

“OUT OF PLACE AND TIME”: THE QUEER TIME AND SPACE OF MILTON HATOUM’S *THE BROTHERS*

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ABSTRACT: According to Juana María Rodríguez (2010) queer perspectives allow bodies and acts to be disentangled from preconditioned meanings regarding normative conceptualisations of the world that surrounds us (p. 338), while, to Stuart Hall (1996), the postcolonial allows deviating cultural movements to proliferate, thence contributing to the deconstruction and decentralisation of essentialist Eurocentric discourses (p. 248). Taking that into account, the context of this essay comprises Milton Hatoum’s novel *The Brothers* (2002), aiming at identifying how Milton Hatoum problematises the space and time of the Amazon as interpreted by hegemonic discourses. Therefore, promoting a profitable bridge between queer perspectives and the postcolonial subject, this study analyses how Hatoum’s narrator positioning on a postmodern margin, as articulated by Santiago Colás (1994), debunks the mainstream linearity of Western imaginary. The Amazon of *The Brothers* (2002) (re)presents a world significant in itself, rather than an empty stage of human development, wherein time and space are no longer so easily encapsulated as hegemony wishes. The conclusion, hence, demystifies a singular construction of history recurrently questioned by Eduardo Galeano (1997) since it poses that “there is no other way” (p. 4) for a space to develop. There are, actually, many.

91

Keywords: Amazon. Literature. Hatoum. Postcolonialism. Queer Theory.

RESUMO: De acordo com Juana Rodríguez (2010) perspectivas queer transcendem significados pré-condicionados no que concerne à conceitos normativos do mundo que nos cerca (p. 338). Stuart Hall (1996), por sua vez, afirma que o sujeito pós-colonial autoriza a proliferação de movimentos culturais que contribuem para a desconstrução e descentralização de discursos eurocêntricos e essencialistas (p. 248). Tendo isto em mente, o contexto desse artigo engloba o romance *The Brothers* (2002), com o propósito de identificar como Milton Hatoum acaba por problematizar o espaço e tempo da Amazônia como interpretados por discursos hegemônicos. Promovendo uma ponte relevante entre perspectivas *queer* e o sujeito pós-colonial, analisa-se como o posicionamento do narrador em uma margem pós-moderna, como articulado por Santiago Colás (1994), é contrário à linearidade do imaginário ocidental. A Amazônia em *The Brothers* (2002) (re)presenta um mundo significante em si, e não um estágio vazio do desenvolvimento humano, aonde o tempo e espaço não são mais tão facilmente categorizados à maneira da hegemonia. A conclusão, desta maneira, desmistifica uma construção histórica singular, imposta pela hegemonia, tão questionada por Eduardo Galeano (1997, p.4) quando este argumenta que não existe apenas uma maneira para que um espaço se desenvolva. Existem, na verdade, diversas.

Palavras-chave: Amazônia. Literatura. Hatoum. Pós-colonialismo. Teoria *Queer*.

Snowman opens his eyes, shuts them, opens them, keeps them open. He’s had a terrible night. He doesn’t know which is worse, a past he can’t regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there’s the future. Sheer vertigo (Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 147).

Introduction

Throughout history, human beings have fostered a relationship with time which has generally been a highly complex and pretty political one. Accordingly, 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 Fabien (1983, p. 9) 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”.

Bearing that in mind, the debate here concerns the unilateral manner through which the contemporary notion of growth, development, improvement and, ultimately, progress is generally and unconsciously temporally associated with the obliteration, modulation and/or institutionalisation of those peoples and regions that do not fit in a steadfast system that does not hail inopportune deviations. Having that taken into account, one’s questions to be asked are: Is the Amazon really ready to be integrated to such a system? Is it desirable? Is the Amazonian space depicted by Hatoum in the midst of Imperial illogicalities or is it completely “out of place and time” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 44)?

The theoretical frame for the contextualisation to be effectively constructed and for us to rethink the temporalisation and otherisation of the marginalised Amazonian peoples is composed chiefly by 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) articulates an astute critique demonstrating how the future of queer marginalised peoples has no chance of becoming the present of hegemony. 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 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).

Correspondingly, and 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 provided in Halberstam’s “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies”. Moreover, as to provide perspectives and arguments capable of augmenting the traditional notions of geographical and temporal scopes, generally limited to what the construction of Western empire deemed precise, the idea of time as a constitutive dimension of social reality proposed by Fabien in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* is to be delineated as the main lens for my analysis of Hatoum’s novel.

