Contesting Globalization: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics in the Atlantic World Economy

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines how contemporary narrative fiction in French and Spanish represents experiences of migration and the circulation of capital and goods in the globalized Atlantic. I argue that the attempt to imagine an increasingly globalized world has been accompanied by a waning interest in character development and an increased interest in what could be characterized as the spatial dimension of literature. Many recent 'global fictions' present readers with impenetrable characters whose interiority is inaccessible. The lack of depth is, however, replaced by geographical breadth. As characters move through space, bringing into relation several different geographical locations, authors draw attention to transnational sites of marginalization and imagine alternative power configurations.

Several important studies have examined the engagement of Francophone writers with globalization in the late 20th and early 21st century. While these readings are sophisticated and persuasive, they remain confined within the Francophone context, rarely establishing comparisons with the Anglophone and the Hispanophone contexts. We thus end up with somewhat contradictory concepts such as Francophone or Hispanophone transnationalism, 'world literature' and globalization. This seems even more paradoxical given that several Francophone writers, including Maryse Condé and Edouard Glissant, have set their novels in non-Francophone countries. My dissertation undertakes translinguistic literary criticism in order to address this gap in critical discourse.

I limit my focus to what I term the Atlantic world economy, that is, the countries touched by the Atlantic triangle and marked by a history of population displacement and cultural mixing inaugurated through colonial slavery. The authors I have selected position their work in the Atlantic framework. Some more explicitly, like Fatou Diome whose novel is entitled *The belly of the Atlantic*. Others, like Maryse Condé and Roberto Bolaño, by moving protagonists between some of the major centers of the Atlantic economy. They all, however, pose the question of a globalized Atlantic, distancing themselves from the Atlantic as a triangular space, and reframing it as a space encompassing many poles. The notion of the globalized Atlantic further underscores the tension between a regional framework and a globalized world within which these authors are operating.

At the turn of the 21st century movements resisting the effects of global capitalism have come into existence in several countries, including Egypt, Chile, the United States, Brazil and Turkey. These modes of activism require us to recalibrate some of our geopolitical categories as a way of thinking about transnational citizenship. The authors in my corpus deploy literary strategies that complement the activism of global socioeconomic and political movements. This dissertation focuses on their imagining of narrative fiction as a space that is both globalized and resistant to the dominant political and economic dimensions of globalization.

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Introduction

Globalizing the Atlantic

In June 2013, *The New York Times* published an article entitled "Trans-Atlantic Trade and its Discontents,"[1] praising the achievements of the now almost twenty-year old North American Free Trade Agreement and gesturing towards the possibility of a free trade agreement between the U.S. and the E.U. As the title of the article refers to Joseph Stiglitz's now canonical book, *Globalization and its Discontents*, which in turn borrows its title from Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, tacit continuity is established between civilization, globalization and the trans-Atlantic, convergences further framed by the notion of discontent. In *The New York Times* article, discontent is not, as one might assume, related to the now widespread consequences of several decades of free trade, but rather to the fact that E.U. countries are still reluctant to fully open-up their markets. However, the article places the Atlantic world and trans-Atlantic connections at the center of globalization, encouraging us to think about the two in relation to discontent.

The New York Times article raises questions that resonate with the Atlantic preoccupations of some contemporary narrative fiction and literary theory. Over the past few decades, a number of literary critics as well as literary authors have placed their work within the Atlantic framework. Some more explicitly, like Franco-Senegalese author Fatou Diome whose novel is entitled *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*. Others, like Guadeloupean Maryse Condé and Chilean

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[1] Guttenberg Karl-Theodor and Barbieri Pierpaolo. "Trans-Atlantic Trade and its Discontents." *The New York Times* 19 June, 2013:n.pag. Web. 28. Feb 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/20/opinion/global/trans-atlantic-trade-and-its-discontents.html?_r=0>

Roberto Bolaño, more indirectly, by having their protagonists travel between some of the major centers of the Atlantic economy. Whereas the Atlantic has long historically been depicted as a triangle, an area bounded by Africa, America and Europe whose contours were first established by the slave trade, contemporary authors have rethought the Atlantic space as comprising other poles.

In this dissertation, I examine how contemporary narrative fiction in French and Spanish represents experiences of migration and the circulation of capital and goods in the globalized Atlantic, identifying and exploring a set of intersecting thematic and formal shifts in modes of representation. I argue, notably, that the attempt to imagine an increasingly globalized world has been accompanied by a waning interest in character development and an increased interest in what could be characterized as the spatial dimension of literature. Many recent global fictions present us with impenetrable characters whose interiority is not at our disposal. At the same time, a certain geographical breadth replaces the lack of depth. Characters are constantly on the move through space, such that their main function seems to be that of bringing into relation several geographical locations. In *Poétique de la Relation*, Edouard Glissant calls this tendency the "baroque mondialisé." According to Glissant, this literary mode relies on baroque techniques that favor "extension" over "profondeur" and devices such as "le contournement, la prolifération, la redondance d'espace." The globalized baroque, he proposes, "'comprend' ou plutôt il donne avec le mouvement du monde."[2] My dissertation examines this globalized aesthetics within the framework of the globalized Atlantic and considers political models and possibilities that arise from the spatialization of novelistic representation.

[2] Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de La Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990, p.93.

The literary Atlantic

The idea of the Atlantic as a disaporic site in which European and African populations and cultures have come together, producing new social and cultural forms, is associated, in particular, with Paul Gilroy's seminal work, *The Black Atlantic.* Gilroy understands the Atlantic as a single complex unit of analysis. He criticizes cultural studies for adopting a nationalistic focus and embracing the idea that cultures always flow into patterns congruent with borders.[3] In his view, nationalist perspectives are not an adequate means to understand the forms of resistance intrinsic to modern black political culture. As an alternative, he proposes that modern black culture is characterized by an attempt to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity. The publication of *The Black Atlantic* in 1993, was a catalyst for literary criticism and cultural studies to more extensively engage notions of transnationalism and diaspora.

While Gilroy's critical reflection has undoubtedly marked the fields of cultural studies and literary criticism, various critics have pointed to that fact that his work remains limited to Anglophone authors who are primarily from the U.S. and U.K. Furthermore, I would argue that by deciding to consider only black writers, Gilroy has excluded many writers who are dealing with new configurations of racial identity. For instance, whereas Chilean writers Roberto Bolaño and Diamela Eltit would probably not self-identify as African Diaspora writers, they both engage questions of race within the context of global restructuring. Now more than ever, in the wake of economic and cultural globalization, in order to have a critical voice, literary authors need to address the question of race on contemporary terms.

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[3] Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Recently, a turn towards the Atlantic has also taken place in French/Francophone studies. In his 2008 book, *The French Atlantic Triangle: History and Culture of the Slave Trade*, Christopher Miller analyzes how the three poles of the triangle: France, Africa and the Caribbean have been constructed in relation to one another throughout history, beginning in the early 18th century and ending in the late 20th century.[4] Miller's is one of the first studies to analyze the French Altlantic slave trade and its consequences as represented in history, literature, and film.

Similarly, Bill Marshall's *The French Atlantic: travels in history and culture*, considers the cultural history of seven different French Atlantic spaces, from Quebec to the southern Caribbean to North Atlantic territory and back to metropolitan France.[5] Whereas Miller focuses on the triangular structure of Atlantic relations, Marshall expands the geographical space by including an analysis of Atlantic ports such as Montevideo and Montreal. However, in both cases the focus remains on the role and influence of France in the construction of the Atlantic world. The problem of monolingualism thus persists, though the language in question is French rather than English. Furthermore, both works take a historical approach. Miller's study ends with Maryse Condé's first novel, *Heremakhonon*, published in 1976, begging the question of the transformations the Atlantic has undergone since then. In this dissertation, through a comparative study of Francophone and Latin American writers, I explore how economic and cultural globalization has affected the Atlantic world since the 1980s.

I thus expand the scope of the Black Atlantic to encompass Atlantic world writers who address race and often also gender in the context of globalization, notably by reconceptualizing notions of location, belonging, oppression, resistance. Moving away from a monolingual

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[4] Miller, Christopher L. *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
[5] Marshall, Bill. *The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.

approach to the Atlantic world raises the question to what extent do authors from different regions identify similar problems and respond in similar ways to capital's hegemonic power? While I consider the cultural and historical context of each work, in the the following chapters I also explore themes and tropes that resonate across national traditions, including the uneven distribution or resources between the Global North and the Global South, the increasing precarization of labor, and the central role of international organizations in the current global configuration. In this respect, my dissertation aligns itself with recent work which has aimed to place Francophonie in a comparative context. For instance, a recent issue of the *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* journal, edited by Martin Munro and Alec Hargreaves, and entitled "The Francophone Caribbean and North America," has focused on the relation between the two regions, an area of study thus far undertheorized.[6] This work also strives to decentralize the image of Paris as the primary destination for immigrants from the Francophone world.

Contemporary authors from the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa, are increasingly addressing issues related to globalization from a multinational standpoint. In fact, we need to engage with the refusal of certain authors to locate their works within a national setting. What does it mean for the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño to set the first half of his novel *2666* in Europe and the second half in the imaginary Mexican town of Santa Teresa? What does it mean for the Martinican Edouard Glissant to begin his novel *Tout-Monde* in Italy?

[6] Munro, Martin and Hargreaves, Alec. (Ed.) *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 15: 1 (2011). Special Issue: The Francophone Caribbean and North America.

From immigration to globalization

An important framework for examining mobility and hybridity in the Atlantic has been the concept of immigration. In the past few decades, many studies have examined the place of minority identities within the French national context. Within the context of "second-generation" literature, critical discourse has strongly privileged authors of North African origin though a few recent works have also dealt with the question of Sub-Saharan immigration. Published in 2006, Odile Cazenave's *Afrique sur Seine* addresses the development of a new type of Francophone African novel created by first-generation black African authors living in Paris.[7] Christopher Miller's *Nationalists and Nomads* (1998) and Dominic Thomas' *Black France* (2006) place recent immigration flows within a historical perspective, reminding us that notions such as multiculturalism, integration and diversity did not enter political discourse after decolonization but have in fact long been at the forefront of colonial politics.[8]

But, while there has been a proliferation of critical studies on literature and immigration, most of this work focuses on the representation and self-representation of immigrants in France. This approach remains largely Eurocentric, with the unstated assumption that immigration begins once immigrants have arrived in Europe. It neglects global dynamics that cause migration as well as the fact that contemporary "economic" migration often involves several stages: migration from rural to urban centers and migration to wealthier and more stable regional neighbors very often precede migration to the "developed world." In fact, contemporary migration cannot be adequately understood without taking into account the cultural and economic entanglement of

[7] Cazenave, Odile M. *Afrique Sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*. Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2005.
[8] Miller, Christopher L. *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Thomas, Dominic Richard David. *Black France Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

"developed" and "developing" countries, as the increasing presence of migrants in European countries bears a relation to International economic policies (such as the IMF's structural adjustment programs) [9] which shape the economies of the Global South.[10] I consider authors who think about the imbrication of the emigration and immigration processes. For instance, Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique,* which takes place in Senegal and in France, relates immigration to the question of Senegal's national debt.

It would not, however, be accurate to say that critical discourse has completely ignored the question of globalization. In *Black France*, Dominic Thomas devotes a chapter to Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* and the place of African youth within the global economy. Celia Britton's contributing chapter to *World Writing: Poetics, Ethics and Globalization*, entitled "Transnational Languages in Glissant's *Tout-monde*," tries to define a globalized aesthetic present in Glissant's work.[11] These readings are, once again, persuasive, but they remain confined within the Francophone context, rarely establishing comparisons with, for example, the Anglophone and the Hispanophone context. A paradox is thereby produced: whereas novels highlight *global* movements of people and capital, they are consistently analyzed only within linguistically homogenous regions. We thus end up with somewhat contradictory concepts such as Francophone or Hispanophone globalization, world literature and transnationalism. This

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[9] See Sassen, Saskia. *Globalization and Its Discontents*: [Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money]. New York: New Press, 1998.

[10] In sociological and anthropological discourses the terms "Global North" and "Global South" have recently replaced the more derogatory First World/Third World distinction. I have adopted the terminology as it is currently the most pervasively used. Nonetheless, I disagree with certain implications inherent in the choice Global North/Global South, namely the fact that the distinction appears as merely geographical, whereas the unequal power distribution is erased from the terminology. It should be noted that alternative frameworks have been proposed. For instance, in *Feminism without Borders*, Chandra Mohanty, uses the terms "One-Third World" and "Two-Thirds World" in order to underline the unequal world distribution of resouces.

[11] See, for example, Thomas, Dominic. "Fashion Matters: La Sape and Vestimentary Codes in Transnational Contexts and Urban Diasporas". *MLN* 118: 4, French Issue (Sep., 2003), pp. 947-973.
Cheick, Sakho. "Citoyenneté Universelle: la Quête Obsédante d'une identité dans le ventre de l'Atlantique." *Ethiopiques* :78 (2007).

seems even more paradoxical given that several francophone writers, including Maryse Condé and Edouard Glissant, have set their novels in non-francophone countries. Others, such as Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou, have repeatedly argued against the idea that African and Caribbean authors should primarily engage their local realities, serving only as vehicles for the expression of their communities. Both Condé and Mabanckou also contend that the categories of nation, race and territory have fallen short of encapsulating today's reality and that we are in need of new categories to think the world and to think literature.

Another important issue in this context is the claim by some scholars that the increased critical interest in immigration narratives has led to a debate regarding their instrumentalization. Authors have raised concerns about an ethnographic reading of their novels, arguing that works by "Franco-French" authors are valued for their literary dimension whereas "Francophone" works are read as illustrations of sociological theories. They have objected to the assumption that their fictions directly translate the experience of certain ethnic or national groups, thus raising the question of whether and to what extent narrative fiction should be read as sociological evidence.[12] My dissertation contributes to this debate by contending the impossibility of a clear separation between a thematic and a formal analysis, but also the importance of reading these works not merely as illustrations of economic and cultural globalization but also as sites of a poetics of contestation.

Whereas the place of "otherness" within French national identity remains the primary focus of francophone criticism, Latin-American criticism has more explicitly engaged globalization. While not directly addressing the question of literature, in *Consumers and Citizens,* Néstor García Canclini argues that the relation between citizen and consumer has

[12] See, for example, Le Bris, Michel, Jean Rouaud, and Eva Almassy. *Pour une littérature-monde*. [Paris, France]: Gallimard, 2007.

changed worldwide.[13] Questions specific to citizenship are answered through private consumption of commodities and media offerings rather than through abstract rules of democracy or participation in discredited political organizations. In *Cultural Residues*, Nelly Richard offers a complex portrayal of a Chile in transition. She draws on literature, photographs, memoirs and art installations in order to understand a rapidly modernizing Chile in the midst of a neoliberal restructuring process.[14]

I see the work of Josefine Ludmer and Reinaldo Laddaga as crucial in understanding Latin American fiction of the past few decades and its inscription in the dynamics of globalization. Ludmer's essay *Aquí America Latina* takes the form of a diary of the year 2000 in Argentina.[15] Following the argument of her earlier work, she proclaims the end of literature's autoreferentiality. According to Ludmer, it is no longer possible to think literature through anachronistic dichotomies such as: national/cosmopolitan, realist/fantastic, traditional/ avant-garde. Contaminated by politics, economy, and media, contemporary Latin American literature continuously crosses the line between reality and fiction, inscribing itself within the domain of what she characterizes as "realidadficción." "Realidadficción" reflects the changes that have occurred in the past few decades with the advent of the internet and other technological innovations, as it strives to encapsulate "the real" in all of its minor expressions. It presents itself as an amalgamation of the instantaneous occurrences of "the real."

Laddaga makes a similar argument in his *Espectáculos de la Realidad,* when he writes that contemporary Latin-American fiction borrows from contemporary art forms, especially

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[13] García Canclini, Néstor. *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
[14] Richard, Nelly, Alan West, Theodore Quester, and Jean Franco. *Cultural residues: Chile in transition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
[15] Ludmer, Josefina. *Aquí América Latina: una especulación*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia Editora, 2010.

performance art.[16] The works he analyzes are composed as "rapid performances of writing": improvisations and arrangements of objects that writers have collected throughout the world. In the manner of photographers, these authors expose us to a series of snapshots, constantly striving to recreate a feeling of instantaneity. Whereas Ludmer's and Laddaga's arguments are persuasive in regards to specific authors including César Aira and Mario Bellatín, I believe that the political intervention of contemporary Latin-American authors exceeds the imitation of other cultural media. The authors in my corpus bring a critical voice to current debates related to globalization, oftentimes attempting to envision socio-economic alternatives.

In the chapters that follow, I draw from the Francophone and Latin-American literary traditions as I explore the question of a globalized Atlantic. However, whereas over the past few decades the Atlantic framework has been increasingly mobilized in literary studies, the terminological validity of the term 'globalization' has been increasingly questioned.

Globalization, an outdated term?

Most scholarly writings on globalization attempt to answer, in one form or another, the following three questions: is globalization happening at all (or are nation-states still the main loci of power?); is globalization something new or has it been happening for centuries?; and does the deterritorialization we see today differ only in degree or also in form from deterritorializations that accompanied previous stages of capitalism? Following Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems approach, I hold that the economic inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of the

[16] Laddaga, Reinaldo. *Espectáculos de realidad: ensayo sobre la narrativa latinoamericana de las últimas dos décadas*. [Rosario, Argentina]: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2007.

world is not a recent development, and that the emergence of the modern world economy (characterized by market trade, a single division of labor but multiple cultures) has existed in various forms since the sixteenth century. I also agree with Wallerstein's account of international capitalism as a system that unites a core, a semi-periphery and a periphery in a relationship of growing inequality.[17] However, whereas Wallerstein rejects the term globalization, instead opting to describe our current time as an era of transition, I have decided to keep it as I believe it has a descriptive validity in relation to the current state of capital, labor and communications. In this decision, I concur with scholars who have argued that we are confronted with denser and more extensive communication networks than ever before. These networks have a strong cultural and economic dimension involving the transmission of advertising and television programs, as well as transfers of capital and computerization of labor.[18] Recent innovations in communication technologies have enabled the instant transfer of information and capital, contributing to a perception of global simultaneity. Arjun Appadurai argues that money, commodities, and people are chasing each other around the world at an unprecedented speed.[19] Yet he also speaks of a growing disjuncture between various domains of global reality: ethnoscapes (landscapes of people who constitute the contemporary shifting world: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles), technoscapes (global configurations of technology), financescapes, mediascapes (distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information and the images of the world created by these media) and ideoscapes (concatenations of images which are directly political and frequently pertain to state ideologies and the counter-ideologies of movements oriented to capturing state power).

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[17] See.Wallerstein, Immanuel M. *World-systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004

[18] See, Jameson, Fredric. "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue." *The Cultures of Globalization.* Jameson, Fredric, and Masao Miyoshi (Eds.). *Post-contemporary interventions.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1998

[19] See Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, Mike Featherstone (Ed.), 1990.

The combination of dispersal and centralization that characterizes globalization is exemplified by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Since the 1970s, under the umbrella of neoliberalism, the politics of structural adjustment programs, austerity measures and increased privatization have created a common social context across various Atlantic rim nations, allowing us to pursue new points of comparison that support a plurilingual study of the Atlantic world. In his *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey defines the neoliberal doctrine in the following manner: "Neoliberalism is a theory that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve such a framework- if markets don't exist then they must be created and state action is necessary."[20]

Harvey further identifies the rise to power of several political figures as the beginning of neoliberalism: in 1978, in China, Den Xiaoping undertook the liberalization of the communist economy. In the U.S. the change is marked by the arrival of Paul Volcker as the head of the Federal Reserve in 1979 and his implementation of a new monetary policy, as well as the election of Ronald Reagan as president of the United States in 1980. Around the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, Margaret Thatcher became prime minister of the U.K.

A few key moments over the following decade have marked the expansion of neoliberalism to other continents. In 1970, democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende came to power in Chile only to be deposed in the violent coup of 1973 led by General Pinochet. With the backing of U.S. economists known as the 'Chicago boys,' Pinochet implemented rapid neoliberal reforms, turning Chile into one the first experiments in neoliberal

[20] Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.2.

governance. Throughout the 1980s a wave of neoliberal reforms swept across the South American continent, using national debt as the primary tool: "Internationally, the core neoliberal states gave the IMF and the World Bank full authority in 1982 to negotiate debt relief, which meant in effect to protect the world's main financial institutions from the threat of default."[21] In fact, in 1982, Mexico announced bankruptcy, which meant serious financial losses for the U.S. investment banks which held the debt. The IMF and the World Bank renegotiated Mexico's debt, in exchange for a series of rapidly implemented neoliberal reforms, including privatization of state owned companies, a dismantling of labor unions and cuts to public programs. By 1994, eighteen countries (including Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Uruguay and Argentina) had agreed to similar deals that forgave them over $60 billion worth of debt. In the 1990s, a similar set of reforms was implemented across the African continent and the Caribbean. In 2000, debt servicing represented an average 38% of the budget of Sub-Saharan African states. In order to repay, governments have had to procure foreign currencies; as a result, in many countries, subsistence crops have been abandoned in favor of export programs, cash crops and monocultures, which create a sense of dependency on transnational corporations that control the market.[22]

Increasingly, texts from disparate regions such as Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America are addressing questions related to debt, privatization and social inequality. They engage these issues, however, on specific terms, as literary texts. In fact, where can literature be situated in regard to these global flows? Does it have a special position compared to other commodities disseminated through these global exchanges? I contend that literature is an

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[21] Ibid, p.72

[22] See, Toussaint, Eric and Damien Millet. *Debt, the IMF, and the World Bank, Sixty Questions, Sixty Answers*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010.
Peet, Richard. *Unholy Trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO*. Malaysia: Zed Books, 2003.

important entryway into the globalization debate, precisely due to its ability to mobilize both imagination and language. In other words, literary works to do not simply reflect globalization, they also imagine new ways of framing dissent. Yet literature is not located in a straightforward sense outside markets, whether national or global. While often critical of globalization, literary authors are also dependent on the globalized literary market for the circulation of their works.

The works included in my corpus also reflect on the status of language within a globalized world. Edouard Glissant, for instance, poses the question of a globalized French as he contends that he is writing, in French, in the presence of "all the languages of the world." The work of Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño, on the other hand, begs the question of translation: what happens to language, as novels become global commodities translated into a myriad of languages? I argue that these authors, while reflecting on how French and Spanish have been affected by globalization, use language as a site of resistance to globalization's exclusionary and divisive effects, considering its capacity to serve as a platform for the construction of new modes of affiliation and community.

Different chapters bring together theoretical and fictional works in an attempt to theorize the engagement of literary authors with globalization. I consider contemporary thought on ethics and politics that deals with global capitalism and modes of resistance, relying notably on Jacques Rancière's understanding of "dissensus." In his ten theses on politics, Rancière writes: "the essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."[23] Dissensus must be understood in relation to its opposite, consensus. According to Rancière, we are currently living in the time of "consensus," characterized by an acceptance of the present distribution of roles and an absence of alternatives to the present "distribution of the sensible." For Rancière, dissensus is an interruption, a break inserted into the "common sense," into the

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[23] Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2010. p.37.

frame within which we see something as given. Politics breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of authority or subordination, assigning them to private or public lives. What is being disrupted are not only the hierarchies of a given social order, but, more importantly, the perceptual and conceptual coordinates of that order and the naturalness that is attached to it.

Aesthetic experience, through the free play of the imagination, can destabilize the "natural" distribution of the sensible. For Rancière, the political dimension of art does not arise solely from the representation of political events, and is not equivalent to the writer's political viewpoints. It grows rather out of art's capacity to suspend the normal coordinates of sensory experience and to imagine new possibilities of what can be seen, said, and thought, consequently leading to a "new landscape of the possible." Furthermore, Rancière links the specificity of art to a particular way of being in the community; art brings into being a "we," a collective subject at the origin of a newly emerging ethical community.

In the following chapters I bring together Rancière's notion of "dissensus" and Glissant's notion of the "globalized baroque" examining how, in their attempt to represent a globalized world, literary works enact scenes of dissensus. The works included in my corpus address the ideological underpinnings of global capitalism and at the same time demonstrate the contingency of such an order. They underscore how modes of governance and domination have created a common experience across a plurality of locations and territorialities. I try to answer, above all the following question: how does literature imagine ways of being in the world that represent an alternative to globalization's modes of organization? Each chapter of the dissertation looks at a specific pairing of authors through a different organizing lens. This structure allows me to address themes and tendencies that resonate across cultural traditions and the specificities of

each text.

The opening chapter examines Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, Maryse Condé's *Histoire de la femme cannibale,* and the construction of gendered identities within a globalized world. I argue that Diome and Condé are attentive to the ways in which capital, in its search for profit, accumulation, and domination, deploys an ideological construction of masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality. By setting their novels in multiple national locations, both writers construct a gender-conscious discourse, attentive to both the micropolitics of specific locations and to practices and discourses of global restructuring. Sali, the protagonist of Diome's novel, a native of the small Senegalese island of Niodior, has trouble finding her bearings in France, where she has been living for ten years. The novel provides an astute commentary on Franco- Senegalese relations at the beginning of the 21st century and the effect of the global economy on populations in the Global South. In *Histoire de la femme cannibale* the reader moves between New York, Cape Town, the Caribbean and France, following Rosélie, a painter and a psychic medium whose British husband is mysteriously murdered on the streets of Cape Town. The novel explores possibilities of transnational solidarity beyond identity politics.

In "French Feminism in an International Frame," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains that symptomatic reading, and consequently a feminist international discourse, entail pursuing a certain gendered problematic (such as the political function of the biological) in all of its historical, political, and social dimensions.[24] In this chapter, I demonstrate how characters who travel across several different geographical locations allow Diome and Condé to trace various gendered problematics (such as polygamy) across different historical, political, and social dimensions, showing that these issues are not bound solely to national politics and ideologies, but are also intertwined with the operations of global capitalism.

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[24] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

I also take cue from Spivak's reading of *Heremakhonon,* Condé's first novel. Spivak argues that *Heremakhonon* points to "the lack of communication within and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world" as an "important infrastructural problem of the restricted permeability of global culture."[25] My analysis focuses on the ways in which these novels strive to establish points of contact in "the immense heterogeneity," thus paving the way for imagining a different gendered politics and different gender relations within a globalized world.

Chapter Two focuses on the work of Martinican writer Edouard Glissant and Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño and the return to the epic form as a means of envisaging the interconnected but disparate world as a fragmented totality. I focus on these writers' most comprehensive works, Bolaño's *2666* and Glissant's *Tout-Monde.* Both novels are distinguished by an extreme proliferation of characters and geographical locations. The first part of Bolaño's novel focuses on a group of literary critics in search of Archimboldi, a German author whose trace has been lost. The plot then shifts on to an African-American journalist who travels to Mexico. The longest part of the novel, however, consists of a series of descriptions of women murdered in the imagined Mexican town of Santa Teresa. Glissant's novel takes a group of Martinican characters who travel around the world, becoming progressively more aware of the inter-connectedness of things they see and places they visit. This novel was the precursor to Glissant's *Traité du Tout-Monde,* which he defines as the order that can be drawn out of this chaos, a unifying perspective, a totalizing vision.[26]

I focus on the notion of globality elaborated in both works, considering the extent to which Glissant and Bolaño are attempting to "write the world in the novel." At the center of my

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[25] ---. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p.18
[26] Glissant, Édouard. *Traité Du Tout-Monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997, p.22

analysis is Glissant's statement that "le rapport fondamental entre politique et poétique est celui des relations de cultures dans le monde."[27] In an attempt to launch a critique of global capitalism from an intercultural perspective, Glissant and Bolaño stage the economic and ideological imbrication of various cultures. I consider the ethics and politics of fiction that crystallizes when authors juxtapose distant places and imagine their relation. What cultural and economic dynamics unite these different spatial locations? How are they brought into relation and kept apart by the hegemonic powers of global capital? More importantly, what are the formal elements of this "globalized" poetics? How is the growing inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of the world expressed in language?

The third chapter analyses the representation of the global division of labor in contemporary novels and the attempt to imagine an ethical community in a world guided by the logic of global capital. I bring together *Mano de Obra* (2002), by Chilean author Diamela Eltit, and *Petroleum* (2004), a novel by Belgo-Gabonese writer Bessora. Both novels are characterized by a lack of movement and permeability of space. Both narratives take place almost entirely in the workplace. The workplaces chosen, nonetheless, differ in nature: whereas Bessora focuses on one of the massive ships extracting oil from the Atlantic Ocean, Eltit sets her novel in the more mundane setting of the supermarket. Even when the plot of *Petroleum* drifts off the confined space of the ship, the narrative still takes place mostly within indoor spaces such as the gated community where the employees of the multinational oil company, Elf-Gabon, live, the company's headquarters and various means of transportation, including taxis and limousines. The two chosen locations embody two opposing (yet inevitably connected) poles of the globalized economy: on the one hand the increasing shift to a service economy, especially in

[27] See Le, Bris M, Jean Rouaud, and Eva Almassy. *Pour Une Littérature-Monde*. Paris, France: Gallimard, 2007.

larger cities; [28] on the other, the continuous exploitation of natural resources, leading to ecological damage and the questioning of the model of development and growth. Within their different settings, both narratives place the workforce at the center of our understanding of globalization, and gesture towards a need for a restructuring of labor conditions as well as a rethinking of the relation between life and work.

The final chapter explores the politics and ethics of opacity in the work of French-Senegalese author Marie Ndiaye, and Mexican author Yuri Herrera. I argue that these authors are reformulating the political as a process of disidentification, moving away from a more traditional model where ethics and politics stem from the identification with a specific character.

Ndiaye's *Rosie Carpe* (2001) and Herrera's *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009) are both stories of young women in search of their brothers. Rosie Carpe travels from Paris to Guadeloupe in the hope of finding her long lost brother Lazare, while Makina, the protagonist of Herrera's novel, illegally crosses the U.S.-Mexican border, in order to bring her brother home. One feature that unites these works is the absence of psychological explanations. The characters are opaque and impenetrable, offering us no possible ground for identification. This lack of character depth is, however, replaced by breadth; the novels do not try to depict a complex interior, but rather focus on the protagonist's constant movement between various geographical locations. This chapter will consider the question of ethics and politics inherent in these novels. Could we imagine an ethics that does not stem from identification but rather from disidentification? In *Poétique de la Relation*, Glissant strongly defends every culture's right to opacity. His argument is in concord with Rancière's claim that the process of disidentification is at the origin of dissensus. These two theories will undergird my argument that a new understanding of politics and ethics, a politics and ethics of opacity, emerges from these novels.

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[28] See Sassen, Saskia. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Through an analysis of several African, Caribbean and Latin-American writers, I read narrative fiction as a site that both represents and responds to globalization. Whereas colonized writers embraced a politics of opposition and emancipation, contemporary writers engage with the hegemonies of global capitalism, a more nebulous and all pervasive system of domination and marginalization. As a result, authors are devising new theories and tactics in order to identify trans-national sites of marginalization and imagine sites of resistance.

Chapter One

Gender, Globalization and Transatlantic Connections in the Work of Maryse Condé and Fatou Diome

In 2011, Franco-Senegalese author Sylvie Kandé wrote an epic poem that imagines the fate of King Aboubakar II of Mali who in the early 1300's, with two thousand canoes, embarked on a voyage to America. [1] The poem addresses alternative trajectories and histories contained by and within the Atlantic; specifically, one where America was not "discovered" by Christopher Columbus but by a Malian expedition. It further begs the question of whether those alternative forms of history would have led to different forms of the present. The poem unravels on the Atlantic; the sounds of past and present roaming oars are textually superposed, as the ending portrays the present attempts of young Malians to reach "the other shore." Kandé's poem is emblematic of a broader interest in contemporary francophone writing to reimagine the Atlantic from new vantage points. Whereas over the past few decades many francophone fictions addressing the question of trans-Atlantic migration were written from the purview of Paris, this is no longer predominantly the case.[2] The shore that Malian immigrants from Kandé's poem are seeking to reach does not belong to France, but to Spain. Furthermore, several authors, including Kandé and Guadeloupean Maryse Condé have recently written fictional works about the Atlantic from their homes, not in Paris, but in New York City. In this chapter, I analyze this displacement of the figure of the Atlantic triangle in several contemporary francophone novels. I address the ways in which globalization has altered the perception and the imagination of the Atlantic in literary fiction, analyzing the textual interweaving of the question of contemporary migration,

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[1] Kandé, Sylvie. *La quête infinie de l'autre rive: épopée en trois chants*. Paris: Gallimard, 2011.
[2] See, for instance, Cazenave, Odile M. *Afrique Sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*. Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2005.

circulation of capital and goods on the one hand; and the middle passage, the memory of slavery and the Atlantic triangular trade, on the other.

A few years before Kandé, Guadeloupean Maryse Condé, wrote *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2003),[3] a novel that takes place within the space of a globalized Atlantic. Condé's narrative reassesses the place of the history of the Atlantic, in the current phase of economic and cultural globalization. In the same year, on the other side of the Atlantic, Franco-Senegalese Fatou Diome published *Le ventre de l'Atlantique,* a novel addressing the bilateral nature of Franco-Senegalese relations and the contemporary configuration of the Atlantic episteme.[4] Both Condé's and Diome's novels preserve the Atlantic as the geographical and theoretical framework while opening it up from a triangular to a multi-nodal space. While the history of slavery and the slave trade remain foundational, they are analyzed within the context of a globalized economy, which has superseded the predominance of the triangle in the francophone imagination. In an interview published in *Feasting on Words*, a compilation of articles on her work, Condé states: "While my first books depict the paradisiacal nature of the Antilles that people dream of, *La Belle Créole* is in the here and now, as is *Histoire de la Femme Cannibale*. It's very difficult to write about the present. You don't have all the artifices that allow you to seduce the reader. You really need to shine a harsh light on things." [5] In a similar manner, Diome's novel, strongly engrained in the history of the Atlantic, poses the question of its present. Whereas references to the slave trade are multiple, they are overlain by the current international trade in African soccer players. The relationship between Senegal and France remains primordial; the third pole of the

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[3] Condé, Maryse. *Histoire De La Femme Cannibale: Roman*. Paris: Mercure de France, 2003.
[4] Diome, Fatou. *Le Ventre De L'atlantique*: [roman]. Paris: Éditions Anne Carrière, 2003.
[5] Broichhagen, Vera, Kathryn Lachman, and Nicole Jenette Simek. *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism, and the Caribbean Text*. PLAS cuadernos, no. 8. Princeton, NJ: Program in Latin American Studies, Princeton University, 2006, p.25.

triangle, the Caribbean, has completely disappeared. In many ways, the trade has become direct; it no longer takes a circuitous route through the Caribbean. At the same time, however, the relationship between the métropole and its former colony is framed within the larger context of the global flows of capital.

While highly innovative, Condé's and Diome's work needs to be assessed in relation to a francophone literary tradition that, for a long time, has grappled with the memory of slavery, population displacement, immigration, return and homeland. Christopher Miller, in his sweeping 2008 study *The French Atlantic Triangle: literature and culture of the slave trade,* establishes the francophone Atlantic literary space as a site of commerce and cultural exchange. Miller considers how francophone authors from the 18th to the 20th century have portrayed the slave trade, through the foundational connection between France, Africa and the Antilles.[6] He argues that forces mobilized by the triangular trade have left their marks beyond abolition, decolonization and departmentalization, but also observes that "the figure of the triangle is not all encompassing: as a mercantilist plan it could not be fully enforced over time and space, and as a projection of the French nation-state it invited resistance from within, below and outside" (p.4). Arguing the continued focus of 20th century Caribbean francophone writers on slavery and the triangle, Miller examines tropes of return/détour in three seminal figures whose work can be seen to represent a progression: Césaire, Glissant, and Condé. In his *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal,* Césaire rewrites the French Atlantic from the Caribbean, substituting the axis of desire from France to Africa. In the oeuvre of Glissant, The notion of "retour" is transformed into "détour," a ruse, an initial turning away and traveling beyond, that is only profitable if it ends in "prise en compte de la terre nouvelle" (p.341), a temporal and spatial grounding in the

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[6] Miller, Christopher L. *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

contemporary Caribbean reality. Maryse Condé's first novel, *Heremakhonon*, further dispels the myth of return while also questioning the existence of a common identity amongst Africans and the African diaspora.[7] The protagonist, Veronica, is a young Guadeloupean woman who, after having spent some time in France, decides to move to Africa in order to find her 'roots.' In the few months that she spends in an unnamed, recently independent African country, Veronica falls in love with Ibrahima Sory, the country's defense minister, and is witness to numerous political agitations and government repressions.

Heremakhonon challenges the myth of the return to Africa as a way to reclaim one's heritage, and the idea of preexisting bonds of solidarity based upon a commonality of fate imposed by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath. As Miller argues: "The novel articulates a deeper objection to the conflation of time and space. Seeking to recapture the past, to find your own ancestors or those of mankind in general, by traveling in the present- a classical mindset of Europeans in Africa- is delusional" (p.362). I find Miller's assessment that *Heremakhonon* offers a more historical vision of Africa and the triangle as well as the possibility of black transnationalism, persuasive. Nonetheless, *The French Atlantic Triangle* ends with a novel published in 1976, begging the question of more recent transformations of the triangle and the Atlantic. I contend that *Heremakhonon* has paved the way for Condé's later work, in which she analyzes the complexities of Africa's position in a globalized world. If *Heremakhonon* still operates within the triangular paradigm, Condé's subsequent novels depict a more multi-dimensional Atlantic space. For example, *Moi, Tituba Sorcière, noire de Salem* (1986) centers on a young female slave from Barbados, one of the first to be tried in the 17th century witch trials in

[7] Condé, Maryse. *En attendant le bonheur (Heremakhonon): roman*. Paris: Seghers, 1988.

Salem, United States.[8] *Célanire coup-coupé* (2003) focuses on a Caribbean woman who, at the beginning of the 20th century, arrives into Africa in order to manage an institution for young girls. In the second part of the novel the scene shifts to Guadeloupe, and the end takes place in Peru.[9] *L'Histoire de la Femme Cannibale* has often been read as a rewriting of *Heremakhonon*, three decades after the fact. In an interview, Condé herself makes this analogy: "I believe that in the end, you always say the same thing. I make an effort to vary the settings and to include a diversity of characters, but it seems to me that if you look at Veronica (from the first book *Heremakhonon*) and compare her to Rosélie (from *Histoire de la femme cannibale*), they aren't very different. My books always deal with women who have trouble living their lives." [10] Whereas Rosélie and Veronica bear some resemblance, I argue that the two are also quite different. Rosélie already knows what Veronica needed to learn; return is impossible. She thus does not travel to Africa in search of her ancestors, but is rather interested in the possibilities of transnational allegiance in a globalized world.

The change of perspective between *Heremakhonon* and *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (through many other novels) is significant. Whereas *Heremakhonon* rethinks the relation between the three poles of the triangle, *Histoire de la femme cannibale* opens up the space of the Atlantic to encompass new geographies. While Rosélie's conflicting relationship to both France and her native island of Guadeloupe is a factor in the narrative, the novel mostly takes place in South Africa, a non-francophone African country. While burdened by the legacies of the apartheid era, South Africa has also become a transnational site of encounter for characters

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[8] Condé, Maryse. *Moi, Tituba sorcière,--: noire de Salem: roman*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1986.
[9] Condé, Maryse. *Célanire cou-coupé: roman fantastique*. Paris: R. Laffont, 2000.
[10] Maryse Condé cited in Broichhagen, Vera, Kathryn Lachman, and Nicole Jenette Simek. *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism, and the Caribbean Text*. PLAS cuadernos, no. 8. Princeton, NJ: Program in Latin American Studies, Princeton University, 2006, p.11.

from around the Atlantic. Furthermore, episodes taking place in New York allow a reflection on the internal divisions of the category "black," further complicating the practice of black transnationalism.

Belonging to a younger generation of literary writers, Diome has thus far published fewer novels. In her first publication, a compilation of stories entitled *La préférence nationale*, she had already shown interest in the question of immigration and racial prejudice within the French context.[11] Following *Le ventre de l'Atlantique,* Diome has revisited the theme of transatlantic circulation in one of her most recent novels, *Celles qui attendent* (2010). The novel addresses the question of migration from the point of view of those who are left behind, women struggling to keep their lives together, in the absence of their sons and husbands.[12] Both Condé's and Diome's narratives thus explore the impact of economic and cultural globalization on women's lives, and the possibility of transnational black feminism.

In his seminal work on Black Atlantic culture, Brent Hayes Edwards has underscored the role of women in promoting exchanges and translation between U.S. and French Caribbean contexts, and uses this practice to consider the modalities of transnational black feminism.[13] The work of early 20th century black female authors writing in Paris, Edwards argues, places race in a transnational context, and emphasizes the way in which contemporary black migrancy as well as patterns of global restructuring are always gendered; ways in which race and gender "are always inextricably interwoven."[14] In this chapter I build on this work but also shift the focus from cultural work performed by elites to a wider set of economic and social issues pertaining to

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[11] Diome, Fatou. *La préférence nationale, et autres nouvelles*. Paris: Présence africaine, 2005.
[12] ---. *Celles Qui Attendent*: Roman. Paris: Flammarion, 2010.
[13] Edwards, Brent H. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003.
[14] Ibid, p.152

gender. Both Diome and Condé are attentive to the ways in which neoliberal ideology, and its emphasis on profit and accumulation, relies on specific constructions of masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality. By setting their novels in multiple national locations, they construct a gender conscious discourse, which is attentive to both the micropolitics of specific locations and to practices and discourses of global restructuring. As Obioma Nnaemeka argues: "Transnational feminism engages border-crossing at boundaries of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and nation but more importantly, it asks crucial questions about who is crossing which border and from where to where."[15] Diome and Condé, in this vein, present us with female protagonists whose experiences and narratives, while reflecting the power dynamics of border crossing, also gesture towards different power configurations. I argue that they position the Atlantic as a space to imagine new forms of transnational feminine solidarity, attentive to the economic and social inequalities produced by neoliberal global restructuring.

Bilateral relations and translateral movements in Fatou Diome

Fatou Diome's first novel, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, recounts the story of Salie, a young woman of Senegalese origin, who works in France as a maid in order to finance her studies. The plot shifts back and forth between France and Niodior, an island off the Atlantic coast of Senegal, introducing us to members of Salie's family, including Madicke, a younger brother who dreams of going to France in order to play for one of the French soccer teams. Distancing herself from a national framework that would pit Senegal against France or even a larger one that opposes Africa to Europe, Diome positions her novel in Atlantic space. She advocates a trans-colonial understanding of

[15] Nnaemeka, Obioma. *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses.* Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005, p.14.

the Atlantic, where the colonial power distribution is still present, but in altered forms. France thus remains central within the Senegalese global imagination, but at the same time, the entrance of new poles of power, such as the United States and Italy (as another powerhouse of European soccer), disturbs the triangular configuration of the Atlantic.

The novel further encourages us to reflect on the multidirectionality of Atlantic networks, rather than thinking about immigration as a unidirectional movement. While the last two decades have seen a proliferation of critical studies on literature and immigration, most of this work focuses on the representation and self-representation of immigrants within France. While these readings are sophisticated and persuasive, their approach remains largely Eurocentric, grounded in the assumption that immigration begins once immigrants have arrived in Europe.[16] Diome's narratives, on the other hand, move away from thinking about immigration within a national context, as a facet of national identity and source of cultural difference. The Atlantic is crossed in both directions; the act of leaving is given as much importance as the act of returning; and globalization is conceived as a process in which "individuals and groups are transformed by diasporas and intercommunication."[17] In fact, in many of her novels, including *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*, Diome focuses on acts of communication including phone calls, letter writing and storytelling that affect the ways in which the Atlantic is imagined and experienced, and shape different subjectivities. Practices of emigration are influenced by the ways in which they are conveyed and transmitted, be it orally or in writing, by those who have returned.[18] While sometimes perpetuating the contemporary power

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[16] In the past few decades, many studies have examined the place of minority identities within the French national context, see, for example: Cazenave, Odile M. *Afrique Sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*. Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2005.
Hargreaves, Alec G. *Immigration, 'race' and Ethnicity in Contemporary France*. London: Routledge, 1995.
[17] Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*, p.132
[18] See, for example, Sayad, Abdelmalek. *La double absence: des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999, for a sociological analysis of how the stories of returning immigrants influence the process of emigration in Algeria.

constellations within the Atlantic world, these narratives also escape the simple core/periphery, life/death binarisms.

