

**"A LIFE WITH NO FIXED POINTS" THE SUBALTERN DE-
CONSTRUCTING NORMATIVE LINEARITIES**

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Was I sleeping while the others suffered?
Am I sleeping now?
Samuel Beckett

Abstract: According to Spivak (2000, p. 21) more than necessary translation is inevitable, even if it is still considered impossible. When translation takes place, the "I" gets in touch with the "Other" and this "Other" is, as posed by Maggio (2007, p. 424), (re)created through what the author calls a "reductionist post-modernity". Therefore, this article aims at rethinking Latin American postmodernity, more specifically in the Amazonian region, through the problematisation of time and space as defined by the (neo)imperial narratology. Such problematisation is here effected through Hatoum's novel *The Brothers* (2002), translated by John Gledson, which potentialises this criticism by inserting into the hegemonic centre the voice of a margin that, for so long, has been silenced by it.
Keywords: Hatoum. Gledson. Translation. Time. Space.

**"UMA VIDA SEM PONTOS FIXOS" A SUBALTERNIDADE
DESCONSTRUINDO LINEARIDADES NORMATIVAS**

Resumo: De acordo com Spivak (2000, p. 21) mais do que necessária a tradução é inevitável, ainda que continue sendo considerada impossível. Quando traduzido, o "Eu" entra em contato com o "Outro" e este "Outro" é, como argumenta Maggio (2007, p. 424),

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(re)criado através do que o autor chama uma “pós-modernidade reducionista”. Sendo assim, este artigo visa repensar o pós-modernismo na América Latina, mais especificamente na região Amazônica, através da problematização do tempo e espaço como definidos pela narratologia (neo)imperialista. Tal problematização é aqui realizada através do romance *The Brothers* (2002), escrito por Milton Hatoum e traduzido por John Gledson, que potencializa esta crítica ao inserir no centro hegemônico a voz de uma margem que, por tanto tempo, foi por ele silenciada. Palavras-chave: Hatoum. Gledson. Tradução. Tempo. Espaço.

The problem to be investigated by this article has to do with the deconstruction of hegemonic chronologies that the novel *The Brothers* (2000) — written by Milton Hatoum and translated by John Gledson — promotes. According to Maggio (2007, p. 424) “Whereas the West marches forward in the temporal world, the colonial world is always fixed, regardless of the ‘movement’ of time. ‘Civilization,’ ‘progress,’ and even ‘self-identity’ itself always eludes the subaltern”. Therefore, the temporal and spatial condition of the Amazon, which does not seem to fit in the Imperial narratology—that imposes ultimate “development” for a region and people to become meaningful—is somehow lost in the middle of postmodern mobility; if development allows hegemony to know exactly where to depart and where to go, it gives places like the Amazon no reason to be: “The West is defined by its differentiation between the ‘present,’ ‘past,’ and ‘future,’ as well as a sense of the other. The colonial world has no such self-identity, at least as the Western viewer perceives it” (MAGGIO, 2007, p. 424).

When one thinks of the most recurring events taking place in this “colonial world” wherein we live, it is second nature to deem the process of hegemony being translated

into subalternity of paramount importance for relations of power—which reinforce Western control over time and space—to be maintained. On the other hand, the neoliberal tradition—which has been repeatedly empowered by Western influence as for it to impose its financial superiority—generates a “spirit of independence”; and through such “spirit of independence [...], essential ingredient for the daily maintenance of a democratic polity [...], subalternity may painstakingly translate itself into a hegemony” (SPIVAK, 2000, p. 22). That is, the outcomes of hegemonic domain comprise the possibility of a tricky inversion in its functioning, when those who are not usually heard are given the chance to, through translation, discredit hegemonic philosophy as it has once discredited theirs.

Therefore, “if cultures separated by large intervals of time are not the same cultures even when they exist in the same geographical location, speak a language with the same name, and call themselves by the same name in the same language” (COULTHARD, 2012, p. 96), the overall purpose of the essay is to identify how the Amazonian existence per se is a token of chronological disruption. If nationally the region is already interpreted as pristine, backward, primitive—if we seem to occupy the same space but controversially are apparently in distinct “times”—internationally it is considered even more temporally and spatially distant. Analysing *The Brothers* in the terms of Halberstam’s (2005, p. 6) definition of queer time and place, I aim at problematising concrete temporal and spatial constructions regarding the Amazon; in order to do that effectively, my goal is to identify what is it that makes the boundaries delimited by the narrowness of Imperialist ideological conceptions regarding both time and place so questionable.