Furthermore, in order to discuss the hybrid and postmodern condition of both Nael and Omar, Santiago Colás’ panorama in *Postmodernity in Latin America* shall be disclosed; the author problematises far-reaching generalisations and universalisms that scaffold geopolitical binarisms concerning the globalised picture of postmodernity. Colás (1994) criticises the Imperial tradition of a hegemonic discourse that defines and naturalises how the postmodernity is and should function in Latin America, he emphasises the importance for Latin America itself to be seen as a source of existential structures concerning such a matter and for Latin American individuals to “renounce the discourse of the universal and its implicit assumption of a privileged point of access to ‘the truth,’ which can be reached only by a limited number of subjects” (COLÁS, 1994, p. 172).

Likewise, as 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?” (ROUTLEDGE, 1996) provides tangible insights for this study’s theoretical benefit in what concerns this specific matter. The goal of the article requires the importance of rethinking the postcolonial to be highlighted, endorsing Hall’s definition that deems it 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 (1996, p. 244) such a process no longer works, “these ‘lines’ may have been simple once (were they?) but they certainly are so no longer”.

This is because if the postcolonial Latin America is still doomed to exist in its colonial spatial and temporal constructed condition, the queer temporality and spatiality, present in Hatoum’s novel, cannot be detached from 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).

Discussion

Hatoum’s narrative is here scrutinised mainly through the observations of Nael, a narrator who realises the great differences between the twins who foreground the story. While Yaqub is in the process of “becoming more refined”, since he grows up personifying “everything that was modern” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 53), Omar does not really care about becoming more educated or civilised, he does not yearn for the “changes” that Yaqub so eagerly expects. When he warns his mother that: “everything’s changing in Manaus” she responds ‘That’s true... only you hasn’t changed, Omar’ (HATOUM, 2002, p. 222). In a way Omar’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; a meaningless hope that deceives those who surround him but is unable to prevent his attitudes and positioning from historicising not only the possibility of existing in the future and in the past but, more importantly, in a meaningful and evocative present.

In fact, and just like he does, it is by acknowledging the present that one might be able to dream about a winsome but reasonable future. 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 the nonnormative behaviours”. Omar’s behaviours are, indeed, and I shall later pinpoint, 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”.

Moreover, Halberstam explains that together with the concept of “queer time” there is the “queer space” which “refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (HALBERSTAM, 2005, p. 6). However, 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. This point is raised by Colás (1994) 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” (COLÁS, 1994, p. 6).

Throughout the analysis of the novel it is easy to notice that most characters in Hatoum’s novel—whose greatest will is to categorise Omar within the temporal and spatial frame offered by normativity—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. 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—, in specific parts of the narrative the reader can easily notice that the narrator is not devoid of this bias whatsoever; on the contrary, he clearly and naively endorses normativity: “He was living in an old motorboat, rented, really cheap [...]. Could they [Omar and his girlfriend] go through life like this? [...] They fished in the deserted branches of the Anavilhanas, laying their net near the boat, [...] an amphibious existence, clandestine, [...], with no set time for anything. Unfettered and free, their life had no fixed points” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 167).

Living, thus, 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. Halberstam (2005, p. 6) sees “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 Amazon, of this piece of Latin America, allows Omar to “misbehave” in what concerns normativity; and the fact that he dares to submit himself to brand-new life habits, if one compares to hegemonic ones, problematises the Imperial view that existence can only follow a unified unilateral path. In this sense if one thinks of postmodernism not operating in mighty, colonial, and developed countries but specifically in Latin America Colás highlights the controversial fact that its main drawbacks 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” (COLÁS, 1994, p. 7).

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, as it would be “normal” for one in his position. 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, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification”. Omar spatial and temporal bonds seem to be not with the future but with that time and space which surrounds him. 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”.

For this “constantly diminishing future”, to which the Amazon is gradually sentenced, to be successfully canvassed it is vital to understand how queer perspectives, responsible for exposing the temporal and spatial configuration of those whose sexual identities are non-normative, and postcolonial ones, which has 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).

Refusing this “home and abroad” perspective, 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.

Hall 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” (HALL, 1996, p. 251). Omar, in this sense, seems to be the one who emerges in *The Brothers* 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”. The study, thence, draws an analogy 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.

At the same time his brother Yaqub grows up hopeful about the opportunities brought by Western notions of progress, development, and improvement; he ignorantly and uncritically understands his condition as one of a savage struggling to be civilised and educated in order to fit into the pattern, and to think about the Amazon as a brute uncultured land running out of time to become the metropolis it should be: “Halim was complaining that the city was flooded, [...] ‘Those plots are asking to be occupied,’ Yaqub smiled. ‘Manaus is ripe for growth’” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 194). 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: “I saw another world in these areas, [...] a hidden, secret world, full of people [...], some just vegetating, like the packs of squalid dogs prowling under the mud” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 73). Western expansionism is not worried about “improving” the

lives of the Amazonians observed by Nael since, as Galeano has put it, “industry lands as an airplane does, without affecting the airport” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 211).