The novel opens with Salie watching a soccer game at the request of her brother Madicke, who is unable to follow it in Niodior: “le 29 juin 2000, je regarde la Coupe d’Europe de football. L’Italie affronte les Pays-Bas en demi-finale. Mes yeux fixent la télévision, mon Coeur contemple d’autres horizons” (p.13). The relation between France and Senegal thus passes through the Italian soccer team and through the medium of television. Madicke repeatedly calls Salie to inquire about the performance of his idol, the Italian soccer player, Maldini. Whereas Salie mentions that most boys from the village are obsessed with French players, Madicke’s adherence to the Italian team marks a move away from the neocolonial France-Senegal relationship. Diome is cognizant of the perpetuation of the old colonial power dynamics, yet this distribution is complicated by globalization and the entry of new poles of power such as the Unites States and other European countries.

As she becomes acquainted with the fate of local youths who left for Europe in order to pursue an athletic career, Salie begins to see soccer through the lens of the history of slavery. Ndetare, the local, Marxist schoolteacher, attempts to convince Madicke and his friends to give up on their dream of playing soccer in France by telling them the story of Moussa. Originally from Niodior, Moussa is contracted by a French soccer team and leaves his family and hometown to prove his worth on the other side of the Atlantic. However, after the recruiter decides that Moussa’s talents are not up to par with the other players, he becomes just one of many undocumented immigrants and has no other option but to accept a job working in the docks of Marseille in order to repay the recruiter’s “investment.” He is ultimately deported and returns to Niodior destitute. Not being able to withstand the humiliation and disillusionment, he drowns himself in the Atlantic. As during slavery and colonization, the Atlantic unites all these events: born on the Atlantic, Moussa crosses it to arrive to

France, he must work on the docks of the Atlantic to repay his debt and upon his return to Senegal he is finally engulfed by it.

Diome makes an explicit rapprochement between the slave trade and the contemporary trade of soccer players: “Je declare 2002 année internationale de la lutte contre la colonisation sportive et la traite du footeux!” (p.281). In spite of several decades of Senegalese independence, France still considers Senegalese soccer players as their property, used to increase the reputation of French teams if deemed talented enough and as sources of cheap and precarious labor otherwise: “En dépit des efforts de Shoelcher, le vieux maitre achète toujours ses poulains, se contente de les nourrir au foin et s’enorgueillit de leur gallop” (p.281). The explicit reference to Shoelcher, the famous French abolitionist, is used to formulate a strong critique of neo-colonialism in which, albeit in altered forms, the old master-slave relationship persists. The proprietor- property dynamic is intertwined with a paternalistic attitude that suggests that French teams are enabling the “development” of Senegalese players. This dynamic mirrors the French colonial ideology where economic utility is countered by (or sustained by) a “humanistic” philosophy known as the “mission civilisatrice.” Furthermore, the question of slavery is transposed from the former colonies to the métropole. Whereas until 1848 slavery was the organizational principle of French colonies (especially in the Caribbean), it was illegal in what we would now call the hexagon. Believing itself the guardian of universal values such as freedom and equality, France declared that any slave that touched the metropole’s soil would be considered free.[19] This discrepancy between France as a republic and France as an empire, between universal republican values and colonial ideology has been analyzed from several perspectives over

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[19] See Peabody, Sue. *There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

the past few decades.[20] Diome inscribes herself into this critical discourse by delineating a contemporary "slave trade" that no longer requires the Caribbean as an intermediary.

Diome thus insists on the relevance of the Atlantic trade as a historical and geographical framework through which contemporary economic and political dynamics can be understood. But this is not an uncritical transposition of the colonial past onto the post-colonial present. Whereas the power dynamic between Senegal and France remains one of inequality and dependence, it has also altered form in order to adapt itself to the current functioning of global capitalism. The neoliberal economic and political doctrines that guide the international soccer world become visible in a passage summarizing the Senegalese news program: "En fin de journée, Son Excellence, monsieur le premier ministre, s'est rendu au port autonome de Dakar pour réceptionner un cargo de riz offert par la France, afin de secourir les populations de l'intérieur du pays touchées par la sécheresse. La France, un grand pays ami de longue date, fait savoir, par la voix de son ministre des Affaires étrangères, qu'elle s'apprête à reconsidérer prochainement la dette du Sénégal……Enfin pour terminer ce journal, sachez que nos braves Sénefs (Sportifs nationaux évoluant en France) s'illustrent de plus en plus dans le tournoi des clubs français " (p.57). This discourse epitomizes the superposition of a rhetoric of domination and one of aid, characteristic of the functioning of global capitalism. France presents the willingness to reconsider Senegal's debt as an act of generosity, stemming out of a long-term friendship between the two countries. However, the subtext of this decision is the IMF's liberalizing policy, which often accepts to renegotiate a country's foreign debt in exchange for structural adjustments, policies that open up local markets to the influx of foreign capital.[21]

[20] See, Wilder, Gary. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

African anti-globalization discourse has, for several decades, underlined the centrality of foreign debt as means of neo-colonial oppression and control. In 1987, during his famous speech at the African Unity Organization Summit, Burkina Faso president Thomas Sankara declared that debt is the new slavery. He further called upon Third World countries to stop repaying their debt to international imperialist powers, arguing that since this debt is illegitimate, African governments are under no moral obligation to settle it.[22] In many ways, the situation has not changed significantly since Sankara's proclamation. In 2000, debt servicing represented an average 38% of the budget of the Sub-Saharan African states. In order to repay, governments have had to procure foreign currencies; as a result, in many countries, subsistence crops have been abandoned in favor of export programs, cash crops and monocultures, which create a sense of dependency on transnational corporations that control the market.[23]

In the specific case of Senegal, a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was instituted in the 1980s, under heavy pressure from the United States, France, the IMF and the World Bank. The main component of the program was the "New Agricultural Policy," meant to encourage export of local crops, such as the peanut, and restructure the state's Rural Development Agencies. The program insisted on the elimination of all state subsidies to the agricultural sector (including fertilizer subsidies), which had devastating effects on local farmers, and ultimately lead to the collapse of the peanut industry. The program also had wider social consequences; over the past few decades Senegal

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[21] For a more in depth discussion of structural adjustment programs and economic liberalization see, for example, Diouf, Makhtar. *L'Afrique dans la mondialisation*. Paris: Harmattan, 2002.
Harvey, David. *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
[22] Video of Sankara's speech is available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfzoToJEnu8
[23] See, Toussaint, Eric, Damien Millet, and Damien Millet. *Debt, the IMF, and the World Bank Sixty Questions, Sixty Answers*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010.
Peet, Richard. *Unholy Trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO*. Malaysia: Zed Books, 2003.

has witnessed an increase in its foreign debt, cuts in health and public services, and rising public sector unemployment.[24]

Diome is extremely critical of the relation of dependence that these reforms have created. Senegal depends on France's donation of a cargo of rice (Senegal's own product), an obviously non-sustainable solution to Senegal's production problems. The superposition of the discourse on debt with that of the Senegalese soccer players living in France marks a direct relation between globalization's liberalizing policies and practices of emigration. But it also introduces the question of globalization as experienced through narration or as a narrative process. The story of Moussa is recounted to Madicke and his friends by Ndetare; the explanation for the food shortage is experienced through a TV screen. In other words, while the effects are experienced directly, they are caused by what is happening at distance.

Atlantic storytelling: local stories and global routes

The Atlantic contains residues of discrepant individual and collective histories of dispossession and resistance. Government oppression, laws of patriarchy as well as the history of trans-Atlantic slavery and contemporary trans-Atlantic migration are all superposed. The Atlantic is also what preserves the local and places it within a transnational network of power relations. Diome's multilayered depiction of the Atlantic aims at breaking the binary between dispossession and resistance, the local and the global, the individual and the collective. Individual and local stories are modified and adapted as they respond to global power restructuring, while at the same time gesturing towards alternative power configurations.

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[24] See Danaher, Kevin. *50 Years Is Enough: The Case against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund*. Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1994.

When she first mentions the island, Diome writes : "Là-bas, depuis des siècles, des hommes sont pendus à un bout de terre, l'île de Niodior " (p.13). This image of Niodior as being at the edge of the earth, where the inhabitants have a tenuous grip on the soil and are constantly at risk of being engulfed by the Atlantic, is perpetuated throughout the novel. Niodior is removed from a national association with Senegal: "Ils auraient pu, s'ils l'avaient voulu, ériger leur mini-république au sein de la République sénegalaise, et le gouvernement ne se serait rendu compte de rien avant de nombreuses années, au moment des élections" (p.57). Geographically removed from the mainland, it also stands at a political and economic distance. This separation is epitomized through the character of Ndetare, who was exiled to the island by the government: "En envoyant Ndetare, ce syndicaliste gêneur, dans le ventre de l'Atlantique, le gouvernement espérait le voir sombrer avec ses idéaux" (p.147). Unmoored from the nation, the island serves as the receptacle for the elements unwanted by the national government. But the novel also reconceptualizes the relation between the local and the global, and the question of isolation in the age of globalization. In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens conceives of globalization as "the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relations 'at distance' with local contextualities." [25] This analysis helps us to understand what it means for the inhabitants of Niodior to be hanging at the edge of the earth, while simultaneously experiencing the effects of global restructuring. The globalized Atlantic is thus experienced as a dialectic space; a space that conjoins contraries such as presence/absence, life/death.

At times nurturing and life-generating, the Atlantic can also be cannibalistic. The metaphor of the belly is often supplemented with images of mouths, teeth and jaws. When she first introduces her native island, the narrator writes: "Accrochés à la gencive de l'Atlantique, tels des résidus de repas, ils attendent, résignés, que la prochaine vague les emporte ou leur laisse la vie sauve" (p.13). The

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[25] Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991, p.21

personified Atlantic is feeding off the lives of Niodior's inhabitants who are at its mercy, as it has the power to give or withhold life. And the Atlantic is not always merciful; it often devours. As mentioned earlier, it is in the Atlantic that Moussa terminates his life. Ndetare's love story with a local girl named Sankele also ends in the Atlantic, as Sankele's father drowns their illegitimate child to spare their family the "shame" caused by his daughter's affair. With Ndetare's help, Sankele subsequently escapes from the island; it remains unknown on which side of the Atlantic she ultimately lands.

Yet at the same time the Atlantic rescues and gives life; it is the guardian of local legends. It is believed that at one point in time a man named Sédar drowned himself in the Atlantic when his impotence was publicly revealed in the village. Madly in love with him, his wife followed him into the ocean. They were subsequently transformed into dolphins and remained friends of the humans. Ever since then, they've transformed every drowned illegitimate child into a dolphin and adopted it into their family. The Atlantic is represented here as an alternative framework that sanctions other modes of living; it exists as a utopian space, free from prejudices and hate. Yet, Diome cautions: "même l'Atlantique ne peut digérer tout ce que la terre vomit " (p.131). The Atlantic is the repository of all the earth's waste, of everything that is deemed unwanted or threatening. Different stories are thus superposed and their retelling embeds them in contemporary circumstances. The legend of Sédar and his wife begins as a response to a specific construction of masculinity and heteronormativity. Yet, the belief that this couple may have adopted Moussa, who spent his life as part of the globalized precarious workforce, repositions the legend within the framework of the contemporary Atlantic. After crossing the Atlantic several times, Moussa returns to this local context, a context that his story and his death have inevitably altered.

Sociologist Roland Roberston proposes the term ‘glocalization’ to replace ‘globalization’ and the insistence on its homogenizing force. According to Roberston: “It is not a question of either homogenization or heterogenization, but rather of the ways in which both of these two tendencies have become features of life across much of late-twentieth-century world. In this perspective the problem becomes that of spelling out the ways in which homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies are mutually implicative.” [26] In this sense, globalization involves the linking of the localities but also the invention of the local in many of its different forms. While I agree with Roberston’s attempt to challenge the opposition between the local and the global, and consider them in their mutual constitution, there is a tendency in contemporary theoretical discourse to dissociate the cultural and economic spheres. In Robertson’s assessment, the pollination of the local and the global can happen anytime, anywhere. This approach, however, does not fully take into account the uneven power structures of the contemporary global economic configuration. We also need to consider who has access to the local, who has access to the global and for what reason; who defines the local and the global and for whom. The cultural and ideological processes of defining local traditions are closely intertwined with the transnational circuits of capital, and the uneven distribution of global resources. The story of Moussa, his participation in the global trade of soccer players and his incorporation into a local legend, offer a critical perspective to current economic reconfigurations. But the narrative moves beyond a mere critique. The incorporation into the local legend offers an imaginative line of flight, an escape from the structures of oppression and marginalization. Once adopted by the family of mythical dolphins, Moussa is no longer merely a victim of the global economy, but also participates in a more utopian social configuration. *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* thus adds a supplementary dimension to Robertson’s glocalization. ‘Home’ and ‘localities’ are reinvented and

[26] Featherstone, Mike, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson. *Global Modernities*. London: Sage Publications, 1995, p.27.

reconceptualized, but in relation to very uneven power structures, which often mirror the colonial period.

Diome's narrative centers on this dialectic between the local and the global, presence and absence that epitomize the Atlantic framework. Similarly, as I will discuss in the following section, Condé is interested in repositioning Africa at the center of the Atlantic framework. In her recent fiction, the African continent, and more specifically South Africa, find themselves at the juncture of emigration and immigration flows.

Reconfiguring the triangle: Africa as destination (not homeland) in Condé

Whereas *Heremakhonon* maps the triangle, France is only sporadically mentioned in *Histoire de la femme cannibale*. The novel's main figure is Rosélie, a young Guadeloupean woman who lives in Cape Town with Stephen, an Englishman who works as a literature professor at the local university. At first glance, the story unfolds as a detective novel; one evening, after he leaves to buy cigarettes, Stephen is mysteriously murdered. Alone, Rosélie attempts to reconstruct a life for herself by working as a "curandera," one who cures the uncurable. Descriptions of contemporary South African society are interspersed with Rosélie's memories of her childhood in Guadeloupe and her life with Stephen. Another narrative emerges within the novel, the story of Fiéla, a South African woman accused of having killed and perhaps even eaten her husband: the enigmatic cannibal-woman of the title. As the plot develops, Rosélie begins to conflate her identity with Fiéla's; she no longer knows who is speaking.

While the narrative structure of *Histoire de la Femme Cannibale* is interspersed with memories from France and Guadeloupe, the story takes place mostly in South Africa and the United

States. The triangle is thus no longer simply French as the question of the memory of the slave trade is mostly analyzed in relation to South Africa and its history of apartheid. In fact, the triangle is reimagined and reversed on multiple levels. Rosélie herself comments upon this restructuring: "Le triangle s'était inversé. Avant le Cap, le Christ-Roi avait abordé à la Pointe où il s'était chargé d'autres bois que des bois d'ébène" (p.52). Rosélie makes this comment in relation to a tree in the backyard of her Cape Town home, which she settled upon as it reminded her of a childhood tree she cherished; yet it also gestures towards the complexity of movements across the Atlantic. Whereas during the slave trade the triangle always followed the same one directional route: Europe- Africa- the Caribbean- Europe, Rosélie embarks on a direct Caribbean-Africa route. But this voyage is not necessarily a recuperative "return to roots."

As in *Heremakhonon*, Africa is situated at the center of the triangle, or rather a complex Atlantic, but the question of "return" is no longer the most prominent concern. If Veronica initially believed in going back to Africa in search of one's ancestors, Rosélie is never swayed by the myth of return. Africa is thus no longer seen as a place where one can access the historical time predating the Atlantic trade, but rather as a destination. The reimagining is twofold; Condé is rewriting the narrative of the return to Africa, and of post-colonial migration from the Caribbean/Africa to Europe. The two are connected as South Africa is represented as a hub for post-colonial migrants. With this gesture, Condé shifts the focus from Europe as the focal point of migrant literature.

In many contemporary francophone cultural productions, Paris is depicted as an immigration hub, where populations around the Atlantic have come into contact.[27] In *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, however, the focus is shifted to Africa: Cape Town is represented as a

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[27] See, Cazenave, Odile M. *Afrique Sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*
Thomas, Dominic R. D. *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007

globalized, multicultural space where people from different African, European and Caribbean countries have found a home. As she is meeting a new client from Rwanda, Rosélie comments: "Encore une histoire d'immigré! Dance ce pays tout le monde en déballait, des cocasses, des ridicules, des rocambuques, plus abracadabrantes les unes que les autres" (p.21). The narrative repositions Africa within the global network of power; immigration is no longer seen as a univocal trajectory, where people from poor and "underdeveloped" countries are escaping to the rich and "developed" ones. Sociologists of immigration have often pointed out that migration is a more complex process than the terms "imm/emigration" convey, since many people move within nations or regions and others move in multiple stages.[28] Condé's novel, while taking place in a non-Francophone country, further contextualizes Africa not merely as a homogenous source of emigration, but rather as a heterogeneous space traversed by diverse migratory routes.

At the same time, the novel rethinks the extent to which emigration networks lead to increased communication among subaltern cultures. In *Death of a Discipline,* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Condé's first novel points to "the lack of communication within and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world" as an "important infrastructural problem of the restricted permeability of global culture."[29] In many ways Spivak's assesment of *Heremakhonon* is applicable to *Histoire de la femme cannibale.* In an increasingly cosmopolitan Cape Town, Rosélie meets people from all over the Atlantic. At the same time, her patients, mostly survivors of African civil conflicts, seek her help because oftentimes they are unable to relate their lived experience. The narrative thus points to the limits of cross-cultural communication in the age of globalization. Whereas globalization has been characterized by the acceleration of communication

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[28] See, Sassen, Saskia. *Globalization and Its Discontents: [essays on the New Mobility of People and Money]*. New York: New Press, 1998.
[29] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p.18

networks, these are not evenly accessed by everyone; the subjective experience of race, nationality, gender and class, determine the level of border crossing and the permeability of global culture, rendering communication and cooperation across different sites of marginalization difficult.

At the same time, economic readjustments that have occurred since the 1970s when *Heremakhonon* was written, the often forceful neoliberalization of the economies of the Global South, have caused similar problems across borders, opening up a space for transnational solidarity. Malian cultural theorist Manthia Diawara has argued that the 1994 currency devaluation in francophone African countries, imposed by European and American financial institutions, united francophone Africa and helped create a regional imaginary around the stakes of globalization and the role of the state.[30] Whereas Condé cautions against an overtly simplistic understanding of black transnationalism, *Histoire de la femme cannibale* explores ways in which global neoliberalism has enabled both inter and intra-regional comparisons.

Is there a past to the globalized present?

As Miller has argued, in *Heremakhonon*, Condé criticizes the conflation of time and space, the idea that by traveling in space one can travel back in time. Whereas a reflection on the relation between time and space is still one of the primary concerns in *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, the configuration is different. The question of temporal and spatial return is explored, not in relation to the Caribbean and Africa, but rather to the United States and South Africa. Before moving to Cape Town, Rosélie and Stephen spent several years in New York. Stephen insists on moving to post-apartheid Africa, as, he believes, it will enable them a temporal return

[30] Diawara, Manthia. "Regional Imaginary in Africa." *The Cultures of Globalization*. Jameson, Fredric and Masao Miyoshi (Eds). Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

in relation to the U.S.: “Après sept ans à New York, connaître l’Afrique du Sud post-apartheid, argumentait-il, serait remonter en arrière. Remonter au temps où l’Amérique venait tout juste de museler ses chiens policiers et de terminer les combats pour les Droits civiques” (p.49). Stephen envisions history in terms of a teleological narrative where Africa is at a temporal “décalage” from the Western world and will be going through the same development, just several decades later. But the comment also positions the United States, and its civil rights struggle, as the endpoint of the question of race. South Africa is beginning to resolve something that the United States has already resolved. The rest of the novel challenges this linear understanding of history by positioning the United States as a negative point of comparison. Thus, as Rosélie and Stephen encounter a house in the center of Cape Town, everyone warns them about the danger of residing in that area: “Evidemment, tous les familiers du Cap leur avaient déconseillé d’habiter le centre-ville. Trop dangeureux! C’est pire que le Bronx! Pire que Harlem! D’ailleurs, Harlem n’est plus Harlem depuis que Rudy Guiliani y a lancé ses escouades de policiers tueurs. A preuve, Magic Johnson y a investi son argent! C’est pire que tout ce que vous avez connu!” (p.52). This reversal is important for several reasons. First of all, it challenges the conception of an Africa devoured by civil war and dangerous for those accustomed to the safety of the Western world. In fact, here, it is South Africa that is at risk of becoming as violent as New York. But this is also not merely a value judgment; the issue at stake is not merely which country is more violent or more incapable of dealing with race relations. Rather, this scene disrupts the idea of teleological development as it establishes other parameters for comparison. It puts into question the understanding of civil rights in the U.S. as racial resolution. If South Africa is several decades “behind” the U.S., what is at the other end is not necessarily progress but rather a different form of violence.

Furthermore, the logic of development is questioned both from an internal and an

external perspective. While Harlem is cited as an example of extreme violence, the narrator also points to the fact that it is no longer what it used to be, due to Guilliani's mobilization of police violence in the neighborhood. As she makes the final value judgment, it is unclear whether she is referring to pre or post Guilliani New York. This ambivalence raises the question of the relation between violence, development and progress, where one type of violence (coming from the neighborhood) is seen as a source of concern, while a different kind (coming from the police) is seen as a sign of progress. The passage also raises the question of cross-class black solidarity. The violent removal of a segment of the population is justified as a sign of development, opening up the space for new investment; the investment sometimes coming from the black middle class. The temporal relation between the United States and South Africa is explored in conjunction to South Africa's relation to its own past.

Condé's Atlantic is caught in a disjuncture where the past, marked by the history of the Atlantic slave trade and apartheid, coexists with the globalized present, its ideology of progress, development, and the incorporation of subalterns and minorities into a global economy. The repressed Atlantic past, including South African apartheid and the slave trade, continually haunts the post-modern eclectic mixture of people and cultures, supposedly "beyond" the question of national belonging and racial affiliation. Shocked by the fact that a former prison, Robben Island, could become a tourist destination, Rosélie comments: "Que faire du passé? Quel cadavre encombrant! Devons-nous l'embaumer et, ainsi idéalisé, l'autoriser à gérer notre destin? Devons-nous l'enterrer, à la sauvette, comme un malpropre et l'oublier radicalement? Devons nous le métamorphoser?" (p.142). The novel can be read as an attempt to answer this question about metamorphosing the past; a question that connects the personal and the national. Rosélie does not want to leave Cape Town after Stephen's death because she claims that she has no present

aside from the past with Stephen. Her attachment to the past and her inability to live in the present, are set against South Africa's inability to erase apartheid divisions.

The novel begins with a reference to the Atlantic slave trade and the question of memory. The description of a dormant Cape Town is interrupted by sirens coming from ferries transporting tourists to Robben Island, an "ex-île-camp de concentration metamorphosée en attraction touristique internationale" (p.11). References to Robben Island are scattered in the novel. Since the end of the 17th century, Robben Island has been used for the isolation of political prisoners. Amongst its early permanent inhabitants were political leaders from various Dutch colonies, including Indonesia, and the leader of the mutiny on The Meermin slave ship. After a failed uprising at Grahamstown in 1819, the fifth of the Xhosa Wars, the British colonial government sentenced African leader Makanda Nxele to life imprisonment on the island. The monument is thus the testament to the South African apartheid but also to the larger history of colonization in Africa and the Atlantic trade. In her work as a curandera, Rosélie encounters Dawid Fagwela, one of the former Robben Island prisoners, who has worked for years as a tourist guide in the place where he previously served his sentence: "Ce n'est pas tous les jours qu'un prisonnier politique se transforme en guide touristique, c'est-à-dire qu'un homme voyage de l'enfer au paradis, en l'espace d'une vie" (p.39). Like most of her other clients, Dawid has trouble sleeping, he often wakes up in terror not entirely certain whether the era of apartheid is indeed over. But the transformation of Robben Island into a tourist site raises the question of the commodification of historical memory.

The museification of the prison turns it into a site of visual and physical consumption, and creates a strange dialectic between the absence and the presence of the past. It is still there, in the form of a museum, yet precisely as such it is held at a distance from the everyday reality of

Cape Town, contained within the closed- off space of the tourist infrastructure. The function of Robben is placed within the larger framework of the Atlantic through an analogy made with the Thomas Jefferson museum in the United States: "En Virginie, elle avait visité Monticello, demeure du président Thomas Jefferson. Touche finale à la couleur d'époque, des Africains-Americains engoncés dans des casaques vendaient des souvenirs dans les communs abritant une boutique" (p.119). The African-American souvenir sellers, in an analogous manner to the ex-prisoner tourist guide at Robben Island, serve as markers of "authenticity" of the history that the museum aims to preserve. But the relationship between the past and the present remains complex. Whereas the present (i.e. current subjects) is used to authenticate the past, it is authenticating a past that is supposedly entirely absent from the present and can only be accessed through the sanctified museum form. In other words, the present is there to grant access to a past that is supposedly otherwise inaccessible. But this configuration creates a strange dialectic where a present body represents an absent history.

Andreas Huyssen has described our present obsession with the past in the following manner: "Memory and musealization together are called upon to provide a bulwark against obsolescence and disappearance, to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever-shrinking horizons of time and space."[31] According to Huyssen, whether or not museums can in fact respond to our need for spatial and temporal anchoring is questionable, since "musealization itself is sucked into the vortex of an ever-accelerating circulation of images, spectacles, events, and is thus always in danger of losing its ability to guarantee cultural stability over time" (p.24). It is interesting, however, to juxtapose this argument to Frederic Jameson's characterization of the contemporary era as a stage of "infantile capitalism." Modernism,

[31] Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, p.23.

according to Jameson, is associated with incomplete modernization, a period where the "pre" or the "non" modern could still be remembered. In our current era, the era that could be named both late and infantile capitalism, the memory of something different has been lost: "everyone has been born into it, takes it for granted, and has never known anything else, the friction, resistance, effort of the earlier moments having given away to the free play of automation and the malleable fungibility of multiple consumer public and private markets: roller skates and multinationals, word processors and overnight unfamiliar postmodern downtown high rises."[32] We could wonder whether Huyssen's and Jameson's positions are incompatible, since one argument explores our obsession with the past and the other our inability to envision the past. I argue that this is not the case, as Huyssen himself contends that at stake in the current history/memory debate is not only a disturbance of our notions of the past, but rather a more fundamental crisis in our imagination of alternative futures (p.2). While the museum preserves the past, it also establishes clear boundaries with the present; the past can be observed in a non-interactive and detached manner, as something that once took place, but that no longer directly affects our lives. Condé's narrative, I contend, gestures towards this difficulty of historicizing the neoliberal present.

There is, first of all, a disjuncture between the individual experience of time and the fast pace of the economy, the inability to move past the past as quickly as the economic configuration of the world requires it. The movement is multifold: memory and museums respond precisely to this inability to 'keep up' with continuous transformations by giving access to a more 'stable' past. Yet, at the same time, they mark a rupture with the past. As Jameson suggests, the crisis of the imagination also stems from the fact that we are unable to historicize the present and act as if we were living in an everlasting present. Our inability to imagine alternative futures is connected

[32] Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p.367.

to our inability to think of the global neoliberal present as a historical form with a present and a past. Instead, we think of our present as timeless. Within this framework, the neoliberal present is seen as an 'overcoming' of the apartheid and not, in many ways, it's direct continuum.

In Condé's novel, the image of a museified Atlantic past is juxtaposed with the image of Cape Town as a global city. At one of the many dinners for inter-racial couples that Rosélie and Steven attend, Rosélie meets Piotr, a Swedish exile who, helped by a photographer, covered the city's buses with 'global' images: "le marché de cocody avant que les flammes l'aient dévoré, un autobus londonien bondé de Sikhs enturbannés, les jonques et les restaurants flottants de Hong Kong, la mosquée de Djenne, une caravane de chameaux traversant le désert en direction des mines de sel de Taoudenit" (p.74). The chosen images gesture towards the infinite heterogeneity of the contemporary world. At the same time, they are brought together under a commonality; they all represent more 'traditional' modes of living. As such, they serve a purpose similar to that of the museum; they offer an escape from the 'hypermodern' to the 'premodern.' Entirely uprooted from their local cultural and historical contexts, these images convey an entirely dehistoricized relation to other places and times. The artistic project thus glorifies the diversity of the globalized present, yet it is entirely devoid of the material historical conditions that have created it. Once again, the narrative points to a temporal and representational disjuncture. South Africa's attempt to join the global community is predicated upon the erasure of history and participation in a snapshot global culture. Oftentimes, this snapshot culture includes representations of the female other.

Thinking gender in the global Atlantic

Female characters who travel among different poles of the Atlantic economy allow Condé and Diome to think gender beyond the framework of the nation, in relation to both the history of the slave trade and a contemporary global division of labor that unequally affects women. The question of what it means to think gender across borders and lines of demarcation has long been fuel for debate amongst feminist activists and theorists. In the past few decades, feminists from across the Global South have strongly criticized a form of international feminism practiced in the West and advocated for a reconceptualization of transnational feminist solidarity. According to Nnaemeka: "Internationally, second wave feminism generated two major responses: (1) the global sisterhood approach that overplayed homogeneity and paid little or no attention to issues of difference based on race, class, culture, ethnicity, beliefs, and so on; and (2) the development approach in its different mutations – Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Gender and Development (GAD) - that instutMtionalized the helper/helped dichotomy. Both responses failed to fully account for and address the issues of hierarchy, power and inequality."[33] Within the African context, and in the context of the African diaspora in Europe, the question of polygamy and female circumcision have, over the past few decades, been highlighted in mediatized political discourses. The discussion of these issues has often been framed within the universalism/cultural relativism dichotomy, where the responsibility for the struggles of African women is attributed to local cultures. As Dominic Thomas argues: "A number of recent texts by African writers have reflected a disturbing pattern, effectively displacing and shifting the responsability for the plight of African women in the Diaspora away from the West in order to reatribute it to Africa, highlighting some of the more

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[33] Nnaemeka, Obioma. *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005, p.14.

problematic dimensions of discourse on human rights, universalism, and hegemony."[34] But if Thomas' description is accurate, it still binds questions of gender and inequality to a national context. The issues affecting African diaspora women must in fact be thought in relation to national politics of the countries they are residing in. But in the same vein, these questions cannot be thought outside of the framework of the global circulation of capital, goods and people. Chandra Mohanty, in *Feminism without Borders*, argues that any transnational analysis of gender must simultaneously decolonize feminisms and demystify capitalism. The two, according to Mohanty, are inseparable since capitalism is "incompatible with feminist visions of social and economic justice."[35] In fact, over the past few decades, international institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and UNICEF, supported by a strand of neoliberal international feminism, have placed emphasis on women as potential capitalists and on microlending as a panacea for a whole array of economic and social issues.[36] In 2006, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Bangladeshi Muhammad Yunus, a pioneer of microcredit programs benefiting women and children.[37] Marxist feminists such as Silvia Federici and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have strongly criticized this practice. In a recent interview, Federici has argued that through microfinance, banks and other financial agencies are turning female support groups into self-policing groups, attacking communal solidarity, and destroying forms of cooperation people

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[34] Thomas, p.134
[35] Mohanty, Chandra T. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, p.9.
[36] See, Daley-Harris, Sam. *Pathways Out of Poverty: Innovations in Microfinance for the Poorest Families*. Bloomfield, Conn: Kumarian Press, 2002.
Bali Swain, Ranjula. *The Microfinance Impact*. London: Routledge, 2012.
Robinson, Marguerite S. *The Microfinance Revolution*. The World Bank, Washington D.C., 2001.
[37] Ledwith, Tim. "Muhammad Yunus, microcredit pioneer and UNICEF partner, awarded Nobel Peace Prize." *UNICEF.* Oct. 2006. Web. March 2014 <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_36162.html>

created to strengthen their capacity for resistance.[38] Similarly, Spivak has argued that "contemporary credit-baiting" is "an overdetermined script of cultural intervention: capital versus patriarchy as well as capital colluding with patriarchy."[39]

Gender, race, as well as issues of global profit accumulation and economic and social inequality, create intersecting sites of oppression that need to be considered in their mutual constitution. Diome's and Condé's female protagonists experience these overlapping sites of marginalization within the context of the African diaspora. I argue that in their analysis of issues such as polygamy, sex tourism and inter-racial marriage, these narratives challenge the separation between the cultural and the economic spheres, as they move beyond the universalism/cultural relativism debate in order to embed these experiences in the context of neoliberal reforms within a globalized Atlantic.

Polygamy: a capitalist tradition?

Though it is mentioned only in a few passages, the issue of polygamy forms an important backdrop to the plot of Diome's novel. The novel features a character named L'homme de Barbès who, for the locals, has become the symbol of successful emigration. His past struggles and humiliations in France are unknown in Niodior, as his many possessions are the only visible sign of his life abroad. L'homme de Barbès is the only person in Niodior who owns a TV; it is at his house that all the soccer matches (as well as the commercials accompanying them) are watched. His nickname is an ironic commentary by the narrator on his situation in France. All of

[38] Vishmidt, Marina. "Permanent Reproductive Crisis: An Interview with Silvia Federici." *Mute*. March 2013. Web. March 2014 <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/permanent-reproductive-crisis-interview-silvia-federici>
[39] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.237.

his possessions, including his Rolex, his TV, his refrigerator, are bought in Barbès, a poor immigrant neighborhood in Paris, notorious for its black market. Most of these products are "de contrabande," smuggled from other countries and sold illegally. The majority of them are most likely produced in the Global South. The irony is that products produced in countries like Senegal for the western market are returned to Senegal by immigrants eager to demonstrate their supposed economic success. The products are valued because they are considered French as they physically come from France, even though they were not produced there. As Thomas argues: "Because of this, the man from Barbès emerges as an emblem of opportunity and therefore of power, but in reality, contextualized within global capitalism, he stands paradoxically as an instrument of continued oppression since his master narrative both relegates him to a position of perpetual subjugation and triggers successive migrations that perpetuate a myth that ultimately serves the capitalist interests of European markets that control the economy and further marginalize Africa" (p.193). I concur with Thomas' description of the man from Barbès' function in the narrative, and I also contend that his arguments can be extended to the theme of polygamy.

Polygamy, or the ability to "possess" several wives, enters the same logic of displaying economic success gained abroad: "En fait, cet homme ne tenait pas particulièrement à sa télévision. Comme sa Rolex de contrebande, qu'il ne savait pas régler, comme son salon de cuir, toujours emballé dans une cotonnade blanche, comme son congélateur et son frigo, fermés à clef, comme sa troisième épouse, éclipsée par la quatrième, qu'il ne remarquait plus que les soirs où sa rotation conjugale l'y obligeait, cette télévision était là, dans sa vaste demeure, pour signifier sa réussite" (p.34). These objects are not marked by their use value but rather by their display value; they are simply flaunted as a metaphor for a lifestyle available on the other side of the

Atlantic, a lifestyle that he has supposedly attained. And so are his multiple wives. The novel performs an important shift where polygamy is not represented as a sign of adherence to African tradition or Islamic religion, but rather as a sign of entry and participation in the globalized neoliberal framework. As such, it does not stand outside of and in opposition to the neoliberal framework (implying that the acceptance of this framework would lead to 'progress' for women and more equality between genders), but has been fully absorbed into the capitalist logic of exchange. Diome's characters are thus simultaneously embedded in local traditions and trying to find their bearings within global power constellations.

Having multiple wives becomes a sign of economic well-being since it requires certain financial stability. Polygamy is thus not related to a refusal of Western culture and value system, but is suggestive precisely of a successful assimilation into a system where buying power is indicative of success and happiness. The novel further points to capitalism's capacity to absorb elements that may have initially stood on its outskirts. Instead of opposing modernity and tradition, progress and "underdevelopment," Diome outlines ways in which these practices have been brought together under the capitalist logic. This does not however signify that polygamy is the result or consequence of capitalism, but rather that a critique of polygamy cannot be done merely from a standpoint of human rights or modernity, but rather must also encompass an analysis of the effects of the neoliberal economic model. Tradition does not exist in opposition to modernity but rather becomes modified to fit the logic of capitalist needs to expand into unchartered territory. As Nnaemeka argues: "Tradition is not about a reified past; it is about a dynamic present- a present into which the past is projected, and to which other traditions (with their pasts and presents) are linked. It is to the present, and to how we as members of local and global communities are implicated in creating and maintaining traditions, that we must respond"

(p.37). Tradition is produced; it implies the existence of modes of life that are viewed as non-traditional or as modern, and can be both a defense mechanism against and a strategy of modernity. The narrative thus allows us to think about the ways in which the micro-politics of everyday life enters into the macro-politics of structural adjustment; how local traditions and hierarchies are adapted and modified to respond to and resist the push for neoliberal reforms. In this instance, the practice of polygamy promotes the logic of primacy granted to private property supported by a specific construction of heteronormativity. Diome's representation of polygamy has been anticipated by other African authors, including Ousmane Sembène in his novel and movie, *Xala*. Set in a post-independence Senegal, *Xala* focuses on a government official who after his wedding to his third wife, discovers that he is under the curse of impotence. Sembène's work challenges the dichotomy between 'pre-capitalist' African traditions and capitalist foreign influence.[40]

In *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, polygamy is framed in relation to a specific construction of femininity. The man from Barbès begins by marrying a local girl from Niodior, his parents' first choice. He agrees to this marriage as a sign of continual allegiance to both his parents and local tradition: "Il se consola du sacrifice consenti à ses parents, en se disant qu'il pourrait, par la suite, épouser une femme de son choix, une fille raffinée, qui se maquille. Plus tard, il en était certain, il aurait une de celles qui s'achètent des slips en dentelle et s'encastrent dans du prêt-à-porter Yves Saint Laurent *made in Taiwan*. Quand on vient de France, on peut épouser qui on veut, il le savait" (p.37). This passage outlines how both the logic of tradition and capitalist modernity rely on specific understandings of femininity and masculinity.[41]

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[40] Sembène, Ousmane. *Xala*. Westport, Conn: L. Hill & Co, 1976.
[41] Several contemporary francophone authors have addressed the issue of the imagined prestige of France and the illusions/ delusions of the migrant. For instance, in *Black Bazaar,* Alain Mabanckou connects this question to La

His adherence to both his family and his newly established life in France is marked through marriage and the acquisition of a wife, or multiple wives; it is only the "type" of woman that changes and that marks the lifestyle and value shift. The paragraph outlines a three-step process: the initial sacrifice of marrying the girl that his parents designated for him is followed by a "par la suite" and a "plus tard." As the man from Barbés' buying power increases so does his ability to acquire a "modern" woman, where modern becomes tantamount to the consumption of certain products. The first wife, coming from the Senegalese countryside, has no ability to manifest her femininity through commodities. The second wife is deemed more refined because of her propensity to use make up (it is important to note that at this point this is still the phantasm of the man from Barbés, his attempt to envision the future). The next step in the assimilation into the Western lifestyle is a wife participating in specific fashion trends: sexy lingerie and clothes designed by the French fashion icon, Yves Saint Laurent. Polygamy thus follows the temporal discourse of progress and development where the movement is always towards something better and superior. As Shu-mei Shih argues: "In the final analysis, the (neo)colonialist value-encoding of time in terms of backwardness and progress is contiguous with the capitalist measurement of time as value in economic terms. Indeed, in all forms of temporal management of the Other, the value-coding of time has always gone with the universalization of capitalist modes of production, consumption and exchange."[42] Yet what is being value-encoded in this instance is also a certain understanding of femininity and the progressive incorporation of the female subject into the capitalist mode of production and consumption. Progress and development are understood in terms

Sape (La Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Elégantes/ the Society of Atmosphere Setters and Elegant People), a Congolese subculture, comprised of the best dressed men in Congo who spend significant amounts of money on designer clothes imported from France. See, Mabanckou, Alain. *Black Bazaar*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2012.

[42] Shih, Shu-mei. "Towards and Ethics of Transnational Encounters, or 'When Does a 'Chinese' Woman Become a 'Feminist'?" in Waller, Marguerite R, and Sylvia Marcos. *Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

of the progressive accumulation of wives, each one superior to the former, due to her increased consumption of goods. The narrative stages a *mise en abîme* of consumption where the practice of polygamy is represented as the consumption of wives who are themselves consumers.

It is also significant that the narrator highlights the fact that the clothes are Yves Saint Laurent *prêt-à-porter* as opposed to *haute couture*. Whereas haute couture refers to the creation of exclusive custom-fitted clothing, which often involves time-consuming, hand-executed techniques, prêt-à-porter is used to designate factory-made clothing, sold in finished condition and in standardized size. The expression Yves Saint Laurent prêt-à-porter becomes almost an oxymoron as it contains both the exclusivity and upper class association with the expensive French designer brand and the theme of mass production. The phrasing gestures towards the illusion of the man from Barbès that migration to France will grant him access to the globalized elite. Class divisions remain in place, the best he could possibly achieve is the mass-produced version of the upper class lifestyle: the Yves Saint Laurent prêt-à-porter. But the paragraph also points to the ways in which value is produced and circulated within an internationalized production framework. In Taiwan, where it's made, Yves Saint Laurent prêt-à-porter stands for the new international division of labor and the precarity of labor in the Global South. In France, it is indicative of the shift from an economic model relying on the upper class and its prestigious consumption to one of mass production and mass consumption. In other words, it stands for a restructuring of class divisions within Europe. Yet, when this product reaches Senegal in the hands of migrants, it once again becomes associated with the prestige of the upper class and the sense of belonging to the global elite. In this way, the paragraph also points to a lack of solidarity and transnationalism between the countries of the Global South. Whereas the systems of production in Taiwan and Senegal are in certain ways similar, there is not direct connection between the two countries; their relation passes

through France. A new type of triangle is created. The work executed in Taiwan is utilized in Senegal as a sign of adherence to the Western value system. The displaced nature of commodities is of course not merely a feature of globalization, and as a practice was in place even during the slave trade.[43] Yet, Diome's Atlantic outlines contemporary circuits and modified trajectories.

Sex tourism: globalization and the negotiation of difference

The question of gender and globalization is further developed in several scenes where Salie visits a beach resort on her home island. Her experience complicates the opposition between local and global, while underlining how globalization is experienced as a conflicting set of forces and power struggles. As she enters the lobby of the hotel, the receptionist confuses her for a prostitute, telling her that her client needs to pay for the room before he can give her the keys. The narrator states that she couldn't possibly be angry at the receptionist since it is in fact unusual to see locals take advantage of their own natural resources, the beach resorts mostly serving foreign tourists. What follows is a reflection on this logic of dependence created by the free market economy: "Comme l'Etat tient énormément aux devises du tourisme, il laisse les investisseurs étrangers s'approprier les plus beaux sites côtiers et payer leurs employés au lance-pierres. Le steak pour le puissant, l'os pour le pauvre! Ainsi soit-il au royaume du capitalisme qui s'étend sous les cocotiers" (p.229). The paragraph gestures towards the tension between the national and the transnational and the waning power of the nation state. While technically under the jurisdiction of the Senegalese government, a significant portion of Senegalese natural resources, including its beaches, belongs to foreign investors to whom the land has been sold. Highly dependent on the

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[43] For a discussion of the displaced nature of commodities in the era of the slave trade see
Dobie, Madeleine. *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

money generated by tourism, the government does not regulate its resorts. Diome here plays on the double meaning of the word “devise.” In French, “devise” refers to foreign currency but can also be translated as “motto” or “catch phrase.” The state claims that it upholds the “devise du tourisme,” “mottos of tourism,” such as job creation and investments in the local economy through tourist spending, whereas it is primarily concerned about the “devise du tourisme,” the foreign currency that it receives from selling its natural resources. This situation cannot be simplified merely into a Global North/Global South opposition, since local elites are the ones creating the conditions necessary for the entry of capital and often profiting from them.[44] The relation is thus not one of explicit dependence; rather, it is one of staged and managed independence.