My specific purpose, thus, is to investigate how the characters Nael (the narrator, a *caboclo* who does not know which brother is his father), Omar (one of the eponymous

brothers, attached to the Amazon and skeptical towards progress), and Domingas (Nael's mother, an Indian who works for the brothers' family as a maid and who, as a teenager, has been raped by one of them) problematise the notion that the subaltern does not speak, that he/she does not have a voice or is not potentially capable of generating social awareness and, thence, change. In the words of Maggio (2007, p. 437), concerning the subaltern, "one must first decide to recognize the language of communication as a valid mode. In other words, we(st) must try hard to listen to people in all of their forms of communication. The subaltern speaks all the time: We are simply unable to hear them".

Western lack of interest in deciding to recognise the subaltern as able to speak for itself can be overpowered by what Spivak (2000, p. 22) calls "the imperative to translate": "Sometimes I read and hear that the subaltern can speak in their native languages. I wish I could be as self-assured [...]. No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate". According to her, it is easy to "assert this in English". The general context for this investigation comprises, therefore, *The Brothers'* discursive potential after translated to this very same language which so often has ignored other voices. The novel's problematisation of hegemonic notions regarding postmodern space and time are put into the system's core by Gledson's (re)textualisation, which allows the margin to be centralised as to discredit the fallacious armour of such centre.

Finally, having briefly defined the general context of the article I shift now to its specific one which encapsulates all that discussion regarding postmodern time and space specifically in the Amazonian region. The Amazon is meaningful not only in what regards Brazilian epistemologies, but actually everywhere else; for those who are close to it and for those who are distant, since identity is constructed by that

which is seemingly part of our “Selves” just like it is by that which apparently is part of the “Other”. One needs only to think of a mirror where the “Self” is looking at an “Other” which is being reflected. This projection of the “Other” is no more than a negative reflection of the “Self”—the contrary image—whose existence, as a fictional image, depends on the existence of the “original”—the source text—and, as importantly, on the existence of the mirror—the translator.

Nevertheless, the mirror is not neutral, each mirror projects a distinct image; Maggio (2007, p. 436) asserts that “a notion of translating the subaltern recognizes that the Western translator is always a self-aware contingent mediator [...] constituted by the other, or the subaltern, and that the subaltern is also constructed vis-à-vis its relation to the dominant groups”. To translate the subaltern is to allow it to speak, and the attempt to show how such voice can make a difference when uttered through the megaphone of hegemony encompasses the discussion proposed by this article. Time, space, postmodernism, development, achievement, business, self-satisfaction, and etc. are all buzz words generally taken for granted as legitimate; being offered an opportunity to raise awareness to the existence of deviances—that ramify from their inflexible structure—might give one the chance to realise how biased such words can be and, who knows, to ultimately discredit their validity. That’s “all” I hope to do.

“No Fixed Points”: On the Space and Time of the Amazon

Judith Halberstam (2005, p. 6) 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”. Omar’s behaviours are, since the beginning of Hatoum’s nov-

el, 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.

Regarding the definition of “Queer space” Halberstam (2005, p. 6) explains that it “refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics”. Nevertheless, to think of postmodernism in Latin America is not a simple task whatsoever since the Imperialist geo and sociopolitical construction of its queer spaces tend to become a major hindrance for its entrance in postmodernity as potential postmodern discursive contributors.

It is second-nature for one to think of postmodernism as a synonym for fragmented identities, hybridity, transition, and mobility and to believe that, in the contemporaneity, these features apply to everyone. But when we(st) discuss such issues it is important to be aware that there are certain difficulties faced by some who cannot be so easily acknowledged as exactly inserted in what we understand as a postmodern moment; “some” people—those who are marginalised for their deviating character—are not given the opportunity to “realise” that they are in a postmodern time and space because there are external factors hindering such a process. Stein & Stein (1970, p. 177) imply that this transitory hypothesis is difficultly taken from the centre to the margin of time and space since “for Indians and most mestizoes socio-economic disadvantages represented great barriers to mobility”.

That is, notwithstanding the transitory nature of postmodernism per se, Latin American regions’ engagement as

acknowledged, noted and/or acclaimed participants might be disabled by hegemonic tradition. In *The Brothers* 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). This point is raised by Colás (1994, p. 6) when he argues that “since we cannot recall the past out of which our present was shaped, we lose our sense of the present as changeable. We therefore weaken our capacity to formulate projects for new futures. We are left immobile as political subjects”.