We are taught to believe that “the airport” needs this proven ineffective “plane”, 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: “The posited authenticity of a past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present (the uprooted, évolués, acculturated)” (FABIAN, 1983, p. 10). 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 Nael’s perspective happens especially when Yaqub returns to Manaus for a visit after spending many years in Sao Paulo: “Yaqub’s visit, though it was only short, let me get to know him a little [...]. [H]e 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, pp. 107-108). Nael considers the possibility that perhaps he has been biased when he chose Yaqub as the one to admire and Omar as the one to dismiss, and he is able to transcend normativity thereof. 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; and, according to Hall, they have “emerged in new forms to disrupt the settled relations of domination and resistance inscribed in other ways of living” (HALL, 1996, p. 251).

Like Omar, the postcolonial subject represented by the narrator and clearly described by Hall seems to occupy, moreover, 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, Rodríguez avers that queer

perspectives are 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. This is mainly because “it has been [...] gender-queer subjects, and other bodies marked as deviant that have been affected most forcefully by pernicious ideologies of ‘perversion, victimization and protection’” (RODRÍGUEZ, 2010, p. 336).

Separating groups, “victimising” and “protecting” them, hinders their autonomy and 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 is able to expose this hypothesis which I dare to say is a pretty obvious fact. 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.

It is exactly because they do not fit in the system that both the narrator and Omar see its flaws. Ultimately believing that the only way to keep on moving is the one that “worked” for developed countries seems to be an Imperial imposition that is mistakenly taken as our only choice. Reaching the climax of the novel, the narrator realises that the idea of future is a lie, and that all those values that he admired for so long in Yaqub’s personality were just part of a façade that masks the ideology of expansionist development. He gives up his dreams about a better future:

He [Yaqub] asked if I needed anything, and when was I going to visit him in São Paulo? I put the visit off for more than twenty years. I had no urge to see the sea. I had already thrown away the sheets with Yaqub’s architectural plans that Omar had ripped up in his fury. I was never interested in structural designs with their reinforced concrete, or in the maths’ books Yaqub had so proudly given me. I wanted to keep my distance from all those calculations, from the engineering and the progress Yaqub aspired to. In his last letters all he talked about was the future, and even demanded to know my opinion – the future, that never-ending fallacy (HATOUM, 2002, p. 263).

Caboclos as Nael are not part of Brazilian future filled with “calculations” and with “the progress Yaqub aspired to”; they are only a curiosity related to its savage past.

As stated by Johannes Fabian (1983, p. 62) “We never appreciate the primitive as a producer; or, which is the same, in comparing ourselves to the primitive we do not pronounce judgment on what he thinks and does, we merely classify the ways in which he thinks and acts”. Imperialism wants Amerindians to forget their past and their present, it wants them to see themselves no longer as simply different people being forced into poverty and marginalisation, but as a low class of humans that are being constructively allowed to be accepted as part of development—less in rank if compared to other classes but, still, part of a strikingly beneficial enterprise.

Neoliberal societies are filled with those who, like the narrator, function both as agents and products of development; they are needed for money to flow not for their benefit but for the benefit of others. They are given the illusion that development is democratic, they are institutionalised and made believe that they are to be “equally” integrated, that they are going to belong to a system which belongs to others: “Domingas, [...was...] not much different from the other maids in the neighbourhood, taught to read and write and educated by the nuns in the missions, but all of them living at the back of some house, right next to the fence or the wall, where they slept with their dreams of freedom” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 59).

Domingas, an Amerindian whose “gift” given by development is her “job” as a maid for *The Brothers*, is not living after, during, or before colonialism, but in the three periods at the same time. The commercial processes applied by financial and marketing enterprises have not been characterised by an exchange based on equality, but on the supremacy of ones and marginalisation of others through the determination of where and when they belong in the globalised world, the marginalisation of the ones who end up sleeping “with their dreams of freedom”: a freedom that never leaves the discursive level. In the words of Fabian (1983, p. 95): “Temporalizations expressed as passage from savagery to civilization, from peasant to industrial society, have long served an ideology whose ultimate purpose has been to justify the procurement of commodities for our markets”.