But what I would also like to suggest is that globalization is not experienced as a set of homogenizing forces that are counteracted by a set of heterogenizing forces. It is rather, as Stuart Hall argues, a peculiar form of homogenization, “a homogenizing form of cultural representation, enormously absorptive of things, as it were, but the homogenization is never absolutely complete, and it does not work for completeness.”[45] Globalization does not strive for an outright destruction of difference; rather, it works through a careful reshaping, incorporation and negotiation of difference. Or to put it in fairly simple terms: difference sells. As long as it’s the right degree of difference. And very often, this difference is gendered. The tourist industry, in fact, accentuates and mobilizes for its own profit, existing gender and race ideologies. Along with sand beaches and coconut trees, another product that Senegal has to offer to the influx of tourists, are its women: “Il faut fidéliser la clientèle! Tant pis si quelques libidineux viennent uniquement visiter des paysages de fesses noires, au lieu d’admirer le Lac rose, l’ile aux oiseaux, nos greniers vides et nos

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[44]For an in depth analysis of the relation between the nation-state and the transnational capitalist class see, Robinson, William I. *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Perspective*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
[45] Hall, Stuart. “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity”, in *Culture Globalization and the World System*, Anthony King (ed), Macmillan, 1991

bidonvilles si pittoresques. D'ailleurs, pour arrondir leurs fins de mois, certains réceptionnistes, lassés de soupeser les cartes de crédit, savent dénicher, sur demande, quelques beautés cannelle, des poules de luxe au sourire mielleux, habitués à danser le rigaudon " (p.230). Guided tours of African shantytowns or, for example, Brazilian favelas, enable tourists to feel that they're experiencing the radically Other, while being fully protected from the hardships of life in those environments and the violence often existing in conjunction with extreme poverty. Shantytowns can satisfy the fascination for what it means to exist outside of the system, because they are not seen as bi-products of development and progress but rather as not having yet been incorporated into the economic system of global capitalism. "Poverty tourism" also epitomizes the speed at which capitalism commodifies its own processes; while producing poverty, it also immediately turns it into a product that can be sold and from which profit can be extracted. The expression "visiter des paysages de fesses noires," gestures towards the widespread availability of African women whose inclusion into the economy is through prostitution. The juxtaposition of the landscape and the image of a black behind, while placing the black female body among other natural resources guiding the economy, upholds the tension between nature and the constructed desire for what is deemed exotic. Furthermore, while the verb "admirer" is used in regards to other sites of natural beauty, the landscape of black behinds is visited. In other words, it is not enough to observe and contemplate the black female body; it has to be accessed, entered, and possessed.[46]

But, as much as foreign tourists are eager to buy black women, local receptionists are eager to sell them: "Quant aux filles en free lance, trop moches pour espérer le coup de fil du réceptionniste ou optimistes se fiant au hasard, depuis les rives de l'Atlantique jusqu'au cœur de Bamako, elles arpentent inlassablement les couloirs d'hôtel en répétant la formule rituelle: *C'est*

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[46] Caribbean novelist Jamaica Kincaid offers a similar indictment of the tourist industry in the context of Antigua. See, Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988.

l'amour qui passe…Fatigués de rafistoler les victimes de guerres tribales pour des salaires de misère, les chirurgiens africains devront amputer la gangrène politique, ou se résoudre à manger au râtelier des poules de luxe en fabriquant la Barbie tropicale à la chaîne" (p.230). This is one of the more perplexing passages in the novel. The juxtaposition of tourists, prostitutes, state and surgeons is quite peculiar; it is not entirely clear why surgeons, more than others, have the power to both challenge the state and determine the future of African women, nor to what extent the very term 'surgeon' is used as a metaphor for a larger male population. Nonetheless, the shift from the girls straddling along the hotel hallways, repeating suggestively "it's love walking by," to the African surgeons, is quite significant. The first sentence puts these two groups in a relation of complicity, or at least similarity. African surgeons are also exploited by the state, having no choice but to serve its political purposes as they patch up the participants and victims of its wars for insignificant financial remuneration. The following sentence however puts them in an interesting position of choice. African surgeons (which are evidently male but could be read as literal or metaphorical surgeons), will need to choose their allegiance, a choice underlying the intricacies of class, race and gender. The narrator seems to offer them two options. They can side with African women and amputate the "political gangrene," which leaves these women no option other than prostitution. This gangrene exists both on a national and an international level; it stems from the state's complicity in both involving their countries in regional conflicts and also leaving them vulnerable and unprotected in the face of the global market. This alliance would thus need to reimagine the role of the state and its relation to global capitalism; either a race and cross-gendered allegiance from below or a class allegiance from above. Because the other option is to join the transnational corporate elite, embrace a global economic system that posits women from the Global South as the ultimate form of "precariat."[47]

[47] The term 'precariat,' formed as a blend of precariousa and proletariat, has received increased attention since the

In this case, African men (or African surgeons) would become complicit in manufacturing the "Barbie tropicale à la chaîne," making women from the Global South available for the needs of the global market. This last expression is extremely rich in its metaphorical meanings. "Travail à la chaîne" refers to assembly work, emblematic of this era of global capitalism, its reliance on mass production, and the ever deepening commodification of various life aspects. The fact that the narrator puts African men in the position of producers of the tropical Barbie gestures towards a complex imbrication of the national and the global. Whereas globalization does ultimately operate as an indirect way for the Global North to appropriate the natural resources of the Global South, a transnational class allegiance is necessary for this to happen. The choice of the wording "Barbie tropicale à la chaine," could also be translated as "the tropical Barbie in chains or shackles," including an implicit reference to slavery and the Atlantic triangle. In the same manner that soccer players are bought and sold in order to generate profit, so is the tropical Barbie, enchained to labor relations produced by late capitalism. Though slave labor has been replaced by assembly lines, certain dynamics, especially the assumed sexual availability of black women, have remained in place, and the Atlantic still remains the background for thinking globalization.

publication, in 2011, of Guy Standing's book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. The term was however already used in the 1990's by Italian labor activists. In the French context, it has been used by sociologist Robert Castel *Refaire Société*. See, Standing, Guy. *The Precariat : The New Dangerous Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. And Rosanvallon, Pierre. *Refaire société*. Paris: Seuil, 2011.

Histoire de la femme cannibale: race and gender explained to the deaf

In a conversation with Manuel, one of Stephen's friends, Rosélie comments: "J'ai toujours rêvé d'écrire un livre sur le racisme. 'Le racisme expliqué aux sourds et aux malentendants'" (p.44).[48] The narrative centers on a 'mise en abîme' of the writing process since, in many ways, *Histoire de la femme cannibale* is that book. In essence, it asks what it means to think about race and gender in a transnational context outside of a victim/savior dynamic, where the non-Western woman is frozen in cultural difference and a never-changing oppressive tradition. Through Rosélie's accounts of her travels, the narrative articulates this problematic across different national contexts.

Rosélie has trouble perceiving her experience of race and gender as inextricably interwoven. The novel outlines an understanding of race as internally divided by issues of national belonging, gender and class. Rosélie vacillates between adherence to a universal category of woman and the difficulties of identification and shifting affiliations in her day-to-day interactions with other women. The question of the intersection of race and gender or which affiliation and discrimination takes precedence over the others, is a prominent question in the novel. Thus Rosélie will, for example, comment that despite visible differences, her life in many ways resembles that of her mother: "En dépit des apparences, ma vie ressemble à celle de Rose. Toutes les vies de femmes se ressemblent. Cocues, humiliées quand elles ne sont pas abandonnées" (p.319). This idea of "women's lives" occurs multiple times in the novel. As Rosélie is talking to Dido, her South African housekeeper, she comments : "Les mots 'Guadeloupe', 'département d'outre mer', ne signifiait pas davantage pour elle que pour le reste

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[48] In 1998, Moroccan writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun published *Racism explained to my daughter*, a book in which the author, during a demonstration against an immigration law in Paris answers his daughter's questions about the reasons for racism. See, Ben, Jelloun T. *Le Racisme Expliqué À Ma Fille*. Paris: Seuil, 1998.

du monde, elle considérait Rosélie comme une française" (p.80). For Dido, Rosélie is French since she speaks perfect French, has studied in France and enjoys French cuisine. Racial solidarity is complicated by class and Rosélie's access to a specific lifestyle, which she has gained, mostly, through a white man. National belonging, epitomized by a specific lifestyle, thus takes precedence over black transnationalism. Dido, however, envisions a solidarity along gender lines: "Toi, tu vois partout le racisme! Ce n'est pas du racisme, ça! C'est parce que tu es une femme qu'on te traite comme on te traite! Les femmes, blanches, noires, jaunes, métisses, c'est le cul du monde!" (p.81). Thus, Dido operates within the framework of singular affiliations, where one can be discriminated against either because of race or because of gender, and the latter ranks higher on the scale of oppressions.

The novel complicates this dichotomy as questions of race intrude into the idea of female solidarity. Rosélie's mother-in-law, an Englishwoman, begs her son to not have children, as she cannot handle the thought of a métis grandchild. Rosélie comments: "Quatre siècles après, le Code Noir avait toujours force de loi: 'Défendons à nos sujets Blancs de l'un et l'autre sexe de contracter mariage avec les Noirs, à peine de punition et d'amende arbitraire" (p.59). She will further add: "Lépreuse et pestiférée, elle était. Lépreuse et pestiférée, elle restait, portant dans sa matrice des germes capables d'anéantir des civilisations" (p.60). The reference to the Code Noir, the first document to have legally codified colonial slavery, reinserts Rosélie's and Stephen's relationship into the history of the Atlantic. The narrative of globalization and post-modern migration where national belongings no longer matter since everyone is transitory, constantly moving across national borders, is haunted by the history of the Atlantic, a history often inscribed on the black female body. Rosélie's shifting solidarities, friendships formed on the basis of gender, race or nationality that break once a new form of experience is introduced, mark her

inability to establish solidarity across lines of demarcation and the difficulty of articulating overlapping sites of oppression. The narrative gestures towards the failure of identity politics, based on a single facet of experience, and a need for a new type of politics more suitable for the intricacies of a globalized world. As Nnaemeka argues: “The factors that subtend oppressive situations- race, gender, class, politics, and so on- are not immutable and isolated categories in their functioning, influences and determination; they derive their impact and complexity from their capacity to travel and join forces with other categories to create contexts of oppression.”[49] However, whether the novel actually succeeds in overcoming the multiplicity of positionalities, and proposes an ethics in the age of globalization, is a question worth pursuing.

The difficulties of black transnationalism become visible in a scene in New York as Rosélie and Stephen are dining at the house of Amy and Caleb, a couple they met in Montauk. At the same event, Rosélie meets Andy and Alice, a doctor and a law professor, both of whom, as she says, “terrify her.” As Rosélie describes them as an African-American couple, she also comments: “Voyons, il y a belle lurette qu’on ne dit plus Noir-American. Ni même Afro-Americain. Quant au mot Nègre, il ne se prononce plus. Le Nègre n’existe pas” (p.216). This comment, as many others in the novel, is rendered in free indirect speech, blurring the line between character and narrator, as well as Rosélie’s interior thoughts and spoken words. The style also makes it difficult to know whether the impersonal pronoun “on” is used to convey Rosélie’s personal opinion, or indicative of a common sense understanding that Rosélie is transmitting. In either case, the problem of naming, prevalent throughout the novel, reappears here: does the “Nègre” still exist and who is the “Nègre”? The word Nègre, with its links to the history of the

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[49] Nnaemeka, Obioma. “The Challenges of Border-Crossing: African Women and Transnational Feminisms” in Nnaemeka, Obioma. *Female Circumcision and the Politics of Knowledge: African Women in Imperialist Discourses*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005.

slave trade and the history of the Atlantic, is erased and replaced by African-American, a term connoting national affiliation and unison across the Atlantic. Yet, the hyphen that unites African and American is going to be challenged in the rest of the conversation.

As the conversation continues, Andy and Alice explain that they met in Nigeria, where both of them served as Peace Corps volunteers. They further continue to talk about how they discovered Nigeria to be "un cancre en démocratie," due to the corruption, the imprisonment of political dissidents and "la lapidation des femmes adultères" (p.219). Stephen then interrupts the conversation and redirects it to the question of U.S. prisons, filled with black prisoners accused of murder, rape and armed robberies. Deeply angered, Alice and Andy respond that the American justice system is one of the most inhuman systems in the world, which favors solely the rich, and that these prisoners, whether guilty or innocent, are ultimately victims of its iniquities. To which Stephen retorts: "-Justice inhumaine pour les faibles! Système social inique!...que de failles dans la démocratie américaine!

Alice et Andy en convinrent

-Donc, poursuivit Stephen, si j'étais un Africain-American, au lieu de me mêler des affaires du reste du monde, je balaierais devant ma porte" (p.220).

Amy and Caleb will later ask Rosélie to concur that Stephen was on the verge of racism. While not admitting it in public, Rosélie is actually proud of Stephen for not adopting the onlooker role, one that she herself frequently accepts. But this scene, as many others in the novel, problematizes the question of the Black Atlantic. How do national affiliations and the uneven power distribution on the world scale, affect the question of black transnational solidarity? Stephen points to the disjuncture that exists between the national and the transnational sphere, as

Alan and Alice are comfortable criticizing the failures of American democracy at home yet at the same time promoting it abroad. In this case, the idea of black solidarity is in fact used to promote U.S. interests as the Peace Corps is sending African-Americans to African countries to serve as the link between the African population and American values and foreign interests. The passage also gestures towards how power is mobilized differently on different levels of engagement. American democracy, sustained through the marginalization of its black population is simultaneously what allows Alan and Alice to travel to Nigeria and judge the failures of its political system. Yet, the two of them are in fact incapable of thinking on a transnational level, as they can only understand issues affecting Nigeria through its internal dynamics and cannot make a connection with the marginalization of African-Americans within the United States. The passage raises several different questions: what does it mean for Nigeria to be a "cancre en démocratie," if the normative democracy in question is the one practiced in the United States? In other words, what does it mean to fail at implementing a failing system? But also what would it mean to think the contemporary trans-Atlantic connections between the United States and Nigeria? The novel struggles to articulate trans-Atlantic solidarity where different entangled power positions are acknowledged.

Towards an ethics of solidarity

As she is describing Simone, one of her few Antillean female friends in Cape Town, Rosélie says: "A ceux qui rechignaient devant la connotation tellement coloniale du terme 'Négresses' et qui proposaient des périphrases du genres 'femmes d'origine africaine,' 'femmes de couleur,' 'femmes du Sud,' ou même 'femmes en devenir,' Simone répondait qu'au contraire il est beau et bon de choquer" (p.69). Whereas Simone herself opts for the term "négresse," a

derogatory term used especially in the 1920s and gesturing towards the history of slavery and colonization, to claim a collective identity, I believe the novel poses the question of which of these categories, if any, are still pertinent today and what modes of solidarity they entail. The question of naming and of collective categories is also related to Rosélie's personal development throughout the novel. Rosélie's problem is one of naming. In fact, at the beginning of the novel she is incapable of finding titles for her paintings which she simply categorizes as 1,2,3,4 and A,B,C,D. It is also important to remember that "femme cannibale," as much as it refers to Fiéla, is also the title of a painting that Rosélie produces, a title that, at the very end of the novel, she was finally able to find: "Fiéla, est-ce toi? Est-ce moi? Nos deux figures se confondent. Cette fois, elle était en possession de son titre. Elle l'avait trouvé avant même que de commencer son ouvrage. Il avait surgi du plus profond d'elle-même au bout d'une marée incontrôlable: Femme Cannibale" (p.351). *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, the title of the novel is thus also the story of the genesis of the painting. But, I would like to suggest that whereas the entire novel dwells on different collective categories and identifications, and the different attempts and difficulties of female solidarity, the novel is entitled *Histoire de la femme cannibale,* where woman remains in singular, yet is still the result of an identification and solidarity between Rosélie and Fiéla.

Whereas with the other female characters there is an additional power dynamic, be it race, class, national belonging or inter-racial marriage, that impedes full-fledged solidarity, it is with Fiéla, the only woman in the novel that Rosélie has not met, that she can identify fully. What does that mean for the possibility of trans-Atlantic feminism? Fiéla is accused by her son in law of having killed, and possibly even eaten her husband. Her trial becomes the number one news in South Africa, followed by the entire population. It is, however, a relatively silent trial as Fiéla will not utter a word. Whereas the prosecutor asks for life imprisonment, Fiéla will be

sentenced for fifteen years. However, the day she is to be transferred to her assigned prison, she commits suicide, without, once again, saying a word. Throughout the novel, Rosélie begins to conflate her story with Fiéla's; in one of her many imaginary dialogues with the South African woman on trial, she says: "Ne me cache rien. Tu le sais bien, quand tu dis 'je', c'est 'nous' que tu signifies" (p.105). Later on, in a dream, Rosélie encounters Fiéla and the following dialogue ensues: "Pourquoi est ce que tu as fait cela ? Fiéla la fixa et fit avec reproche : - Tu me le demandes ? Tu me le demandes ? …- J'ai fait cela pour toi ! Pour toi!" (p.263). As Fiéla commits suicide, Rosélie wonders whether, in the spirit of complete identification, she should follow the same route. She however decides not to: " Fiéla, tout bien réfléchi, tu ne m'as pas donné l'exemple. Tu as choisi de mourir. Or, ce n'est pas mourir qu'il faut mourir. C'est vivre qu'il faut vivre. S'accrocher à la vie. Obstinément" (p.350). Instead, Rosélie decides to stay in Cape Town, return to her painting, and finally give it a name: Histoire de la Femme Cannibale. In this respect, the ending very much diverges from *Heremakhonon*, where Véronica, entirely disappointed by her experience in Africa, returns to France. As Kathryn Lachman argues: "On a second level Condé develops a parallel plot that has all the elements of a Bildungsroman: Condé narrates Rosélie's progressive transformation from a broken, dependent, grieving woman into a determined artist and medium in full possession of her personal history and experience."[50] However, Rosélie's relationship with Fiéla begs the question of the connection between identification and cannibalism. Is Rosélie's appropriation of Fiéla's story for a work of art, an act of cannibalism?

[50] Broichhagen, Vera, Kathryn Lachman, and Nicole Jenette Simek. *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism, and the Caribbean Text*. PLAS cuadernos, no. 8. Princeton, NJ: Program in Latin American Studies, Princeton University, 2006, p.80

Mireille Rosello introduces the term 'post-cannibalism' to characterize Condé's novel. The novelty of Condé's fiction, Rosello argues, lies in the fact that it refuses to instrumentalize cannibalism. The novel does not idealize cannibalism, it does not turn the accusation against the broad category of the West, and it rejects the idea that it 'cannibalizes' other texts. On the contrary, it "insists that all the characters, including the narrator, are cannibals, but cannibals who wish they weren't so and who can be saved from their cannibalism by each other. By identifying closely with Fiéla, or rather with the fiction of Fiéla that she creates in her dialogue with this unknown woman and in her paintings, Rosélie finally proposes a limited and specific definition of what we could call a process of narrative cannibalizing."[51] I concur with Rosello's assesment that the novel deconstructs the process of naming someone a 'cannibal,' and I further build on her argument. I contend that the fact that all the characters are identified as cannibals does not necessarily stem from a recognition of a universal human nature, but is rather, interwoven with the rethinking of the Atlantic. The process of recognizing the cannibal in oneself and the other is intertwined with the process of establishing points of solidarity across historical and cultural differences.

Histoire de la femme cannibale is more than a story of personal development and transformation; it is also the story of the repossession of the female Atlantic and its history. In this regard, Rosélie's transformation is not merely a parallel, second level plot, it is entangled with the story of South Africa and the Atlantic, taking place in the foreground. The narrative thus also deals with the question of geographical and historical grounding. Throughout the novel, Rosélie refuses any national, political, racial or gender affiliations. Her attachment to all the cities she passed through is purely circumstantial. As Manuel Desprez, one of her friends, asks

[51] Ibid, p.37

her whether she will return home now that Stephen is dead, she responds: "Chez moi? Si seulement je savais où c'est. Oui, le hasard m'a fait naître à la Guadeloupe. Mais, dans ma famille, personne ne veut de moi. À part cela, j'ai vécu en France. Un homme m'a emmenée puis larguée dans un pays d'Afrique. De là, un autre m'a emmenée aux Etats-Unis, puis ramenée en Afrique pour m'y larguer à présent, lui aussi, au Cap. Ah, j'oubliais, j'ai aussi vécu au Japon. Cela fait une belle charade, pas vrai ?" (p.43). Furthermore, throughout the novel, Rosélie yearns for a world with no national and racial division: "Peut-être son rêve d'un monde ou les différences seraient abolies reflétait-il son dénuement? Trahissait-il un désir d'aligner tout le monde sur la même *tabula rasa* qu'elle? Elle avait perdu ses parents et sa terre, aimé des étrangers qui ne s'exprimaient pas dans sa langue- d'ailleurs, possédait-elle une langue?-, dressé sa tente dans des paysages hostiles. Faustin en plaisantait parfois:

- Tu es comme les nomades. Ton toit, c'est le ciel au-dessus de ta tête.

Ne sommes-nous pas tous des nomades? N'est-ce pas la faute au foutu siècle de turbulence dans lequel nous vivons?" (p.293). Rosélie's development throughout the novel is thus a movement away from the naïve and, one might add, quintessentially neoliberal imagination of a post-national and post-racial world, to a more sophisticated understanding of solidarity as embedded in historical difference and similarity. In this way, there is a parallel between the personal and the national. Rosélie's attempt to imagine a world with no differences echoes South Africa's attempt to simply forget and compartmentalize its history of apartheid and enter a phase of peace and reconciliation where past hatreds are no longer present. But as the plot unravels, Rosélie realizes that this is neither possible nor necessarily desirable. Rather, a different mode of historical understanding and possibility emerges. Towards the end of the novel, Rosélie states: "le monde est un linge mal repassé dont on ne peut corriger les faux plis" (p.328). This is a fairly different

understanding of the world from the one where national belonging, race and gender simply do not matter. It is one where the “faux plis” are durable and therefore have to serve as ground for comparison and solidarity. Her decision, at the end of the novel, to remain in South Africa, is a refusal of the post-modern attitude of national detachment, where one is in a constant transitory state through various geographical spaces. Instead, Rosélie decides to embed herself, and her art, in a specific historical and geographical context. This is not, however, an opting for the ‘local,’ in opposition to and defiance of the ‘global.’ Rather, it is a more historically and geographically grounded understanding of the dialectic between the local and the global.

The transition from the personal to the more historical and political also occurs in regards to Fiéla. Initially, Rosélie bases the identification to Fiéla on personal circumstances: both were abandoned by their husbands; both were left to fend for themselves. But as time passes by, Rosélie understands Fiéla’s story more and more in relation to the history and the present of South Africa, and thus to the history and the present of the Atlantic. In a conversation she has with Lewis Sithole, the inspector in charge of the case, he comments that: “Le ministère public est sur les dents. Il veut qu’on la juge au plus vite et que nous en fassions un exemple” (p.104). Furthermore, in front of the courthouse, while Fiéla’s trial is in process, random passersby are expressing their anger: “Affreux, affreux, affreux! C’est une honte pour notre pays!” (p.233). In other words, Rosélie begins to realize that the history of the Atlantic unfolds through and on the female body. South African entry into the world of globalized economies is predicated upon its “overcoming” and effacing the history of the apartheid and its adoption of certain norms of national stability and propriety. Fiéla’s supposed cannibalism is seen as an obstacle to South African progress and thus as a source of national shame. But this is also a question of how female

lives are interwoven into national narratives and often perceived as an obstacle to their development.

How far the novel pushes this 'ethics of solidarity' is not entirely clear. Fiéla commits suicide and Rosélie remains in Cape Town alone. Whereas the majority of the narrative is constructed upon the post-modern fracture of identities and subjectivities, the episode with Fiéla is not entirely inscribed within this framework and opens up a space for a different understanding of the relation between race and gender. The relationship between Rosélie and Fiéla culminates in a work of art, ultimately leaving us with the following question: what is the role of art in a globalized world?

The cultural worker in the age of globalization

As they expand the literary Atlantic space beyond its triangular representation, Diome and Condé also outline modes of transnational feminist solidarity that move beyond identity politics. In order to escape the human rights/cultural relativism debate, Diome positions practices of polygamy and prostitution in relation to the global circulation of goods and the globalized labor market. In Condé's novel, Rosélie has trouble moving beyond solidarity based on a single facet of identity until she meets Fiéla and realizes that different national narratives are similarly constructed upon specific understandings of gender.

Both novels conclude with a discussion of the role of the artist in a globalized world. As already discussed, at the end of *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, Rosélie returns to painting at the same time that she decides to stay in South Africa. Art allows her to remain grounded in a specific national territory. Similarly, in the last paragraph of the novel, the narrator of *Le ventre*

de l’Atlantique engages in a discussion about the relation between writing and exile: “Je cherche mon territoire sur une page blanche; un carnet ça tient dans un sac de voyage. Alors, partout où je pose mes valises, je suis chez moi” (p.296). In both cases, art enables a mode of belonging.

More than Diome, Condé also raises the question of the work of art as a global commodity. Several times, as an acquaintance offers to help her organize a solo exhibit, she refuses, being very critical of the nepotism within the art world and the fact that the industry is guided by the rule of the market. These moments could be interpreted as a form of self-critique, a commentary by Condé on her own place within the globalized cultural sphere. If art enables belonging, this from of belonging is still mediated by the art market.

Like Rosélie and Salie, the protagonists of the novels analyzed in the following chapter, Edouard Glissant’s *Tout-Monde* and Roberto Bolaño’s *2666,* are artists. These novels further explore the relation between the literary sphere and the economic and social restructuring related to globalization. How is the novel, as a product, positioned in relation to these flows and as a global commodity? Unlike Diome and Condé, these novels also explore the question of literary translation.

Chapter Two

Translating Globalization in the Work of Edouard Glisant and Roberto Bolaño

"To write is to recount the world," explains Martinican writer Edouard Glissant, in his 1997 essay, *Traité du Tout-Monde*.[1] In a similar manner, Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño writes in his 2004 novel *2666* that the Santa Teresa murders "contain the secret of the world."[2] Both authors point to the status and form of the world in literature as central to the discussion about world literature. The literary careers of these two writers in fact followed an analogous turn towards the end of their lives. Various critics have remarked that Glissant's perspective shifts significantly between *Le Discours Antillais* (1981) and *Traité du tout monde* (1997). Whereas *Le Discours Antillais* focused primarily on his native island of Martinique and the place of the Antilles in the Atlantic world, Glissant's later texts are much more encompassing, offering a global perspective. Similarly, *By Night in Chile* (2000), the first of Bolaño's novels to be translated into English, is a monologue of a sick and aging priest, taking place in a single location and over the course of a single evening.[3] In his posthumous novel, *2666*, however, Bolaño's perspective acquired a much broader dimension, exploring 20th century global history.

It could be argued that Glissant and Bolaño reach diametrically opposed conclusions: whereas Glissant ultimately embraces hybridity and cross-cultural contact, Bolaño adopts a more apocalyptic vision of the world at the end of the century. Nonetheless, in the late stages of their respective careers both writers begin a reflection on the ways literary writing has been altered by the reorganization of the world under global capitalism. And both of them conclude that, as globalization has given rise to complex circuits of exploitation and commodity exchange, the

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[1] Glissant, Édouard. *Traité Du Tout-Monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997

[2] Bolaño, Roberto. *2666.* Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2004

[3] Bolaño, Roberto, and Chris Andrews. *By Night in Chile*. New York: New Directions Books, 2003.

challenge of literature is to give an account of the world as a fragmented yet inter-connected reality. Within this account, the Atlantic paradigm still remains significant. Whereas the focus of *Tout-Monde* is indeed wider than in Glissant's previous works, the memory of the Atlantic trade and the current position of Martinique in a globalizing Atlantic world are central. Similarly, in Bolaño's novel, most of the plot takes place between three poles of the Atlantic world; Europe, the U.S. and Mexico.

In this chapter, I focus more specifically on translation in relation to world literature. What does it mean to translate the world into a novel? I argue that both authors, as they engage the question of globalization in relation to world literature, ponder about the representational value of literature. Which aspects of globalization can be translated into literary form and which cannot? What does it mean for literature to move beyond its representational value? The issue of representation is also intertwined with the question of linguistic translation. Can there be a monolingual account of the globalized world?

The question of the world in literature and/or world literature is of course not new. Nonetheless, in the francophone context the debate was given a higher profile than ever before in 2007 with the publication in *Le Monde* of a manifesto entitled *Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français*, followed by a collection of essays edited by Michel Le Bris, under the same name.[4] Endorsed by forty-five writers, including Edouard Glissant, the manifesto calls for, at the same time as it proclaims, the end of Francophonie and its replacement with a "littérature-monde" in

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[4] See, "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français." *Le Monde*. 15/03/07. Web. 16/03/14 <http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html>
Le Bris, Michel, Jean Rouaud, and Eva Almassy. *Pour une littérature-monde.*Paris, France: Gallimard, 2007.

French.[5] In its hyphenated form, "littérature-monde" is highly influenced by Glissant's "Tout-Monde," which he defines as "le monde actuel tel qu'il est dans sa diversité et dans son chaos."[6] The manifesto gestures in two directions. Firstly, it elaborates a critique of the neo-colonial aspect of Francophonie, which still posits the *métropole* at the center of the francophone world and considers other regions to be merely its appendages. Signatories object to the fact that writers from former colonies are continuously marginalized under the category "francophone," their works considered inferior to the "French" canon. This argument inscribes itself into an ongoing French/Francophone debate. In 2006, Amin Maalouf, a Lebanese writer who a year later signed the manifesto, published (also in *Le Monde*) an article entitled "Contre la Litérature Francophone."[7] Maalouf argues that it is time to dispense with sterile and discriminatory literary categories such as South/North, Black/White, and Periphery/Métropole, all of them contained within the Francophone/French opposition. He further contends that this move has already occurred in the Spanish and English speaking worlds where one can no longer distinguish between Hispanophone and Spanish, Anglophone and English writers. France should learn from other former imperial powers and end these discriminatory practices.

The second direction distances this "new" literature from the tradition of structuralism and post-structuralism. Refuting literature's posited self-referentiality, contemporary transnational works are said to return to the "world, the referent, History." This shift, the

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[5] The concept of *francophonie* took shape during decolonization as a government program to preserve ties with former colonies, and to maintain the global status of French. In the 1980s-1990s, however, literary scholars and authors (particularly in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K.), have reframed to term to emphasize not the former colonies' relation to the métropole, but rather the plurality of cultural productions in the French language. Emphasis has been placed specifically on regions outside of metropolitan France, including Africa and the Caribbean.

[6] Chanda, Tirthankar. "La Créolisation culturelle du monde: Entretien avec Edouard Glissant." *Label France* 38 (2000). Web.March 2014. <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/label_france/FRANCE/DOSSIER/200 0/15creolisation.html. 1-5>

[7] *Le Monde des Livres*. 10/03/06. Web. 16/03/14. <http://medias.lemonde.fr/mmpub/edt/doc/20060309/748928_sup_livres_060309.pdf>

manifesto argues, coincides with the end of great ideologies (as does post-structuralism, it was once argued) and the emergence of "mouvements anti-totalitaires" throughout the world. This side of the argument can also best be understood in relation to the French literary sphere. For a long time writers from former colonies have lamented the fact that their works are often classified as inferior because read as ethnological texts, social documents, considered not "literary" enough, where literariness is associated with highly self-referential and linguistically experimental texts. The return to the referent as a distinguishing factor of the new world literature can thus be read as an attempt to challenge the supposed non-literary value of francophone texts. As a result, the manifesto distances itself from possible understandings of world literature as either a canon of world masterpieces, or as related to the circulation of works beyond their country of origin. Rather, world literature is comprised of works that offer a specific vision/imagination of the world. An understanding that echoes Glissant's and Bolaño's.

But the most surprising aspect of the manifesto is its monolingualism. As noted by various critics including Lydie Moudiléno and Jean-Pierre Cavaille, a world literature in French is an oxymoron.[8] While declaring the death of Francophonie, the signatories are in fact not at all dispensing with the category but merely reframing it in order to be more inclusive of writers outside of the *métropole*. In fact, while the Anglophone and the Hispanophone contexts are mentioned, it is merely as models to the French-speaking world. No attempts are made to establish any lateral linkages with writers writing in other languages. The manifesto advocates for a deconstruction of binaries, yet the categories of the French, Spanish and English speaking worlds are left unquestioned. The prime relation remains the one between the *métropole* and its former colonies.

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[8] See Moudileno, Lydie. "Francophones, l'écriture est polyglotte." *Libération.* 30/03/07 Web. 16/03/14
< http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/010198018-francophones-l-ecriture-est-polyglotte>

This is even more surprising given that the work of many contemporary non-francophone writers has been translated into French. In fact, the same issue of *Le Monde* that published Maalouf's article against francophone literature also published a literary review of a hispanophone writer, none other than Roberto Bolaño. The article celebrates Bolaño's novel *The Savage Detectives*, translated into French eight years after its original publication. It praises Bolaño's work for echoing various continents and breaking national boundaries by setting the plot in countries as different as Chile, Argentina, Nicaragua, France, Liberia, and Germany. Bolaño's overall work, the review explains, offers us a brutal and lyrical vision of the world, "tissant un réseau planétaire, mais anarchique, poétique et mené du côté des perdants, du côté de nous autres, les 'nec spes nec metus' ('sans peur et sans espoir')."[9] Reading the article, one cannot help but think that Bolaño has achieved what Maalouf announced and the signatories of *Pour une littérature-monde* embraced: a literature that spans a planet, offering us a global vision of the world at the end of the century. Yet, a rapprochement between the two has not been made thus far. This chapter aims precisely to transpose this spatial juxtaposition into a theoretical one.

Pour une littérature-monde could be, and has been, criticized for many theoretical inconsistencies and problems.[10] Nonetheless, I contend that the manifesto posits a pertinent question of the meaning of world literature in the age of globalization. Through a close reading of Glissant's *Tout-Monde* and Bolaño's *2666,* I explore this question from a multilingual and comparative perspective, as I argue that for both authors contemporary power dynamics can only be understood through a superposition and collision of different national spaces and subjects. I also further analyze the politics of representation in these works: is representing globalization the

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[9] *Le Monde des Livres*, p.3.

[10] See, for example, Hargreaves, Alec G., Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy. *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010.

same as contesting it or are these authors reproducing the very mechanisms of contemporary power they are trying to denounce? In order to move the analysis beyond the contestation/reproduction binary, I take cue from Jacques Rancière's understanding of "dissensus" as a process of reframing reality and imagining new possibilities of what can be seen, said and thought.[11] I engage in a dialectical reading of Rancière's theory and Bolaño's and Glissant's novels; whereas Rancière's analysis of the relation between aesthetics and politics can inflect our reading of *Tout-Monde* and *2666*, Glissant's and Bolaño's fiction allows us to expand Rancière's discusson of "dissensus" beyond the nation-state, opening up the possibility for a globalized dissensus.

Glissant's *Tout-Monde* was conceived as the novelistic embodiment of the theoretical concept that significantly influenced *Pour une littérature-monde* and its conception of a new world literature. As such, it is the perfect site to begin a conversation about novelistic representations of a globalized world. Within Bolaño's work, *2666,* I would argue, is the novel that most explicitly engages globalization both through its subject matter (the world of maquiladoras on the US-Mexican border) and its geographical expansiveness. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that these are not the only two authors whose novelistic projects have aimed to encompass the world. In his book *The Modern Epic*, Franco Moretti categorizes Goethe's *Faust*, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as "world –texts" (referencing Immanuel Wallerstein's notion of world-systems), "whose geographical frame of reference is no longer the nation-state, but a broader entity- a continent, or the world-system as a whole."[12] These texts, bearing structural similarities with the traditional epic form,

[11] See Rancière, Jacques, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: on politics and aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2010
[12] Moretti, Franco. *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez.* London: Verso, 1996, p.50.

also present several discontinuities, including “the supranational dimension of represented space” (p.2). They operate within the contradiction between the totalizing form of the epic and the fragmented reality of the modern world. While Moretti’s readings are highly sophisticated, his corpus is problematic, encompassing only Western works with a brief intrusion of magical realism at the very end of his literary history. The world-text thus remains mostly Western, producing yet another oxymoron.

The category of world-texts informs my reading of Glissant and Bolaño, yet, I also believe that an unprecedented perception of global simultaneity distinguishes their novels from Moretti’s corpus. Joyce’s metropolis could be read as “a concentrate of the world” and Marquez’s Macondo, as Moretti writes, is “open to the world.” Glissant’s and Bolaño’s narratives, however, actually span various continents staging the economic and cultural imbrication of these different Atlantic spaces. The nation-state, the city or the village as a metaphor for the world, are replaced by a multifocal and transnational imagination of the Atlantic world under global capitalism.

Furthermore, according to Moretti, from the traditional to the modern epic, the protagonist suffers significant transformations. If, in the traditional epic, the hero is defined by action, in *Ulysses* he becomes pure passivity and interiority and in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* we are confronted with a family saga. I would argue that Bolaño and Glissant take this development a step further, as there is no protagonist. The reader is confronted with a myriad of characters, constantly on the move through space, such that their main function seems to be that of bringing into relation several geographical locations. In fact, as soon as a character becomes too prominent, the narrative focus shifts onto someone else. This spatial expansion, combined with a waning interest in character development, leads to a new form of “globalized aesthetics.”

Whereas these two writers explore the difficulties of representing a globalized world, their work also poses the question of literature as a global commodity and of literary translation. The juxtaposition of these two authors informs the ongoing discussion of the global circulation of literary works, precisely due to their different critical receptions. Both of them, throughout their lives, straddled multiple national literary spheres. Before finally settling in Spain, in 1977, Bolaño lived in Chile, Mexico, and France. In 1965, after almost twenty years spent in Paris, Glissant returned to Martinique in order to found the Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes, a private high-school in Fort de France. He spent the rest of his life traveling between Martinique, Paris and New York. Their respective positions within the literary world were however, quite different. Bolaño's *2666* reached a much wider audience than Glissant's *Tout-Monde*. The 2008 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction was posthumously awarded to Roberto Bolaño for *2666*. The novel was also short-listed for the Best Translated Book Award. *Time* awarded it the honor of Best Fiction Book of 2008, while the *New York Times Book Review* listed it among "10 Best Books of 2008" as chosen by the paper's editors. Bolaño's acquired international fame and the creation of the "Bolaño myth," have been widely discussed among literary critics. Sarah Pollack argues that Bolaño's success in the United States is partially due to the marketing of the writer as a "renegate artist," one who embodies the image of a Latin America where all political, sexual, spiritual and literary fantasies are easily satisfied.[13] Similarly, the novelist Horacio Castellanos Moya wrote a diatribe in *La Nación*, an Argentinean daily newspaper, arguing that the image of Bolaño created by the publication houses feeds into an exotic myth of a Latin America reduced to road-trips and rebellious adventures.[14] These critics have further argued that

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[13] Pollack, Sarah. "Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño's The Savage Detectives in the United States," *Comparative Literature* 61:3 (2009).
[14] Horacio Castellanos Moya. "Sobre el mito Bolaño." *La Nación,* September 19th, 2009. Web. http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1176451-sobre-el-mito-bolano

whereas he fiercely criticized the global capitalist system, Bolaño also generated an incredible amount of profit for that same system.

Edouard Glissant remains one of the most renowned Caribbean writers. He was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in 1992 and from 1995 until his death in 2011 he was Distinguished Professor of French at the CUNY Graduate Center. Nonetheless, his novels have never achieved the status of bestseller, nor were the publishing houses interested in creating a "Glissant myth." This difference in positions within the literary field may be a consequence of their different writing styles. Whereas Bolaño's writing is mostly straight-forward and very approachable, Glissant does not believe in the easy accessibility of literature. But, as I will demonstrate, it is also their different understandings of a globalized French and Spanish that have made *2666* easily translatable and *Tout-Monde* much less so. This further raises the question of the relation between the publishing industry and the impact of narrative fiction: who is more influential, a writer perhaps commodified by the literary market but whose work has reached millions of readers or a writer who kept his distance from the literary market and whose work has reached a more limited audience?

Representing globalization

The plot of Glissant's *Tout-Monde* is difficult to recount as it advances through an enmeshment of sequences and characters from several previous works. The main narrative centers around the world "dérive" of Mathieu Béluse and Raphael Targin, two characters from *La Lézarde* (1958). But the novel also deals with the death of the "quimboseur" Longoué, the madness of Marie Célat (Mathieu Béluse's companion in *La Lézarde*), the resurrections of

Stepan Stepanovitch, the predictions of Artémise and Marie-Annie and a myriad of other characters. The multitude of characters and narratives form what Glissant names "la folle diversité du monde."

Bolaño's *2666* is similarly difficult to summarize as it consists of five distinct parts. The connecting thread throughout is Archimboldi, a German author whose trace has been lost. The first part deals with four European literary critics and their relentless search for this worshipped literary figure, whereas the last part recounts Archimboldi's life story. The novel further introduces an African-American sports journalist and a widowed university dean living with his only daughter. The lives of all of these characters intersect in the urban sprawl of Santa Teresa, where the murders of female maquiladora workers are an unsolved mystery.

Whereas both novels span a great variety of geographical locations, their forms are quite different. In a single sentence Glissant will take the reader from Martinique to Italy, and from the 18th century to the present. By contrast, there is a very linear progression between different parts and episodes of Bolaño's novel, many of which are written in a journalistic style. This is especially true in the part about the murders of women in Santa Teresa, where each scene is recounted in a very neutral tone, focusing on an accumulation of descriptions and details, occasionally mimicking a police report. These different forms allow Glissant and Bolaño to produce different understandings of globalization.

Countering the capitalist imagination: Glissant's utopia as battlefield

Glissant's later work has been criticized in some quarters for its too abstract and theoretical aspect, as opposed to his earlier work, supposedly more attentive to the specificities of Martinican history and the longlasting consequences of the Atlantic trade. The weaknesses and dangers associated with *Tout-Monde*, in particular, have been reiterated many times: risk of creating a homogenizing totalization, losing sight of local differences and histories, ignoring the pernicious effects of globalization in favor of a celebration of "creolization" that it generates.[15] I believe it is important to recognize that the dialectic between the local and the global has been present in Glissant's work since the beginning. Whereas the focal point of *Le Discours Antillais* is the unity of Caribbean history, a global framework is already elaborated upon. On the other hand, in his novel *Tout-Monde*, the specificity of Atlantic history persists. Intertwined with stories from other geographical spaces and historical times is a representation of post 1980s Martinique, affected by both the history of the slave trade and a globalized economy. In this section, I will focus on the social imaginary of globalization that *Tout-Monde* articulates. Within the novel, global capitalism appears as an imaginary and imaginative project; a project that attempts to transform places according to its own imagination of progress and development. This analysis is further punctuated by attempts to imagine a different form of transnationalism. For Glissant, the global struggle is the struggle of the imagination.

Tout-Monde stages the confrontation between two forms of cross-cultural thinking: one that, in the service of global capitalism, sublimates difference into sameness, and an alternative one which fights to maintain difference in the form of what Glissant names diversity. In Glissant's eyes, Martinique is the locality where these two forms encounter and challenge each

[15] See, for instance, Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle*.

other. As he writes in the *Discours*: "Martinique is a land in which products manufactured elsewhere are consumed. It is therefore destined to become increasingly a land you pass through."[16] The influx of foreign capital, mainly from France, is shaping Martinique, according to the Western understanding of development, into an increasingly consumerist society, dependent on foreign products. At the same time, Martinique is being increasingly consumed, as its economy has long relied on the tourist industry. *Tout–Monde* understands capitalism through its attempt to manage difference; to modify places according to the same logic of a consumerist society, while also leaving room for some difference which assures that those places remain attractive as global destinations. But Glissant also performs an attempt to construct another form of cross-cultural thinking that emerges out of Martinique, a form of "transversality" that links different local histories through the similarities of their struggle with global capitalism. These dynamics, however, are not only affecting his native island.