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). Notwithstanding the fact that Nael’s view over this matter slowly changes during the novel—since he becomes gradually able to question others’ and his own beliefs, the reader can easily notice that the narrator is not devoid of this bias whatsoever; on the contrary, he often endorses normativity:

[L]iving in an old motorboat, rented, really cheap.
They [Omar and his girlfriend] slept in the open air on

deserted beaches, wherever they moored their boat. Could they go through life like this? [...] They fished in the deserted branches of the Anavilhanas, laying their net near the boat, gathering the fish before dawn. They lived an amphibious existence, clandestine, both of them in a dignified poverty, with no set time for anything. Unfettered and free, their life had no fixed points (167).

Living a life “with no fixed points”, Omar seems to accept the identitarian fluidity that he shares with the Amazon. Is such a condition positive or negative? It is difficult to think about a right answer for this question unbigotedly. Perhaps Halberstam (2005, p. 6) said it best when he defined “postmodernism as simultaneously a crisis and an opportunity—a crisis in the stability of form and meaning, and an opportunity to rethink the practice of cultural production”. That is, the postmodern condition of the Amazonian space and time, of this piece of Latin America, allows Omar to “misbehave” in what concerns normativity; and the fact that he dares to submit himself to dissonance with traditional life habits, if one compares to hegemonic ones, problematises the Imperial view that existence can only follow a unified, flat, and unilateral path.

This ontological possibility can only take place if one thinks of postmodernism not operating in mighty, colonial, and developed countries, but specifically in Latin America. The impossibility of pondering upon postmodernism as endemic to society as a whole is highlighted by Colás (1994, p. 7) when he poses that the main drawbacks of underdeveloped regions end up triggering what he sees as its main assets: “The Third World returns from its annihilation, paradoxically, to serve as the cultural source for historical rethinking”. Even though, as well noticed by the narrator, “the future, or the notion that it held out great promise, melted in the sultry Amazon air” (HATOUM, 2000, p.123); in a way it is only in places such as the Amazon, which have still not been com-

pletely reformulated by neoliberal values, that people like Nael, Omar, or Halim, “who never wanted more” money than it “was necessary to eat” (HATOUM, 2000, p.122) are still able to speak; and, perhaps—if only we allowed, to have their voices being heard.

Therefore, from this initial analysis we can already suggest that Omar does not deal with time and space as the Imperial tradition thinks he should. He was obviously not accompanying the “great” changes happening in Manaus, as this dialogue between his mother and himself suggests: “Manaus is full of foreigners, mama. Indians, Koreans, from the interior of the state... Everything’s changing in Manaus’. ‘That’s true... only you hasn’t changed, Omar. You’re still a mess; look at your clothes, your hair” (HATOUM, 2000, p.222).

Regarding this abnormal characterisation of Omar, perhaps we could say he fits in no time and space if not in a queer one since, according to Judith Halberstam (2005, p. 1), “queer uses of time and space [...] develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification”. This is maybe why for the narrator it is so difficult to understand Omar’s “excessive hostility to everything and everyone in this world” (HATOUM, 2000, p. 263), since, fitting in or out in “this world” is not optional, at least not “logically”. The impression left for the reader, mainly when Omar is arrested—after Yaqub’s (his “civilised and educated” twin brother) “revenge” at the end of the novel, is that what Omar misses is not available any longer, he misses an Amazon that remains in what seems to be an unachievable past, beyond the chronologic line of Western progress and development: “Sometimes, in the small window in the wall, the frond of an assai palm moved, and he [Omar] imagined the sky and its colours, the river Negro, the vast horizon, freedom, life” (HATOUM, 2000, p. 260)

The manner in which Omar interacts with the landscape is indeed peculiar, he seems to be aloof if compared to hegemonic values, nevertheless, his lack of connection with civilisation seems opposed to his deep connection with Manaus. The next excerpt concerns one day when Nael observes his working in the garden and, insightfully, shares with the reader the deconstruction of the prejudiced and self-interested character he had previously believed to belong to the brother.