Those who do not fit into the system, thus, do not fit into their own temporal and spatial interpellation; Halberstam (2005, p. 99) has asserted that “the temporally contingent is made to reveal an underlying logical necessity. The Now and Then is absorbed by the Always of the rules of the game”. Halberstam’s insight seems also to endorse what happens to Halim’s—the father’s—shop during the development of the

narrative. What we learn in the beginning of the novel is that the brothers’ father had his own shop and was very pleased by his working routine; however, in spite of his feelings of self-satisfaction as a business man, his way of managing his store insouciantly starts to bother Yaqub: “I can hear his [Yaqub] voice, criticising his father’s out-of-date shop, and his friends round the backgammon board. ‘These people get in the way of the costumers’” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 110).

Later Yaqub convinces his sister, Rânia, to take over the management of the shop inasmuch as if his father kept heading it he would never see his ambitious plans for enhancement of the store’s conditions turned into reality. Halim allows the euphemistic actions of his son who he admired so much for having reached such a privileged position, for becoming so educated, to happen. It is only a long time afterwards that he stops to think about what has happened in his store; the family’s father has been taken by the tide of discursive normativity and, as it eventually happens to all of us, has ultimately been deceived by it.

When Halim woke up to the fact, he was no longer selling most of the things he had always sold: hammocks, nets, boxes of matches, machetes, rolls of tobacco, bait for troll fishing, lanterns and night lamps. With these changes, he was no longer so close to the people from the hinterland, up the rivers, who used to come to the door, or into the shop to buy or exchange goods, or simply chat: to Halim it hardly matter. Now the shop-front sported wide windows, and there was almost nothing left to remind one of the old dry goods store less than two hundred yards from the beach of the Negro. The smell did remain: it survived the plastering, the paint and modernity [...] (HATOUM, 2002, p. 127).

Nevertheless, the consequences of such shift regarding especially financial matters are far from limiting themselves to this narrow realm. Even though the smell of Halim’s old shop remained, even though it “survived the plastering, the paint and modernity”, his loss has not only been material, physical, let alone financial. Actually for the commodification of culture, nature, time, space, and etc to effectively happen the neoliberal market needs to be inserted not only in every aspect of the commercial interactions of a desired region, but inside the deepest core of its cultural system. Halim’s daily life in his shop, in the end, was not connected only to his job for its commercial importance, it went much beyond that.

Rânia assumes her father’s role after he becomes dispassionate about the job, managing the small shop as the project of her life; her intention is to lead that specific modernisation contributing, consequently, to the general picture; she wants to take part in this master narrative of national development. Halim’s objects which gradually

disappear from the store are the symbols of a past that is also gradually being literally disposed of, in order to receive modernisation one must get rid of those things that, no matter how important or valuable they might be, do not fit in this new era. In one of her working days Nael decides to help her: “She got rid of all her father’s old junk, even throwing things from the previous century into the bin, like the miniature hookah that had belonged to Halim’s uncle. It didn’t bother her throwing all these things out. She operated with a fierce determination, quite aware she was burying a past” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 205). Deciding that the Amazon is only meaningful if adapted to our “future”, one is also “burying a past”, but, more importantly, turning a blind eye to what our present is trying to show us.

Conclusion

As a final remark for the analysis one could, thus, conclude that the Amazon has proven to be an emblematic locus of the hegemonic discourses and the master narrative of modernity against which it is described as a land which has been lost in time and isolated in its space; what this normative discourses suggest is that if “development” reached those lands things would improve for their “abandoned” populations. Is that so? In the opinion of Galeano (1997, p. 249-250) “The growing relative backwardness of the great hinterlands, submerged in poverty, is not, as some maintain, due to their isolation, but on the contrary to their direct or indirect exploitation”. Studies endorse what Galeano poses: poverty, as I have already suggested, is a necessary means for richness to exist.

As stated by Halberstam (2005, p. 7): “[T]o all different kinds of temporality we assign value and meaning [...] according to the logic of capital accumulation, but those who benefit from capitalism in particular experience this logic as inevitable”. The temporal condition of Hatoum’s characters, hence, can be understood to be neither distinct nor inevitable, even though normativity poses that they belong to different temporal spheres, when going to the US 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.

Ultimately, then, we can ponder upon the importance of thinking about the queer spatiality and temporality of the postcolonial subject represented by the forgotten Amazonians brought forward by Hatoum. According to Hall (1996, p. 248) “the

postcolonial signals, the proliferation of histories and temporalities, the intrusion of difference and specificity into the generalizing and Eurocentric post-enlightenment grand narratives”. However, the author thinks that the postcolonial per se is not enough for us to think about identity since we 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).