At the very beginning of the novel, as Matthieu travels through Italy, he wonders if it were possible "de savoir quelque chose, un rien de quelque chose, des gens qu'on rencontrait, ou qu'on désirait de rencontrer, que dans cet intervalle mort de vacances? Fallait-il être un vacancier pour connaître le monde?" (p.48). Globalization appears here as a system of knowledge, or rather a system of its production. By facilitating access to even the remotest places in the world, globalization has turned mass tourism into a widespread manner of learning, understanding and interacting with the world. On the one hand, it has opened different places to exchanges and interactions, to the extent that hardly any place nowadays exists in total isolation. Yet, whereas traveling is often presented as a beneficial way of expanding one's horizons and contributing to the economy of tourist destinations, the power relations that structure the possibilities of travel

[16] Glissant, Édouard, and J. Michael Dash. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989, p.127

are often overlooked. Mathieu continues his lament: “C’est partout pareil…inutile de lamenter. Il n’y a pas une île dans le monde,- et souvenez-vous que Vernazza était comme une ile,- qui soit à l’abri des visites guidées” (p.49). Underlining Mathieu’s reflection is a dialectic between openness and closure, freedom and control, articulated through the interaction between the tourist and his destination, as the guided visit becomes a site where these various concepts are formulated. The world has become open for examination and exploration, yet both of these are only allowed to occur under the constraints established by capital. The encounter can never be too close; it has to be monitored by the intermediary of guided visits and hotel resorts. The knowledge obtained by a vacationer is heavily guided, as what is shown, told and withheld is carefully chosen.

The larger question Mathieu raises is what does it mean to be free within the system of global capitalism? How is freedom managed under this system and who is allowed to be free? Freedom and unfreedom exist in a close dialectic. The visitor’s freedom to consume, presented as almost an ethical obligation, is dependent on the locals’ inability to refuse this consumption: “…la pétulance en tout cas que confère au touriste la certitude qu’il apporte une manne indispensable, et qu’il n’a pas à se préoccuper du sentiment des habitants de ce lieu qu’il visite puisque de tout manière ils ne pourraient pas se passer de lui ni de ses prébendes” (p.47). The consumption of the tourist takes place under the guise of benevolence and humanitarianism, as mass tourism is presented as one of the biggest promoters of local economies. The tourist thus has no responsibility towards his destination of choice, as the economic survival of his destination is dependent on his very presence. His personal pleasure becomes the only guiding principle of his actions, justified by the belief that he/she is contributing to the “development” of the “developing” world.

Mathieu's imagination then returns to his native Martinique as he evokes "la lente banalisation des paysages de Martinique, sous le bétonnage et la pollution médiocre du progrès" (p.52). The neoliberal imaginary of progress emerges out of (and is materialized in) the spatial reconfiguration of Martinique and the complex (and never complete) process of uniformization. This uniformization becomes visible under two aspects. First of all, Mathieu describes the increased banality of landscapes under the guise of progress, where remote locations are starting to resemble each other as they are being remodeled according to the standards of Western lifestyle and architecture, whose cultural particularity is obfuscated under the supposedly universal sign of progress. But this uniformization is further complicated by the fact that the islands can never become fully Western, as they need to preserve their exotic aspect, which renders them attractive to Western tourists. Yet the exotization itself relies on a form of homogenization, as all the islands becomes devoid of their local histories and differences, in order to comply with the same standards of what constitutes the exotic. As in Chapter One, I resort to Stuart Hall's characterization of this peculiar form of homogenization as a homogenizing form of cultural representation that is never complete and does not work for completeness. It strives to recognize and absorb differences within the larger overarching framework of what the Western conception of the world is. The forms which are different can be reshaped and negotiated without being absolutely destroyed.[17]

Later on in the novel, as Mathieu is searching for Artémise and Marie Annie, the two powers of day and night, he recounts that Martinique "avançait dans ce changement imperceptible ou les boutiques à feuilles de beurre rouge et blanc s'étaient, sans qu'on sut comment, ni si c'était les mêmes, transformées en centres commerciaux climatisés,- des jets

[17] Hall, Stuart. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethinicity." *Culture, Globalization and the World System*, Anthony King (Ed.), Macmillan, 1991.

d'eau s'y essoufflaient parmi les faïences, au milieu de monts de foie gras importé, et des romanciers en vogue y signaient leur dernier ouvrage paru,- ou chacun s'efforçait donc, non pas seulement dans ces bazars de luxe mais partout alentour, à s'évertuer de croire que c'était là le bonheur "(p.164). I would like to suggest that the "global" can be located between these competing spatial configurations (the boutique and the shopping mall), each one associated with a specific social imaginary, inflecting a different understanding of happiness. In contemporary Martinique, the striving for a life of luxury, and the instantaneous "garantie des plaisirs" are landmarks of happiness, while every other forms of life are progressively erased. The air-conditioned mall becomes the materialization of happiness within the framework of global capitalism, but also the site of its production. This progressive shift from a small local boutique to a shopping mall engenders a specific understanding of global power dynamics. It is important to note that the change is almost "imperceptible;" power does not operate through direct violence and destruction but rather through the notion of progress, and the internalization of the "global order."[18] In *Tout-Monde,* it operates through the widespread acceptance of the fact that malls, air conditioners and foie gras are universal sings of progress and development whose beneficial impacts cannot be disputed.

But the globalized world is also represented as a space of conflicted and competing transnational imaginaries. Descriptions of contemporary Martinique are punctuated by other possibilities of transnational encounter, which are supposed to evade the logic of commodification. Mathieu thus doesn't end his reflection with a mere criticism of global capitalism, he introduces the dichotomy between traveler and tourist, wondering whether it is possible to see the world as a traveler and not as a tourist; whether there is a way of engaging

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[18] Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power*, p.33.

with the world in its totality and understanding the multiple geographical and historical connections, which exceed the logic of capitalism.

The very first paragraph of the novel incites us to reflect in this direction. The novel begins with the word “post-card”: “les cartes postales, ou sinon, le dicton public, chantent que c’est l’ile des Revenants.” Whereas the epigraph to the first chapter: “Y a-t-il une Italie aussi au monde de la lune,” indicates that we are located in Italy, the island of those who return is never explicitly identified. It could be Italy but it could also be the other recurring island in the novel, Martinique. This very first paragraph, through the image of the “Revenant,” already contains the two systems of knowledge that the novel will pit against each other. The narrator explains that whereas this characterization of the island may be true: “vous ne savez pas si c’est parce que vous y revenez toujours au moins une fois, après que vous y avez, vous madame vous monsieur, heureux dérivants, séjournés ne serait-ce qu’un jour? Ou si c’est parce que nous, habitants un à un dénommés, nous y retrouvons nous-mêmes comme des revenants d’on ne saurait quelle éternité?” (p.17). It is important to note that in French the word “revenant” has a double meaning. It can simply mean a person who returns to a place they have already been to, or it can designate a ghost. The island could thus be the island of those who keep returning, as they are mesmerized by its beauty and “paradisiacal” atmosphere. This is the image that the post-cards, product of the tourist industry, are trying to sell. Once anyone visits the island, its beauty will captivate them to such an extent that they will always have to return. This image complies with the logic of global capitalism, which transforms landscapes into exotic products to be bought and consumed. The island is reduced to the expectations of the ones who are expected to invest in it. Within this marketing logic, it does not really matter which specific island this is, since more and

more of the world's islands are expected (and forced to, due to their economic dependency on the Global North) to fulfill this function.

To this experience of the island, the narrator will oppose an alternative one. The island is the island of those who return because its inhabitants are ghosts of an unknown eternity. There is another manner of experiencing and knowing the island through the events and stories that keep recurring in different times and slightly modified forms; by engaging a history that is continuously present. To a system of knowledge founded upon oversimplification and objectification, the novel opposes a network of stories, past and present, local and global. Instead of being reduced to a guided visit, the island becomes a site from which the world, in all its interrelationality, could be imagined. The figure of the "Revenant" furthermore reaffirms the overlap of time and space. The "Revenant" is the one who returns from a different place, his/her experience bringing different locations into contact. But as a ghost, the "Revenant" is also the one who returns from a different time, connecting the present to its past.

Thus, as he is searching for Artemise and Marie-Annie, Mathieu remembers the phrase "non pas seulement, mais" found in the work of William Faulkner. This sentence for Mathieu evokes a point of commonality between Martinique and Mississipi: "La souffrance de la mémoire n'était donc pas seulement ici. Il y a avait dans l'ailleurs d'autres lieux, peut-être privilégiés, ou la béance ouvrait" (p.165). The failure of memory that may have originated from different historical situations, ultimately leads to the same forms of struggle. Mathieu goes on to say that Artemise's power lies precisely in her capacity to place "en relation des paysages si éloignés…lesquels se touchent par des allures évanescentes et par la même douleureuse profondeur" (p.165).

The idea that since capitalism is a transnational form of domination, any resistance to it also has to be transnational, keeps recurring in the novel. As Anastasie, a character who seeks out the writer of the novel in order to tell him that Mycéa's story is in fact her story, recounts her story of being raped by M. Bernard, she mentions that during their encounters, the only thing she could think about was all the countries where the same forceful interactions were occurring at the same time: "Tous ces pays, monsieur, en meme temps au meme moment. Il ne sait pas que je fréquente les pays au loin, je suis désordonnée par tous ces pays, alors un combat, quelque chose, combat dans mon corps et je ne vois pas comment l'attraper ni le garrotter" (p.201). Anastasie's personal struggle, her rebellion against the fact that as a black woman she is rendered sexually available to a "mulâtre" of a superior social class, is immediately framed as a collective and transnational struggle. Her ability to endure and resist, stems from her capacity to remove herself from the purely local situation and imagine a form of solidarity with other women, who while geographically removed, have experienced the same form of oppression. But this is not merely an identification based on the unproblematized universal category of "woman." Anastasie's comment alludes to the fact that capitalism reproduces similar gender and race dynamics in distant places, allowing for the possibility of trans-national analysis and solidarity. As Chandra Mohanty explains in another context, the establishment of this kind of connection does not mean that the lives of all women in the Global South are the same, but rather, that they are comparable (p.144). Furthermore, Anastasie completely identifies with the fictional narrative of another character, Mycéa. The intertwined stories of these two female characters, posit literary fiction as a privileged site of transnational connections.

Different embodiments of Anastasie appear throughout the novel, upholding the transnational frame for thinking oppression and marginalization. The narrator believes that after

the conversation in his Parisian office he had forgotten Anastasie, until she, as he tells us, suddenly reappears in a conversation with a psychiatrist friend. The friend begins to tell a story about a black woman working as a cleaning lady in a public institution. The director of the institution approaches her in order to tell her that if she is "gentille avec lui," he could do a lot for her. To which the employee replies: "Monsieur, dit-elle, je suis agrégée torchon-mouillé. Licenciée laver-carreaux. Diplomée la vaisselle…qu'est ce que vous pouvez faire pour moi, mussieu?" (p.215). Anastasie's third embodiment appears later in the novel. The same psychiatrist friend recounts another story that occurred in 1992. A young woman living in a poor neighborhood of Fort-de-France begins to scream, as she is observing French families living in her surroundings, that she must kill six white people. The psychiatrist explains that it was a case of "délire et dépossession qu'on eut pu comprendre dans les temps anciens, mais qui désorientaient sa famille, en cette époque d'accord et de consensus, de progrès social et de responsabilités locales, d'investissements et d'allocations, de construction de lycée ou d'achèvement de stades sportif" (p.256). Superposing these three anecdotes allows Glissant to think global capitalism through the question of history's reoccurrence. The "délire" of the woman in 1992 is the consequence of a past that has been repressed but has not passed. The novel thus becomes the space to stage raced and gendered power dynamics as persisting while altering form. A black woman raped by a mulatto in whose house she works as a live-in maid, a black cleaning lady being propositioned by the white director of the institution she works at, and finally a black woman feeling the need to murder white people in the midst of "social progress," tracks the development of capitalism through its various phases, and understands it as a complex network of power relations that relies on "the ideological construction of jobs and tasks in terms of notions of appropriate femininity, domesticity, (hetero)sexuality, and racial and cultural

stereotypes."[19] The anecdotes also strain against a static understanding of power as they stage the progressive shift in modes of domination, from overt violence to violence in the guise of investment and social progress. The contemporary era of investment and development no longer appears as a rupture from the colonial violence of the past, but rather as its continuation. *Tout-Monde* aims precisely at putting pressure on this neoliberal narrative of history and progress by reframing race, gender and class tensions as central to the myth of consensus.

In his article *Homme du Tout-Monde,* Michael Dash reads Glissant's later work in terms of its utopian thrust. Glissant, he writes, had a special definition of utopia: "utopia is not a dream. It is what is missing in the world."[20] In fact, Glissant believed that the role of narrative fiction was to reform our imagination, to identify instances of "créolisation," cultural syncretism where two thoughts encounter or echo one another. Fiction, he contended, could transform our relation to nearby and faraway places by thinking Martinique in relation to Vernazza and Paris and Faulkner's Mississippi. As I've outlined in the introduction, Glissant has been at times praised and at times criticized for this "utopian thrust," which has been continuously underlined as the central dimension of *Tout-Monde*. However, as I have demonstrated in this section, whereas this dimension is in fact present, it is developed in conjunction with a subtle analysis of contemporary power dynamics. Glissant is specifically interested in the social imaginary of global capitalism, in the ways in which it transforms places according to its own understanding and imagination of progress and development. The literary form, allows him to encapsulate moments and places where different imaginaries collide. Instead of being a specific place, Utopia is conceived as a battlefield of the imagination.

[19] Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, p.142.

[20] Dash, Michael. "Homme du tout-monde." *The Caribbean Review of Books*. January 2011. Web. March 2014 <http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/25-january-2011/homme-du-tout-monde/ >

Global aesthetics of power: Bolaño's unaccountable subjects

If Glissant's *Tout-Monde* has been read as a (perhaps too) utopian vision of the contemporary world, Bolaño's *2666* could be read as its dystopian counterpart. Edmundo Paz Soldán describes *2666* as "la aventura y el apocalipsis, diseminados a lo largo y ancho de la planeta" ['adventure and apocalyse disseminated throughout the planet'].[21] I would like to connect three different moments in Bolaño's novel, highlighting the different understandings of the global and globalization that emerge out of each one of them. I will focus in particular on the notion of accountability as a gateway into the discussion about global power dynamics. Within *2666,* the global aesthetics of power operates through the production of various "global" subjectivities, some of which demand accountability, whereas others don't.

The first moment occurs in the first part of the novel, the part about the critics, and involves three characters, Espinoza, Pelletier and Norton. Pelletier and Espinoza, both in love with Norton, come to visit her in London, hoping that she will finally choose between the two of them. As they are driving in a cab, they begin to discuss Norton's relation to her former lover. The discussion develops under the gaze of a Pakistani cab driver whose critical comments ultimately lead to a violent outcome. What offsets this physical argument between the driver and the two men is the cab driver's comment that London is like a labyrinth:

> Algo que llevó a Espinoza a decir que el taxista, sin proponérselo, coño, claro, había citado a Borges, que una vez comparó Londres con un laberinto. A lo que Norton replicó que mucho antes que Borges Dickens y Stevenson se habían referido a Londres utlizando ese tropo. Cosa que, por lo visto, el taxista no estaba dispuesto a tolerar, pues acto seguido dijo que él, un paquistanì, podía no conocer a este mentado Borges, y que también podía no haber leído nunca a esos mentados señores Dickens y Stevenson, y que incluso tal vez aún no conocía lo suficientemente bien Londres y sus calles y que por esa

[21] Paz Soldán, Edmundo. "Roberto Bolaño: literatura y apocalipsis." *Proyecto Patrimonio*, 2008. Web. 2014 <http://www.letras.s5.com/rb020708.html>

> razón la había comparado con un laberinto, pero que, por el contrario, sabía muy bien lo que era la decencia y la dignidad y que, por lo que había escuchado, la mujer aquí presente, es decir Norton, carecía de decencia y de dignidad, y que en sus país eso tenía un nombre, el mismo que se le daba en Londres, qué casualidad, y que ese nombre era el de puta o zorra o cerda, y que los señores aquí presentes, señores que no eran ingleses a juzgar por su acento, también tenían un nombre en su país y ese nombre era el de chulos o macarras o macrós o cafiches (p.102).

> Which led Espinoza to remark that he'd be damned if the cabbie hadn't just quoted Borges, who once said London was like a labyrinth-unintentionally, of course. To which Norton replied that Dickens and Stevenson had used the same trope long before Borges in their description of London. This seems to set the driver off, for he burst out that as a Pakistani he might not know the Borges, and he might not have read the famous Dickens and Stevenson either, and he might not even know London and its streets as well as he should, that's why he'd said they were like a labyrinth, but he knew very well what decency and dignity were, and by what he had heard, the woman here present, in other words Norton, was lacking in decency and dignity, and in his country there was a word for what she was, the same word they had for it in London as it happened, and the word was bitch or slut or pig, and the gentlemen here present, gentlemen who, to judge by their accents, weren't English, also had a name in his country and that name was pimp or hustler or whoremonger (p.73).[22]

The cab can be theorized as a contact zone where class, race and gender dynamics are staged and reworked. One could wonder whether the cab driver would have even commented on the conversation he had overheard, had Espinoza not made an analogy between his and Borges' depiction of London. But why would this reference to Borges, followed by one to Dickens and Stevenson, anger the Pakistani to such an extent? It seems to me that the cab driver's anger stems from the critics' inability to relate to his personal experience other than through a reference to the Western literary canon (Borges is of course Argentinean, but Norton immediately inscribes him into the Western tradition by claiming that the same literary trope already appears in Dickens and

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[22] All of the translations are taken from:
Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer. *2666*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Stevenson). For Norton, Espinoza and Pelletier, the Pakistani's presence and opinions are significant only in so far as they fit neatly into their own academic interests, illustrating or emulating the Western literary canon. In fact, when Espinoza makes his remark, he is not addressing directly the cab driver, but is rather talking to Pelletier and Norton, the cab driver serving only as a medium for his literary reflection. In what follows, the driver opposes his personal experience to a more "literary" reading of his comment, arguing that London is a labyrinth for him because he is not from there and is thus not very familiar with the city. He also insists on the fact that "as a Pakistani" he might not have read Borges or Dickens, critiquing the Eurocentric focus of the critics' literary references.

This passage further articulates the intersection of class and race. Espinoza is confident that the driver could only have quoted Borges "unintentionally," as this framework of literary references is only accessible to an educated elite; an elite that of course includes the four critics but could never include a taxi driver. The cab driver, being aware of the implication of Espinoza's statement, tries to suggest that if his knowledge does not encompass these references, it is because they are not universal, as Espinoza assumes, but culturally specific. By reading the driver's comment in relation to Borges, Dickens and Stevenson, Espinoza is not only reaffirming his very Eurocentric position but also erasing all the economic and social factors that may have brought the driver to utter such a comment; factors that could lead a Pakistani to feel entrapped in what he perceives to be a London maze. In other words, his estrangement in the city of London stems from his status as a foreigner. He is not from London and thus does not have an extensive knowledge of the city's streets. Yet it also raises the question of the circumstances that would lead a Pakistani to work as a cab driver in London, a question that of course never crosses Espinoza's mind.

As he states that he might not know Borges or Dickens but is quite familiar with notions of decency and dignity, the driver attempts to shift the conversation from a culturally specific content (a content he does not have access to), to what he perceives as a more universal content (a conversation that he could be a part of). Espinoza and Pelletier, completely erasing the context surrounding the conversation, hear only the comment addressed to Norton. They then ask the driver to stop the car, pull him out on the street and start beating him "hasta dejarlo inconsciente y sangrando por todos los orificios de la cabeza, menos por los ojos" (p.103) ["until he was unconscious and bleeding from every orifice in the head except the eyes"] all the while shouting: "Métete el islam por el culo, allí es donde debe estar, esta patada es por Salman Rushdie…esta patada es de parte de las feministars de París (parad de una puta vez, les gritaba Norton), esta patada es de parte de las feministas de Nueva York…." (p.103) ["Shove Islam up your ass, which is where it belongs, this one is for Salman Rushdie… this one is for the feminists of Paris (will you fucking stop, Norton was shouting), this one is for the feminists of New York..."]. Espinoza and Pelletier immediately associate the comment with the driver's adherence to Islam, an adherence that he himself has never proclaimed. The justification of violence towards the racial or cultural Other through the defense of women's rights is hardly a new trope; but here it appears in relation to the European academic culture and its liberal politics. Espinoza and Pelletier immediately position themselves against Islam as secular defenders of feminism and women's rights, locatable only within the outlines of the West, represented here by the metropolitan centers of Paris and New York. Bolaño is careful not to merely position European racism against a benevolent other. The driver's comment on Norton is hardly justifiable, but it exists within a larger, multinational framework of class, race and gender dynamics. Furthermore, as academics, Espinoza and Pelletier subtly avoid the theory of the "clash of civilizations." What

could otherwise be a simplistic opposition between a secular, progressive Europe and a reactionary, religious Middle East is thus further complicated by the reference to Salman Rushdie. This reference allows them to displace a geographical opposition onto a reactionary/liberal opposition that supposedly exists independently of race and gender, thus allowing them to claim their own universality. The global framework emerges out of violent social interactions and within the narrow space of a cab. The cab thus becomes a space to critically explore the tensions inherent in the Western belief in its own universality, as there is a contradiction between the assumed universal reach of Western values and the fact that only a selected few, such as Espinoza and Pelletier, fully understand what these values are.[23]

Norton attempts to separate the three men under the logic that this behavior will only make him hate the English even more. She is not putting into question the opposition between the liberal European "us" and the conservative non-European "them," but merely commenting on the fact that violence will slow and deter the spread of neoliberal values. After the incident, Espinoza and Pelletier regret what had happened, "por más que en su fuero íntimo estuvieran convencidos de que el verdadero derechista y misógino era el paquistaní, de que el violento era el paquistaní, de que el intolerante y mal educado era el paquistaní, de que el que se lo había buscado era el paquistaní, una y mil veces. En estas ocasiones, la verdad, si el taxista se hubiera materializado ante ellos, seguramente lo habrían matado" (p.110) ["even though deep inside they were convinced that it was the Pakistani who was the real reactionary and misogynist, the violent one, the intolerant and offensive one, that the Pakistani has asked for it a thousand times over. The truth is that at moments like this, if the Pakistani had materialized before them, they

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[23] See Baudrillard's *The Agony of Power* and his concept of a "democratic" feudality" (p.52)

probably would have killed him" (p.80)]. Perhaps we could interpret this further to mean that, in moments like those, they probably would have killed the Pakistani as he was reminding them of their own reactionary and misogynist attitude, performed in the name of tolerance. The passage stages a complex process of mirroring, of identification and disidentification. Espinoza and Pelletier can only formulate their identity in contrast to that of the reactionary, violent other. However, this opposition can only be maintained through violence whose very presence invalidates it. Identity, within the context of globalization, is not posited as prefigured; rather, it is the result of social relations and possibilities that congeal global dynamics into the extremely local form of a cab.

This is not the only time that Norton witnesses an attack against a taxi driver. Later on, she, Espinoza and Pelletier fly to Mexico City in search of Archimboldi. Norton is leaning on the window of her hotel as Espinoza, Pelletier and El Cerdo, a Mexican who claims to have met Archimboldi in Mexico City, are entering the hotel. They all witness the scene of a taxi driver being fiercely beaten by the hotel doormen. It is not exactly clear what has happened between the driver and the doormen. The driver brings a drunken tourist to the hotel, a tourist that, according to Norton, could easily be an American. The entire scene is described from her point of view, and she believes that the driver is asking for additional money that the tourist is refusing to give him. El Cerdo then explains to the three Europeans that the argument is about tips and there is "una especie de Guerra entre taxistas y porteros" (p.147) ["a kind of war between taxi drivers and doormen" (p.109)]. It is never explicitly stated whether the tourist was refusing to tip the cab driver at all or whether the driver was trying to charge the tourist an unfairly large amount. In any case, it is in order to protect the well-being of the American tourist that the doormen attack

the driver. Once again, the question of the global surfaces in the interactions and confrontations between various subjects.

In the past few decades, Mexico, like Martinique, has become increasingly financially dependent on the consumption of foreign tourists.[24] In order for this consumption to continue, the tourists must be kept safe and comfortable; the economic inequality between the Global North and the Global South that renders the South increasingly dependent on the income generated by mass tourism from the North has to be occluded. This dynamic operates through a twofold movement: the presence of the American tourist highlights the inequality between the North and the South, thus pushing the taxi driver to demand more money for his service. On the other hand, if the tourists are to keep spending money in Mexico, their economic superiority is not to be challenged. These social interactions rest on an unequal (global) power dynamic where the value of human life is determined in relation to the amount of capital that it generates. The life and interests of an American tourist are thus more valuable than those of a Mexican taxi driver, leading the two doormen to brutally beat the driver. The three critics, while expressing curiosity in relation to the situation, are still a lot more interested in the whereabouts of Archimboldi, and seem to establish no parallel between race and class dynamics underlining this situation and their own encounter with the Pakistani taxi driver in London. The passage furthermore formulates discrepant understandings of the global. For the critics, Archimboldi is the embodiment of the world writer, the perfect international literary figure, and their own interactions are examples of transnationalism. The two violent encounters with the cab drivers are nothing but expressions of the local. They are incapable of seeing the two cabs as spaces where the global is formed and formulated.

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[24] See, for instance, Theobald, William F. *Global Tourism*. Maryland Heights, MO: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2004.

The part of the novel focusing on Santa Teresa deals most explicitly with the aesthetics of global power. Fate, an African-American journalist reporting on the current situation in Mexico, believes that writing about Santa Teresa amounts to elaborating "un retrato del mundo industrial en el Tercer Mundo" (p.373) ["a sketch of the industrial landscape in the third world"(p.294)]. Guadalupe Roncal, a journalist from Mexico City, claims that the secret of the world is contained in the murders (p.439)/ (p.348). Most of the women murdered work in *maquiladoras*, manufacturing or export assembly plants in northern Mexico, producing parts and products for the United States. The proliferation of maquiladoras along the US-Mexico border is explained by the fact that Mexican labor is inexpensive and, courtesy of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), taxes and custom fees are almost nonexistent, which benefits the profits of corporations.[25] Most of the women murdered are not actually from Santa Teresa, which exemplifies the massive rural- urban exodus due to the destruction of traditional agriculture and development of industries in urban centers. Maquiladoras also epitomize what Saskia Sassen calls the feminization of labor in the Global South. Sassen argues that immigration and off-shore production are "ways of securing a low-wage labor force and of fighting the demands of organized workers in developed countries."[26] Disadvantaged from the point of view of race, gender and class, women in the Global South become the ideal source of low-wage labor.

Furthermore, the murders of women raise the question of belonging in the age of globalization. The cosmopolitanism of the transnational academic intelligentsia is contrasted to the forced migration of the Mexican working class. The dead women have no familial ties in Santa Teresa and often do not possess any identification documents; some of them may be

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[25] See, Kopinak, Kathryn. *Desert Capitalism: Maquiladoras in North America's Western Industrial Corridor*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996.
Kamel, Rachael, and Anya Hoffman. *The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Organizing Since NAFTA*. Philadelphia, PA: American Friends Service Committee, 1999.
[26] Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents*, p.111.

migrants from other Central American countries, stopping in Santa Teresa on their way to the United States. One of the doctors in Santa Teresa asks at a certain point: "come me voy a responsabilizar de esta mujer si ni siquiera sé cómo se llama?" (p.448) ["how can I take responsibility for a person when I don't even know her name?" (p. 357)]. The question could be rephrased in the following manner: who is accountable for this internationalized labor force? This issue of accountability stems out of the reorganization of circuits of capital in which the constant flows of populations render individuals fungible. In global relations responsibility is diminished as local authorities, the state, multinational corporations and international organizations lay the blame on one another. The passage further dwells on the relation between identity and responsibility: is the important thing being able to identify these women? And just because we cannot identify someone, does that mean we are not to be held accountable for their life? Within the current organization of the world accountability exists only in relation to specific identities: citizen, tourist, academic, etc. Responsibility is eschewed precisely by creating subjectivities that do not fall within these categories. The novel thus posits the question of whether, in the context of globalization, we may need to rethink the concept of accountability. What would it mean to be accountable for someone whose name we do not know?

These victims are rarely described in relation to their familial and geographical affiliation. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the clothes they were wearing, especially Nike sneakers and blue jeans; products symbolizing American culture and the American way of life, but also epitomizing the fact that the American way of life is produced in the Global South. Two things thus anchor the murdered women in the reality of the contemporary globalized world: their presence in the maquiladoras as disposable, inexpensive labor and their consumption of goods produced primarily for another culture. But the association of these women with Nike

shoes and blue jeans establishes more than just their identity as consumers in a capitalist world. By wearing these products they are trying to emulate the lifestyle that they are manufacturing. Their deaths, however, illustrate the fact that this lifestyle will always only be produced for the other side of the border.

The specific moment that I would like to focus on occurs toward the end of the part about the crimes. Several officers from the Santa Teresa police department, at the end of their night shifts meet for breakfast at Trejo's "a long coffee shop like a coffin, with few windows" (p.552). They spend most of their time recounting jokes to each other, jokes that more often than not relate to women:

> Por ejemplo, un policía decía: ¿cómo es la mujer perfecta? Pues de medio metro, orejona, con la cabeza plana, sin dientes y muy fea. ¿Por qué? Pues de medio metro para que te llegue exactamente a la cintura, guey, orejano, para manejarla con facilidad, con la cabeza plana para tener un lugar donde poner tu cerveza, sin dientes para que no te haga daño en la verga y muy fea para que ningún hijo de puta te la robe (p.689).

> For example, one cop would say: what's the perfect woman? Pues, she's two feet tall, big ears, flat head, no teeth and hideously ugly. Why? Pues two feet tall she comes right up to your waist, big ears so you can steer her, a flat head so you have a place to set your beer, no teeth so she can't bite your dick, and hideously ugly so no bastard steals her away. (p.552).

In fact, the text offers us a proliferation of commonly circulated jokes about women. This moment alludes to a larger culture of misogyny in Mexico, a culture that the recurrent murders of women cannot be extricated from. The jokes, explicitly misogynistic, rely on a complete objectification of women and their bodies whose sole purpose is the satisfaction of male pleasure. Another joke, for example, goes on to say: "a ver, valedores, defínanme una mujer…pues un conjunto de células medianmente organizadas que rodean a una vagina" (p.690)

"what's the definition of a woman? pues a vagina surrounded by a more or less organized bunch of cells" (p.552). The jokes relay a sense of sexual availability of women, and disposability of their bodies. This overall sexualization of women cannot be separated from the sexual nature of most of the crimes. The jokes are one step away from explicitly justifying rape, as they highlight and reinforce the obscurity of these lives, and equate obscurity to the lack of social value. They underscore the belief that these lives are undeserving of protection. Since this is the pervasive attitude, it is no wonder that most of the murders are only superficially investigated, while evidence disappears and laboratory samples are misplaced.

But reducing this misogynist atmosphere to a facet of Mexican "culture" and thus a local problem (which is precisely what Norton, Pelletier and Espinoza do as they identify sexism with Islam) would be an oversimplification. As much as the murders cannot be extricated from the misogynist culture of Santa Teresa, they also cannot be extricated from the global economic order, which relies on the disposability of female labor and life. In fact, the two reproduce and mirror each other. As we have seen earlier on, the functioning and productivity of maquiladoras depends on the availability and expandability of female labor. Low wages can be maintained precisely because there is a surplus of cheap labor. If a worker disappears or is murdered, another immediately replaces her. It is not so much the case that one comes before or causes the other but rather that these different dynamics replicate and sanction each other, forming a network of power relations which relies on the embeddedness of the sexual and the economic. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty explains: "global processes…inflect and draw upon indigenous hierarchies, ideologies and forms of exploitation to consolidate new modes of colonization (or "recolonization"). The local and the global are indeed connected through parallel, contradictory, and sometimes converging relations of rule that position women in different and similar

locations as workers."[27] Maquiladoras, one of the signature signs of global capitalism, produce subjects that are included into the economic order through their exclusion. They are allowed to enter and contribute to the economic system precisely because they demand no accountability on the part of that same order. Similarly, the murders in Santa Teresa are possible because female life in Santa Teresa demands no accountability.

The failure of the police investigation rests on the fact that the police and the media refuse to acknowledge different global and local power relations that render certain lives more prone to murder than others. Instead, they are attempting to explain the crimes through the presence of an unidentified serial killer. After the arrest of Klaus Haas, presumed to be the psychotic serial killer, we learn that "la ciudad se dio un respire…Ciertamente, hubo muertos…Las muertes habituales, sí, las usuales, gente que empezaba festejando y terminaba matándose, muertes que no eran cinematográficas, muertes que pertenecían al folklore pero no a la modernidad: muertes que no asustaban a nadie. El asesino en seria oficialmente estaba entre rejas" (p.675) ["the city got a break…True, there were deaths….there were the usual deaths, yes, those to be expected, people who started off celebrating and ended up killing each other, uncinematic deaths, deaths from the realm of folklore, not modernity: deaths that didn't scare anybody. The serial killer was officially behind bars" (p.540)]. In this opposition between folklore and modernity, the figure of the serial killer becomes the embodiment of modernity. Whereas deaths from the realm of folklore are associated with petty arguments and impulsive actions, a result of exuberant displays of emotions, modernity is associated with the production of the figure of the serial killer, a figure living outside the norms of society and morality, engaging in murder for no particular reason aside from the emotional thrill. Yet, I would also

[27] Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders,* p.142.

argue that modernity creates and mobilizes the figure of the serial killer in order to displace the responsibility for the marginalization and violence that it creates. Within this framework, society skirts accountability since the violence is not generated from within it (and in this case the global economic order), but comes from outside of society, from a clearly identifiable sociopath who simply does not comply with the supposedly non-violent norms of neoliberalism and global capitalism. Following this logic, once this non-submissive element is removed, society can and will return to its harmonious, peaceful existence. The figure of a sole killer furthermore raises the question of serialization, where murder is conceived as a repetitive gesture of ultimate consumption. In fact, the act of consumption partakes in these murders on different levels. First of all, as I have already explained, the victims, all of whom have been sexually consumed prior to the murder, are described in relation to products (mainly clothing items) that they have produced for consumption and are themselves consuming. But the underlying relation is the one between reading and consumption. As a reader, we are consuming hundreds of pages of murder descriptions. Yet again, we return to the question of accountability. What is the responsibility of the author and the reader in front of these murdered bodies? These are the questions that the subsequent sections of this chapter will address.

These three novelistic moments frame global power relations and modes of domination and oppression that exist outside of the traditional oppressor/oppressed relation. Whereas Glissant's focal point is the transformation of space under the hegemony of global capitalism, Bolaño posits the question of accountability, and the absence thereof, as the main dialectic through which to think globalization. Nonetheless, for both authors current power dynamics can only be understood through a superposition and collision of different national spaces and

subjects. These transnational imaginaries however raise the question of the political dimension of fiction: can these attempts to rethink globalization be conceived as political gestures?

Beyond representation

Is staging globalization equivalent to contesting globalization? Does divulging power relations that guide the organization of the contemporary world render these works political? Jacques Rancière questions this pedagogical approach to literature, which according to him relies on a specific cause-consequence relation between knowledge and action. There is no basis, he states, for the assumption that once aware of the ways in which power operates; we will strive to change it. Furthermore, Rancière argues, in its attempt to reveal the power of the commodity, the reign of the spectacle or the obscenities of power, art oftentimes reproduces the very effect that it denounces. Jean Baudrillard ventures along the same lines of thought as he writes that the main characteristic of hegemony is the absorption of all critical negativity: "What is the impact of a film like Darwin's nightmare, which denounces racial discrimination in Tanzania? It will tour the Western world and reinforce the endogamy, the cultural and political autarky of this separate world through images and consumption of image" (p.60). Baudrillard further uses the example of the BNP (Banque Nationale de Paris) slogan "votre argent m'intéresse" to argue that under global capitalism our ultimate power has been stolen, the power to denounce. The logic of capitalism relies on the constant incorporation of negative elements; the system has incorporated criticism as it performs its own denunciation. In the face of capitalists who willingly admit that their only interest is profit, "the privilege of telling the truth eludes our grasp." In other words, is there a purpose in denouncing what no one contests?

Whether we opt for Baudrillard's "hegemony" or Rancière's "consensus" to describe the contemporary power constellation, they both agree that current forms of governmentability allow for opposition and criticism.[28] Global neoliberalism admits that people have different values, lifestyles and opinions, as long as they accept economic globalization as the ultimate, inevitable reality. Criticism is welcome in so far as it remains within the very reality that it criticizes. This is why Frederic Jameson characterizes the contemporary era as "infantile capitalism." Modernism, according to Jameson, is associated with incomplete modernization, a period where the "pre" or the "non" modern could still be remembered. In our current era, the era that could be named both late and infantile capitalism, the memory of something different has been lost: "everyone has been born into it, takes it for granted, and has never known anything else, the friction, resistance, effort of the earlier moments having given away to the free play of automation and the malleable fungibility of multiple consumer public and markets: roller skates and multinationals, word processors and overnight unfamiliar postmodern downtown high rises."[29] There is no harm in criticizing global capitalism and representing its negative sides, since this gesture does not challenge it as the unique, irrevocable reality. Is the attempt of literary authors to represent globalization but another proof that we are fully engulfed in its logic?

Whereas I agree with this analysis of the power configuration within the system of global capitalism, I would like to reaffirm the representational value of literature. First of all, Baudrillard himself still clings to the power of denunciation as he denounces our inability to denounce. Besides, saying that we already know enough about the "horrors" of the world

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[28] It is important to underline certain differences in Rancière's and Baudrillard's approaches. Rancière has distanced himself from Baudrillard and Lyotard's idea of postmodern art defined by a logic of consumerism and continuity with the market, arguing for art as a field in which detachment and passivity constitute an indirectly critical political perspective. The political dimension of art does not however, for Rancière, stem from the representation of political events or the author's political opinions. Rancière's understanding of the relation between politics and aesthetics will be further explored in the last section of this chapter.

[29] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* p.367

assumes knowledge and power to be static, instead of in mutual constitution and constant flux. We are currently in a stage of capitalist development where "historical conflict no longer opposes two massive molar heaps, two classes- the exploited and the exploiters, the dominant and the dominated, managers and workers – among which, in each individual case, one could differentiate. The front line no longer cuts through the middle of society; it now runs through the middle of each of us, between what makes us a citizen, our predicates, and all the rest."[30] Whereas I would refute the idea that class has fully disappeared, I believe that sites of domination and struggle, constantly in a state of flux, need to be continuously articulated. The front line must constantly be identified anew. Furthermore, this front line is transnational and needs to be recognized as such. Jameson argues that "as an ideology which is also a reality, the 'postmodern' cannot be disproved insofar as its fundamental feature is the radical separation of all the levels and voices whose recombination in their totality could alone disprove it."[31] In the Marxist tradition, he names this process reification, which he defines as the erasure of the global dimension from the system of production and from our daily interactions and experiences. Rearticulating this global dimension and reestablishing connections between different domains of experience remains a political gesture. Thinking jointly, for example, the politics of Western academia and the politics of Mexican maquiladoras, challenges the supposed unrelatedness of these realities, and demonstrates how power operates through the construction of specific subjectivities.

At the same time, works of fiction, and in this case specifically *Tout-Monde* and *2666*, emerge within the logic of global capitalism and thus reproduce it as such. In this respect, it could be said that both Bolaño and Glissant fall within the politics of consent, though perhaps

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[30] Tiqqun (Collective). *This Is Not a Program*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011, p12.
[31] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* p.376

from opposite sides. Bolaño ultimately conveys to us that the demise of global capitalism is inevitable and that this demise will involve a global apocalypse. The last paragraph of *2666's* fourth part unwinds the metaphor of Santa Teresa as a black hole: "Las navidades en Santa Teresa se celebraron de la forma usual. Se hicieron posadas, se rompieron piñatas, se bebió tequila y cerveza. Hasta en las calles más humildes se oía a la gente reír. Algunas de estas calles eran totalmente oscuras, similares a agujeros negros, y las risas que salían de no se sabe dónde eran la única señal, la única información que tenían los vecinos y los extraños para no perderse" (p.791) ['The Christmas holidays in Santa Teresa were celebrated in the usual fashion. There were posadas, piñatas were smashed, tequila and beer were drunk. Even on the poorest streets people could be heard laughing. Some of these streets were completely dark, like black holes, and the laughter that came from who knows where was the only sign, the only beacon that kept residents and strangers from getting lost' (p.633)]. Interestingly enough, if part four ends with Santa Teresa disappearing into a black hole, part five ends with literature sharing that same fate. As Lotte, Archimboldi's sister, reads one of his novels while crossing the Atlantic, she comments: "El estilo era extraño, la escritura era clara y en ocasiones incluso transparente pero la manera en que se sucedían las historias no llevaba a ninguna parte: sólo quedaban los niños, sus padres, los animales, algunos vecinos y al final, en realidad, lo único que quedaba era la naturaleza, una naturaleza que poco a poco se iba deshaciendo en un cladero hirviendo hasta desaparecer todo"(p.1111) ['The style was strange. The writing was clear and sometimes even transparent, but the way the stories followed one another didn't lead anywhere: all that was left were the children, their parents, the animals, some neighbors, and in the end, all that was really left was nature, a nature that dissolved little by little in a boiling cauldron until it vanished completely' (p.887)]. Various levels of meta-discourse are intertwined here. In a novel that posits

the Mexican border as the epitomy of a black whole, a character reads a novel which itself devolves into a black hole. Is this another manner of reaffirming global capitalism as the final stage in history? As critical of globalization as he may be, is Bolaño ultimately suggesting that there is no alternative and no way out except in the form of a black whole? And if this is the case, why write a one thousand page novel about it? Is global capitalism also posited here as the end of literature, whose only faith is to disappear into nothingness?

One could also argue that while trying to denounce the disposability of female life at the Mexican border, Bolaño reproduces the same effect. In fact, the novel offers a proliferation of murder scenes and raped female bodies. One could wonder about the effect of such detail accumulation. Shock? In a culture so accustomed to scenes of violence, most likely not. It is certain that these female characters are not highly developed, almost never speak, and are represented only in their identity as victims. Does this produce anything other than the reader's sympathy? And perhaps not even that, since it is very hard to identity with the characters of whom we know very little and who disappear very rapidly. The sheer quantity of pages depicting murders also inevitably leads to a form of detachment, where the reader can no longer account for the names and the numbers of missing women.

Glissant, on the other hand, while underlining the destructive effects of global capitalism also tells us that we should focus on its positive side; the abounding shocks of cultures and creolizations that it produces. But this still is a way of confirming the system by saying that it does not produce only this but also something else. We thus encounter two models: within the first one, the only exit from the current system appears to be an inevitable apocalypse, in which case there is not much for us to do but wait for it to happen. In the second, the author analyzes

the pernicious effects of globalization, yet his role is still to search for its positive outcomes. Both enable one to argue that representation is reaffirmation.