From time to time he [Omar] dropped the rake and the machete to appreciate the beauties of our garden: the river Negro curassow that Domingas liked so much, roosting on a high branch of the old rubber-tree; a chameleon crawling up the trunk of the bread-fruit tree, stopping near a nest of black-tailed trogons, where the hen-bird was sitting. On the ground near the fence, Omar grubbed for the rose-apples and red flowers that fell from the neighbouring garden. He filled his hands with the little pink fruits, and hungrily bit into the ripe ones, purple and fleshy. The children from the slum came to plague him: a grownman like him, on all fours, smelling the flowers, twisting the *ingás* and sucking their white berries. He would stop, too, to dig in the earth, just for the sake of it, perhaps to get the smell of the humidity, strong after the rain. He enjoyed this freedom, and even made you feel like doing the same. [...] He spent a good time this way. Sometimes he smiled, almost happy, when the intense light of the equatorial sun blazed in the garden (203-204; 220-221).

The narrator's graduate but slowly-growing sympathy towards Omar indicates that he has finally learned to admire some features of his personality and behaviours, controversially especially those that make him so different from the other twin. Omar spatial and temporal bonds seem to be not with the future but with that time and space which surrounds him. He does not really take into account the vast possibilities

ties of visiting distinct places or planning on profitable prospects given by the modernisation of Manaus, different from his brother—who embraces such a cause.

Halberstam (2005, p. 2) argues that the constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on “the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand”. In the end, Omar, Halim, and even Nael, who, notwithstanding his initial support on ideas of development and his first discrediting of Omar’s “backward” and counter-hegemonic conduct, prefer to keep their distance from “the engineering and progress Yaqub aspired to”. When the story is over the former is arrested, the second dead, and the latter dispassionate about the future, a future that he himself ends up describing as what it is indeed: a “never-ending fallacy” (HATOUM, 2000, p. 263).

“Far from Voices, Threats, and Orders”: Postcolonially Queer

It is vital to understand how queer perspectives—initially responsible for exposing the diminishing future of those whose sexual identities are non-normative—and post-colonial ones—which has broadly discussed those whose racial and socio-economic temporalities are nonnormative—can and should be seen here as thoroughly and deeply interconnected. The hypothesis here is that, due to the parallels that might be profitably drawn, the postcolonial site is also one of queer temporality. One of these chiefly parallels is the fact that, just like it happens when one thinks about the already discussed queer time and space of the Amazon and Amazonians, “the postcolonial [...] value lies precisely in its refusal of this ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘then’ and ‘now’, ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ perspective” (HALL, 1996, p. 247). While the separation of time and space allows social relations to be lifted out of their locale, “place”—which is in some senses left behind

by modernity—becomes an anxious and contested site of the link between language and identity, a possible site for those local realities that the universal separation of time, space, and place leaves virtually untouched (BILL, 2007, p. 162).

Moreover, if one takes into account Omar's queer behaviour concerning the modernisation of Manaus, Domingas' spaceless and timeless existence as half savage and half civilised in the postmodern Amazon, Halim's unnerving inaptitude to fit his values in a world where such values have become disposable, Rânia's attempts to evade the advent of an even more male chauvinist—despite so-called neoliberal—culture, and Nael's shifting observations regarding the confusing atmosphere that surrounds him, it becomes clear through these characters' institutionalisation and silencing that they have been paradoxically enslaved by modernity in the postcolonial moment.

These characters are strongly marked by such paradox; the "liberal" world, wherein they have been popped in, has controversially "liberated them from their freedom", transforming their history into a past that can no longer be achieved materially, physically, but only recollected by a lingering but innocuous nostalgia that permeates their murky existence. As mentioned beforehand, the autonomy the system of "insertion" gives to some is fairly distinct from the one given to others; and characters as Domingas have to deal with the fact that they 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 (66-67-68).

One might equivocally complain that the postcolonial moment as lived by Domingas 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 (1996, p. 253) 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's (1996) 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 over-simplified

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 (1994).

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 carless, no use at all! There was no point in

trying to educate these savages; they were all lost cases, an utter waste of time! (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, p. 23) 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. 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.

What the author seems to bring up here is the fact that the social structures of some peoples and communities grant them more possibilities of articulation of a more delineated citizenship; 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 patten for citizenship that can only be reached when one modulates his/her singularities; that is, the Westernisation of the Amazon, 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.

