the interconnection between the introduction of dominant discourses about the economy, their inscription in institutions and practices such as development, and “their effect on local historical situations, including the resistance to these processes” (ESCOBAR, 2009, p. 438). The fact that development interferes not only in the economy but in many other “institutions and practices” results, thus, in an interesting side effect: it alters the “historical situations” of marginalised regions like the Amazon. The ultimate consequence of this interference ends up being the emergence of diverse forms of “resistance to these processes”, and I honestly hope this article will be read as one of them.

Às Margens do Negro e da Sociedade: Quando a Mobilidade Pós-Moderna é Obstruída pela Cronologia Hegemônica

Resumo: Este artigo aborda o discurso de temporalidade e espacialidade hegemônica como desafiado por Nael em sua representação da Amazônia no romance *The Brothers* (2002), de Milton Hatoum. A natureza transitória do pós-modernismo não pode ser lida acriticamente já que a mobilidade de regiões marginalizadas, no caso a amazônica, como é impossibilitada

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por noções hegemônicas sobre linearidade temporal e espacial; tais noções visam impor sistemas normativos de comportamento responsáveis por dificultar o surgimento de desvios conceituais. Logo, sujeitos desviantes são gradualmente forçados a abandonar seu futuro e passado em função de um futuro que nunca chega. Ainda assim, essa investigação objetiva analisar se e como a cronologia hegemônica é incapaz de prevenir a historização dos personagens do romance como pertencentes não apenas ao futuro e ao passado como também, principalmente, a um presente *queer* e pós-colonial.

Palavras-chave: Mobilidade. Margem. Tempo. Espaço. Amazônia.

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