This is a bind both authors are operating within. The constant tension between representation, reproduction and a potential moving beyond appears in both Glissant's and Bolaño's fictional and theoretical writings. Both authors wonder whether narrative fiction is capable of producing a new system of value, and whether that is its role at all. In both novels this question is articulated in relation to the notion of the sacred. In *2666,* Fate, the African-American journalist who arrives to Santa Teresa in order to cover a boxing match, raises this question. As he is eating dinner with Charly Cruz and Chucho Flores, two Santa Teresa men he had met a few days prior, Charly Cruz begins to speak about the end of the sacred. He is not sure when the end of the sacred actually began, whether it was in the churches or in families when fathers started abandoning the mothers. However, he continues, a movie can recreate the sense of the sacred, if it is watched in the solitude of one's living room: "A partir de ese momento todo depende de la película y de ti. Si todo va bien, que no siempre va bien, uno està otra vez en la presencia de lo *sagrado*" (p.398) ["After that it all depends on the movie and on you. If things work out, and sometimes they don't, you're back in the presence on the sacred" (p.315)]. This discussion leads Fate to reflect on the meaning of sacred: "¿Qué es para mí lo sagrado? pensó Fate. ¿El dolor impreciso que siento ante la desaparición de mi madre? ¿El conocimiento de lo que no tiene remedio? ¿O esta especie de calambre en el estómago que siento cuando miro a esta mujer?" (p.399) ["what's sacred to me? The vague pain I feel at the passing of my mother? An understanding of what can't be fixed? Or the kind of pang in the stomach I feel when I look at this woman?" (p.315)].The question of the sacred reappears a little later on, in a somewhat different form. As Emilio Garibay, the oldest medical examiner in Santa Teresa, begins to reflect

on his life, he mentions that he is an atheist, and that he had not read a book in years. He then continues to say: “A veces pensaba que ya no leía precisamnete por ser ateo. Digamos que la no lectura era el escalón más alto del ateísmo o al menos del ateísmo tal cual él lo concebía. ¿Si no crees en Dios, cómo creer en un pinche libro?” (p.687) [“Sometimes he thought it was precisely because he was an atheist that he didn’t read anymore. Not reading, it might be said, was the highest expression of atheism or at least of atheism as he conceived it. If you don’t believe in God, how do you believe in a fucking book?” (p.550)].

The question of the sacred and its meaning emerges in Glissant’s novel as well: “Mathieu Béluse pourtant, qui ressemblait au déparleur, c’est-à-dire, dans ces riens qui important tellement, et d’ailleurs vous n’avez pas oublié que Mathieu, déparleur, chroniqueur, romancier, c’était quatre-en-un, sinon davantage, lui aurait sans doute argué que seuls les matérialistes, si l’appellation vaut et tient encore, ont le sens du sacré” (p.345). Both authors represent a world with no overarching system of values, aside from material accumulation and possessions. The only thing that remains sacred, or that is promoted as sacred, is the continual flow of capital, and its association with the myth of constant growth and development. In this aspect, both Bolaño and Glissant fall in line with Baudrillard’s analysis of global capitalism as producing and promoting valuelessness: “Classical, historical domination imposed a system of positive values, displaying as well as defending these values. Contemporary hegemony, on the other hand, relies on a symbolic liquidation of every possible value” (p.35). Globalization, Baudrillard continues, aside from its technical aspect, ultimately operates through a degradation and desecration of every system of value, which is replaced, either by consensus or force, by the ‘simulacrum of development and growth’” (p.66). Universal development is of course an unattainable ideal since global development relies on the underdevelopment of the Global South. But the larger question

posed by both novels is whether and in what ways are literary works capable of producing value within the overall system of its erasure.

In his interview for *Pour une littérature-monde*, Glissant argues that if there is anything political about poetry, it is its capacity to express the relationality of peoples in what he calls the "totalité-monde." A political consciousness must be able to think the world in the totality of its relations, and to assess the position of different cultures in this world totality. Glissant then continues to differentiate between two types of writers, those that merely reproduce the world and those that venture into its depths: "Il existe, bien sûr, des poètes militants qui écrivent des poèmes comme on écrit des tracts mais c'est ce que j'appelle la litéralité, des gens qui, littéralement, copient le monde. Or, ce qu'il y a de fondamental dans l'art, c'est le moment ou on abandonne le littéral, la thèse, etc., et ou on essaie de voir ce qui se passe au fond, ce que le poète est le seul à voir. Quand je dis le poète, je ne veux pas parler de celui qui écrit des poèmes mais de celui qui a une conception du vrai rapport entre poétique et politique… "[32] Glissant mobilizes here a problematic notion of a "true" relation between poetics and politics. Several critics, including Chris Bongie, have responded critically to this type of binary thinking. According to Bongie, this is a "post-political" gesture "in which political action at the 'literal' level can always be written off as superficial or false (mere 'ideology'). True politics is elsewhere, and it is an elsewhere best accessed by those who have earned the name of 'poets': those who have left behind old ideological struggles; and are uniquely equipped to show the rest of the world the right way forward."[33] Glissant further confirms this reading as he writes: "En matière de politique, ma référence la plus haute était aussi le monde, non pas le monde conçu comme l'internationale des prolétaires, mais comme lieu de rencontre, de choc des cultures, des

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[32] *Pour une littérature-monde*, p.84
[33] *Transnational French Studies*, p.130

humanités."[34] This opposition between politics as class expression and politics as cultural expression begs many questions. In fact, it corresponds to Bongie's characterization of a post-political gesture, a gesture that distances itself from any overarching political ideology, in this case Marxism. Glissant's skepticism towards Marxism can be understood from a postcolonial perspective. But this argument, in a problematic manner, posits the workers' international as a form of homogenization that does not correspond to the diversity of the contemporary world. It separates the economic from the cultural and assumes "cultural encounters" to be immune to class dynamics.

A similar gesture appears in Bolaño's writing. In an interview, Bolaño reiterates that the search for origin is one of literature's objectives: "…del escritor que entiende el arte como una aventura vitalista, y en otras ocasiones del narrador y del poeta como detectivas en busca del 'origen del mal,' y por ello condenados desde el principio a la derrota" ["…of the writer who understands art to be a vitalist adventures, and on other occasions of the narrator and the poet as detectives in search of 'the origin of evil,' and for that reason bound to failure from the very beginning"].[35] The author stages a never-ending search for the origin of evil, a search that in spite of its unlikely outcome, literature must conduct. Furthermore, in *Entre Paréntesis*, Bolaño explains that literature is a dangerous enterprise as writing entails the courage to venture into the dark and jump into the void. Bolaño compares the narrator and the poet to a detective constantly in search of the origin of evil, and thus, from the beginning, condemned to failure. In this encounter with "el monstruo," Bolaño continues, the writer must "tener el valor, sabiendo

[34] *Pour une littérature-monde*, p.77
[35] Bolaño, Roberto, and Ignacio Echevarría. *Entre paréntesis: ensayos, artículos y discursos (1998-2003).* Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2004, p.36

previamente que vas a ser derrotado, y salir a pelear: eso es la literatura" ["have courage, knowing that he will be defeated, he must go out and fight: that is literature"]. [36]

Albeit from different perspectives, both authors strive to retrieve and reassert the specificity of literature and its political function, by endowing the writer with special hindsight. This attempt to define the politics of literature is a struggle; both authors remain fairly vague in their explanation of literature's purpose. It is not fully clear what it means to dive into the "depths" of reality nor is it fully clear what the search for the "origin of evil" entails. The representational quality of literature is, however, preserved- literature still represents the world, but it represents aspects of it that we (non-writers) are incapable of seeing. Literature must engage reality, but there seem to be two realities, one that everyone has access to, and another one that only literature can expose. Furthermore, while rejecting any explicit ideological affiliation both writers cannot extricate themselves from an ideological vocabulary. Literature's purpose is still articulated through the concepts of good/bad, surface/depth, sacred/profane. In an attempt to locate the political outside of ideology, Glissant resorts to culture as a pure category, extricable from other forms of experience. Bolaño performs a similar gesture in regards to morality. This philosophical position actually contradicts the representation of globalization as a totalizing system extending across multiple domains.

My intention is not to categorize Glissant and Bolaño as either political or nonpolitical writers, or to resolve the contradictions they are facing, but rather to trace the engagement of literary authors with globalization as a constant struggle to carve their position and purpose. Understanding the contradictions inherent in contemporary literary production can help advance our reflection on both the politics of globalization and the politics of dissent. Baudrillard argues

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[36] Ibid, p.226

that if domination ends with a revolution, hegemony can only be attacked through inversion and reversion. Domination creates its exterior and can thus be overthrown from the outside. There is no exterior to hegemony, which can only be "inverted or reversed from the inside."[37] Any political gesture stands in an ambiguous relationship to the existing power distribution; including literature. Within this framework, we may need to rethink what it means to dissent or contest. I want to preserve Glissant's and Bolaño's understanding of literature as a quest for a different type of knowledge and a different way of seeing. But in order to distance myself from the binary oppositions that they present us with, I will take cue from Rancière's understanding of dissensus as a process of reframing reality in order to argue that by doing so, literary works can create potential lines of flight, occasional moments of possibility.

Reframing globalization

According to Rancière, fiction generates knowledge by reframing the real: "'Fiction'….is not a term that designates the imaginary as opposed to the real; it involves the reframing of the 'real,' or the framing of a dissensus. Fiction is a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective."[38] Dissensus must be understood in relation to its opposite, consensus. According to Rancière, we are currently living in the time of "consensus," characterized by an acceptance of the present distribution of roles and an absence of alternatives to the current "distribution of the sensible." For Rancière, dissensus is an interruption, a break inserted into the "common sense," into the

[37] Baudrillard, *Agony of Power*, p.34

[38] Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, p.141.

frame within which we see something as given. Politics breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of authority or subordination, assigning them to private or public lives. What is being disrupted are not only the hierarchies of a given social order, but, more importantly, the perceptual and conceptual coordinates of that order and the naturalness that is attached to it. Aesthetic experience, through the free play of the imagination, can destabilize the "natural" distribution of the sensible. For Rancière, the political dimension of art grows out of its capacity to suspend the normal coordinates of sensory experience and to imagine new possibilities of what can be seen, said, and thought, consequently leading to a "new landscape of the possible."

While I find Rancière's discussion of the relation between aesthetics and politics convincing, it is nonetheless surprising that he never engages with francophone or transnational works of fiction. Whereas the examples he uses in the domain of visual arts and film are contemporary and span various geographical regions, when dealing with literature, Rancière remains within the Western canon, using as his central examples Balzac and Flaubert. One cannot help but wonder why this is the case: does transnational literature strain against and point to the limits of Rancière's model?

I contend that Rancière's unwillingness or inability to engage with authors such as Glissant and Bolaño stems from his repudiation of the representational value of literature. In fact, Rancière makes an explicit distinction between the model of art that relies on representational mediation and one that relies on aesthetic distance. The politics of aesthetics, Rancière argues, is not to be found in an alternative model of behavior that art provides or in an analysis of the dimensions of power. Works of art, he contends, create moments of dissensus precisely because they do not have a specific social function, offer no specific lessons or address no specific

audience. This is clearly a very different theorization of aesthetics from Glissant's for whom the writer, and especially one from the Caribbean, performs specific social functions, as he/she reclaims the repressed historical memory, as well as the space and language that the colonized population has been dispossessed of. But, I would like to suggest that these aspects are not mutually exclusive, as there is no reason why works that include an analysis of power structures could not also provoke effects of dissensus, precisely by reframing the ways in which we understand that power and our current reality. In fact, by operating on both levels, Glissant and Bolaño can help us rethink the question of dissensus in the age of globalization. I will focus here on two specific narrative instances that open up this possibility for a globalized dissensus.

In *Tout-Monde*, the chapter entitled "Mycéa, c'est moi" is structured around two opposing forms of thinking: the "banalité bétonnée des gens d'aisance" and the "mangrove." The mangrove is for Glissant an incarnation of the rhizome, a plurality of relations that does not stem out of or return to a single origin. The mangrove is the middle ground between earth and water, characterized by incredible biodiversity, its capacity to protect the shore and purify the air. It is no accident that the narrator tells us that an airport supposed to attract new tourists is being built on the mangrove. The confrontation of two forms of thinking takes place precisely through the confrontation between a group of tourists and the mangrove: "Un car de touristes comme par exprès, était arrêté sur un chemin de traverse, le chauffeur important expliquait le paysage, l'emplacement prévu pour l'agrandissement de l'aéroport, l'Hôtel six étoiles qui serait construit à côté, le nouveau stade couvert ou les Harlem Globe Troters étaient venus jouer, le nombre impressionnant de terrains de tennis…" (p.229). As the tourist guide is pointing to all the different signs of progress that have come to replace the mangrove, tourists are appalled by a stench coming from the mud being removed in order to facilitate future construction. To their

questions about the origin of such an unappealing smell, Mathieu replies: “Qu’est ce qu’il soulèvent ainsi? Le corps rétif d’Anastasie…le corps meurtri- en bout de tant d’histoires déroulées tout du long- que les tracteurs aveugles, mais qui n’oublient jamais rien, auront distrait de son repos et, tout autant, de sa si longue pérégrination” (p.230). The integration of Martinique into the neoliberal global economic framework can only happen on the cadaver of Anastasie.

As I have demonstrated earlier, Anastasie is the one who exhibits a cross-cultural memory, the one who is able to think of her oppression through a transnational framework. Her “délire” is an expression of the repressed historical memory. Pouring cement over Anastasie’s remains becomes an allegorical way of “cleaning up” historical tensions and preventing the formation of a collective consciousness: “But his contradiction- not being clarified within the collective consciousness, where historical memory has not been able to play its cumulative role- feeds a morbidly irrational mechanism, which allows us to accept the implied logic that suggests that from historical evolution to social evolution our community has ‘progressed’ towards consumerism that threatens it today.”[39] Consumerism has become capitalism’s way of subduing social tensions that it inevitably creates, by proposing the shopping mall as the utopian vision of collective existence. This instrumentalization of consumer culture is an issue that has been raised with particular force in the French Caribbean, a site of cultural encounter and of the repression of historical memory.

But the poignancy of this passage does not only lie in a straightforward critique of globalization but also in the specific articulation of space that it provides. In fact, the paragraph deals precisely with the partition of land. On the one hand is the tourist guide recounting a future division of space, a capitalist projection of future spatial configuration. Next to it is the

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[39] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p.93

construction truck performing an actual reconfiguration of space and encountering as an obstacle the remains of Anastasie's body. The materiality of the body is juxtaposed to the virtual configuration of capitalist planning and development. The question raised relates to what is visible or not in a certain social and economic configuration, and what needs to be erased or ignored for that configuration to function. The narrative of harmonious capitalist development and progress is interrupted by a rancid smell whose origin cannot be fully identified. It gestures towards an excess, an extra-subjectivity that cannot be encompassed into the neoliberal global logic, and that by its very presence outlines the limits of that system. The body literally needs to be buried for the capitalist phantasy to materialize; at the same time, it can never be fully hidden as it returns to hunt the capitalist imagination by marking its presence.

If we return to Rancière's definition of consensus as consisting "in the annulation of dissensus as separation of the sensible from itself, in the nullification of surplus subjects, in the reduction of the people to the sum of the parts of the social body and of the political community to the relations between the interests and aspirations of these different parts,"[40] then the excavation of Anastasie's body is precisely the excavation of that surplus subject, the one that cannot be fully identified yet which reminds the system of its contingency. Once again, it is not about a cause-consequence relation between the building of infrastructure and Anastasie's body or about concluding that capitalism lead to Anastasie's death, but rather about disrupting what is perceived as the natural distribution and use of space, the most efficient attribution of space to a specific purpose. It is about the introduction of a disruptive element, which at the same time is and is not foreign, since it has always been the carrier of historical alternatives. In his contribution to *Pour une littérature-monde*, Glissant insists on the importance of poetic

[40] Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, p.42.

reappropriation of landscape as a political gesture: "…dans cette relation des cultures du monde, et en particulier dans cette relation entre colonisés et colonisateurs, l'espace est un des éléments fondamentaux. Quand on ne maîtrise pas, qu'on ne fréquente pas librement son espace, qu'entre le paysage et vous il existe toute une série de barrières qui sont celles de la dépossession et de l'exploitation, la relation au paysage est évidemment limitée et garrottée. Par conséquent, libérer la relation au paysage par l'acte poétique, par le dire poétique, est faire œuvre de libération."[41] This act of liberation will most likely remain unfulfilled as the capitalist imagination of space is already on its way to being realized. But a different configuration of global space emerges onto the scene, for a moment, at least. This imaginative gesture is accompanied by the text's reflection on its own limits as language is trying to convey space and smell, two dimensions usually out of its bounds. What are the limits of language in conveying the current transformations of the world? In the same way that language will never be able to fully convey smell or space, the "liberatory" act remains incomplete. Or rather, in the constant process of formation.

The construction of globalized spaces is also addressed in *2666*. The narrator insists repeatedly on the fragmentary nature of reality in Santa Teresa. As the prominent American investigator Albert Kessler drives in a taxi around Santa Teresa he:

> …volvío a mirar el paisaje fragmentado o en proceso de fragmentación constante, como un puzzle que se hacía y deshacía a cada Segundo, y le dijo al que conducía que lo llevara al basurero El Chile, el mayor basurero clandestino de Santa Teresa, más grande que el basurero municipal, en donde iban a depositar las basuras no solo los camiones de las maquiladoras sino también los camiones de la basura contratados por el alcaldía y los camiones y camionetas de basura de algunas empresas privadas que trabajaban con subcontractos o en zonas licitadas que no cubrían los servicios públicos… (p.752).

[41] *Pour une littérature-monde,* p.79.

> …looked out again at the landscape, fragmented or in the constant process of fragmentation, like a puzzle assembled and disassembled, and told the driver to take him to the illegal dump el Chile, the biggest illegal dump in Santa Teresa, bigger than the city dump, where waste was disposed of not only by the maquiladora trucks but also by garbage trucks contracted by the city and some private garbage trucks and pick-ups, subcontracted or working in areas that public service didn't cover… (p.602).

The question I would like to address is what kind of framing of globalization emerges out of this image? What does it mean for an idea of the global to emerge, literally, out of a pile of trash? El Chile serves as a metaphor for Santa Teresa, a place where national and international waste is being dumped, including the bodies of Santa Teresa women. This sentence contains the complex economic reality of Santa Teresa, the relation between the shrinking public sector and the expanding influence of multinational corporations. El Chile replicates the idea of a fragmentary landscape, a product of the accumulation of different wastes and, like Santa Teresa, a result of the superposition of different realities, all interconnected through the logic of global capitalism. Furthermore, El Chile is an illegal dump; created on land that is neither public nor private, it contains the waste of both sectors. It exists within the bounds of Santa Teresa, yet the city has no jurisdiction over it; it is used by the multinationals but they do not claim it. This pile of trash represents a specific framing of the conflicting relation between the private and the public, the national and the multinational. What does it mean for the state to not have legislative control over the multinationals and for multinationals to not be invested in a specific national space? What sort of spaces and subjectivities does this configuration allow for? These questions do not need to be explicitly answered, the image of El Chile, and the bodies of maquiladora workers buried in it, allow us to think through them.

The presence of the taxi window, through which the landscape is seen, introduces an

additional spatial division. In fact, in many other scenes as well characters observe Santa Teresa through a window (be it of a taxi or a hotel), reaffirming the inside/outside opposition. In this specific passage, there is a confrontation between the contained space of the American investigator and the continuously expanding space of El Chile. What is seen is always seen from a safe distance and a protected environment, indicative of the power relation between the subject and the object of the gaze. But this scene could also be interpreted as Bolaño's reflection on the role of literature and its limits. The exposure of the reality of the "other" inevitably entails a voyeuristic, non-participatory gaze. An effect reproduced by the entire novel, perhaps.

El Chile reappears throughout the novel as both a political space and an aesthetic object (interestingly enough, it is also named after the Latin American country which served as one of the first neoliberal experiments). The passage, similarly to Glissant's, can be read in terms of the production of excess. The constant piling of trash, originating from different places is the result of the logic of capitalist accumulation, yet, at the same time, escapes its grasp. The tension between containment and overflowing is persistent. The system produces its own waste that it attempts to discard, but which will ultimately engulf it as the pile becomes too large to manage.

It is no surprise that the dead maquiladora workers appear precisely in this space that belongs to no one and that no one is accountable for. The presence of these bodies dressed in blue jeans and Nike shoes, among the waste of El Chile, disrupts the supposed separation of the public and the private, the national and the transnational. The police interpret these murders as "private" incidences conducted by individuals, but the corpses emerge within a space that is neither public nor private, covered in trash that is both public and private. These discarded bodies continuously return to haunt the capitalist logic of progress and development. This passage allows us to think about the materiality of globalization but also about the question of

representation. Can language contain this process of never-ending accumulation? Chile, in fact, can be read as a metaphor for the novel itself: fragments being constantly assembled and disassembled, the continuous piling of details, descriptions and characters. This self-reflexive gesture can lead us to wonder whether the endless descriptions of raped and murdered female bodies are the literary equivalent of this accumulation of trash. If these bodies produce an excess to the system of constant commodification and exchange, what is the linguistic equivalent? One possible answer appears to be the novel that Archimboldi's sister is reading on the plane, a novel that, like the pile of trash, ultimately collapses upon itself destroying its very possibility. *2666*, however, remains a novel, and a bestselling one. In other words, as within Glissant' novel, the liberatory gesture remains incomplete, or rather, in the constant process of (re)formulation.

The language of globalization

I would like to conclude on a different act of reframing, the act of reframing language. Both novels encompass several national territories raising the following question: in what language can globalization be told?

Glissant advocates against the idea of monolingual writing when he states that he writes in France "en présence de toutes les langues du monde." As Celia Britton explains in her article "Transnational languages in Glissant's Tout-Monde," the plurilingualism that Glissant strives for is an ethical commitment to the importance of preserving all languages that are in danger of being obliterated by English and to a lesser extent French. This process does not entail a simple introduction of foreign words into a French text, but rather "the importation into French of large-

scale discursive structures that are typical, for instance, of the Caribbean folktale."[42] For Glissant, language is an open-ended system where stylistic and discursive structures from different languages influence each other. "Multilingualism" also distinguishes the "déparleur" from the "poète." The "déparleur," is the one who can unite the oral and the written; the one who can write with and through oral linguistic structures. In other words, the multilinguism takes place within and through French, by constructing a form of globalized French, influenced by other linguistic structures. Whether, and how, this becomes visible for the reader is a question worth exploring. At the very beginning of the novel, while in Italy, Mathieu meets Amina whom he believes to be a gypsy, since "elle était capable de toutes les langues du monde" (p.40). Amina speaks perfect French; her multilingualism thus does not stem from a tendency to introduce foreign words into French, but rather, from her special way of uttering French: "elle ne trébuchait pas, n'hésitait pas, mais s'étonnait, oui s'étonnait avec elegance, à l'amorce de chacune de ses paroles" (p.40). This understanding of multilingualism relates it to orality rather than to written language, further complicating the question of what it means to write in a multiplicity of languages; in French. Ultimately, the narrator can only *describe* what Amina is doing, but cannot reproduce it in writing.

In *2666*, the question of language is never explicitly addressed, even though we are constantly witnessing various degrees of translation. In fact, it is never stated what language(s) the characters speak. The scene with the Pakistani taxi driver takes place in London and the cab driver comments on the fact that he can tell by the critics' accents that they are not from England. He then mentions that in "his language" there exists a word to describe Norton- "puta"/"whore." He is assumingly, at this point, speaking English, yet the entire passage is

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[42] Britton, Celia. "Transnational Languages in Glissant's Tout-monde." *World writing: poetics, ethics, globalization*. Gallagher, Mary (Ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008., p.70.

written in Spanish which is never explicitly acknowledged or posited as a problem. Furthermore, an interesting act of translation occurs here. The driver's statement that there exists a specific word in his language to describe Norton, rests on the cultural specificity of the concept he is trying to communicate. At the same time, it appears that he pronounces the word in English (since the critics understand it and thus get angry), performing an act of translation that assumes the universality of the concept. The narration, however, never comments on these multiple levels of translation. In the same manner, we don't really know which languages are being spoken in Santa Teresa. Does everyone speak Spanish, including Fate, the Africa-American journalist? It is quite surprising that in a novel that "spans the globe," the question of translation and communication is never raised.

I would like to suggest that these discrepant attitudes towards language are indicative of and have resulted in Glissant's and Bolaño's different positions within the literary world. One could argue that by ignoring the question of language, Bolaño anticipates the status of his novel as a global commodity. If a conversation between a Pakistani taxi driver and four European critics, which presumable takes place in English, can be recounted in Spanish, then it can be recounted in any language. The novel thus paves the way for its translation. Glissant's understanding of language, on the other hand, renders it almost untranslatable and as such, unsuitable to a globalized market. If *Tout-Monde* attempts to construct a "globalized" French, inflected by foreign linguistic structures, then a translation entails a transposition into, for example, a "globalized" English, equally affected by different grammatical structures. This is quite a daunting task.

In their attempts to think the globalization of language, both authors produce a contradiction. Glissant's *Tout-Monde,* a novelistic ambition to imagine the world in the totality

of its relations, remains accessible to a very limited audience, one with a strong grasp of French. Bolaño, on the other hand, by taking the process of translation for granted, opens up his novel to a global audience. At the same time, he assumes a universal transparency of experiences, instead of addressing a more interesting issue of how globalized spaces and subjects are construed through various processes of translation and mistranslation.

The question of language in a globalized world brings us back to the manifesto *Pour une littérature-monde en Français*, its monolingualism and the question of world literature. As mentionned in the introduction, the signatories of the manifesto argue for the return of the world as referent in literary works; they advocate for a world literature in French, which focuses on the world. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the notion of the world as literary referent is quite complex. Both Glissant and Bolaño attempt to engage this issue as they explore both what it means to represent globalization and whether literary authors, in their attempt to engage contemporary economic processes, can move beyond representation. Furthermore, both the manifesto and the two novels analyzed in this chapter seem unable to resolve the problem of representational plurilingualism.

Both Bolaño and Glissant, as well as Diome and Condé in the previous chapter, place an emphasis on the role of the writer, and the development of the cultural sphere in the globalized world. What is quite specific about Bolaño's novel, however, is that the scholarly quest for a disappeared writer is interrupted by a series of descriptions of murdered women, most of whom are maquiladora workers. Bolaño juxtaposes the critical question for knowledge (of an absent author) to the given materiality of the female workers' bodies. The superposition of these two parts raises the question about the relation between the literary field and the production of precarious labor. The following chapter will further explore this question. I will address the

question of the globalized Atlantic through the category of precarious labor, in relation to the work of two contemporary Atlantic world authors, Belgo-Gabonese Bessora and Chilean Diamela Eltit.

Chapter Three

How to Say 'All Work and no Play': Work, Language and Literature in *Petroleum* and *Mano de Obra*

In a 2005 interview, Senegalese writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène fiercely denounced economic globalization while underlining the ongoing importance of class struggle: "Class struggle always exists. The free market is not just a way of production, it is also an ideology. Maybe today's workers are not as fierce as they used to be 20 years ago, but we can't talk about social justice being achieved without class struggle. Globalization has brought nothing to Africa, and trumpeting that word is hypocrisy – especially coming from the U.S., Britain and France."[1] Decades earlier, during his time as a dock worker in Marseille and as a railway worker in Senegal, in the 1940s and 50s, Sembène became very active in the labor movement, through his involvement both in the communist-led CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) and the French Communist Party. His literary and cinematic work reflect his interest in labor conditions and accord a central place to the figure of the worker. *Le docker noir* (1956), Sembène's first novel, focuses on an immigrant dock worker in Marseille, and *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) fictionalizes the real-life story of a railroad strike on the Dakar-Niger line between 1947 and 1948.[2] In his works of the 1950s and 60s, Sembène focused on work conditions during colonial times and immediately after independence. In the 1990s and 2000s, a new generation of writers from across the Atlantic, has explored the reorganization of labor under global neoliberalism.

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[1] Olende,Ken and Kimber Charlie. "Interview with Ousmane Sembène- Father of African Film." *The Socialist Worker.*11 June 2005. Web. 2 Sept. 2013 <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art/6498/Interview+with+Ousmane+Semb%C3%A8ne+%E2%80%94+father+of+African+film>

[2] Sembène, Ousmane. *Le docker noir*. Paris: Présence africaine, 1973
Sembène, Ousmane. *Les bouts de bois de Dieu = Banty mam Yall*. Paris: Les Livre Contemporain, 2007

Several of the novels analyzed in previous chapters (*2666*, *Tout-Monde*, *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*) focus on the figure of the writer and by extension the cultural worker in the age of globalization. Furthermore, in a number of contemporary narratives exploring globalization, the figure of the writer is interwoven with that of the industrial worker. While the two contemporary Atlantic world writers analyzed in this chapter, Chilean Diamela Eltit and Belgo-Gabonese Bessora, also place the notion of work at the center of their fictions, they approach the topic from a different angle. Unlike the novels studied thus far, both Bessora's *Petroleum* (2004)[3] and Eltit's *Mano de Obra* (2002)[4] are characterized by a lack of movement and permeability of space. Both narratives take place almost entirely in the workplace. The workplaces chosen, nonetheless, differ in nature: whereas Bessora focuses her attention on one of the largest ships extracting oil from the Atlantic Ocean, Eltit sets her novel in the more mundane setting of the supermarket. Even when the plot of *Petroleum* drifts off the confined space of the ship, the narrative still takes place mostly within indoor spaces such as the gated community where the employees of the multinational oil company, Elf-Gabon, live and the taxis or limousines in which they navigate the African city. The two chosen locations embody two opposing (yet inevitably connected) poles of the globalized economy: on the one hand the increasing shift to a service economy, especially in larger cities; [5] on the other, the continuous exploitation of natural resources, leading to ecological damage and the questioning of the model of development and growth. Within their different settings, both narratives place the workforce at the center of our understanding of globalization, and gesture towards a need for a restructuring of labor conditions as well as a rethinking of the relation between life and work.

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[3] Bessora. *Petroleum: roman*. Paris: Denoël, 2004.
[4] Eltit, Diamela. *Mano de obra*. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena, 2002.
[5] See, Sassen, Saskia. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.

The notion of work has been at the center of many theoretical debates around globalization and its alternatives. Feminist Marxist critic Silvia Federici, for example, describes the emergence of a new International Division of Labor (NIDL) to be the primary characteristic of globalization: "My own perspective is that 'globalization' is a strategy seeking to determine a process of global proleterianization and the formation of a global labor market as means to cheapen the cost of labor, reduce workers' entitlements, and intensify exploitation. These, in fact, are the most unmistakable effects of the policies by which globalization is driven."[6] The past few decades have been marked by a significant de-industrialization in the Global North, the rise of off-shore manufacturing and the industrialization of the Global South, as part of the 'development' process. Sociologists such as Saskia Sassen have argued that the global restructuring of labor has also led to a new gender division: "immigration and off-shore production have evolved into mechanisms for the massive incorporation of Third World women into wage labor."[7] Debate has furthermore sparked around the naming of this contemporary labor force. Noam Chomsky, for instance, has suggested that our contemporary society is divided into the 'plutonomy' and the 'precariat.' The term 'precariat,' as opposed to the commonly used term 'proleteriat,' in Chomsky's view, more adequately describes our current situation, since the main characteristic of contemporary labor is the unavailability and instability of jobs, the lack of benefits and security and the proliferation of short term contracts in place of full-time positions.[8] The term further implies the breakdown of old class divisions and associated modes of social and political struggle. As such, it has led to the fragmentation of critique and opposition; the focus on

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[6] Fenneke Reysoo, *Genre, mondialisation et pauvreté*, Cahiers Genre et Développement, n.3, Genève : iuéd-efi; Paris : L'Harmattan, 2002, 255 p., pp. 45-69.
[7] Sassen, Saskia. *Globalization and Its Discontents*: [Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money]. New York: New Press, 1998. p.111.
[8] Chomsky, Noam. "Plutonomy and the Precariat." *Huffington Post.* 05 Aug. 2012. Web. 31 Oct. 2013 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/noam-chomsky/plutonomy-and-the-precari_b_1499246.html>

labor unions, salaries, workers' benefits 'at home,' and the focus on migration and globalization, often being analyzed separately.

Another set of commentators, including Marxist theorists Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, have adopted the concept of affective or immaterial labor in opposition to the more traditional category of material labor, in order to highlight the shift to service economies in the Global North: "Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we define the labor involved in this production as *immaterial labor* — that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication."[9] Along similar lines, various activists and theorists have placed work, and especially its refusal, at the center of the contemporary struggle for social and economic justice. Autonomous Marxist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has argued that the upcoming insurrection will "not be an insurrection of energy, but an insurrection of slowness, withdrawal and exhaustion."[10] Similarly, radical anthropologist David Graeber has proposed the global cancellation of debts and a significant reduction of work as a way out of the current economic crisis.[11] The notion of 'overwork' is at the center of these various arguments. The politics of continuous economic growth, which has led to significant environmental degradation, has been sustained by an ideological commitment to work, efficiency and productivity. Contemporary social change thus requires a new politics of labor, which would move beyond the struggle for better pay and hours, and rethink our relation to work.

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[9]Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.290
[10] Berardi, Franco. *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance.* Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012, p.69
[11] Graeber, David. "A Practical Utopian's Guide to the Coming Collapse." *The Baffler:* 22 (2013). Web. 31 Oct. 2013.< http://www.thebaffler.com/past/practical_utopians_guide>

The politics of global labor is at the center of Bessora's and Eltit's narratives. Both authors attempt to represent a complex international division of labor that can no longer be understood from a simply national point of view. At the same time, they caution against a simplistic opposition between material and immaterial labor, the precariat and the proleteriat. Eltit's supermarket as well as Bessora's oil rig are characterized by a complex imbrication of life and work, production and consumption. Furthermore, as literary texts, *Petroleum* and *Mano de obra* reflect on the place of language as both a site of work and a site of resistance. In my reading I take a cue from Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's analysis of contemporary labor relations in *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. That is, I emphasize the crucial place of language in today's workplace as the medium through which work is done. If neoliberalism has led to the increased commodification of different social spheres, language too has been subjected to the laws of commercial exchange. The crisis of today's global economy can thus also be approached as a crisis of language: the difficulty of extrapolating communication from the realm of finance and profit, and of articulating a language that doesn't reproduce current modes of oppression and marginalization. In *The Coming Insurrection*, the French radical collective *Tiqqun* holds that we have yet to formulate a language that can adequately express our common experience. According to *Tiqqun*, whereas every struggle creates "a language in which a new order expresses itself," this is not occurring today.[12] Though this statement seems difficult to prove or refute, it informs the guiding question of this chapter: in what ways have works of fiction articulated the experience of today's workers, proposed an alternative relation to work and foregrounded the place of language in these dynamics?

[12] Comité invisible. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009, p.26.

According to Berardi, over the past few decades the accumulation of profit through risky financial speculations, such as ‘futures’ and ‘derivatives,’ has become progressively dissociated from the production of goods. Financial markets are increasingly relying on the production of services that are exchanged through communication. Language has thus been incorporated into the work process to an unprecedented level. Berardi focuses extensively on the concept of ‘insolvency,’ as not only the refusal of ‘debt’ owed to the financial class but also “the line of escape from the reduction of language to exchange.”[13] The poetic task is thus to produce an ‘excess’ of language that supersedes capitalist modes of relation. Like Tiqqun’s, Berardi’s argument remains at an abstract level. It is not entirely clear what it would entail for language to produce a form of excess that moves beyond the logic of exchange. Nonetheless, this argument informs my reading of Eltit and Bessora as it places language at the center of contemporary economic and social processes, while also endowing literary texts with the political task of reconfiguring the relation between language and work.

While both authors question the role of language in today’s social and economic global configuration, it is important to note that in doing so, they take different routes. Whereas Eltit resorts to poetic and opaque language, Bessora embraces the vernacular genre of crime fiction, as well as a return to African mythology and the language of the supernatural.

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[13] Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, p.17.

The new global Atlantic: oil, ships, and multinationals

The daughter of a Gabonese diplomat and granddaughter of a Swiss confectioner, Bessora was born in Brussels. After earning degrees in management and applied economics, she pursued a career in finance before dramatically changing course. After a long stay in South Africa, she enrolled in a doctoral program in anthropology in Paris and published her first novel in 1999. In 2001 she obtained the Fénéon Prize for her novel *Les Taches d'encre*.[14] The Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire was awarded to her in 2007 for her novel *Cueillez-moi jolis messieurs...*[15] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the question of finance, and especially the relation between finance and language plays an important role in her literary work.

Petroleum begins at the end, or rather with a prophecy of the ending. The Ocean Liberator, an oil ship belonging to the Elf-Gabon multinational, is drilling deeper than ever before in an effort to uncover the last remaining source of oil in Gabon. Onboard the ship we encounter an array of characters including Médée, a young geologist, who has been recruited from British Petroleum because she has thus far never failed to successfully locate the resource that the narrator suggestively names "la nomade noire." After a mysterious explosion on the ship, which takes the life of Etienne, the second in command, an investigator from Paris is invited to solve the crime. The main suspect is Jason, the local cook, for whom Médée has developed a passion and who has disappeared after the accident. Jason grew up with an aunt capable of communicating with the local spirits, deeply angered by the geologists' continuous profanation of the local land and water. Alidor Minko, a former union activist now the director of company's public relations, is also deeply involved in the investigation.

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[14] Bessora. *Les taches d'encre: roman*. Paris: Serpent à plumes, 2000.
[15] ---. *Cueillez-moi jolis messieurs--: roman*. [Paris]: Gallimard, 2006.

The novel depicts a more than century long history of 'progress' and 'development,' founded on the continuous extraction of resources, which has come to its point of exhaustion: "Après un long périple, l'Or noir rencontrera la faille. Son voyage s'achèvera par trois milles mètres de fond. Le Libérateur le délivrera des entrailles de la terre" (p.7). This dialectic between liberation and an impending apocalypse permeates the plot. Written in 2004, the novel inscribes itself into a growing global environmental movement that has pushed back against the principle of extraction, production and consumption.[16] *Petroleum* is clearly set in our contemporary moment in history, perceived as 'apocalyptical,' where planetary resources are depleting at an unprecedented rate. But what has reached an end is not merely natural resources. Economic and social paradigms of infinite growth have also come to a halt, as they have stumbled against the finitude of our planet. In *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil,* Timothy Mitchell argues that the relative accessibility of oil, since the 1950s and 1960s, has enabled the predominance of the economics of growth. Due to its continuously declining price, relative profusion and easy transport, oil appeared inexhaustible. Furthermore, economic growth, measured in terms of GNP, did not, until fairly recently, need to take into consideration the depletion of energy resources.[17] Nowadays, however, it is becoming evident that oil resources are limited. We are no longer operating from a position of abundance and accumulation, but rather, from one of exhaustion and lack. The novel raises the question of where we go from here; are the notions of exhaustion and lack emblematic of an unavoidable collapse or 'apocalypse,' or could they be the foundation of a new form of liberation? The neoliberal answer has thus far been the refusal of a paradigm shift. The liberatory act, within the context of Elf-Gabon and the Ocean

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[16] See, for instance, Pellow, David N. *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007.
[17] Mitchell, Timothy. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. London: Verso, 2011.

Liberator, is the discovery of untapped resources meant to postpone the 'apocalypse' caused by the lack. It thus promotes the same logic of capitalist expansion into unconquered markets, including the crust of the earth.

While it is not without referential dimensions, the discourse of depletion/exhaustion like that of discovery/progress, is a discourse that reflects various kinds of ideological and sociopolitical investments. Recently, for instance, it has been used in several European countries to justify austerity measures and cuts to public services.[18] Furthermore, in his analysis of the oil industry, Mitchell argues that oil companies themselves have, from the beginning, promoted the concept of scarcity, in order to keep oil prices high.[19] The environmental crisis thus does not exist independently from the many political discourses that claim it. *Petroleum* poses precisely the question of alternative framings.

The novel, however, operates within the indeterminacy of what a different mode of resistance and liberation could look like. It represents the present as a moment where ideological foundations are crumbling, yet the language of alternatives, fraught with anxieties about populism, ecological nostalgia etc., is only slowly emerging. Previous modes of resistance are represented as clearly inadequate to face the current capitalist crisis. The hierarchical structure onboard the Ocean Liberator is a result of a restructuring aimed at disempowering unionism and past labor struggles. Thus, we know that Alidor Minko, the chief of communications of Elf Gabon, was, in the past, one of the main union organizers. His silence, like that of many others, has been bought with a promotion and a salary raise: "Avec d'autres délégués syndicaux, il a dénoncé les inégalités, toutes les inégalités…La compagnie a acheté le silence de nombre de ses compagnons d'armes: le plus virulent d'entre eux, un dénommé Alidor Minko, père de Flavie,

[18] See Blyth, Mark. *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*. 2013.

est aujourd'hui assez bien payé pour être le directeur de la communication du groupe" (p.44). Unlike Sembène in whose work the union plays a significant role as a tool of political organizing, younger authors such as Bessora (and Eltit, as we will see later on), represent the union as an outdated model, no longer able to counter the power of large multinationals operating in a restructured global labor market.

Petroleum shifts back and forth between the present moment, identified both as the end of a paradigm and an open space for the imagination of alternatives, and a historical account of oil exploitation in Gabon. Myth, fiction and historical facts are intertwined as Bessora unravels the history of Gabon through the history of Elf-Gabon. The latter, it turns out, has a very controversial history, including, among other episodes, the trial of its top managers. Until its privatization in 1994, the company belonged to Elf-Aquitaine, a French oil company, which, the prosecutors argued, "worked as an unofficial arm of France's murkiest diplomacy." As it expanded into the African continent in the 1960s and 1970s, Elf paid bribes to African officials and funneled money into French politics.[20] The secretive and illegal nature of Elf affairs seems to condone its portrayal in the form of detective fiction.

The focus on Elf is, however, significant beyond its historical accuracy. Departing from the established novelistic paradigms of national/regional history, *Petroleum* stages the history of a company. As opposed to fictions in which the economic dimension is mentioned only insofar as it affects the lives of characters within a national setting, here the political and social dimensions are mentioned only insofar as they affect the life of the company. Instead of telling the story of Gabon, the novel recounts the history of Elf-Gabon, posing the question of whether

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[20] Astier, Henri. "Elf was secret arm of 'French policy'" *BBC News*. 19 March, 2003. Web. 31 Oct. 2013 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2862257.stm>

nation and corporation are in fact separable. Did the history of Gabon frame the history of Elf-Gabon or was it the other way around? The novel thus points to the inextricability of political and economic dimensions and presents us with a world where all dimensions of life have been overshadowed by the economic sphere. If Glissant's and Bolaño's narratives question the limits of expansion in an attempt to encompass the globalized world in all the complexity of its relations, in Bessora's, we see the opposite gesture, a shrinkage whereby the Ocean Liberator, a ship extracting petrol from the bottom of the sea, becomes a metaphor for the world.

The choice of the ship further gestures towards a transcolonial understanding of the Atlantic. At the basis of the Atlantic economy there has always been a ship. In his seminal work *Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy indeed posits the ship as the "first of the novel chronotypes presupposed by…. attempts to rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora into the western hemisphere."[21] The slave ship has, however, been replaced by the oil ship. The ship still operates as a metaphor of the world: it contains all the race, class, national, and gender divisions while at the same time being positioned outside national territory, but it is, additionally, a metaphor of the world as workplace. I argue that the nature of work in the age of globalization and the preponderance of the economic sphere make a multinational the most appropriate metaphor of the postcolonial, globalized world.

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[21] Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993, p.17.