The matriarch in the house, Zana, even though valuing education as a possibility of granting Amazonians with this “universal citizenship” seems to endorse that only when it

goes to her sons—that is, those of purer breed. For Zana, Nael’s condition places him in a distinct stage if compared to the brothers, and by obstructing his possibilities of studying as his only means to evade his impalpable and predictable destiny as a *caboclo* being left behind by the system, she seems to be willing to make that clear; if the brothers deserve the “universal citizenship” which is being brought by Westernisation, Nael’s fate is to be forgotten by it; that is what is expected of him:

I missed classes two or three times a week. With my uniform on and ready to go, Zana’s orders put paid to my morning in school: ‘You’ve got to pick up the dresses from the seamstress and the go by Au Bon Marché to pay the bills’. I could easily do those things in the afternoon, but she brooked no refusal. My homework was late; the teachers reprimanded me and called me thickhead, lazybones and worse. I did everything in a hurry; even now I can see myself rushing from morning till night, desperate to get some peace, to sit in my room far from voices, threats and orders (80-81).

The fact that Nael “could easily do those things in the afternoon” is an evidence that Zana’s interest is not only in getting her dresses back or having her bills paid; she seems to be trying to (dis)place him in his preordained space as a *caboclo* who does belong to the system, but as far as he understands his roles—which are pretty limited—in it. For her it does not matter if Nael “missed classes two or three times a week” since a native as his mother or a *caboclo* like himself going to school stands for a useless effort—just like it seems useless for the neoliberal system to respect and listen to Amerindians and *caboclos* when the subject to be addressed is their part in the contemporary developmentalist picture.

Zana, therefore, by “colonising” Nael, seems here to impersonate this new face of Imperialism, one that, by pro-

moting the sole maintenance of colonialism, problematises the notion that the “post”-colonial Amazon is deprived of the colonial Amazon. Discursively it is fairly undemanding to assert that the melting pot resulting from the colonisation and neocolonisation of the Amazon has created a hybrid but equally autonomous population; however, if this were really one of the goals of Western development, then its homework would be much later than Nael’s.

Nevertheless, despite the unquestionable correlation between the colonial and the postcolonial Amazon, these two distinct periods, perspectives, and possibilities of transformation cannot be understood as defining interchangeable historical moments since one is permeated by binary social, political, ecological and racial notions while the other is marked by the opportunity of relativisation of the hegemonic discourses that have nourished 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).

This is why Hall (1996, p. 251) still argues that in this 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, have, of course, emerged in new forms to disrupt the settled relations of domination and resistance inscribed in other ways of living”. That is, pre-assigned meanings of domination, resistance, freedom, autonomy are disrupted by “the transverse, transnational, transcultural movements” upheld by the protagonists of this “postcolonial moment”. If Yaqub is the protagonist of Western progress, Nael, Domingas, Halim, and Omar are the protagonists of a “counter-progress”, the ones whose lives deviate from the main theme performed by Yaqub inasmuch as the whole

narrative becomes discombobulated by their version and experience of events.

Omar, in this sense, seems to be the one who emerges in *The Brothers* (2000) as the postcolonial subject who most draws the attention not only of other characters but also of the reader due to his excessively uncommon “ways of living”, reason why he becomes the laughing stock of the neighbourhood: “He filled his hands with the little pink fruits, and hungrily bit into the ripe ones, purple and fleshy. The children from the slum came to plague him: a grown man like him, on all fours, smelling the flowers, twisting the *ingás* and sucking their white berries” (HATOUM, 2000, p. 204). Omar’s contact with the Amazon, with Manaus, indeed “disrupt the settled relations” which are common in the region, and, although Nael finds his behaviour quite bizarre, the reader notices that, as mentioned before, the narrator gradually starts to crave Omar’s self-indulgence: “He enjoyed this freedom, and even made you feel like doing the same” (HATOUM, 2000, p.220).

One could, thus, draw a parallel between the differing but interrelated ways in which the stability of the hegemonic system is threatened by the postcolonial subject represented by Omar through his queer perspectives and behaviours. Notwithstanding his individual interests—this he shares with the system—when making his “deviant” choices, the norms of progress cannot afford to allow deviances to happen; the fact that Omar himself is not bothered whatsoever by the nonwestern character of both the Amazon and his daily activities, the means whereby he chooses to pursue joyful events— such as the one just mentioned—are absolutely unnerving for the Imperial system.

Finally, perhaps one could conclude that Omar’s behaviour is a hazard for hegemony because it not only problematizes universal beliefs about freedom and autonomy, but also regarding how time and space should be managed in order to

be mastered. While Yaqub is willing to accept each step of a capitalist mainstream chronology, studying and working hard in order to enjoy life only after retiring—such as most of us have learned to do, Omar is not following such pattern at all; if Yaqub looks at the future as the possibility of life, Omar looks at his present, endeavouring to enjoy every moment he can; and such behaviour is contemptible in a capitalist world.