In Halberstam’s (2005, p. 35) view “little more than technology and sheer economic exploitation seem to be left over for the purposes of explaining Western superiority. [...] It takes imagination and courage to picture what would happen to the West if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other”. When Hatoum describes what development destroys rather than what it constructs he endorses these deviances from the normative discourses that attest the supposed superiority of Western culture. The general image of the novel is not one of gains, improvements, enhancements; on the contrary, *The Brothers* is about the obliteration of a past through the commodification of a future in our very present: “The house gradually emptied, and aged in a short time. [...] She [Rânia] told her mother the move was inevitable. [...] How could she [Zana] live without the cries of the fishmongers, coal-heavers, pedlars and fruit-sellers? The voices of people who already in the early morning had stories to tell” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 245).

As for Omar, he is just like the Amazon; both have no prospects, no chance of fitting in a future that cold-shoulders the ones who are not willing to be “integrated”. Contrarily, Yaqub has always been admired by his teachers and his parents and his opinions have always been the most respected ones. How could his family believe in such a disguise for so long? How can we? Galeano asked us more than 40 years ago “Hasn’t our experience throughout history been one of mutilation and disintegration disguised as development” (GALEANO, 1997, p. 277)?

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 the queer space and time of the Amazon as an opportunity for us to question Western positioning, to start anew an ideological search for how not to make the same mistakes we have been making for thousands of years. In Halberstam’s view “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).

Therefore, if we fail to acknowledge that the Amazon is neither in another space nor in another time, we will keep mitigating the revolutionary power of the only peoples and regions who can provide them; civilisation can only change its behaviour if it is able to accept the existence of different ones. The Amazon is not a pristine land that must be ignored, protected or abandoned; it is a possibility. However, if things keep going the way they are there will always be this gap between past, present and future, since our selfish manner of managing the temporalisation and spatialisation of the places where we settle and the peoples who we institutionalise is exactly what puts them in the queer time and space where they are now. In the end of the novel Nael takes one last stroll through the streets of Manaus and, once again, shares his insights:

[I came] back here on foot, in the rain, looking at the waste being dragged down the gutters, the lepers piled on top of one another, hunched up under the oitizersos. I looked, 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. [...] I had left the little that remained of the trees and climbers to the fury of the sun and the rain. Looking after all this meant submitting myself to the past, a time that was dying inside me (HATOUM, 2002, p. 264-265).

It is the Western behaviour that causes the past to “die inside” us. In the words of Fabian (1983, p 155): “Tradition and modernity are not opposed nor are they in conflict. All this is (bad) metaphorical talk. What are opposed, in conflict, in fact, locked in antagonistic struggle, are not the same societies at different stages of development, but different societies facing each other at the same Time”. The chronological order of our development, from savage to civilised, is not a universal truth, the Amerindians are not what we were once, they do not represent our past and, as I honestly hope, we do not represent their future.

As Fabian (1983, p. 144) has stated “Neither political Space nor political Time are natural resources. They are ideologically construed instruments of power.” The author argues that “[I]mperialist claims to the right of occupying ‘undeveloped’ space for the common good of mankind should be taken for what they really are: a monstrous lie perpetuated for the benefit of one part of humanity, for a few societies of that part, and, in the end, for one part of these societies, its dominant classes” (FABIAN, 1983, p. 144). Hatoum’s novel is depicted in a setting where it is impossible to believe in the

western redemption and in the beneficial contact between neo-coloniser and neo-colonised, between the neoliberal time and space and the so-called savage ones.

As the narrator observes, in the future of the Amazon there is no place for those marginalised Amazonians, like his mother and himself, and if their space and time belong to a future that does not acknowledge them, that makes Nael and Domingas spaceless and timeless. Nael constructs the character Domingas, his mother, as the postcolonial subject who has to accept her condition as undeserving to be better assisted in the queer space and time where she is forced to be embedded in, and he observes his mother living her whole life for others, always helping, but never helped. Hatoum is not asking the reader to think about how fair it is for this to happen, he is just asking the reader not to turn a blind eye to the fact that this has happened and is still happening in the very climax of our contemporary development, progress, future, and etc: “Domingas was useful; and she only stopped being useful when she died, as I saw her die, almost as shriveled-up as when she came to the house – for all I know, into the world” (HATOUM, 2002, p. 57).

I must conclude by posing that at the beginning of Hatoum’s novel the narrator is anxious about future progress and development. Impressed by the tales told by Yaqub and by the promises of hegemony he believes in the normative discourses that have set the Amazon in the path to the future. By the end what he sees, nonetheless, is not the beginning of a new and great civilisation, but the remains of a past which had been much more hospitable than what has come after it. His hope has vanished in 266 pages. How long is ours going to last?

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Notas:

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