The workplace and the space of capital

According to several autonomist Marxist theorists, including Antonio Negri and Franco Berardi, the characteristic feature of neoliberal capitalism is the lack of separation between the different domains of experience, and, more specifically, the lack of separation between work and life. Whereas during industrial capitalism the body was at work, today, in the era of what Berardi names 'Semiocapitalism,' the soul is at work. Our cognitive and intellectual abilities are increasingly being used in the spheres of service, communication, and creative industries: "The rise of post-Fordist modes of production, which I will call Semiocapitalism, takes the mind, language and creativity as its primary tools for the production of value. In the sphere of digital production, exploitation is exerted essentially on the semiotic flux produced by human time at work."[22] Today, the fact that our mind is increasingly involved in the work process impedes a clear separation between work and life: "There is no longer a distinction between life time and work time: all of your time has to be devoted to earning money, as money has taken the place of desire."[23] Whereas I agree with Berardi's assessment that most of the spheres of life have been penetrated by the capitalist logic of value and exchange, or what he terms the "inoculation of the enterprise principle to every space of human relations,"[24] I find his description of labor in the age of globalization too homogenous. The overt focus on 'immaterial' labor, for one thing, disregards the increased industrialization of the Global South and the expansion of the 'material' labor force exemplified by the entry of women in the Global South into the industrial workforce. The loss of interest in the industrial worker in the writing of many Western Marxist theorists is concomitant with the de-westernization and increased feminization of the industrial working

[22] Berardi, Franco. *The soul at work: from alienation to autonomy*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009, p.21
[23] Ibid, p.111
[24] Ibid, p.189

subject. The shift from the material to the immaterial worker ensures that the revolutionary subject remains, to a large extent, white and male. Furthermore, the clear-cut separation between material and immaterial labor is never brought into question. In contrast to the Marxist Autonomist philosophers, Bessora's representation of the work environment of the oil ship brings into question this a priori distinction between material and immaterial labor as it gestures towards a very complex imbrication of the two.

The process of oil extraction, a 'material' task, is accompanied by the 'immaterial' labor of the geologists, Médée and Etienne, their endless calculations and predictions. The entire staff of the ship is at the same time supported by the 'material' labor of Jason, the cook. Bessora traces the entire international chain of labor, which originates with natural resource extraction in Gabon and ends in financial speculations on Wall Street. Thus, 'immaterial' labor in New York City, often perceived as quantitatively unlimited speculation and accumulation, is, in fact, supported or made possible by the 'material' labor in Gabon. The abstractness of the financial market and its supposed capacity for infinite expansion have collided with the concrete and finite nature of both 'material' labor and natural resources, leading to the current economic and environmental crisis.

The choice of an oil barge, as a site of reflection about the contemporary division of labor, is significant, as it gestures towards contemporary modes of worker control. On board the Ocean Liberator local workers, in charge of the physical extraction of oil, are located at the bottom floor of the ship, under constant supervision of the foreign technicians, located straight above them: "Au sommet, les directeurs et cadres très supérieurs…Au milieu, un agrégat d'agents techniques et administratifs, classe moyenne à deux vitesses, la blanche et la noire, avec ascenseur dans le premier cas…En bas, les classes laborieuses strictement indigènes…Marne à

engraisser les deux premières” (p.9). The organization of the ship as workplace not only reflects, but rather perpetuates the race/class hierarchy, as it curbs workers’ potential for resistance. While it could be argued that the Ocean Liberator serves as a metaphor for a generic contemporary workplace, the specificity of the oil industry is emblematic of contemporary forms of labor organization. In *Carbon Democracy*, Mitchell explores the relation between carbon energy and modern democratic politics. According to him, the rise of the oil industry and its progressive replacement of the coal industry, enabled a new form of labor politics: “An important goal of the conversion to oil was to permanently weaken the coal miners, whose ability to interrupt the flow of energy had given organized labour the power to demand the improvements to collective life that had democratized Europe” (p.29). Spending most of their days in the mines, with no supervisors nearby, coal workers enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. They also controlled the transportation of coal, and were thus in a position to significantly disrupt the system. This led to several significant miner strikes in both England and the U.S. in the 1940s and 50s. The shift to oil entailed closer supervision of workers and significantly curbed their political power. Sharing their workspace with their supervisors, oil workers no longer benefited from spatial autonomy. Furthermore, oil pipelines, which require very little worker supervision, have been a lot less affected by labor actions.

In *Petroleum*, worker’s lack of autonomy and the constant presence of the company are conveyed through the spatial organization of both ship and city. On the one hand, there is a mental lack of separation between life and work. The explosion on the Ocean Liberator and the subsequent search for the perpetrator extend the workplace into all realms of social relations. Every conversation is interpreted as a potential ‘clue’ and every moment outside of work is used to uncover the truth about the workplace. This mental inability to not be at work is reinforced by

a physical inability to escape the domain of Elf-Gabon. Most of the novel takes place on the ship, in the office building on shore, or in the gated apartment complex, built for the employees of Elf-Gabon. Moreover, the city is divided by the Elf-Gabon Boulevard: "Elf bâtit son boulevard entre la compagnie forestière et la société pétrolière. Il est parallèle à un vieux canal qui autrefois séparait la ville blanche, interdite aux Noirs, des villages africains. En ce temps-là, la cité blanche prospérait en bordure de la baie qui, de siècle en siècle, vit naître et mourir des cases à sel, des entrepôts d'esclaves, des maisons de commerce, des filiales de compagnies concessionnaires, des parcs à bois.

Le canal séparait deux races.

Le boulevard sépare deux classes, dont l'une est noire" (p.124).

The city's landmarks are thus neither national nor colonial symbols, but rather industrial, as urban planning has been conducted in light of the existing natural resources and industries. The passage articulates a transcolonial understanding of capitalism, and the inextricability of race and class. The colonial racial division has been replaced by a class division, yet, in fact, not much has changed aside from semantics.

The spatial organization of the narrative also gestures towards the fact that neoliberal restructuring has often been experienced as a fight for space. The representation of space within the novel is dialectical. On the one hand, the economic domain is continuously expanding through space. The novel thus outlines the progressive expansion of Elf-Gabon through the national territory of Gabon, in constant search for oil. On the other hand, this spatial expansiveness is contrasted to the confined spaces within which the characters operate. Public and common spaces have mostly disappeared. The characters rarely find themselves in open

spaces as most of the narrative unfolds in private spaces such as the boat, the Elf-Gabon office building and the company's apartment complex. When the plot takes us out of these private spaces, the city is still navigated (as in Bolaño's novel), through the enclosed space of a private car or cab. The novel thus adds a spatial dimension, or perhaps a spatial metaphor, to Berardi's argument. The extension of the capitalist logic of exchange into all spheres of life is materialized in the restriction of space, the physical impossibility of escape and autonomous life.

Product overload in *Mano de obra*

Like Bessora, Diamela Eltit has combined her literary career with non-literary professional engagements. During Patricio Aylwin's government, the first democratically elected government after the dictatorial rule of Augusto Pinochet, she was named cultural attaché at the Chilean embassy in Mexico. She is also married to Jorge Arrate, the communist candidate in the 2009 Chilean presidential elections, whom she supported in his campaign. Her novel *Mano de obra* (2002) takes place primarily in a supermarket. In the first part, chapters are named after Chilean labor newspapers followed by the year of their publication, e.g. *El Despertar de los Trabajadores* (Iquique, 1911), *Autonomía y Solidaridad* (Santiago, 1924). By contrast, the second part of the novel is entitled simply *Puro Chile* (Santiago, 1970); its chapters are named after characters, supermarket workers who also live together. The writing style shifts between the two parts. The beginning takes the form of an interior monologue of one (or several) workers whose names are never mentioned. A first person narrative permeates this section. In the second part, we are still confronted with an interior monologue; however, while describing interactions between different workers and their experience of the supermarket, the narrator often speaks in the name of 'nosotros,' an anonymous 'we.'

The choice of years is not accidental. In "El espacio de la marginalidad y el desamparo. En mano de obra de Diamela Eltit," María Elvira Luna Escudero-Alie relates this choice of time period to the Chilean labor movement.[25] For instance, in 1907, three hundred salt workers were assassinated in Santa María de Iquique as they were striking for better working conditions. That same year, Chilean workers were granted the Sunday off. In 1909, one thousand workers died due to labor accidents; three years later, the Socialist Workers Party of Chile was formed. 1970, the only year mentioned in the second half, is the year when the democratically elected socialist president Salvador Allende came to power only to be deposed in the violent coup of 1973 led by General Pinochet. With the backing of U.S. economists known as the 'Chicago boys,' Pinochet implemented rapid neoliberal reforms, turning Chile into one the first experiments in neoliberal governance. Workers lost many of the benefits they acquired during the short Allende term.[26] Labor conditions represented in the novel reflect the impact of measures leading to the increased privatization of every aspect of everyday life, the precarious nature of the labor force, hourly wages, lack of benefits and job security. Furthermore, whereas most of the titles in the first part refer to labor power and upheaval, the narrative presents disempowered characters who have interiorized the capitalist work ideology.

As in Bessora's novel, the lack of separation between work and life is one of the major themes. In the first chapter, the narrator is so identified with his task of meticulously organizing the merchandise that he interprets customers touching and displacing products as an attack on his subjectivity: "Ah, ellos obstaculizan las mercaderías cuando se apoyan en los estantes y con el

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[25] Escudero-Alie, María Elvira Luna. "El espacio de la marginalidad y el desamparo. En mano de obra de Diamela Eltit." *Crítica.cl*. 21 Jul.2007. Web. 31.Oct.2013 <http://critica.cl/literatura/el-espacio-de-la-marginalidad-y-el-desamparo-en-mano-de-obra-de-diamela-eltit>

[26] See Taylor, Marcus. *From Pinochet to the 'Third Way' Neoliberalism and Social Transformation in Chile*. London: Pluto Press, 2006.

Winn, Peter. *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1972-2002*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

codo malogran hasta destrozar las mejores verduras…Cuando eso ocurre, yo no cuento para nadie" (p.14) [Ah, they block the merchandise as they lean on the shelves and smash the best vegetables until they are ruined].[27] However, unlike *Petroleum*, the novel dwells on the rise of the service economy and the specific nature of service work. While it is physically taxing, the work does not occupy solely the body as the workers' thoughts are always directed at interpreting and anticipating clients' reactions. As mentioned previously, Berardi characterizes our time as "an era marked by the submission of the soul, in which animated, creative, linguistic, emotional corporeality is subsumed and incorporated by the production of value."[28] Whereas I disagree with some aspects of this argument, for example, Berardi's use of the term 'post-industrial' to describe our present economy, his description is helpful in understanding Eltit's representation of workers' subjectivity and the concept of endless work.

The novel oscillates between the closed space of the supermarket and the closed space of the house where some of the workers live. It produces a significant feeling of claustrophobia, raising the question whether it is at all possible to escape from this neoliberal nightmare. On the one hand, working hours and the accessibility of work are diminishing as more workers are hired. Lack of job security is also leading to shrinkage of living space, as more and more people have to move into the household to contribute to rent and more furniture is sold to compensate for the lack of wages. As such, the household is but an extension of the workplace; the hierarchy of the living space reflects that of the workplace. Thus, for instance, Enrique, one of the workers, is given the task of solving all the household problems since: "El entendía de problemas. Se había convertido en un experto en encontrar soluciones. En el súper era capaz de disimular el impacto de una botella rota, comprendía como esquivar a los supervisores o

[27] *Mano de obra* hasn't been translated into English, all the translations are thus my own.
[28] Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, p.109.

mantener a raya a los clientes" (p.144) ['He knew about problems. He became an expert in finding solutions. In the supermarket he knew how to hide the impact of a broken bottle, he understood how to avoid supervisors or keep customers at bay']. Time and space in this instance merge together, rendering it unclear when works ends and life begins.

The shrinking of time and space is explored on multiple levels. As in Glissant's and Bolaño's narratives, the presence of the state is weak and public space is disappearing. There is no overarching framework or institution, be it state or church, that regulates what happens inside the supermarket and by extension, inside the country. The supermarket is thus entirely guided by the law of the market. In the first part of the novel, as the narrator begins to feel angry at the fact that he is emotionally and physically abused by both customers and supervisors, he also immediately puts the legitimacy of his anger into doubt: "Y expulso de mi mente la escalada de mi atroz resentimiento, porque, después de todo, antes que nada, se trata de clientes que ejercen su legítimo derecho de maltratarme" (p.75) ['And I expel from my mind my growing resentment, because, after all, and before anything else, this is about clients who are exercising their legitimate right to mistreat me']. This is one of the very few times in the novel where the question of rights is articulated. However, the question that the novel poses is where, in the current age of neoliberalism, does the notion of rights stem from? The paragraph also raises the question of legitimacy and who defines it. It is obviously not the state, which is entirely absent from the narrative, and does nothing (as in Bolaño's novel) to protect its workers and regulate work practices. In a similar manner, religion is no longer an alternative. Sacred language has, indeed, been transposed onto the sphere of shopping. As he describes the clients, the narrator mentions that they "tocan los productos igual que si rozaran a Dios" (p.15) ['they touch the products as if they were praying to God']. He further adds: "Estoy en condiciones de asegurar

que detrás de estas actitudes se esconde la molécula de una mística contaminada" (p.15) ['I can assure you that behind these attitudes lurks a molecule of a contaminated mystic']. Thus, the novel gestures towards the transformation of citizen into consumer under the current economic system. The language of religion is transposed onto the language of consumption, which is posited as the only existing ideology. Products are organized by workers and dismantled by customers in what the narrator calls a "fanatic frenzy." The analogy between religion and capitalism is of course not new. In his fragment on "Capitalism as a Religion," Walter Benjamin argues that capitalism is not merely influenced by religion, but actually has a religious configuration: "One can behold in capitalism a religion, that is to say, capitalism essentially serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, and disquiet formerly answered by so called religion."[29] Eltit similarly paints a world where the metaphysics is the one of consumption.

The theme of 'frenzy,' the acceleration of both work and consumption, exists in a dialectic with the idea of decomposition. As in *Petroleum,* the ideology of development and growth is counteracted by one of extenuation and exhaustion. Chilean cultural and literary critic Rubi Carreño has written that in *Mano de obra* "la degradación es el motor de la H/historia, en la doble acepción del término. Ella alcanza a los sujetos, a los materiales narrativos, a lo sagrado, y a la propia mercancía, cada vez más artificial, de mala calidad, y despojada del aura que le daba la vitrina"[30] ['Degradation is the motor of (Hi)story in both senses of the term. It reaches the subjects, narrative materials, the sacred, and the very merchandise, every time more artificial, of bad quality, and stripped off the aura it had in the window']. In fact, the decomposition of the body parallels the perishing of the merchandise. In the second part of the novel, Sonia, one of the

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[29]Hamacher, W. "Guilt History: Benjamin's Sketch "Capitalism as Religion."' *Diacritics* 32:3/4 (2002): 81–106.
[30] Carreño, Rubi. "Mano de obra, una poética del (des)centramiento." *Revista Casa de las Américas*, Jan-Mar 2003. Web. 31 Oct. 2013. <http://www.letras.s5.com/eltitcuba0808037.htm.>

workers, cuts off a piece of her finger while slicing a chicken. The finger is subsequently sold with the rest of the food. There is no clear separation between body as tool and body as product, leading to the notion of 'work symptoms': "Estoy poseído, lo afirmo, desde la cabeza hasta los pies por un síntoma enteramente laboral, una enfermedad horaria que todavía no está tipificada en los anales médicos" (p.49) ['I have been possessed, I confirm it, from head to toe, by a work symptom, an hourly illness that still hasn't been classified in medical annals']. The body becomes the symptomatic vehicle for the expression of labor conditions; the vocabulary of precarity is transposed onto the body and the 'illness,' which, like work, is described as 'hourly.' The body, both individual and collective, is in a state of constant deterioriation. Within this atmosphere of overall decay, spaces of supervision and sites of resistance converge.

The subject of history in the age of neoliberalism

Like Bessora, Eltit emphasizes the diminution of labor power and the dissolution of social bonds. Eltit's representation of the working class is clearly influenced by Foucault's understanding of biopolitics, especially his concept of the Panopticon, a structure allowing a supervisor to observe the inmates, without them being able to tell whether they are being surveyed or not. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault depicts the Panopticon as the ideal tool of modern disciplinary power, which operates by creating a consciousness of permanent visibility. Domination thus no longer needs to be explicit or physical.[31] The question of the gaze and supervision is prevalent in Eltit's novel (as in Bessora's). The structure, as already anticipated by Foucault, is more horizontal than vertical. In the absence of any clearly defined source of power such as the state or the church, the gaze does not seem to be coming from one direction, but

[31] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.

rather is collective and reciprocated, which Foucault posits as the tendency of the age of discipline. The narrator thus says: "Yo (ya) no me detengo en los finales del pasillo, con una mirada más que ordinaria o bien con una expresión definitivamente turbia, a acechar a los clientes monetarios. No. Yo no espio a nadie" (p.20) [I no longer wait at the end of the hallway, I no longer watch clients with an out of ordinary look or a shady expression. No. I am not spying on anyone']. Identification with the supermarket and its products is such that there is an urge to monitor clients at every step. But the supervision moves in many directions. Thus the narrator also mentions the anxiety that he feels as he is confronted by vigilant clients: "Este cliente me mira tal como si yo fuese el representante de una casta enemiga que se le ocurrió combatir" (p.26) ['This client is looking at me as if I were the representative of an enemy caste that he needs to combat']. Workers are also worried about their supervisors' gaze, even though the supervisors never directly appear in the novel but are only mentioned in workers' stories. The trope of the gaze is also transposed to the household. The workers are supervising one another in constant expectation of betrayal. The question of the gaze is also related to the question of the body and its disciplining. Thus the narrator, for example, complains that he is experiencing pain in his body that he is unable to localize. In a way, in the same manner that the source of power is not clearly localizable, neither is the source of pain.

Mutual supervision has also ensured that unions no longer represent a counterpoint. When Alberto begins to attend secret meetings in an attempt to organize workers, everyone turns against him and considers asking him to leave the household: "Le dijimos que Alberto participaba en asociaciones secretas para organizar un sindicato en el supermercado. Isabel se puso pálida y en su rostro se instaló la huella de una tristeza infinita….Dijo que como Alberto podía ser tan mierda, tan chucha de su madre" (p.88) ['We told her that Alberto was a member of

secret organizations that were trying to unionize the supermarket. Isabel turned pale and her face was marked by infinite sadness….She said how could Alberto be such shit, such an asshole']. Thus joining a union (or forming one) is seen as the biggest form of betrayal. As the Marxist geographer David Harvey, amongst others, argues, neoliberalism and its restructuring of labor conditions have resulted in the effacement of previous victories achieved by labor and the civil rights movements and the restoration of class power.[32] The collective bargaining power of organized labor has been replaced by precarious labor conditions including lack of job stability, benefits and unceasing competition. Eltit takes a similar stand on the organization of labor in Chile. In her novel, worker solidarity has been replaced by continuous competition and mistrust. Thus, what is conveyed to the reader through the interior monologue of the anonymous narrator are often assumptions and suspicions that workers have about one another: "Esa noche las palabras de Gabriel sembraron entre nosotros una incertidumbre atroz. Sus presunciones introdujeron la sombra de una peligrosa desconfianza" (p.117) ['That night Gabriel's words spread amongst us a horrible uncertainty. His suspicions introduced the shadow of a dangerous mistrust']. The last chapter, entitled 'El Capitán,' however, gestures towards the possibility of collaboration. Things have come to an end, and as the narrator tells us, every meaning has been lost: "Nuestra casa carecía de sentido. No era. No nos contenía" (p.170) ['Our house lacked meaning. It wasn't. It did not contain us']. The workers admit that they've been defeated, "victimizados por una arma que nosotros mismos habíamos construido" (p.170) ['victimized by a weapon we had constructed ourselves']. At the same time, the idea of a new leader emerges. The workers place their trust in Gabriel because he is "un poquito más blanco que todos nosotros" (p.175) ['a little whiter than the rest of us']. In the very last paragraph of the novel, the narrator tells us: "Ah, sí, él tenía el porte y tenía la presencia que necesitábamos para la próxima

[32] Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

forma de organización, que, sabíamos, nos iba a indicar una ruta posible. Por eso, por el cariño y el respeto que nos inspiraba, asentimos cuando nos dijo: 'vamos a cagar a los maricones que nos miran como si nosotros no fuéramos chilenos…Ya pues huevones, caminen. Caminemos. Demos vuelta la pagina" (p.176) ['Ah, yes, he had the demeanor and the presence we needed for the next form of organization, which, we knew, would show us a possible route. Because of this, because of the respect and tenderness he inspired in us, we agreed when he said: 'Let's go fuck up these fags that are looking at us as if we weren't Chilean…Well, assholes, walk. Let's walk. Let's turn the page']. Thus the novel ends on an open note, the possibility, or even the inevitability of a new form of organization, though it is not entirely clear what it may look like.

Read in the context of 2013, this idea of change and leadership appears somewhat outdated. Whereas the novel ends on a choice of an individual, male leader, in the past decade, social movements from Chile and Argentina, to the Arab spring, los Indignados in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the U.S. have challenged the idea of representational democracy in favor of some form of direct democracy.[33] These groups all at least provisionally refused the idea of representatives and leaders and tried to redefine the political as direct participation and collective will. So it seems interesting that, in light of the developments of the past few decades, Eltit still reverts to the idea of a single male leader. One could argue that she does this in a very critical manner. The narrator mentions that Enrique was chosen as the leader because he is whiter than the others, implying that the new organization may still be based on the same racial hierarchy. According to Carreño: "Eltit muestra cómo hay un cambio en la noción de resistencia, de líder y de discurso político. La calle, lugar histórico de las protestas ciudadanas, es percibida como un

[33] See, for instance Sitrin, Marina. *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina*. London: Zed Books, 2012.
Maeckelbergh, Marianne. *The Will of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement Is Changing the Face of Democracy*. London: Pluto Press, 2009

espacio amenazante para los trabajadores y para el narrador…un líder será simplemente quien pueda asegurar que el colectivo que dirige no sea despedido, y el discurso político será cambiado por el improperio." ['Eltit shows how there is a change in the notion of resistance, the leader and political discourse. The street, the historical space of citizen protests, is perceived as threatening by the workers and by the narrator…the leader will be the one who simply makes sure that the group he is leading does not get fired, and political discourse will be replaced by curses'].[34] Whereas this indeed seems to be the case, one could also point to the problems of representing a working class that has entirely interiorized modes of domination, in a society where all cohesion has been broken. In the last chapter, the narrator admits that the workers lack imagination. However, a similar critique could be waged against the narrative itself, which offers a dystopian vision but not many imaginative alternatives. Furthermore, in that last paragraph of the novel, the word Chile appears for the first time. It is interesting that at the very end Eltit decides to ground the novel in a national setting and tie the question of labor to the question of national belonging. The end almost reverts the attention from the issue of global economic restructuring to national politics.

Nonetheless, it is significant to mention that there a few other moments in the novel that open up the possibility for different modes of organization and social interaction. Thus, for example, the narrator gestures several times towards the fact that the workers are speaking from a position of knowledge with regards to capitalism: "Nosotros conocíamos perfectamente la conducta de los clientes. Nosotros sabíamos cómo funcionaba el súper. Como operaba por dentro" (p.106) ['We knew the clients' conduct perfectly. We knew how the supermarket

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[34] Carreño, Rubi. "Mano de obra, una poética del (des)centramiento." *Revista Casa de las Américas* Jan. 2003:n.pag. Web. March 2014. <http://www.letras.s5.com/eltitcuba0808037.htm>

functioned. How it worked on the inside']. At the same time that the novel questions any division between inside/outside (since the neoliberal organization of economy pervades all social spheres), it is clear that the workers are in possession of a specific kind of knowledge, about the mechanisms of capitalism. The workers are trained precisely to understand the consumerist patterns of the middle class. Unfortunately, the novel doesn't really develop this dimension much further and it seems that the violence experienced is not used to fuel forms of resistance against the establishment but rather against other workers.

Forms of collective solidarity and cohesion also appear in relation to reproductive labor. Gloria, one of the characters who lives in the household, is the only one who no longer works, since she has been fired from her supermarket job and has been unable to secure another one. The collective finally decides that she should stay at home and take care of the house. She is however requested to abandon her room and live in the maid's quarters in the back of the house. She does not receive any financial remuneration but according to Enrique: "Tiene casa y comida gratis…Te parece poco?" (p.85) ['She has free food and lodging. Does that seem like little to you?']. Thus, on the one hand, there is a high depreciation of reproductive, gendered labor; anything that does not receive the approval of the supermarket supervisors is deemed unworthy. Once in charge of the house, Gloria also begins to receive all of the men of the house in her bedroom, at night. On the other hand, the narrator says that as they all returned from work "agotados y vencidos por la identificación prendida en el delantal," ['exhausted and defeated by the identity attached to their apron'], fortunately Gloria was there: "ella nos esperaba y nos apaciguaba con sus agudos comentarios cuando ingresábamos a la casa demolidos por la fuerza del día" (p.111) ['she waited for us and calmed us down with her clever observations as we entered the house crushed by the force of the day']. As Gloria gives everyone advice on how to

interact with the supervisors, the narrator states that she was intelligent, endowed with a rich form of 'domestic intelligence' (p.112).

Reproduction, including the reproduction of the ideological mechanisms of capitalism, is one of the novel's central themes. Silvia Federici has argued that "the 'commoning' of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. It is also the first line of resistance to a life of enslavement and the condition for the construction of autonomous spaces undermining from within the hold that capitalism has on our lives."[35] Federici thus places the rethinking and collectivization of reproductive work at the center of anti-capitalist struggle. In *Mano de Obra*, the domestic sphere evidently reproduces the capital-labor relations of the supermarket. Yet, at the same time, there are moments of rupture when different models of social relations seem to emerge. However, these moments are recuperated relatively quickly. In fact, before the end of the same chapter, the narrator tells us that Andres, another coworker and housemate, told them that Gloria was actually trying to divide them. Any form of collective solidarity is quickly recuperated into capitalist modes of relation based on competition and mutual observation.

The predominance of the workplace, combined with questions of spatial confinement, supervision, and 'endless' work are at the center of both *Petroleum* and *Mano de Obra.* In both cases the political and social themes are connected to stylistic choices and the mobilization of genre. Bessora's *Petroleum* drifts away from Eltit's stream of consciousness into the world of crime fiction.

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[35] Federici, Silvia. "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons." *Uses of a WorldWind, Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States*. Craig Hughes, Stevie Peace and Kevin Van Meter for the Team Colors Collective (Ed.). Oakland: AK Press, 2010.

Globalization and the detective novel: solving the neoliberal crime?

Bessora's *Petroleum* is a contemporary take on the long literary tradition of crime fiction. An explosion devastates the Ocean Liberator, a barge drilling for petrol off the coast of Gabon. The crime is an Atlantic one, taking place on (and perhaps against) the ocean. The attempt to solve it drives the plot: was it a terrorist attack? Was it orchestrated by the enemies of Elf-Gabon? Or was it a deed of aquatic spirits, angered by the continuous desecration of their residence? The answer will never be provided. *Petroleum* is one of a group of novels on the globalized Atlantic (Roberto Bolaño's *2666* and Maryse Condé's *Histoire de la femme cannibale* are among the others) that embrace the medium of detective fiction, begging the question of the relation between the global spread of neoliberalism and the rise of the 'global' crime novel.

Detective fiction has a long tradition, beginning, in most literary histories, with Edgar Allan Poe's Three Dupin novelettes (*Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Mystery of Marie Roger,* and *The Purloined Letter*) published in 1841-1844. In *Mayhem at the Crossroads: Francophone African Fiction and the Rise of the Crime Novel*, Paul Higginson analyzes several contemporary African detective novels in relation to both the literary history of the genre and contemporary socio-economic conditions of the continent. Higginson identifies five characteristics of crime fiction: an urban setting and a threatening alterity, the ambiguity of the law, a vexed literary status, trans-Atlantic mobile evolution, and the vernacular.[36] The 'popular' status of crime fiction, he contends, allows African authors to distance themselves from the French aesthetic models taught in colonial schools. He further characterizes African crime fiction as "a novel literary-ideological en- terprise-one that refuses existing socio-political conditions while steering clear of intrusive didacticism and/or excessive idealism" (p.17).

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[36] Higginson, Pim. *Mayhem at the Crossroads Francophone African Fiction and the Rise of the Crime Novel*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2005.

While I find Higginson's analysis apt- and he is one of the few critics who have focused on contemporary African crime fiction- I feel that the relation between the current global neoliberal power constellations and the genre of crime fiction can be explored on other terms. As mentioned earlier, contemporary authors from across the Atlantic have chosen the detective novel as their preferred literary form. In *Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction: A Transatlantic Discourse on Urban Violence*, Glen Close traces the development of the genre through transatlantic literary and publishing connections between the United States, Spain and Latin America.[37] In the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* (1996) Gustavo Pellón identifies the 'novela negra' as one of the three most distinct narrative tendencies of the post-boom era.[38] Close argues that the focus on the criminal in Latin American fiction exemplifies the "new urban violence of the neo-liberal era, the uncontrolled growth of the city which has led to a fragmentation of the urban imaginary and the rise in violence" (p.19). Thus, it seems that from multiple sides of the Atlantic, crime fiction has emerged as the prevalent form in dealing with the effects of globalization.

While in the three novels studied thus far the nature of the crimes is different, they all remain unsolved (and perhaps unsolvable). In *2666*, the narrative develops around the proliferation of the murdered bodies of Mexican maquiladora workers, whose assassin is never identified. *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, on the other hand, deals with two crimes of passion: Stephen is murdered by his young, male, lover; whereas Fiéla is accused of murdering her husband (whether she in fact has done so, remains a mystery). In P*etroleum*, the target of the crime is no longer a person, but an entity: the multinational Elf-Gabon company. Etienne, the

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[37] Close, Glen S. *Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction: A Transatlantic Discourse on Urban Violence*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
[38] González Echevarría, Roberto, and Enrique Pupo-Walker. *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

sole human victim of the crimes, is also one of the primary suspects. At the end of the novel, characters still have different convictions as to the perpetrator. I concur with Close's assessment that detective fiction arises as an appropriate form to address the rise in violence in the age of neoliberalism, the new political emphasis on terrorism and an increasing insistence on the importance of national and personal security. I would add that in addition to reflecting the rising social inequalities in the world metropolises, detective fiction stages the dialectic between the known and the unknown which is reflective of contemporary modes of power and marginalization.

In Chapter Two, I discuss Bolaño's analogy between the writer and the detective, both of whom are engaged in a never-ending search for the origin of evil. This 'origin' is never to be found. In fact, in *2666* it is unclear who is to be held responsible for the murders of maquiladora workers: the state, the American multi-nationals, the local drug cartels, or a serial killer? While, unlike Bolaño, I wouldn't use the theologically charged term 'evil,' I concur that the current international division of labor makes it difficult to clearly identify 'the source' of social injustice and inequality. While during colonial times, the politics of opposition and emancipation could be gaged against a specific colonial power, contemporary writers engage with the hegemonies of global capitalism, a more nebulous and all-pervasive system of domination and marginalization.

In *Petroleum*, the question of power is explored in relation to the concept of 'invisible realities.' For instance, as Médée is driving to the company's headquarters, she passes an intersection between the boulevard President- Bongo, the avenue Charles-de-Gaulle and the boulevard Elf- Gabon: "Bongo, de Gaulle, Elf-Gabon. Aucune pancarte n'indique les noms de ces avenues. On peut comprendre que ces réalités cadastrales soient cachées car il n'y a pas de quoi pavoiser. Oui, ces réalités sont invisibles" (p.87). These realities are invisible because

unacknowledged. But they are also invisible because the flows of capital that connect them are not always tangible; there are missing links that explain the relation between the Gabonese authorities, foreign governments and the multinational. In a similar manner, whereas the reality of the oil extraction and the politics of Wall Street are inevitably linked, the power networks that connect the two are not immediately visible to workers on board the Ocean Liberator. The international division of labor has divided the process of production and distribution into various fragments that seem autonomous yet are utterly dependent: "The digital transformation started two different but integrated processes. The first is the capture of work inside the network, that is to say the coordination of different labor fragments in a unique flow of information and production made possible by digital infrastructures. The second is the dissemination of the labor process into a multitude of productive islands formally autonomous, but actually coordinated and ultimately dependent."[39] Detective fiction encapsulates this fragmentary understanding of reality, which results from a fragmentary nature of work. In crime novels, characters are searching for missing causal links and explanations, in an attempt to recover a fuller understanding of the chain of events.

Our current political and economic system, which could be characterized as hegemonic, relies on this form of fragmentation. In *Agony and Power,* Jean Baudrillard argues that whereas domination relies on a binary distinction between dominators and dominated, hegemony is the domination of networks: "In order to grasp how globalization and global antagonism works, we should distinguish carefully between domination and hegemony. One could say that hegemony is the ultimate stage of domination and its terminal phase. Domination is characterized by the master/slave relation, which is still a dual relation with potential alienation, a relationship of

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[39] Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, p.88.

force and conflicts. It has a violent history of oppression and liberation. There are the dominators and the dominated- it remains a symbolic relationship….Hegemony begins here in the disappearance of the dual, personal, agonistic domination for the sake of integral reality- the reality of networks, of the virtual and total exchange where there are no longer dominators and dominated."[40] Baudrillard moreover insists on the dialectic between the invisibility and visibility of the current power networks: whereas on the one hand, "the face of capital is unveiled by capitalists" (p.38) themselves, as, for instance, the banks publicly state that they are only interested in money; on the other hand, due to the simultaneous dispersion and pervasiveness of modes of domination, it is difficult to clearly locate the centers of power. This, however, doesn't necessarily mean that power has been entirely decentralized. For instance, in *Global City* Saskia Sassen contends that new forms of 'capital dispersal' associated with advances in technology and the predominance of off-shore production have been accompanied by new forms of centralization of financial power in large metropolises, such as New York, London, Tokyo, etc.[41] However, similar power relations are reproduced at every point of the network, rendering it difficult to single out a specific node.

The intersection of the three boulevards gestures towards this complex power configuration. Who is to be held responsible for the current situation: the local government, the colonial past, or the unregulated markets? In the literary imagination, multiple crimes whose perpetrators and causes cannot be found operate as a way to gauge the power of networks, the inability to clearly identify the sources of power and the causes of marginalization. However, what distinguishes *Petroleum* from other detective novels mentioned is the fact that local forest

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[40] Baudrillard, Jean, Sylvère Lotringer, and Ames Hodges. *The agony of power*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2010.
[41] Sassen, *The Global City*

and ocean spirits are among the suspects. The concept of crime is thus closed linked to the question of natural resources.

Globalization, eco-criticism and anti-capitalism

As the mystery of the Ocean Liberator is being investigated, the narrative takes us into the world of the "divinités martitimes." We learn that Jason, the ship's cook and Médée's lover, was raised by Louise, a local woman capable of seeing and communicating with the spirit world. The novel further introduces a mythical substance named the "sémence du sorcier" that Jason supposedly sprinkled on the ship, causing the explosion that cost Etienne his life. The novel then oscillates between the contemporary reality of Gabon and Elf-Gabon and the legends and stories that Louise used to recount to Jason, introducing him to various mythical creatures, including Mamiwata, the goddess of the maritime world. One hypothesis that is proposed is that the conflict between the local spirits and the western 'explorers' reaches far back into history, but that now the spirits have finally risen up against the desecration of their habitat. In 1962, as Louise initiates Jason into the secrets of the 'other world,' she wonders: "Maintenant, les casques oranges fouillaient les eaux; les génies aquatiques, sujets de Mamiwata, demanderait-ils leur comptant?" (p.193). On many levels, the novel thus represents a binary structure: the city is divided into two classes/two races, while it is simultaneously divided into two worlds, the world of the spirits and the world of the mortals.

Petroleum contrasts the exploitation of natural resources by multinational companies to a more 'local' and anthropomorphic understanding of nature. The latter treats nature as a source of knowledge and power, the former, as a commodity. Thus, for instance, in 1926, as Zéphyrin, the

local "pisteur," guides foreign explorers in their search for oil, he pleads with them to pay due respect to the forest spirits. The explorers disregard his supplications and proceed to cut down a tree Zéphyrin deems sacred. This aspect of the novel, it could be argued, attempts "to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds," which, according to Ursula Heise, is one of the main characteristics of "Eco-cosmopolitanism." Heise further distinguishes between an apocalyptic and a risk perspective: "In the apocalyptic perspective, utter destruction lies ahead but can be averted and replaced by an alternative future society; in the risk perspective, crises are already underway all around, and while their consequences can be mitigated, a future without their impact has become impossible to envision."[42] Whereas the notion of 'crisis' drives the plot of *Petroleum,* the novel also points to the limits of eco-criticism as a category.

Heise's is one of the fundamental texts in eco-criticism and her analysis is extremely astute in juxtaposing activist and literary discourses on the environmental crisis. Nonetheless, she doesn't link the crisis to a wider capitalist paradigm. Heise acknowledges that many environmental activists believe capitalism to be responsible for the current environmental degradation. However, her analysis primarily focuses on the ways in which the local and the global are experienced in various novels. While she outlines the criticisms of multinationals' environmental practices, she still largely separates the environmental issues from other socio-economic issues. There is a reluctance to present the problem as systemic, and acknowledge that

[42] Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.34.

it will not be solved by the imposition of new regulations on a few multinational corporations. The risk with such an approach is that it may simply contribute to the 'greening' of capitalism.[43]

The term 'green capitalism' has been used to refer to the expansion of alternative energy markets and the proliferation of eco-friendly products. While these eco-markets may address the depletion of natural resources, they are already highly transnationalized and operate along the same laws of global capital accumulation. For instance, in a recent state of the union address, President Obama declared: "the nation that leads the clean-energy economy will be the nation that leads the global economy, and America must be that nation."[44] Here, 'clean-energies' are simply presented as a new, unexplored market that the planet will soon depend on. Market ideology, and its labor politics are never questioned. To return to Mitchell's argument, we may anticipate that in the same manner that the coal and oil industries conducted their own labor politics, so will the 'clean-energy' industry. Unless environmental discourses (including eco-criticism) begin relating the question of natural resources to the question of labor, it is highly unlikely that this politics will be any more equitable than the current one.

Petroleum pushes the limits of eco-criticism precisely because it combines a representation of 'nature' with the analysis of a workplace. The exploitation of natural resources in the novel is related to modes of worker control and exploitation. The question of sustainability is thus concomitant to the question of labor politics. Furthermore, the question of 'lack' pushes anti-capitalist critique further than a mere incrimination of companies. The fact that petrol is no

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[43] See, Comolet, A. "Le Renouveau écologique. De l'éco-utopie à l'éco-capitalisme." *Futuribles* 157 (Sept.1991): 41-54.
d'Humières, Patrick. *Le développement durable va-t-il tuer le capitalisme?* Editions Maxima, 2010.
Sarkar, Saral K. *Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism?: A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices*. London: Zed Books, 1999.
[44] Ariel Schwarts, "The Green Guide to Obama's State of the Union Address." Jan. 27, 2010. Web. March 2014 <www.fastcomponay.com/blog/ariel-schwartz>.

longer to be found in the country points to the end of an entire paradigm. The logic of development, growth and consumption has come to a halt, confronted by the mere finiteness of the planet. As already mentioned, according to Mitchell, it was precisely the nature of oil and its availability that enabled and sustained the politics of growth. The depletion of oil could thus be an opportunity to challenge this model of unlimited growth and the economic discourse which favors profit and markets instead of questions of resource distribution and social equality.

Unfortunately, the novel ends on what appears to be a compromise between labor and capital. Médée is imprisoned as she is suspected to be an accomplice in the explosion. Louise visits her in prison, gives her a local substance that will create the illusion of her death. As Médée's funeral takes place without her, Louise transports her to a faraway place where she is finally united with Jason, who she was yearning for throughout the novel. The interesting detail, however, is that throughout the investigation, Louise and Médée had found refuge at the home of a former Elf-Gabon financial director, Edouard Emane Tole. After leaving Elf-Gabon, Tole decided to open a navy yard. He explains to Médée that he was the one who employed Aliko and that, while in charge, he made various improvements to Elf-Gabon: "A l'époque, j'étais directeur financier. Vous savez, j'ai fait beaucoup: j'ai augmenté les salaires…j'ai même ouvert une salle de judo…j'ai donné des cours" (p.328). Why would the narrative end on the property of an Elf-Gabon employee? Does this end represent the final uniting of the world of spirits and the world of capitalism? In the final scene, as Médée and Jason are walking together on the beach, they are both in the 'house of Mamiwata' and close to Tole's navy yards. Once could argue that the novel in fact ends on a much less political note, as it gestures towards a reconciliation of the world of spirits and the world of capitalism. Furthermore, this romantic ending is individual rather than

collective. Instead of a paradigm shift, the novel thus ultimately proposes a reformed system, more executives like Tole, who use their energy and power to improve workers' lives.

As we have seen, the lives of workers are also at the center of Eltit's narrative. Notions of gaze, supervision and work are similarly imbricated. The question of resources is transposed onto the world of the supermarket and its products. However, in its attempt to represent current modes of oppression, *Mano de obra* gravitates towards a stream of consciousness rather than to the narrative-driven model of detectives and criminals. Correspondingly, Eltit focuses on the complex role language plays in today's economy.

Supermarket chatter

In the supermarket, work and language are inextricable. While I don't endorse a clear-cut distinction between industrial and post-industrial work, I agree with Berardi that recent forms of capitalism have made it increasingly difficult to segregate work and home, body and mind. For instance, as the 'cultural industries' are expanding, an increasing number of freelancers are working from home, rendering it difficult to calculate actual work time. Moreover, a number of professions, including writing, teaching, IT, require a preparatory stage where the 'idea' for the project is developed before it can be implemented. Work thus often occupies the mind outside of the space of the office. As Berardi writes: "Assembly-line workers, while forced to repeat the same movements, still had brains that thought freely, at least until their energies were available and fatigue and sadness did not prevail. Despite the machines' clanking, it was possible to discuss and start processes of autonomy and revolt. But in Semiocapitalim, the soul itself is put to work. This is the essential point of the postindustrial transformation that we experienced in the

last decades of the twentieth-century." [45] Once again, whereas I would caution against a clear-cut opposition between industrial and non-industrial work as well as body and mind, I agree that in the area of service work, communications and thus language have become intrinsic to the work done.

In the very first paragraph of the novel, Eltit writes "Los clientes (el que ahora mismo me sigue y me esquicia o el que me corta la respiración o el que me moja de miedo) se reúnen únicamente para conversar en el súper. Yo me estremezco ante la amenaza de unas pausas sin asunto o me atormento por los ruidos insípidos y, sumergido de lleno en la violencia, me convierto en un panal agujereado por el terror" (p.13) ['The clients (the one who is following me and spying on me right now or the one who makes me unable to breathe or the one who makes me sweat from fear) gather in the supermaket just to chat.' I tremble at the threat of pauses with no subject matter, I am tormented by insipid sounds and, completely submerged in violence, I turn into a honeycomb perforated by terror']. There is an interesting dialectic between what is said and what is left unsaid. The fact that customers gather in the supermarket to converse is indicative of the shrinkage of public or common space where people can socialize. Our consumer society is characterized by the fact that very few human interactions can and do happen outside of the mode of consumption. Recently, this shrinkage has been a focal issue of protest movements from New York City to Cairo to Istanbul.

But I believe it is also important that Eltit stages this superposition between the act of talking and the act of buying, where the exchange of words is superposed with the exchange and selection of products. This is not merely to say that language, like everything else, has become a commodity. But rather, that the act of consumption happens through language, and that every

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[45] Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, p.116

form of exchange is caught up in the culture of consumption. Consumption infiltrates language, as does work. The supermarket worker monitors the language of the customers but also interacts with them through language. This is a moment where service work, which relies to a significant degree on communication, spins out of control, turning into paranoia. The narrator is frightened by the pauses, the moments when language is not there, which he cannot control. Work relations permeate narrator's thoughts. In fact, the anxious state of the narrator is induced by the fact that he is projecting onto the thoughts of the customer and also desperately trying to anticipate them. The abundance of information and communication is combined with a complete inability to actually establish communication.