In such world one is not supposed to be as happy “as a kid”, to enjoy a moment without paying for a ticket, to feel free without being westernised; those who do it are, like Omar, considered scatterbrained, irresponsible, selfish, reckless, and obtuse. This is, nonetheless, not the case whatsoever; in this sense Halberstam’s (2005, pp. 4-5) words might conclude this topic better than I would: “Within the life cycle of the Western human subject people who live in rapid bursts [...] are characterized as immature and even dangerous. But their ludic temporality [...] reveals the artificiality of our privileged constructions of time and activity”.

Final Remarks: So “Where” and “When” is the Amazon?

It is clear that Hatoum’s characters, especially Omar and Nael, put into question the hegemonic notions of time and space; the fact that they bring forth an Amazon which does not fit in the mainstream chronologies of globalisation and progress, allow the reader to rethink about such biased narratologies. It is the margin trying to communicate with the centre, and Gledson’s translation empowers such voice even more. Are Hatoum’s characters going to be heard now that they are able to speak in the hegemonic language? Well, it is complicated; let’s just say the international book trade is not so worried about counter-hegemonic discourses since it represents the hegemonic ones; that is, it allows the margin to speak, but no one can be sure there will be someone listening to it.

Maggio (2007, p. 17) poses that “[t]he international book trade is a trade in keeping with the laws of world trade. It is the embedding network which moves books as objects on a circuit of destined errancy.” Deemed a commodity, and depending on editorial and governmental interests, the conditions that circumscribe avant-garde literature produced by authors like Hatoum and translated by professionals like Gledson go way beyond its literary potential or quality. Maggio (2007, p. 17), as a translator, finds it difficult to balance the financial and ideological interests that permeate his job and, dispassionate, believes that most translators operate in similar conditions: “At one end, the coming into being of the subject of reparation; at the other end, generalized commodity exchange. We translate somewhere in between”.

The in-betweenness of translators is like the in-betweenness of the Amazon, lost between the noncommercial and commercial, the savage and civilised, the backward and progressive, the past and the future, the modern and post-modern. Where it is it cannot go anywhere else for both the region and its inhabitants have been deprived of belonging in a world that, as we(st) learned to believe, has very greedy and egotistic owners. Nevertheless, if one insists on translating such picture might, sooner or later, become at least less acceptable. In the words of Judith Butler (2004, p. 228): “[I]t is only through existing in the mode of translation, constant translation, that we stand a chance of producing a multicultural understanding of [...] society. The unitary subject is the one who knows already what it is [...]”.

It is, indeed, much more comfortable to be sure about the chronological status of our lives, to understand the Amazon as representative of our past and, for instance, the US as a token of this futurity we must eagerly aspire. If people have been blinded by the system, if their eyes have been directed to one single possibility, translation is potentially capable of promoting the inverted process. Giving literary translation

the attention it deserves, thinking of it ideologically—rather than economically, the world would possibly stop being so marginalising and centralising in order to become more entwined and intermingled by all margins which, together, could easily disrupt and resignify what is currently taken as universal.

Notwithstanding how informational globalisation has made the world, or how technologically capable of interacting we have become, the centre has been designed as unable to change, unable to ask if its mainstream chronology is, indeed, accurate and if its notions of time and space are as all-embracing as they are deemed. Still according to Butler (2004, p. 228), hegemony is represented by the already mentioned “the unitary subject”: “the unitary subject [...] enters the conversation the same way as it exits, who fails to put its own epistemological certainties at risk in the encounter with the other, and so stays in place, guards its place [...] refusing self-transformation”.

Is this “unitary subject” becoming weaker or becoming stronger? Difficult to answer, again, since in some realms of society it seems to be close to disappearance and in others thriving from top to bottom. In the academy, through fields such as translation studies, postcolonialism, queer theory and etc. we(st) have learned to question some of the several hegemonic dogmas that permeate our society, and to give voice to marginalised discourses that had never been credited in the past.

But to achieve the understanding and equal rights that these areas privilege we must also change economics as to question the commodification of our space, time, culture, and life. Coulthard (2012, p. 99) articulates an interesting question, and answering it sounds as the best way for concluding this article: “While Hollywood still reigns supreme and can truly be considered hegemonic, it is perhaps the case that English letters in general [...] have lost their hegemonic

position in the eyes of their own academic elites"? Probably the answer is "yes". But I am compelled to say that, unfortunately, this is far from being enough.

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