The novel juxtaposes several different forms of language. As mentioned earlier, in the first part of the novel the chapters are entitled according to different labor newspapers. In the second half, on the other hand, they bear the names of different workers: Isabel, Gloria, Andres, etc. However, those chapters are never narrated from the point of view of the worker in question. They are told from the point of view of an anonymous narrator who often uses the pronoun 'we.' The novel is thus written entirely in the form of an interior monologue. However, whereas the first part focuses on the narrator's personal experience, the second half conveys the narrator's impressions of other workers. There are several degrees of removal, as the narrator tells us mostly what he has heard from other workers, or the rumors that circulate within the supermarket. There is thus an interesting contrast between the two halves of the narrative. The free indirect speech of the first part gives us access to the narrator's thoughts, but these refer us back to the outside, to the narrator's perception and obsession with the products and the clients in the supermarket. In the second part, we are still in the domain of the stream of consciousness, but

the narrator never tells us anything about him/herself, he/she recounts rather a sequence of events, often counteracted by another worker's story or impressions.

On the one hand, the novel attempts to dwell on the conditions of each worker, particularly by assigning them specific chapters. Yet, at the same time, the content of the chapters points to the precariousness of their situations. Most of the time, workers discuss the fact that the supermarket continues to employ more workers, which enables them to cut everyone's hours and keep them in the position of permanent precarity. Their working hours are reduced and their positions shifted from one department to the next. The permanent state of anxiety and paranoia all the narrators find themselves in, has become characteristic of the precariat. The titles of the chapters gesture towards an attempt to retrieve the singularity of the workers, yet, throughout the chapters this attempt seems to dissolve into an impossibility. An attempt at singularity is counteracted by a continuous precarization of that singularity.

Mónica Barrientos describes Eltit's style in following terms: "El movimiento es un atentado a la fijación, es decir, no permite la permanencia, el estado, lo eterno; así, como primer flujo, los personajes en la obra eltiana representan fases cambiantes que huyen del mundo que intenta atarlos " ['The movement is an attack on fixity, that is to say, it does not permit a permanent state of being, the eternal; thus, characters in Eltit's work are continuously shifting, evading the world that is constraining them']. She further interprets this in light of Derridean deconstruction and the decentering of a stable subject: "Así surge el descentramiento y la alteridad, y como consecuencia conjunta, una desjerarquización del centro que favorece lo que había sido descartado por las jerarquías (ya sea logocéntrica, falocéntrica, etnocéntrica, etc.) El sujeto es visto como una subjetividad que está en constante cambio, es heterogéneo,

multiple…"[46] ['Thus, emerges the de-centering and the alterity, and as a joint consequence, a de-hierarchization of the center, which favors that which has been discarded by hierarchies (be it logocentric, phallocentric, ethnocentric, etc.) The subject is seen as a subjectivity that is constantly changing, that is heterogenous and multiple…'].

While Eltit has undoubtedly been influenced by postmodernist philosophy, her writing style mobilizes the postmodern endeavor to decenter the homogenous subject in an attempt to grasp increasing precarity in the age of global neoliberalism. In her attempt to represent precarious thoughts and language, Eltit plays with the different meanings of the term: dangerously lacking in security or stability; subject to chance or unknown conditions; based on uncertain, unwarranted, or unproved premises. The language that Eltit produces is in fact, precarious. It is a language that lacks security and stability; a language with no grounding. Thoughts are constantly shifting and replacing one another, while simultaneously running in a loop and creating a feeling of claustrophobia: "Ya sé. Ya sé. No solo me debo a los niños y a los clientes sino a ellos, a los supervisores, trastornados por el estropicio de los camiones, los pelos plásticos de las muñecas, los aviones, los conejos, las pistolas, los osos…" (p.19) ['I know. I know. I owe it not only to the kids and to the clients but also to them, the supervisors, tourmented by trucks, dolls' plastic hair, airplanes, bunnies, pistols, teddy bears…']. Furthermore, it is a language that lacks autonomy, a language that responds to outside objects and circumstances including the merchandise and the customers. The literary style gestures towards a subjectivity trying to master external circumstances and gain independence from them, yet unable to do so.

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[46] Barrientos, Mónica. "Vigilancia y Fuga en *Mano de obra* de Diamela Eltit". *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*. 2005. Web. March 2014 <http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero31/diamela.html>

In his now canonical work, *La Société de Consommation*, Jean Baudrillard argues that in our contemporary society the principle of social equality has been replaced by a principle of supposed equality of consumptive habits. We are all equal in our needs and in our efforts to satisfy them. This equality before the object masks deeper social discrimination, which manifests itself through uneven access to knowledge and power, as well as basic social necessities such as space, clean water and air: "Le principe démocratique est transféré alors d'une égalité réelle, des capacités, des responsabilités, des chances sociales, du bonheur (au sens plein du terme) a une égalité devant l'Objet et autres signes évidents de la réussite sociale et du bonheur. C'est la *démocratie du standing*, la démocratie de la T.V., de la voiture et de la chaine stéréo, démocratie apparemment concrète, mais tout aussi formelle, qui répond, par-delà les contradictions et inégalités sociales, a la démocratie formelle inscrite dans la Constitution. Toutes deux, l'une servant d'alibi à l'autre se conjuguent en une idéologie démocratique globale, qui masque la démocratie *absente* et l'égalité introuvable."[47] *Mano de obra* explores the tension between this apparent equality and an underlining inequality, through linguistic experimentation. The supermarket is represented as a space that allows for an 'equitable' satisfaction of needs. All the products are equally available to everyone. The clients are thus often represented as an anonymous multitude, their only characteristic being desire of the commodity. Products furthermore mediate relations between workers and customers: "Ah, estos clientes. Mezclan los tallarines, cambian los huevos, alternan los pollos, las verduras, las ampolletas, los cosméticos. Entiendan: lo que pretendo expresar es que revuelvan los productos" (p.15) ['Ah, these clients. They are mixing up noodles, switching eggs, moving chickens, vegetables, light bulbs, cosmetic products. Understand: what I am trying to express is that they are messing up the products']. The

[47] Baudrillard, Jean, and Jacob Peter Mayer. *La société de consommation ses mythes, ses structures*. [Paris]: Gallimard, 1986, p.61.

grammatical transition from worker to customer occurs through the object. The worker's and the customer's equal obsession with the object is meant to erase class distinctions. However, this superficial 'equality' exists within the context of a class war, where the 'us' and the 'them,' the workers and the customers, appear as mutually exclusive. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this abundance of objects is counteracted by a lack of public and living space, as well as social interactions outside the purview of work.

While exploring the tension between singularity and precarity, and undertaking an attempt to construct a 'precarious' language, Eltit's narrative poses a larger question that will be explored more extensively in the last chapter. Are fleeting characters, characters with little psychological depth whom we do not understand well, indicative of a new form of resistance and a new politics? Can opacity form the basis of a new form of ethics and politics in the age of globalization?

Chapter Four

Transatlantic Citizenship and Opacity in the Work of Marie Ndiaye and Yuri Herrera

In *L'entretien infini* (1970), referring to the figure of the traditional literary hero, Maurice Blanchot writes: "Le héros n'est qu'action, l'action le rend héroïque, mais ce faire héroïque n'est rien sans l'être; seul l'être- l'essence- nous satisfait, nous rassure et nous promet l'avenir, c'est que l'ignoble obscurité nous fait peur…L'héroïsme est révélation, cette brillance merveilleuse de l'acte qui unit l'essence et l'apparence. L'héroïsme est la souveraine lumineuse de l'acte. Seul l'acte est héroïque, et le héros n'est rien s'il n'agit et n'est rien hors de la clarté de l'acte qui éclaire et l'éclaire…Il n'existe pas de héros obscur."[1] According to Blanchot, the traditional hero is characterized by action, and, above all, by the transparency of the act. Since the act is transparent when intentionality is transparent, in order for the hero to be heroic, the author must represent him in his transparency.

Two decades later, in his *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), Edouard Glissant proclaims: "Nous défendons notre droit à l'opacité." With this statement, Glissant proposes a mode of literary writing that distances itself from the concept of the traditional hero. Here and in other works, Glissant argues against the notion of transparency and opts for what he terms a writing of opacity that does not strive for full comprehension or explanation. Opacity is furthermore at the basis of his understanding of the Relation: "Non pas seulement consentir au droit à la différence mais, plus avant, au droit à l'opacité, qui n'est pas l'enfermement dans une autarcie impénétrable, mais la subsistance dans une singularité non réductible."[2] According to Glissant, the act of comprehension is simultaneously an act of violence as it brings the other back to the

[1] Blanchot, Maurice. *L'entretien infini*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p.544.
[2] Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de la Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

same, the known. Opacity, on the other hand, while it doesn't preclude a relation with the other, prevents the reduction of the other to known norms and categories; it prevents the reduction of the other to the same.

Alongside Glissant, other francophone authors, including Maryse Condé and Leila Sebbar have turned to opacity, posing the question of political possibilities that emerge out of their fiction.[3] This chapter explores the politics and ethics of opacity in the work of two contemporary Atlantic world writers, Franco-Senegalese Marie Ndiaye, and Mexican Yuri Herrera. Why have these authors decided to construct opaque protagonists and what type of relationship is established between these characters and the reader? If opacity is at the basis of an ethical relation to the other, can it be at the basis of ethical trans-Atlantic citizenship?

Whereas Ndiaye and Herrera may not have ever met or been directly influenced by each other's work, their novels, *Rosie Carpe* (2001) and *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009), as well as their literary careers, bear some striking resemblances.[4] Both narratives focus on young women in search of their brothers. Rosie Carpe travels from Paris to Guadeloupe in the hope of finding her long-lost brother Lazare; while Makina, the protagonist of Herrera's novel, illegally crosses the Mexico-U.S. border, in order to convince her brother to return home. Makina is sent by her mother Cora, who for a long time has had no news of her son's whereabouts. The brother, whose name is never mentioned, left Mexico for the United States several years prior, in order to reclaim a piece of land that belongs to the family. Another feature

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[3] See, Condé, Maryse. *Histoire de la femme cannibale*: roman. Paris: Mercure de France, 2003.
Sebbar, Leïla. *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*. Paris : Editions Stock, 1982.
[4] Ndiaye, Marie. *Rosie Carpe*. Paris: Minuit, 2001.
Herrera, Yuri. *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*. Cáceres: Periférica, 2010.

that unites the two works is the absence of psychological explanations. Both protagonists are opaque and impenetrable, offering us little ground for identification. This lack of character depth is however replaced by geographical breadth; the novels do not try to depict a complex interior, but rather focus on the protagonists' travels between various geographical locations.

I argue that this shift in focus from characters to border crossings enables both authors to outline a new relation between literature and politics. They are reformulating the political as a process of disidentification, thus moving away from a more traditional model of literary ethics where ethics and politics stem from the identification with a specific character. The reader is introduced to characters he/she doesn't fully comprehend and thus cannot fully identify with. However, whereas any attempt to 'explain' these characters is avoided, the relation between characters and transnational spaces becomes central.

Opaque characters who escape the reader's comprehension are of course not new in literary history. The lack of psychological explanation is often associated with the aesthetics of the Nouveau roman, a literary movement of the 1950s and 60s associated with, amongst others, Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe Grillet and Michel Butor. In a lecture entitled "Ce que je cherche à faire," given at the *Nouveau Roman, hier, aujourd'hui* conference, Natalie Sarraute said: "il faut éviter la clarté mortelle du connu."[5] Similarly, Alain Robbe Grillet has written that the coherence and unity of characters is but an illusion of the realist novel.[6]

Furthermore, Rosie Carpe, the protagonist of Ndiaye's novel, has been read by many critics as a decentered and alienated subject, characteristic of postmodernist aesthetics and philosophy. Whereas there is indeed a literary continuity between the nouveau roman,

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[5] Ricardou, Jean, and Françoise van Rossum-Guyon (Eds.). *Nouveau roman: hier aujourd'hui*. Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1972.
[6] See, Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *Pour Un Nouveau Roman*. [Paris]: Editions de Mínuit, 1963.

postmodernist aesthetics and the work of Ndiaye and Herrera, there are several aspects that also distinguish these novels from previous works including the fact that these narrative take place in multiple geographical locations. As mentioned in the introduction, Glissant, in his later writings, has named this tendency "the globalized baroque," an aesthetic choice that favors extension over depth.[7] As I have argued throughout this dissertation, opting for extension instead of depth, enables these authors to comment on the political and economic imbrication of different geographical locations within the socio-political context of globalization, thus outlining new forms of political subjectivity.

As I discuss in Chapter Three, the question of refusal has been at the center of contemporary theory and social activism. Autonomous Marxist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has argued that the upcoming insurrection will "not be an insurrection of energy, but an insurrection of slowness, withdrawal and exhaustion."[8] Similarly, radical anthropologist David Graeber has proposed the global cancellation of debts and a significant reduction of work as a way out of the current economic crisis.[9] Within this framework, contemporary social change relies on a paradigm of refusal and withdrawal as opposed to a model that seeks systemic change through direct confrontation. Similarly, in their book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Studies*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney explore what it would mean to refuse what they term "the call to order." Building on the black radical tradition, Moten and Harney define black aesthetics in terms of disawoval, refusal and fugitivity: "We are disruption and consent to disruption. We preserve upheaval. Sent to fulfill by abolishing, to renew by unsettling, to open the enclosure whose immeasurable venality is inversely proportionate to its actual area, we got

[7] Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de la Relation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.
[8] Berardi, Franco. *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012, p.69.
[9] Graeber, David. "A Practical Utopian's Guide to the Coming Collapse." *The Baffler* No. 22, 2013. Web. March, 2014. <http://www.thebaffler.com/past/practical_utopians_guide>

politics surrounded. We cannot represent ourselves. We can't be represented."[10] As Jack Halberstam explains in the introduction to the book, Moten and Harney suggest that when we refuse, "we create dissonance and more importantly, we allow dissonance to continue."[11] This mode of politics, or perhaps rather as Moten and Harney phrase it, "antagonism to politics" in its contemporary form, is expressed through a refusal of representation. The possibility of fugitivity is predicated upon the preservation of opacity. This is clearly a different mode of understanding power and resistance than, for instance, Baudrillard's claim that there is no outside (thus no possibility for refusal) to the power of hegemony.

This question seems particularly pertinent in 2014, as social movements that have emerged over the past decade in New York, Turkey, Egypt, Brazil, and many other countries, promote politics similarly based on forms of disidentification. In all of these cases, we have witnessed a distancing from identity politics towards a politics of space: most of these movements are organized around a spatial occupation of a public square; furthermore, they all advocate a form of disidentification from current society and forms of dissociation, rather than affirmative identifications. They have been at times praised, and at times critized for this tendency. Both in literary texts and in contemporary movements a new form of politics and political subjectivity has emerged, and it requires critical attention.

In this chapter I explore the relation between this call to refusal and the politics and aesthetics of opacity in the work of Ndiaye and Herrera. To what extent does the refusal to represent transparent characters, characters whom the reader could identify with, lead to a new form of politics founded on refusal and disidentification? In my discussion of these issues, I rely on Jacques Rancière's concept of "subjectivation politique." According to Rancière, in order for

[10] Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. 2013, p.20.
[11] Ibid, p.8.

politics ("le politique") to come into play, there needs to be a form of disidentification, and a "écart par rapport à un certain soi." I explore how these two novels invite the reader to distance him/herself from his/her world, thus leading to new forms of the political. Building on my discussion in Chapter One, of Maryse Condé's attempt to establish transnational solidarity beyond identity politics, I ask what role identity and opacity play in contemporary discourses on ethical global citizenship?

Frontier narratives

Yuri Herrera is the youngest novelist studied thus far. His first novel, *Trabajos del Reino* received the 2003 *Premio Binacional de Novela* turning Herrera into one of the most praised contemporary Latin American writers.[12] Also published in Spain in 2008, the novel received the "Otras Voces, Otros Ámbitos" prize, as the best work of fiction. The novel depicts life inside a Mexican drug cartel, focusing more specifically on one of its leaders, known as The Artist. Elena Poniatowska, one of Mexico's best renowned authors, wrote in the newspaper *La Jornada*: "Los capítulos, sin numerar, son fulgurantes. Ni una palabra de más. La prosa es escueta, dura, certera y sabe a pólvora porque Yuri la dispara con precisión. Nada de andarse por las ramas; esta novela es concluyente y definitiva" ['The chapters, which are not numbered, are stunning. Not one word is superfluous. The prose is concise, hard, accurate, and tastes like gunpowder because Yuri fires it with precision. There is no beating around the bush; this novel is conclusive and

[12] Herrera, Yuri. *Trabajos del reino*. México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, CONACULTA, 2004.

definite']. [13] Since the publication of this novel, Herrera has indeed become prominent for his concise, unadorned style.

Critics have also classified Herrera's *Trabajos del Reino* as an example of "narcoliteratura." In *Nada es lo que parece: Arquetipos de la narcocultura*, José Eduardo Serrato Cordova, while situating Herrera within the genre, argues that he establishes a "determinismo social" ['social determinism'] that questions the clear cut distinction between a good and an evil tradition of "narconovelas." Herrera himself has, however, (like Ndiaye), refused any type of classification. In an interview conducted in 2012, he declared: "Me parece que la mera etiqueta de narcoliteratura no engaña a nadie. Lo que tú tienes son las distintas expresiones lingüísticas de los grupos criminales. No son ficción, no son arte, pero por otro lado son un objeto de estudio lingüístico. Todo esto era porqué nunca me pliego ante la etiqueta" ['It seems to me that the narcoliterature label doesn't fool anyone. What you have are different linguistic expressions within criminal groups. They are not fiction, they are not art, but on the other hand, they are an object of linguistic study. All of this, because I never bow before a label'].

Herrera's second novel, *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* (2009), received equal praise. By 2011, Herrera's work had been translated into five languages. While still interested in marginalized subjectivities, in his second novel Herrera distances himself from the world of drug trafficking in order to address the experience of border-crossing, this time through a female protagonist, Makina. Discussing the differences and similarities between his two novels, Herrera states that whereas he believes that *Trabajos del Reino* focuses more explicitly on the border, *Señales* deals with the question of the border in an epistemological sense:

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[13] Poniatowska, Elena."Trabajos del reino, libro del escritor Yuri Herrera." *La Jornada.* Dec 2004. Web. March 2014. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/12/05/03aa1cul.php.>

> Creo que en *Trabajos del reino* estaba más claramente la frontera. Espacial y temporalmente. Es más explícito. Pero esta última novela es más fronteriza en un sentido epistemológico. En realidad hay un sólo capítulo que sucede en la frontera. Al principio es un movimiento hasta la frontera y después cuando la cruza y lo que ocurre del otro lado. Sin embargo podría decir que este texto es más fronterizo. Una frontera que no tiene que ver sólo con los límites geográficos o políticos. El de Makina es un personaje fronterizo. Ella es una traductora de lenguas, de realidades. Está en la frontera de distintos tipos de sujetos.Y al moverse transforma su identidad. Conforme está viajando, su identidad, que ya es inestable, se modifica. La frontera es un espacio lábil, es un espacio de intercambio donde se está gestando otro universo.[14]

> [I believe that the border was more clearly present in *Trabajos del reino*. Spatially and temporally. It is more explicit. But this last novel is more frontier-like in an epistemological sense. In reality, there is only one chapter that takes place on the border. At the beginning there is a movement towards the border followed by the crossing and what happens on the other side. However, I could say that this text is more of the border. A border that is not simply related to geographical and political limits. Makina is a frontier character. She is a translator of languages, of realities. She is at the border between different types of subjects. And as she moves, she transforms her identity. As she is traveling, her identity, which is already unstable, is modified. The frontier is an unsteady space, it is a space of exchange where a new universe is developing.]

Throughout the novel Herrera explores what it means to construct border characters. The relationship between the name, the territory and the border is primordial in this discussion. In *Señales* the name has become detached from the subjectivity which it no longer grounds. The only two characters whose names are revealed are the protagonist, Makina, and her mother, Cora. The name Cora, refers to an indigenous Mexican people and is also the second name of the Greek goddess Persephone, who according to Greek mythology ruled the underworld. Thus, instead of linking the character to a specific territory, the name gestures towards the capacity of Herrera's characters to connect different worlds. Makina and Cora are also often referred to as "the sister" and "the mother." Similarly, Makina's brother is only known to the reader as "the brother." The frequent absence of names allows us to read these characters as arquetypes. A

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[14] Erlan, Diego. "El lenguaje como frontera, entrevista con Yuri Herrera." *Clarín, Revista Ñ*. Sept. 09, 2011. Web. March 2014 < http://www.revistaenie.clarin.com/literatura/Entrevista_Yuri_Herrera_0_551944828.html>

corresponding relation extends to cities. The cities Makina travels through are not assigned local names but rather generic ones; the first chapter is thus simply entitled “Tierra” (Land).

Herrera’s language oscillates between the allegorical and the highly local. Whereas character names such as Makina and Cora do not attach them to a specific territory, as they do not sound particularly Mexican, their language does. Herrera’s style, highly concise, includes many specifically Mexican terms. For instance, characters frequently use the word “gabacho” and “el gabacho” to refer to the English language and the United States. “Gabacho” is a derogatory term commonly used in Mexico, a harsher version of the word “gringo.” The origins of the term are multiple. Etymologically, the term comes from Occitan “gavach” (“rude highlander,” “northerner who speaks the local language wrongly”). By semantic sliding, it was then applied to French people in Spain and to United States Anglo-Saxon citizens in Mexico or in the United States by Mexican-Americans. In Mexico, “gabacho” refers to both U.S. citizens and their country. Thus, whereas the characters’ language identifies them as Mexican, their names and designations point to the opposite. Furthermore, the question of the local is problematized as even the local term “gabacho” originates in several different territories. Language, words, including names, while gesturing towards the local, at the same time escape grounding in a specific territory. This does not imply that meaning is not tied to a territory, but rather that it shifts along with movement through space.

Aside from rendering identity unstable, the narrative also conceives of it not in positive, but effectively in negative terms. The novel raises the question of what it means to think about identity in terms of withholding and absconding, rather than asserting and constructing. The two characters who help Makina cross the border are designated by a letter (possibly the first letter of their name): Señor Hache (Mister H), and Señor DobleU (Mister W). Mister H and Mister W are

defined by their function that is their illegal activities on the border. As such, they can only reveal the first letter of their names; all other signs of identity must be withheld. Similarly, once in the United States, as she fears she may be in danger, Makina thinks about calling the police, only to realize: "Y para qué llamar a la policía, si la medida de la ventura es que ellos no se enteren de que uno existe" (p.95) ['And why call the police if the goal of the adventure is for them not to realize that one exists']. In other words, the central preoccupation is not for one to display one's identity but rather to protect it. In *The Undercommons*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney argue in a loosely similar way that blackness operates "as the modality of life's constant escape and takes the form, the held and errant pattern, of flight."[15] Whereas Herrera may not be focusing explicitly on the question of blackness, characters in *Señales* similarly seek to escape anyone's grasp, continuously erasing their traces.

The fact that characters conceal their identity from the police may not be immiediately perceived as an epistemological challenge. However, Herrera's entire narrative is constructed around the contemporary preoccupation with control and safety that forces characters into errancy and evasion. When she first enters the United States, Makina notices: "Carteles de prohibición hormigueaban calle a calle inspirando a los nacionales a verse siempre protegidos, seguros, amables, inocentes, soberbios, intermitentamente azorados, livianos y desbordantes…" (p.62) ['Signs indicating what is prohibited filled the streets, inspiring nationals to see themselves as always protected, safe, pleasant, innocent, proud, constantly alarmed, light-hearted and uninhibited…']. As in Eltit's novel, modes of control and superivision are represented at the micro-level, though this time, in the context of immigration. As a result, the instinct to flee and withhold information is shared by all characters. Makina does not want to reveal much to anyone

[15] Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*, p.51.

who she encounters during her journey. When she finally finds her brother, he is also initially hesitant to disclose a lot about his life in the United States.

Makina's brother has managed to stay in the United States precisely because he has been willing to exchange his identity for someone else's. When Makina finally finds him in a military camp, he tells her the incredible story of his life on the other side of the border. He was introduced to a family whose son had enlisted in the army. The parents were terrified by the idea that their son could be sent to war and offered Makina's brother money to join the army under their son's name. Makina's brother accepted; he was subsequently sent to Iraq, yet returned from the war alive, something that no one expected. Thus, while identities are fluid, the narrative also brings into play a hierarchy of identities and by extension a hierarchy of lives: what is a life worth and are all lives worth the same? The American family values Makina's brother's life less than the life of an American citizen, which is why, within their logic, it is less unthinkable for him to go to war. Like Eltit, Herrera strives to represent precarious subjects and to think about identity in precarious terms. Ties, linguistic, national or territorial, are not a cause of positive identification, as they render characters disposable. The act of absconding stems out of necessity, in the fight for survival. The reason that Makina's brother can go to war in the place of the young American is because no one can identify or recognize him. The narrator mentions that although the other soldiers were surprised by the discrepancy between his face and his name, no one could prove this incongruity valid. When she arrives in the U.S., Makina travels from town to town enquiring about her brother and hoping that someone will recognize him and direct her to his whereabouts. This task proves to be quite difficult. Whereas the act of being recognized by another is often posited as the basis of individual self-consciousness, Herrera represents subjects in their struggle to not be recognized.

As Makina's brother surprises the American family with his return, they decide to move away, since they've promised him the son's name and documents: "Pues nos vamos a otro lugar, respondío la madre. Nos cambiamos de nombre, nos volvemos a inventar, respondío la madre" (p.102) ['Well, let's go to a different place…Let's change our name, let's reinvent ourselves…']. Herrera is aware of the social conditions that influence the process of identity formation. The novel thus stages circumstances under which an identity can be reinvented and factors that are necessary for someone to 'change' identities. Whereas certain characters have the possibility and the right to choose their name, others can only accept the name that is given to them, or can only survive if they do not have a name.

As mentioned previously, this instability of subjects exists in a dialectic with a desire for territorial grounding. Thus, it is important to notice that Makina's brother first heads to the U.S. in order to retrieve a "terreno," a piece of land that supposedly belongs to the family. Once in the United States, he realizes that the land doesn't exist. Furthermore, most of the chapters bear the names of places, or perhaps rather, landscapes: "El lugar donde se encuentran los cerros," ['The place where hills meet'] "El cerro de obsidiana" ['The obsidian hill'], "El lugar donde el viento corta como navaja" ['The place where the wind cuts like a knife'], etc. The narrative thus unfolds in relation to the characters' (especially Makina's) movement through space, but also their inability to permanently situate themselves in a given space. Whereas titles gesture towards location and immobility, characters are in constant movement. The fact, however, that places do not bear the names of specific cities but rather descriptive landscape characteristics, makes us wonder whether they indicate permanence or the illusion of permanence. In fact, places are not clearly defined or located but could refer to many different places and furthermore, are represented through a subjective interpretation of the place.

In *The practice of everyday life*, Michel de Certeau famously considers our everyday "ways of operating" which "constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production."[16] Certeau addresses ways in which we define or redefine ourselves in relation to the spaces we inhabit as well as our everyday practices of consumption and production. He is especially interested in the localized, contingent crossing of borders and boundaries within cities organized by economic power. Thus the very simple act of walking through the city can be seen as a mode of space reappropriation and reorganization. Herrera's novel places Certeau's analysis into a transnational framework, asking what it means to think of immigration as a constant estrangement from and reappropriation of space. In *Señales*, border-crossing is a practice of everyday life.

Ndiaye's contradictory realities

Like Herrera's, Ndiaye's world is a world where contradictions coexist, where one can embody opposing character traits, where one can be and not be themselves at the same time. In the same way that Makina, when she first sees her brother, tells us that he was not himself, Rosie believes her brother to be black as she seems him at the Guadeloupe airport.

At the beginning of Ndiaye's novel, Rosie Carpe arrives to Guadeloupe with her son Titi, hoping to find her brother Lazare. In Guadeloupe she encounters a postslavery society marked by deep social divisions, unemployment and economic precarity, as well as an island paradise that beckons to tourists and expatriate retirees. Rosie encounters her strangely rejuvenated parents, who are trying to begin a new life in this "tourist paradise."

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[16] Certeau, Michel de. *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p.xiv

A flash-back then leads us to Rosie's and Lazare's childhood in Brive-La-Gaillarde, to explain Rosie's banal and monotonous life in Antony, her brief sexual affair with Max, the manager of the hotel where she works. At the end of this part, Rosie observes: "Je suis au bout du rouleau" (p.169). Under the weight of this feeling, she decides to leave France for Guadeloupe. In the third part, we are once again located in Guadeloupe, but Rosie has disappeared as the main character. We now see her through the eyes of Lagrand, a black man from Guadeloupe, friends with Lazare, who is at the center of the plot. He continuously poses the same question: "Où sont mes amis, où est ma famille ?" The novel ends as Rosie and Lagrand are married, at that point, Rosie only barely speaks; according to the narrator, she has arrived to "le point le plus extrême de la passivité et de l'indifférence" (p.334).

Critics have focused on the theme of abandonment and exclusion in the novel. Rosie is a solitary and marginal character; neglected by her parents, her brother and Max, Titi's father, she remains alone. She is excluded, alienated and uncertain of who she is: "Marie Ndiaye fait partie de ces écrivains dont on reconnaît la signature stylistique dès les premières lignes d'un roman. Une même quête, un même questionnement identitaire animent ses écrits. Sous sa plume, ses protagonistes subissent le même processus d'exclusion, d'aliénation et de nomadisation," writes Nora Cottille-Foley.[17] For many critics, Rosie Carpe is the perfect example of postmodern and postcolonial alienation. She cannot successfully occupy the position of the subject or assume the "I." The subject is doubled, Rosie often refers to herself in the third person; she has the feeling that she is observing herself from the outside. She does not know how to position herself in History nor in the story; she effectively plays no role in a life narrative that was constructed without her will or participation. Rosie's instability as a character has led critics such as Lydie

[17] Cottille-Foley, Nora. "Postmodernité, non-lieux et mirages de l'anamnèse dans l'oeuvre de Marie Ndiaye." *French Forum* 31: 2 (Spring 2006), p. 81

Moudileno to write that Rosie is a subject "in disarray," who perfectly illustrates "the condition of the contemporary subject ill-equipped to interpret reality whose logic always seems to escape her."[18]

Whereas Moudileno's reading emphasizes Rosie's inability to master her narrative, Cottille-Foley focuses on characters' loss identity caused by the discontinuity of memory: "Revenant incessamment, pathologiquement, sur le lieu ultime de leur maison natale, les personnages constatent la discontinuité de leur propre mémoire. Soumis à la démythification de leurs souvenirs, ils se désagrègent peu à peu, perdant par là même leur propre identité."[19] According to Cotille-Foley, characters become "victimes du leurre d'un lieu de mémoire dont la validité est sans cesse remise en question," and finally, they "perdent leur identité même."[20] I would argue that most critical readers of *Rosie Carpe* have seen the novel as a "roman de caractère, roman psychologique."[21] This reading essentially holds that identity exists as a stable and definable category. There exists an originary identity which, at a certain moment, characters' possessed, and that they are now "losing." The wandering and the instability of characters are perceived as an existential crisis, a state that needs to be overcome, in order to restore the unity of the self and the continuity of memory. Though indeed the novel presents us with unstable characters, I argue that *Rosie Carpe* moves beyond the simple decentering of the subject and the question of "identity loss."

Like Herrera's narrative, *Rosie Carpe* poses the problem of the name, and the relation between the name and the person who carries it. We know that Rosie used to be called Rose

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[18] Moudileno, Lydie. "Marie Ndiaye's Discombobulated Subject." *SubStance* 111: 35: 3 (2006), p. 84.
[19] Cottille-Foley, p.83
[20] Ibid,p.88
[21] Galli Pellegrini, Rosa. "Marie NDiaye: de l'abandon à la (ré)-appropriation. Thèmes et techniques romanesques." *Trois études sur le roman de l'extrême contemporain : Marie Ndiaye, Sylvie Germain, Michel Chaillou.* Rosa Galli Pellegrini (Ed.). Paris/Fasano, PU de Paris-Sorbonne, 2004, p. 18

Marie. However, Rosie refuses to admit that Rosie and Rose Marie are the same person; she refuses to admit a continuity between the two. Rosie does not depend on, does not need Rose Marie in order to be Rosie: “Bien longtemps après que les années de Brive-la- Gaillarde se furent écoulées…. elle se contentait de dire, sans regret, sans intonation : Je m’appelais encore Rose-Marie à ce moment-là. Et il fallait comprendre, car elle ne savait pas trop elle-même et ne pouvait rien ajouter, que le pli lentement affermi de l’appeler Rosie, plus tard à Paris, avait signifié et comme provoqué la fin d’une saison jaune, douce, provinciale et pleine d’aspiration” (p.51).

Thus begins the second part of *Rosie Carpe*. Whereas in the first part we were in Guadeloupe, here we have returned to Rosie’s and Lazare’s childhood in Brive-La-Gaillarde, to their brief stay in Paris, and to Rosie’s life in Anthony. This passage is characteristic of Ndiaye’s style: the reader is disoriented in relation to the temporality of events. There are several temporal adverbs in this passage: however, these adverbs, which connote the past or the future, exist in relation to a present that is not clearly defined. This chapter, meant to represent a return to the past, begins with a reference to the future: “Bien longtemps après que les années de Brive-la-Gaillarde se furent écoulées...” However, at that moment in the novel, we don’t yet know that Rosie grew up in Brive; Brive is still an empty reference point, in the same way that “a long time after,” is a very imprecise temporal indicator. How long after is “a long time after?” Furthermore, “after” does not refer to the time right after she left Brive, but rather, to a time after the Brive years have gone by; this future exists in relation to a present where the years spent in Brive are already behind. Similarly, when the narrator says “later on in Paris,” the reader wonders, later on when? Later on in relation to what?

The name change marks a temporal discontinuity of the subject. The narrator tells us that the decision to be named Rosie "avait signifié et comme provoqué la fin d'une saison jaune;" the name change appears simultaneously as the consequence and the cause of an event. She begins to call herself Rosie because the Brive years are already over, but also in order to provoke the disappearance of the time in Brive. But this change of name is not perceived as a loss in relation to an originary name. Rosie remarks with no regrets that her name is no longer Rose Marie. The name change is not related only to a temporal discontinuity, but also to a spatial one; it is the result of a movement through space. In a similar manner that Rose-Marie became Rosie once she moved to Paris, her mother, Danielle, decides to become Diane, when she moves to Guadeloupe:

"En ce qui me concerne, Monsieur Lagrand, vous pouvez m'appeler Diane.

-Danielle, dit Carpe, à la fois sombre et indifférent.

- C'est que, de Danielle, je suis passée à Diane. Pas de mal à ça, pas vrai, Monsieur Lagrand?

- Elle se contentait bien d'être Danielle, grogna Francis Carpe" (p.188).

Because characters change names as they move to a different place, I argue that instead of being defined by their names, they are rather defined by their manner of inhabiting, existing within a certain space; every movement in space thus requires a change of name.

In addition to characters having multiple names, there is also a hermeneutic name code. While in Guadeloupe, Lazare and his friend Abel, assault a French couple as they try to steal their possessions. Unfortunately, events do not follow as planned, and during a dispute with the couple, Abel kills the husband. In the bible, Abel is killed by his brother Cain. However, in the novel, Abel is the one who commits a murder. Similarly, in the bible, Lazare is the beggar who begs in front of the house of the rich; he is rewarded in the afterlife because he handled his poverty with virtue. The Lazare from *Rosie Carpe* is the contrary of the biblical Lazare. Unable

to withstand poverty, he resorts to crime. He ends in prison, and is not redeemed in any way. Ndiaye plays with names, with the symbolic expectation that certain names produce. Characters never fulfill the destiny that was foreseen through the name; most of the time, their lives move in the opposite direction. In the same way that characters define themselves against their name, they also define themselves against their family.

In *Rosie Carpe*, the family is above all linked to abandonment and suffocation. Rosie comes to Guadeloupe to join her parents and brother, but soon enough she realizes that they do not necessarily look forward to seeing her: “Elle pensait soudain : En vérité Lazare ne voulait pas que je le rejoigne, et il croyait bien certainement qu’après cinq ans il ne courait plus trop le risque de me voir débarquer. Et la même chose, c’est évident, pour papa et maman qui ne veulent pas de moi ici, et surtout pas de moi avec Titi... ”(p.26). Rosie’s distancing from her parents begins much sooner (earlier on in Rosie’s life but later in the novel). Once Lazare and Rosie arrive in Paris, they realize that “les parents Carpe leur avaient si peu appris, si peu légués, hormis la gêne, la docilité, et une sorte de béance maussade et défiante devant les imprévus de l’existence” (p.59). The family legacy prevents a peaceful and autonomous existence. But all of Lazare’s and Rosie’s attempted rebellions fail because the Carpe parents never expected anything from their children. Lazare hopes that by failing in school in Paris, he will betray his parents’confidence, forcing them to react. He is wrong: the Carpe do not feel responsability towards their children. Rosie understands this very well: “Rosie se sentit rougir pour Lazare qui avait tant attendu des parents Carpe, qui s’était imaginé avoir vaincu Brive et les Carpe alors qu’on n’avait rien attendu de lui et qu’on n’avait jamais pensé devoir attendre quoi que ce fût de lui…Et si, jamais, ils n’avaient eu peur pour Lazare ou pour Rosie, ce n’était pas par confiance, comprit-elle accablée de honte, mais parce qu’ils étaient incapables d’aimer assez Lazare et

Rosie pour redouter de les voir s'égarer, pour craindre autre chose que le scandale quand bien même cet autre chose serait, pour Lazare et Rosie, une source de malheur plus grand que le scandale" (p.63). There is a denaturalisation of filiation, which does not necessarily provoke feelings of love and responsibility. Later on, in Guadeloupe, the father Carpe says to Lagrand: "Une fille qui vous est devenue étrangère…si elle revient vous voir après des années et vous demande de l'aider ou je ne sais quoi, vous ne lui devez rien, je pense" (p.222). The novel questions the relation between familiarity and "étrangéïté," but also, like Bolaño's novel, it poses the question of responsibility; when and for whom are we responsible?

If she succeeds in detaching herself from her parents early in life, Rosie nonetheless remains attached to her brother Lazare. In Paris, she traverses the city asking people: "Est-ce que vous avez vu mon frère Lazare?" Throughout most of the novel, Rosie is capable of defining herself only in relation to her brother. However, Lazare never fulfills his role as a brother. He abandons her in Paris, he takes all of her savings in order to go to Guadeloupe, and he doesn't come to see her at the airport. Towards the end of the novel, Rosie finally frees herself from this last family connection: "J'ai parfois le sentiment, dit Rosie, que mon frère Lazare ne reviendra pas, Lagrand. Et savez-vous alors ce que j'éprouve ? Je ne suis que légèrement déçue. Je n'ai plus besoin de Lazare, Lagrand. Je ne l'attends plus. Je suis délivrée de l'amour que j'avais pour lui" (p.218). After so many years, Rosie finally succeeds in breaking all of her family ties, in freeing herself entirely from her family.

Both narratives thus present the reader with characters questioning their relation to both their names and their families, and defining themselves mostly in relation to the spaces they are moving through. Aside from their relation to a specific space, there is very little we, as readers, know about these characters. As already mentioned, they primarily define themselves against

various aspects of their identity, leaving us with opaque characters about whom we know very little.

Writing Opacity

When asked about his intention to write about "the beauty of the arid," Herrera responds: "Si es cierta esa frase de Lezama Lima de que el paisaje crea cultura, algunas de aquellas historias surgieron directamente de cómo percibía el Mezquital. Un lugar duro, sin exuberancia, de una belleza trabajosa que exige atención y tiempo para advertir el resplandor de la tierra árida"[22] ['If Lezama Lima's statement that the landscape creates culture is true, some of these stories emerged directly from how I perceived Mezquital. A hard place, with no lushness, with an arduous beauty that requires attention and time to notice the splendor of arid land'].

While Herrera's style with its short sentences and carefully chosen vocabulary could be characterized as 'arid,' this aridity also appears between characters, in their infrequent and sparse dialogues. When she finds herself in the border city of Cuidadcita, Makina is continuously asked the same question: "Vas a cruzar?" ['Are you going to cross?']. That question represents the extent of her communication with the characters she encounters. Furthermore, communication is constructed in relation to space; however, not in relation to a present, but rather in relation to a future location. Language does not indicate where someone is currently situated, but rather where maybe someone is going to.

Whereas dialogues are sparse and characters exchange very few words, the question of the means of communication is at the center of the narrative. Makina begins the quest for her

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[22] Erlan, Diego. "El lenguaje como frontera, entrevista con Yuri Herrera." *Clarín, Revista Ñ*. Sept. 09, 2011. Web. March 2014 < http://www.revistaenie.clarin.com/literatura/Entrevista_Yuri_Herrera_0_551944828.html>

brother in order to convey a message from their mother. Along the way, Mister H gives her a package to deliver to one of his associates in the United States. Literally and metaphorically, Makina is the one who delivers messages. In her hometown, she also worked as a telephone operator, in charge of the only telephone in a radius of many miles. Receiving both local calls and calls from across the border, Makina learned to speak three languages.

As in the case with the notion of territory, the importance of communication exists in a dialectic with the impossibility of communication. As discussed in Chapter One, In *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Condé's first novel points to "the lack of communication within and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world" as an "important infrastructural problem of the restricted permeability of global culture."[23] Similarly, in Herrera's novel, the notion of 'the message' is developed in relation to the difficulty of transmitting a message. In fact, the entire novel is centered around Cora's attempt to transmit a one sentence message to her son, and the difficulty of doing so, as the interconnectedness of the world has produced subjects whose survival depends on the erasure of any sort of communication.

Makina is the only one who transmits messages, and who translates and operates on both sides of the frontier: "En todo caso, Makina ni se hacía ilusiones ni perdía el sueño culpándose por haber inventado la política; llevar mensajes era su manera de terciar el mundo" (p.20) ['In any case, Makina had no illusions, nor did she lose any sleep feeling guilty about having invented politics; carrying messages was her way of participating in the world']. However, Makina does not necessarily construct her identity in the interstices of cultures. Herrera's approach to the question of the border is thus significantly different from some of the identity-

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[23] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p.18.

centered discourses of the 1970s and 80s. In *Borderlands= La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist and theorist, develops the concept of a "mestiza consciousness" or the consciousness of the borderlands. According to Anzaldúa, the mestiza consciousness is characterized by a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity. And while the mestiza is not merely an assembly of disparate pieces, contradictions do ultimately get resolved in a synthesis that transcends the initial duality.[24] In Herrera's narrative, as in Ndiaye's, there is no ultimate resolution or syncretic unison of the two sides of the border. Whereas Makina's subjectivity shifts in relation to the space she inhabits and her main function is to connect, the spatial contradictions are not necessarily resolved within a hyphenated identity. Thus, a fairly different relation to the border is articulated here: a relation that doesn't erase, but rather underlines, the inequalities on both sides of the border. In *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, as she describe Glissant's philosophy, Emily Apter writes that Glissant "subordinates instabilities of nomination to geopoetics, replacing the old center-periphery model with a world system comprised of multiple linguistic singularities or interlocking small worlds, each a locus of poetic opacity."[25] This characterization also applies to Herrera's novel. But how can these different interlocking worlds be connected? Furthermore, what is the role of opacity in the act of translation and border-crossing?

As Makina crosses the border and comes into contact with U.S. farmers, she realizes that she identifies with their language: "Hablan una lengua intermedia con la que Makina simpatiza de inmediato porque es como ella: maleable, deleble, permeable…un algo que sirve para poner

[24] Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands = La frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
[25] Apter, Emily S. *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p.245.

en relación. Más que un punto medio entre lo paisano y lo gabacho su lengua es una franja difusa entre lo que desaparece y lo que no ha nacido" (p.73) ['They're speaking an intermediate language, one that Makina immediately recognizes because it is like her: maleable and permeable. Even more than a halfway point between the rural and the 'gringo,' her language is a diffused border between what is in the process of disappearing and what has not yet been born']. Language is thus also understood in relation to movement and change; translation is neither a process which transposes one set of signs and meanings into another, nor does it create a new set of meanings halfway between the two. Rather, it is associated with questions of impermanence and the continuous transience of meaning. In the same way that the question of the border is not resolved with a Mexican-American identity, the question of language is not resolved with a heterogeneous form such as Spanglish. Rather, a constantly changing relation is imagined. In fact, Herrera's understanding of the border and a border language is in several ways similar to Glissant's understanding of the Relation, where the 'primary' elements do not simply create a third element, as they are also themselves transformed in the process.

The result is that aspects of the narrative remain opaque and escape our full understanding. For instance, throughout the novel, immigration is described as a search for "something," material or immaterial, that always escapes us. At the end of the novel, as Makina asks her brother why he refuses to return to Mexico, he replies: "Ya peleé por esta gente. Debe que haber algo por lo que pelean tanto. Por eso me quedé en el ejército, mientras averiguo de que se trata" (p.103) ['I fought for these people. There has to be something they are fighting so much for. That is why I stayed in the army, to figure out what it was']. Immigration is thus interpreted as search for a meaning that continuously escapes the immigrant, a desire for a resolution and an explanation that is never found.

Though Makina brings into relation the different spaces that she traverses, we know very little about her. Like Rosie, she remains an opaque character with whom it is difficult to identify. *Señales* is almost entirely written from a perspective of an external narrator, who never describes Makina. In the few instances where the narraitve drifts into Makina's interior monologue, the reader doesn't learn much more. The first sentence of the novel is: "Estoy muerta, se dijo Makina cuando todas las cosas respingaron…" (p.11) ['I am dead, Makina said to herself when everything went awry…']. In one of the rare occasions when we have access to Makina's thoughts, we learn that she is in fact uncertain whether she is dead or alive. The entire narrative is built on this ambiguity. A 'realistic' reading might posit that Makina merely feels close to death as she is crossing the Mexico-U.S. border. But, there is an alternative reading, where Makina, without being fully aware of it, is in fact dead, and she is crossing the border into the underworld. Within this interpretation, Makina's voyage takes her through the nine levels of the underworld, known as Mictlán. Herrera has himself commented on this ambiguity:

> La novela permite dos lecturas: una más llana, que es el viaje de una mujer en busca de una persona querida que descubre un mundo. Y otra, que es el viaje de un muerto que no sabe que está muerto. La estructura narrativa es la del descenso al Mictlán en la cultura Mexica. Es la mitología de una cultura que algunos se confunden y dicen que es la azteca, pero no. Cierto es que no hay sólo una versión de esa mitología. Yo tomé una versión de esta narrativa y tomé los nueve pasos en este descenso al inframundo. Pero para entenderla el lector no necesita estar enterado de todo esto. De todas maneras, y tal como lo comentás, en este nivel de lectura el personaje también pone en duda la estabilidad de la realidad.[26]

> [The novel allows for two readings: a more straightforward one, where a woman discovers a world as she travels in search of a loved one. The alternative reading focuses on the voyage of a dead person who doesn't know they are dead. The descent to Mictlan in Mexica culture provides the narrative structure. Some believe that this myth comes

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[26] Erlan, Diego. "El lenguaje como frontera, entrevista con Yuri Herrera." *Clarín, Revista Ñ* Sept. 09 2011: n.pag. Web. March 2014. <http://www.revistaenie.clarin.com/literatura/Entrevista_Yuri_Herrera_0_551944828.html>

> from the Aztec culture, but it doesn't. It is true that there exist multiple versions of this myth. I took one version and I borrowed the nine steps of this descent into the underworld. But to understand the narrative the reader does not need to be aware of all of this. In any case, as you mention it, at this level of reading the character also questions the stability of reality].

Herrera thus introduces, into a narrative about modern immigration, the indigenous belief in the myth of Mictlan. According to the myth, the journey from the first level to the ninth is difficult and lasts for four years; the dead have to pass many challenges, such as crossing a mountain range where the mountains crashed into each other, a field with wind that blew flesh-scraping knives, and a river of blood with fearsome jaguars. Of course, the analogy between the descent into the underworld and the crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border points to hardships associated with immigration, an experience that can result in death. But furthermore, the ambiguity the reader faces as a result of these multiple readings, parallels the ambiguity faced by characters who are continuously searching for an answer or a resolution that never presents itself.

Thus, whereas the first sentence gives us access to Makina's interiority, we are also immediately invited to doubt her statement. We are presented with a character who cannot reveal much about herself, as she herself is uncertain whether she is dead or alive. Furthermore, right after Makina makes an affirmative statement about herself: "Estoy muerta," the narrative shifts focus from her interiority to her spatial surroundings. The following paragraph opens with a long description of the border city. In this passage, the lack of access to characters' feelings and thoughts is immediately counterbalanced by detailed spatial descriptions and characters' attempts to find their bearings within unknown spaces.

Similarly, the statement that Makina speaks three languages is immediately complemented by: "Makina hablaba las tres, y en las tres sabía callarse" (p.19) ['Makina spoke

all three, and in all three she knew how to remain silent']. Whereas Makina is the one who transmits messages and Herrera himself defines her as a translator, she rarely speaks. When asked whether she is going to cross the border, she often simply nods, and as she accepts a drink from Mister W in the border city, the narrator remarks that they were enjoying it in silence. While Makina goes through several situations where her life is in danger, the reader does not know how she fells in any of those instances. For example, after Makina and Chucho, a character responsible for smuggling people across the border, arrive in the U.S. they encounter a ranchero who threatens to kill them. Chucho tries to prevent the ranchero from shooting and yells at Makina to run. Surprisingly, only one sentence is offered as a description of Makina's reaction: "Makina no estaba acostumbrada a que la gente le dijera Huye" (p.54) ['Makina was not used to people telling her Run'].

Like Rosie, Makina doesn't have a strong say (not does she attempt to have a strong say) in how the narrative unravels. As such, she remains difficult to relate to. Several passages in the novel outline Makina's ambiguous position: "Una no hurga bajo las enaguas de los demás. Una no se pregunta cosas sobre las encomiendas de los demás. Una no escoge cuáles mensajes lleva y cuáles deja pudrir. Una es la puerta, no la que cruza la puerta" (p.19) ['One doesn't look under other people's underskirts. One doesn't wonder about other people's assignments. One doesn't choose which messages to carry and which to let rot. One is the door, not the one who goes through the door']. In many ways, she is a contemporary take on the classical theme of the female muse, who allows the poet to access the higher realm, without herself having access to it. Like a muse, Makina is here described as the door, rather than as the one who goes through the door. However, the question of what is actually put into relation is left open; is it Cora and her son, the world and the underworld, or Mexico and the United States?

It is not only Makina who escapes our full understanding. After she learns that her brother fought in the Iraq war, Makina asks him to describe his experience. Her brother's response, however, puts into question the possibility of understanding or explaining: "Para qué quieres saber, dijo, No lo entenderías. Para entenderte a ti" (p.100) ['Why do you want to know, he said, you wouldn't understand it. To understand you']. Even though the brother proceeds to recount some of his experience in the war, the question of comprehension remains suspended; it is unclear whether the narrative helps Makina to understand her brother or whether the experience remains incomprehensible. To return to Glissant, the question raised here is what it means to have a relation while maintaining opacity? What does it mean for all of these elements to be brought together by an opaque character in an atmosphere of opacity? This same question is addressed in Ndiaye's narrative.

Who is Rosie ?

In an interview for the French magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Marie Ndiaye declares: "Aucune définition de ce que je suis censée être ne peut me venir à l'esprit. En revanche, j'entends de plus en plus d'injonctions de se définir (en tant que Noire ou métisse, métisse en France, etc.). Se définir, c'est se réduire, se résumer à des critères, et par le fait entériner ce que d'autres seraient ou ne seraient pas."[27] Like Herrera, Ndiaye has refused any classification of herself and her work. And, like Makina, Rosie Carpe evades any stable definition.

[27]Anquetil, Gilles, et Armanet, François. "'Se définir, c'est se réduire': interview avec Marie NDiaye." *Le Nouvel Observateur* 2162 (13 Avril 2006).

First of all, Rosie rarely speaks, she is mostly characterized by her silence. In Paris "Rosie ne connaissait personne à qui parler. Je cherche un certain Lazare Carpe, murmurait-elle de temps en temps, surprise d'entendre sa voix, ayant prévu cette surprise et malgré tout surprise" (p.65). Similarly, when she arrives in Guadeloupe, she has such a feeling of powerlessness and solitude that she "ne pouvait soulever ses pieds ni prononcer le moindre mot" (p.42). There is very little dialogue in the novel, aside from the two questions that Rosie continuously poses : "Connaissez-vous mon frère Lazare Carpe ?" and "Connaissez-vous le père de l'enfant que j'attends ?" (p.168). Not only does she rarely speak, but Rosie is immensely frustrated that Max, her supervisor at the Antony hotel and the father of her child, speaks too much: "Rosie savait qu'elle était cette Rosie Carpe qui bondissait sur Max pour le faire taire. Elle le haïssait d'aimer autant papoter" (p.73). Their encounters always follow the same pattern, Max speaks and Rosie listens to him without saying a word: "Il savait des choses qu'elle ignorait. Elle l'admettait et l'écoutait parfois, engluée dans un vague dégoût mais attentive, silencieuse" (p.73). Max knows almost nothing about Rosie because Rosie never tells him anything about herself: "Rosie appréciait qu'il ne lui pose aucune question la concernant. Il ne savait d'elle qu'une chose, qu'elle était Rosie Carpe de son vrai nom, et cela lui suffisait" (p.74). In fact, Max doesn't know anything at all about Rosie since her real name is not Rosie Carpe.

It is not only the protagonists who don't know each other very well. As the reader, we find ourselves in the same position; Rosie remains for us an impenetrable character whom we cannot fully grasp or understand, a character with whom we cannot identify fully. The reader is never certain why Rosie is doing what she's doing. Even though in the first two parts of the novel we have access to her point of view, through free indirect discourse, Ndiaye plays with the distinction between exteriority and interiority. As a result, while Rosie's mind is transparent to

us, she remains opaque, because we don't learn anything through Rosie's thoughts except the fact that she doesn't understand herself. She is surprised that the figure she sees in the mirror is her, Rosie Carpe; she is surprised that the life she lives belongs to her. She is surprised to be Rosie Carpe; she is surprised to do the things she does. The reader is also surprised; sometimes by her lack of action, sometimes by her actions, sometimes by her surprise. The narration contributes to this feeling as very little is elucidated. There is often no causal relation between Rosie's actions and thoughts. Rosie's interiority simply sends us back to her exteriority since she feels like she is observing herself from the outside.

While there are several descriptions of Rosie, these descriptions don't allow us to form a precise image: "Rosie portait des vêtements larges et discrets, et elle attachait ses cheveux en une queue peu fournie, si bien que chacun devait comprendre, en la rencontrant, qu'elle n'avait aucune prétention à signifier ou exprimer quoi que ce fût" (p.56). The description thus merely tells us that there is nothing that differentiates Rosie from anyone else, leaving the reader to wonder what Rosie Carpe is actually like. Often, Rosie acts in a way that is not fully understandable and the narration doesn't attempt to explain her actions. For instance, when Max brings an unknown woman to film them during intercourse, Rosie knows that she doesn't want to do this, she knows that she wants Max and the woman to leave, she knows that she wants to scream, but she doesn't do anything. Why? She doesn't know: "Rosie tachait d'exécuter ce qu'on attendait d'elle, ne sachant pas comment il était possible qu'elle fût incapable de le refuser, ne comprenant pas et s'absorbant dans une rêverie grise et maussade" (p.79). Rosie further mentions that these filming sessions upset her because her skin feels cold after them and because Max and the woman "…la condamnaient à vivre dans le froid permanent de la confusion des saisons…" (p.78). This is a peculiar passage. It is not entirely clear why pornographic

filming sessions would lead to a confusion about seasons, except to indicate the physical malaise that Rosie feels. The passage also allows the narrator to avoid and circumvent any psychological explanation; it is not because she finds it immoral or because she is ashamed (or at least we don't know that she does) that Rosie wants to scream when Max and the woman enter the room, it is because, as she says, she no longer wants to be confused about seasons. She is responding to an exterior cause, to a corporal sensation; she wants the cold to end. But after ten pages of description of these filming sessions, it is still unclear why she does it.

The narrative is punctured with ellipses, which appear at crucial moments in the novel. Between the moment when pregnant Rosie moves into an Antony apartment and the moment when Titi is one year old, there is an ellipsis. After a scene where Max finds Titi nearly dead because Rosie has lost her milk and hasn't fed him in days, once again, there is an interruption. In the following scene, Rosie is already in a different apartment; Titi was taken away from Rosie for an undetermined period of time but is now living with her again. A similar situation occurs in Guadeloupe, at the end of the novel's third part. Titi almost dies when Rosie leaves him with a young girl, Lisbeth; Lagrand brings him to the hospital and saves him. After this scene there is a temporal ellipse. The next time Lagrand sees Rosie she lives in Morne-à-l'Eau with Titi who is a teacher and who is married to Lisbeth. We learn from Titi that Rosie abandoned him and that he spent the majority of his childhood with his grandparents. Titi's birth, both of his hospital stays and finally the moment when he is abandoned by his mother are all erased from the novel. How does Rosie feel when Titi is born; when she realizes that he almost died twice; when she abandons him? Whenever there is a need for psychological or moral explanation, the narrative breaks off.

There is no narrative development toward clarity and self-understanding. At the end of the novel, Lagrand and Rosie are married and in their common life “Rosie ne lui commandait rien, ne le maltraitait d’aucune façon, esquivait son regard. Elle lui semblait avoir atteint le point le plus extrême de la passivité et de l’indifférence” (p.334). Instead of offering us a progressive elucidation of the character, the novel does the opposite. If, at the beginning, we at least had access to Rosie’s thoughts, at the end, she is but a surface.

The narrative is constantly disorienting the reader. We have already seen how Ndiaye plays with temporal indications; the past and the future exist in relation to an unspecified present, leaving the reader perplexed in relation to the novel’s temporality. For instance, it is not clear how much time has passed between the different parts of the novel. The novel begins in media res: “Mais elle n’avait cessé de croire que son frère Lazare serait là pour les voir arriver, elle et Titi...” (p.9). What does this “mais” refer to? The narrative is immediately placed into a temporal continuum that we don’t have access to. The second part begins with a return to the past, but what past are we in? How many years ago? It is unclear. The other parts of the novel are structured in a similar way. At the beginning of the third part the plot returns to Guadeloupe. Rosie has been living there for some time, but how long is ‘some time’? At the beginning of the fourth part, when Lagrand meets an adult Titi, the only existing temporal indication is that it has been nineteen years since Lagrand married a woman named Renée. But when did Lagrand and Renée get married?

But it is not only the position of events in time that we cannot fully understand. Comprehension is always differed in the novel; there is a temporal gap between the event and the comprehension of the event, both for the characters and the reader. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, when Rosie thinks that Lagrand is her brother Lazare, the reader deduces that Rosie is also

black. Only after a few pages do we realize that this is not the case. Similarly, from the beginning we know that Rosie is pregnant with a second child, but it is only much later that we learn that she got pregnant at Max's wedding. The reader thus finds him/herself in the same position as the characters; they also do not understand the meaning of events right after their occurrence: "Plus tard encore, lorsque Rosie essaierait de comprendre quand les choses avaient commencé à mal tourner, il lui semblerait ne pouvoir mieux illustrer les premiers temps à Paris qu'en expliquant qu'ils étaient demeurés, elle et son frère Lazare, dans l'air épais de Brive" (p.54). Once again, the passage begins with a 'plus tard,' characteristic of Ndiaye's writing; this 'later,' whose 'now' is undetermined. The narrative doesn't reveal the meaning of events; it simply relates what the characters themselves will only understand later. Furthermore, Ndiaye doesn't tell us that at that moment Rosie will have understood, but that she will have tried to understand. It is not certain that she will have understood, since comprehension is never complete in Ndiaye's prose.

In both *Rosie Carpe* and *Señales* we thus encounter opaque characters who live in violent and strange worlds, who commit unexplainable actions without the overlay of any value judgment; characters with whom we cannot fully identify; spaces that escape the reader's control and comprehension. The reader is not in a position of power because he/she is not in a position of knowledge. The reader is invited to enter a space that he/she will never be able to own, a space that remains somewhat 'other,' a space where he/she feels other.

Both novels are trying to establish a relation between the reader and characters not founded on complete comprehension. As mentioned in the introduction, opacity lies at the basis of Edouard Glissant's understanding of relation. According to him, the relation thinks "la totalité" but not the "totalitaire." Generalization is totalitarian. It establishes universal models

and ideas that it seeks to impose, turning the world into an "évidence transparente." On the other hand, "la totalité" envisions the world in the totality of its relations, while acknowledging that it will never be able to encompass this totality: "L'errant…n'est plus le voyageur ni le découvreur ni le conquérant, [il] cherche à connaître la totalité du monde et sait déjà qu'il ne l'accomplira jamais- et qu'en cela réside la beauté menacée du monde."[28] The totality of the world is the totality of its differences that remain opaque, and cannot be assimilated or standardized. Glissant thus establishes a difference between "la pensée de l'autre" and "l'autre de la pensée." The "pensée de l'autre" accepts the principle of alterity but pretends that we can think alterity without being altered by it; on the other hand, "l'autre de la pensée" is at the basis of an aesthetic of turbulence, and also an ethic, but an ethic that is not pregiven. Relation is not constituted by initial elements that can be clearly defined, since "celle-ci définit les éléments ainsi joués en même temps qu'elle les émeut (les change)."[29]

Glissant's opacity resembles Blanchot's "rapport neutre." According to Blanchot, there are three possible types of relations between men. The first is founded on the law of the same. The self sees the separation but wants to reduce it. It is a dialectical relation where the end goal is to reduce the other to the same. The second relation also strives towards unity, but this unity is obtained immediately, through fusion and correspondence. To these two relations Blanchot adds a third, which precisely does not strive for unity. He names this relation the "rapport neutre." This relation is not founded on "la proximité, proximité de lutte, de services, d'essence, de connaissance ou de reconnaissance, voire de solitude" but rather on "l'étrangeté entre nous: étrangeté qu'il ne suffit pas de caractériser comme une séparation, ni même une distance."[30]

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[28] Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, p.33
[29] Ibid.,p.183
[30] Ibid.p.97

Whereas Glissant could be (and has been) criticized for too quickly and unconditionally embracing cultural hybridity and mixing, his theorization of the Relation and of opacity are essential to our understanding of contemporary texts like *Rosie Carpe* and *Señales*. It is a "rapport neutre," a relation founded on opacity that Ndiaye and Herrera attempt to establish between the characters and the readers. Both of them are trying to find modes of representation that do not transform the other into material to know and to understand.

Atlantic citizenship and opacity

Both Herrera and Ndiaye are interested in the figure of the stranger and the process of estrangement. In Ndiaye's novel we encounter characters who change names, who have become magically younger, and who disappear and reappear in different spatial locations without specific logical explanations. In an interview, Myriam Boutoulle asked Maire Ndiaye: "Quelles sont vos obsessions ?" Ndiaye responded: "L'étrangéité. Le fait d'être étranger pour une raison ou pour une autre. Soit dans le sens propre, soit dans un sens plus figuré."[31]

In Herrera's narrative, as already mentioned, we are never entirely sure whether Makina crosses the U.S.– Mexico border or if she is descending into the underworld. The contemporary reality of Mexican migration is thus juxtaposed with mythical belief in the Mictlan. The ending of the novel is particularly ambiguous. On her trip back home, Makina encounters Chucho again. Chucho leads her to a miniature doorway and invites her to enter. She subsequently finds herself

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[31] Boutoulle, Myriam. "Entretien: Marie Ndiaye." *Lire* 1 Nov. 2003.Web. March 2014 <http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/entretien-marie-ndiaye_808497.html>

in a small, crowded space that she describes as an "antro."[32] She is then approached by a man who hands her identity documents with a new name, a new city of birth, and a new address. After the man disappears, Makina states that she finally understands what is happening and that she is no longer afraid: "…lo comprendió con todo el cuerpo y con toda su memoria, lo comprendió de verdad y finalmente se dijo Estoy lista cuando todas las cosas del mundo quedaron en silencio" (p.119) ['…she understood it with her entire body and her whole memory, she understood it trully and she finally told herself I am ready when all the things in the world fell silent']. The novel thus ends on the question of citizenship but in a context in which the knowledge acquired by the character is not entirely shared by the reader, as questions of citizenship and border-crossing are once again juxtaposed with the notion of the underworld.

The question of citizenship is central to Herrera's understanding of the role of literature. In an interview, Herrera states that literature can lead the reader to reflect on the concept of ethical citizenship: "Creo, en todo caso, que la lectura sí puede tener ciertos efectos en la creación de ciertas formas de ciudadanía. Yo siempre insisto en que la literatura no hace hombres buenos o malos, pero que puede crear ciudadanos reflexivos" ['I believe, in any case, that the act of reading can play a certain role in creating certain forms of citizenship. I always insist on the fact that literature doesn't create good or bad people, but that it can create reflective citizens'].

Thus, on the one hand, Ndiaye has expressed her interest in the figure of the stranger, and on the other, Herrera has spoken about the relation between literature and citizenship. Of course, the figure of the citizen and the figure of the stranger have always existed in a dialectical relation; in order for there to be citizens, there also have to be non-citizens or strangers. Whereas this idea is not new, I would like to push this equation even further. What is the relation between

[32] In Spanish, the word 'antro' can refer to a place with a bad reputation, a dump, a cave, or, in it's modern usage, to a nightclub.

these authors' refusal to represent transparent subjects, their turn towards opacity and, if we are to take Herrera's formulation, literature's role in providing alternative understandings of citizenship? Can we think of citizenship, and especially citizenship in a globalized world, in relation to opacity and disidentification?

While citizenship is normally associated with the right to work, live and participate in the political life of a country, there have been extensive debates, dating back centuries, over the factors that create the link between a nation and its citizens. In the canonical, 19th century essay "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation" (1882) Ernest Renan argues that it is neither common language, nor religion, nor geography that create a bond between citizens, but rather a common, agreed upon, project of living together.[33] Renan is writing against discourses of his epoch, which posit ethnic and linguistic purity as prerequisites for the existence of a nation. By opposition, he is trying to emphasize common bonding experiences that do not preclude ethnic mixing and linguistic and religious plurality. Nonetheless, Renan's national citizenship is still conceived of as a process of identification, though this time to a common history and a common project. But what would it mean to think of transnational or perhaps trans-Atlantic citizenship as a process of disidentification?

I want to suggest that in both novels studied in this chapter, there is an attempt to rethink and resituate the political in relation to the process of disidentification. Both authors are distancing themselves from identitarian discourses and identity politics, a shift already analyzed in Chapter One in relation to Maryse Condé's novel. Which doesn't mean that categories such as race, gender, class, and nationality are no longer pertinent; in fact, both narratives deal with the intersections of race and gender from a transnational perspective. However, identification along

[33] Renan, Ernest. "Qu'est ce qu'une nation." *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present: A Reader*. Woolf, S J (Ed.) London: Routledge, 1996.

any of these categories does not seem to be at the basis of the political. Instead, I would like to propose that it is the interplay between identification and disidentification in these two novels that is political.

The notion of "subjectivation politique," as defined by Jacques Rancière in *Aux Bords du Politique,* can perhaps help us to better understand *Rosie Carpe* and *Señales*. For Rancière, in order for there to be politics, there has to be disidentification. He argues that identification with victims often produces feelings of fear and pity, which are not political affects. In order to illustrate this point, Rancière offers an analysis of the images of massacres in Rwanda and Bosnia: "Cette exposition produit au mieux de l'indignation morale, une douleur de ce qui arrive à l'autre, une haine à vide contre le tortionnaire; plus secrètement cela produit souvent le sentiment de sécurité de n'être pas dans la peau de cet autre, quelques fois une irritation contre ceux qui nous rappellent indiscrètement l'existence de la souffrance."[34] In order to feel pity, we must be located in a safe and distant place, we feel pity for what happens far from us, and not to us. Pity is not political because in order for there to be the "cause de l'autre" as a political figure there needs to be a "désidentification par rapport à un certain soi."[35]

In order for a political feeling to exist, there has to be an "écart" ('a distancing') in relation to ourselves, in relation to the world we live in. On October 17th, 1961, thousands of Algerians responded to a call from the FLN and demonstrated in the streets of Paris, only to be brutally murdered and thrown into the Seine by the police.[36] Rancière tries to explain the relation between disidentification and politics in relation to this event. As he comments, a key aspect of this event was that the number of victims was never revealed to the public. Political

[34] Rancière, Jacques. *Aux bords du politique*. Paris: La Fabrique, 1998, p.211.
[35] Ibid.,p.212.
[36] Ibid.,p.207.

subjectivation came from a disidentification from the French state that committed murder in the name of its citizens: “Nous ne pouvions pas nous identifier à ces Algériens brutalement apparus et disparus comme manifestants dans l’espace public français. Nous pouvions en revanche nous désidentifier par rapport à cet Etat qui les avait tués et soustraits à tout compte.”[37] Political subjectivation doesn’t stem from an identification to Algerians because this identification is impossible. A total identification requires the transparency of the other, the reduction of the other to the same. On the other hand, the disidentification of the citizen in relation to the state, of the reader in relation to his/her world, bears the potential for the emergence of a political subjectivity.

Rancière is not the only theorist who has focused on the concept of disidentification in its political dimension. Queer activist and theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz, has addressed disidentification in relation to queer performativity and the notion of utopia. His book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* examines queer and racial minority issues from a performance studies perspective. Muñoz argues that:

> Disidentification is a point of departure, a process, a building. Although it is a mode of reading and performing, it is ultimately a form of building. This building takes place in the future and in the present, which is to say that disidentificatory performance offers a utopian blueprint for a possible future while, at the same time, staging a new political formation in the present. Stakes are high…Queers of color and other minoritarians have been denied a world. Yet, these citizen subjects are not without resources- they never have been…The minoritarian subject employs disidentification as a crucial practice of contesting social subordination through the project of worldmaking. The promises made by disidentification's performance are deep. Our charge as spectators and actors is to continue disidentifying with this world until we achieve new ones.[38]

[37] Ibid.,p.212.
[38] Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Muñoz explores the process of disidentification in relation to the notion of "worldmaking," where a disidentificatory moment in the present leaves a utopian imprint on the future. The question, however, is whether the process of disidentification inevitably leads to the building of an alternative future, or whether, in the case where a new collective subject is not constructed, it results in an ideological void. Muñoz argues that the process of disidentification precedes the construction of a new world. But when will this construction begin and who will initiate it?

The question of the discrepancy or "décalage" between citizens and citizenship is addressed in both novels on various occasions. In *Rosie Carpe*, the reader is presented with scenes of different marginalizations (in relation to class, race and gender). The whites who have gone to live in Guadeloupe are often poor, and, like Rosie and Lazare, cannot find their place within the social hierarchy, thus inhabiting the margins of society. Guadeloupe becomes their last resort, their last attempt to revalorize themselves. As Anita's (Lazare's Guadeloupean lover) father states at the beginning of the novel, they come to Guadeloupe because there, due to the color of their skin, they can do whatever they please. Similarly, before Lazare and Abel assault the French couple, the two tourists do not feel threatened by them because they are white. Whereas in France they would have felt threatened by their poverty, in Guadeloupe, common racial identity supersedes class inequality. Questions of race and racism also reappear when Rosie meets Marcus Calmette, a black man from Guadeloupean, who during one of his trips to Paris, stays at the hotel where Rosie works. When he invites Rosie for a coffee, she hesitates and then finally refuses. Rosie realizes that she has refused to go out with Marcus simply because, for her, he remains "le Noir." Rosie will later on regret that she sided with the Carpe and the Maxes, rejecting Marcus because of the color of his skin.

In *Señales*, the question of the relation between the state, its citizens and its non-citizens is a prominent concern. As she tries to return to Mexico, Makina is stopped by the police and ordered to join a line of immigrants kneeling on the ground. The police officer then announces the first "rule" of immigration: "Si quieren venir, se forman y piden permiso, si quieren ir al médico, se forman y piden permiso, si quieren dirigirme la puta palabra, se forman y piden permiso. Se forman y piden permiso. ¡Así hacemos las cosas aquí, la gente civilizada!" (p.108) ['If you want to come, form a line and ask for permission, if you want to see a doctor, form a line and ask for permission, if you want to frickin' talk to me, form a line and ask for permission. Form a line and ask for permission. That is how we, civilized people, do things']. Following this speech, he realizes that one of the men in line was holding a poetry book. He then takes possession of it and demands that the men write a poem on a blank piece of paper. Noticing the man's fear, Makina intervenes and begins writing: "Nosotros somos los culpables de esta destrucción, los que no hablamos su lengua ni sabemos estar en silencio. Los que no llegamos en barco, los que rompemos sus alambradas. Los que venimos a quitarles trabajo, los que aspiramos a limpiar su mierda, los que anhelamos trabajar a deshoras…Nosotros los oscuros, los chaparros, los grasientos, los mustios, los obesos, los anémicos. Nostros, los bárbaros" (p.110) ['We are the ones guilty of this destruction, the ones who don't speak your language and don't know how to remain silent. The ones who didn't arrive on a boat, the ones who break your barbed-wire fences. The ones who come to take your jobs, the ones who aspire to clean your shit, the ones who yearn to work at odd hours…Us the dark ones, the short ones, the greasy ones, the obese ones, the anemic ones. Us, the barbarians']. To the officer's definition and identification with "civilized people," Makina proposes a definition of "the barbarians." However, this is not merely a counter-identity or identification. Rather, Makina also points to the inextricability of different

forms of experience, and the fact that "civilized" life is ultimately dependent on the labor of those deemed "uncivilized." After reading Makina's poem, the guard walks away. With this act, he demonstrates his inability to identify with the "barbarians" but also his ability to disidentify from his role in the construction of the civilized/barbarian dichotomy. Furthermore, the entire scene centers on a moment of writing, gesturing towards the capacity of the narrative to produce moments of disidentification.

Both novels thus create an effect of distancing between the reader and his/her world. The reader is drawn into a world in which he/she feels slightly alienated. A world he/she cannot fully understand or own. And that is nonetheless his/her world; a world he/she knows but which he/she cannot recognize. The reader disidentifies from this world that has produced so much violence and discrimination. What is one to do when faced with these violent and strange worlds? The question is in a way transmitted to the reader. And it is in this process of disidentification, or reappropriation of this question by the reader, that the political resides. It is from here that a "political subjectivation" could be constructed. But let us not forget, this moment is merely a possibility, a creation of a potential political space.

In his 2003 book, *The Decline of American Power*, Immanuel Wallerstein defines our current moment as a period of transition: "We do indeed stand at a moment of transformation. But this is not that of an already established newly globalized world with clear rules. Rather we are located in an age of transition, transition not merely of a few backward countries who need to catch up with the spirit of globalization but a transition in which the entire capitalist world-system will be transformed into something else. The future, far from being inevitable, one to which there is no alternative, is being determined in this transition, which has an extremely

uncertain outcome."[39] This transition, according to Wallerstein, is marked by a global struggle between those who wish to preserve a hierarchical class system and those who are struggling for more inclusion and a more equal distribution of power and resources. Wallerstein also argues that it is precisely now, when the future appears uncertain, that any, even minor political action can influence the outcome of the transition. It is also precisely in a moment like this that the notion of political disidentification becomes even more relevant, as it puts into question the notion that the existing model is the only alternative and opens up imaginative possibilities for thinking about alternatives.

[39] Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World*. New York: New Press, 2003, p.46.

Conclusion

What Happened to Globalization?

In the 1990s and early 2000, an anti-globalization movement swept across the Atlantic world. While heterogeneous in terms of goals and strategies, the movement's main targets included the legal status of corporate personhood, free market fundamentalism and the economic privatization measures of the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Trade Organization.

The movement's mode of organizing has been characterized by mass decentralized campaigns of direct action and civil disobedience, often attempting to stop the proceedings of large corporate summits. One of the most renowned confrontations took place on November 30, 1999, when protesters blocked delegates' entrance to WTO meetings in Seattle, Washington, and forced the cancellation of the opening ceremonies. The Genoa Group of Eight Summit protest followed in July 2001. After hundreds of civilians and policemen were wounded and a young Genoese anarchist murdered, the protest was declared one of the bloodiest in recent Western history.[1]

That same year, the first World Social Forum, an annual meeting of civil society organizations, took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as an alternative to the World Economic forum annually held in Davos, in an effort to promote counter-hegemonic globalization. In its charter, The World Social Forum defines itself as "an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to

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[1] See Maeckelbergh, *The Will of the Many*
Smith, Noah. "The Dark Side of Globazliation: Why Seattle's 1999 Protesters Were Right." *The Atlantic*. Jan 2014. Web. March 2014. < http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/01/the-dark-side-of-globalization-why-seattles-1999-protesters-were-right/282831/>

neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth."[2] The World Social Forum has thus been envisioned as a space where social and political alternatives to global neoliberalism can be conceived. Since 2001, the World Social Forum has traveled across the Atlantic world. In 2006, NGO representatives, fair-trade advocates, anti-globalization protestors and activists united in Bamako, Mali, to discuss the consequences of free trade, social inequality, and debt relief, many of the issues discussed throughout this dissertation. But while the forum persists, protests and direct actions directed at international organizations have subsided in strength and frequency over the past decade, leading many to wonder what has happened to both globalization and anti-globalization.[3] Until, perhaps, a new wave of uprisings known as the "Arab spring," began in 2010. Since then, many other countries, including Chile, Quebec, the Unites States, Brazil and Turkey have experienced popular revolts. Whereas the most recent protests have appeared as more local, since their immediate target is not international organizations, they share many critiques and grievances of the anti-globalization movement, including an emphasis on social inequality, forced privatization and cuts to public services.

I have chosen to conclude with an account of social movements as I believe that the novels I have discussed in this dissertation share similarities with the global protests we are currently witnessing. I am not trying to equate literary production to social movement formation or literary and activist discourses, but rather, to suggest that a different form of political subjectivity and relation to politics has emerged over the past decade and has found an

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[2] See, "The World Social Forum Charter of Principles." Web.<http://www.fsm2013.org/en>

[3] Dwyer, Miami. "Where Did the Anti-Globalization Movement Go?" *The New Republic*. Oct. 2013. Web. March 2104. < http://www.newrepublic.com/article/115360/wto-protests-why-have-they-gotten-smaller>

embodiment both in social movements and in literary production. Specifically, both have emphasized, though in different ways, the importance of space and both have grounded their politics in what could loosely be called opacity, rather than in an effort to endorse charismatic leaders or construct captivating characters.

Though, as we have seen, Glissant and Bolaño draw on the epic form, whereas Bessora and Condé opt for the detective novel, the novels in my corpus share formal similarities. As mentioned in the introduction, the focus has shifted from character development to the spatial dimension of literature. Even in Bessora's and Eltit's novels, which could be characterized as the most "local," since they mostly take place in single country, space (especially the workplace) plays a fundamental role. The workplace becomes a metaphor for the globalized world, characterized by the lack of separation between life and work.

Maryse Condé's and Fatou Diome's novels are perhaps the best examples of works that move beyond the triangular representation of the Atlantic, as they introduce new poles such as Italy, the U.S. and South Africa. They also both offer us ways to think about the possibilities of transnational feminism that can overcome the identity politics and human rights versus cultural relativism debate. Edouard Glissant and Roberto Bolaño raise the question of translation both in terms of the representative value of literature and with respect to linguistic translation. Finally, the question of opaque and impenetrable protagonists appears most explicitly in the novels of Ndiaye and Herrera.

Similarly, in the recent "square movements," from Turkey to New York City, the struggle to control space has emerged as central. Spatial occupation, which several movements have used as their primary tactic, raises various questions about the role of space in our present socio-economic configuration: Who has access to space and who does space belong to? What is the

meaning of public space in the age of globalization? The continuous privatization of public space has been identified as a contributing factor to the dissolution of community bonds and the atomization of society. The reappropriation of public space was cast in recent protests as both an actual and metaphorical gesture towards the recreation of community. Simultaneoulsy, this emphasis on space has been accompanied by a refusal to anoint leaders and representatives. In fact, most of these movements have described themselves as "leaderless."

Within social movements, the rejection of leaders is related to a denunciation of governmental politics, which, according to protesters, benefits corporate interests. In light of what has been defined, by activists, as the failure of representational democracy, movements have enacted and experimented with forms of direct democracy, often accompanied by a practice of horizontality that excludes leaders and representatives. Similarly to the novels analyzed in this dissertation, movements have tried to contain any possibility of identification with a specific individual or their story. In Greece, for instance, activists did not allow journalists to approach the square too closely, so that there would be no individualized representation of the occupation, and so that no individual could act as a representative of the movement. I contend that this mode of practicing politics based on the valorization of space and refusal of representation is, in many ways, analogous to the aesthetic choices of contemporary Atlantic world writers that I have discussed throughout this dissertation. Of course, it is not unusual to say that globalization has been represented spatially; that in a time of unprecedented immigration and emigration flows, questions of what it means to inhabit and belong to a space become essential. At the same time, I believe there to be a political component to this mode of representation.

One of the main elements of globalization, as identified by contemporary novelists including Eltit, Bessora, Bolaño, Herrera and Ndiaye, is the production of precarious

subjectivities. The proliferation of characters about whom we know very little and who we do not understand well has become for these authors a mode of representing contemporary forms of precarity. Social movements have also attempted to confront the precarization of society. The refusal of leaders and a valorization of forms of anonymity and opacity, has been associated with a rejection of hierarchy and a search for more equitable and collective modes of participation. In many ways, it has been an attempt to reappropriate precarity and transform it into a collective experience. The question is to what extent this same desire exists in contemporary novels and whether in their attempt to represent precarity and their turn towards opacity, contemporary authors succeed in creating a more collective form of experience.

In a recent interview, Jacques Rancière has argued that: "Democracy is not, to begin with, a form of State. It is, in the first place, the reality of the power of the people that can never coincide with the form of a State. There will always be tension between democracy as the exercise of a shared power of thinking and acting, and the State, whose very principle is to appropriate this power. Obviously states justify this appropriation by citing the complexity of the problems, the need to the long term, etc. But in truth, politicians are a lot more subjected to the present. To recover the values of democracy is, in first place, to reaffirm the existence of a capacity to judge and decide, which is that of everyone, against this monopolisation. It is also to reaffirm the necessity that this capacity be exercised through its own institutions, different from those of the State. The first democratic virtue is the virtue of confidence in the capacity of anyone."[4] While he has advocated for a form of politics independent of the state, Rancière has also been critical of both the 2005 uprisings in the French suburbs and recent social movements,

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[4] "Jacques Rancière Interview: 'Democracy is not, to begin with, a form of State.'" Web. April 2014. <http://hiredknaves.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/jacques-ranciere-interview-democracy-is-not-t/>

including Occupy Wall Street and 15-M. Regarding the French protests, he claimed that while the grievances of the suburban youth were justified, their social critique was misguided. According to Rancière, the protesters identified with their marginal role at the same time that they were demanding social inclusion. As a result, instead of challenging the equality/inequality, exclusion/inclusion dichotomies, they reproduced them.[5] Similarly, while acknowledging that Occupy Wall Street and 15-M protesters responded to the most fundamental idea of politics: "that of the power possessed by those to whom no particular motive determines that they should exercise power," Rancière also maintains that "demonstrators today no longer have a floor nor a horizon that gives historical validity to their battle. They are, firstly, outraged people who reject the existing order without being able to consider themselves agents in a historical process. And this is what certain people take advantage of in order to denounce, in a self-serving way, their idealism or their moralism."[6] Rancière's argument contains a contradiction. While maintaining that politics assumes faith in the capacity of anyone to exercise power, Rancière also prescribes a specific mode of resistance. Yet, if we are to have faith in the capacity of anyone to exercise power, we also need to have faith in the capacity of anyone to determine their mode of resistance. This does not necessarily preclude any form of critique of movements and actions, but it does mean that a multiplicy of modes of resistance need to be valued. But, despite this contradiction, Rancière's attempt to place 'any one,' an anonymous and opaque subject, at the center of politics, resonates with the preoccupations of social movements and contemporary Atlantic writers.

Whether the attempt to represent 'anyone' leads to the reproduction of precarity (as I have discussed for instance in relation to Bolaño) or rather to an experimentation with

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[5] Roy-Desrosiers, Stéphane. "Introduction approfondie à l'esthétique de Jacques Rancière." *Gnosis* 12:1 (2012): n.pag.

[6] "Jacques Rancière Interview: 'Democracy is not, to begin with, a form of State.'"

democracy or perhaps both, is a question I will leave open. What is certain is that literature's engagement with globalization is a constant, often ambivalent struggle to carve its position. Understanding the contradictions inherent in contemporary literary production can help advance our reflection on both the politics of globalization and the politics of dissent. It may seem inconclusive to say literature is both tributary to the forces of globalization (linguistic, aesthetic, commercial) and resistant in the sense that it exposes their implications, but I would argue that this irreducible mix of being embedded in historical processes and at a remove from them is a constitutive feature of the literary.

I would like to end on the question that I began with, the question of the globalized Atlantic. In the introduction, I argue that the combination of dispersal and centralization that characterizes globalization is exemplified by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Since the 1970s, under the umbrella of neoliberalism, the politics of structural adjustment programs, austerity measures and increased privatization, have created a similar social context across the Atlantic. Of course, the tension between a regional and a global framework appears as soon as we conceive of a globalized Atlantic or an Atlantic globalization. However, through a close reading of texts from both the Francophone and the Latin American tradition, I have attempted to demonstrate that the regional and the global are not necessarily in opposition but rather supplement one another. As discussed in the introduction, trans-Atlantic trade has been a cornerstone of economic and cultural globalization. Similarly, the novels in my corpus reference the Atlantic framework. In francophone works, the memory of the Atlantic triangle and trade persists. It is however, interconnected with the question of contemporary migration, circulation of capital and goods. In Latin American novels, the question of U.S. imperialism has been central both to the regional

American framework and the spread of neoliberal globalization. While there are indeed differences between these two literary traditions, the introduction of neoliberal reforms across the Atlantic world has allowed for points of comparison.

In my approach, I have been influenced by Franco Morretti who speaks of "inter-related literatures." I concur with Moretti's claim about the importance of going "against the grain of national historiography…in the form of *an experiment*." Yet, I also disagree with other aspects of his argument, especially his repudiation of close reading. In "Conjectures on World Literature," Moretti argues against close reading, which, according to him, inevitably leads to a selection of a small number of 'representative' works and thus a formation of a canon. As an alternative, he proposes the concept of distant reading "where distance…is a condition of knowledge: it allows *one* to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, less is more."[7] As literary critics, I believe that we are confronted with the task of selecting works, whether we are performing close or distant reading. I also agree with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who defends the value of close reading. In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak writes that "to withdraw in-depth language learning and close reading from Comparative Literature when it moves to the global South is to decide that the only relationship the United States can have with those areas is based on considerations of security, that the critical intimacy of literary learning must remain isolationist in the Euro-U.S " (p.104). Furthermore, in the absence of close reading, Moretti arrives at debatable and fairly problematic conclusions about the entirety of Third World

[7] Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (Jan-Feb 2000): 54-68. Web. March 2014. <http://geertvdm.wordpress.com/2008/03/05/conjectures-on-world-literature-franco-moretti/.>

literature. By comparison, my approach has been to identify cross-cultural tropes and tendencies while preserving close reading as the primary tool of literary analysis.

As the century unravels, more theoretical experiments may be on the horizon. In fact, since 2000, more and more countries of the Global North, including Greece, Spain, France, and the U.S. have dealt with issues that until then have been associated with the Global South: privatization, debt, mortgage crisis, education crisis. Over the past decade, new transnational connections have emerged, for instance, between the student movement in Chile and in Quebec; between the teacher strike in Oaxaca, Mexico and in Chicago, putting into question the traditional colonizer/colonized, North/South divide. These development are perhaps offering us more opportunities for comparative work, and more occasions for a decentered approach to francophone studies.

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