



## 'Dead Words': translated literature against the social systems of domination

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**ABSTRACT.** Since the margin is not generally given the chance to speak and since such important issues should be tackled with sensibility, the discarded discursive modulations will be discussed. Milton Hatoum's literary treatments of Western discourses of progress and development in *The Brothers* (2002), and its potentialization in John Gledson's translation of the novel will be mainly analyzed. The concepts of social hierarchy and degrees of social inferiority are a deeply rooted issue in Brazil's colonial heritage. Similarly, the future of Brazilians who have been deeply marginalized cannot avoid the scars of the past. They are doomed to have their freedom limited to dead words.

**Keywords:** Hatoum, translation, local, development, Amazon region.

## 'Palavras Mortas': literatura traduzida contra sistemas sociais de dominação

**RESUMO.** Já que a margem, geralmente, não possui a chance de se expressar, para que tal problema seja discutido de forma sensata, a proposta é a de refletir acerca de modulações discursivas ignoradas através da análise do tratamento literário feito por Milton Hatoum acerca dos discursos ocidentais progressistas e desenvolvimentistas em *Dois Irmãos* (2000) e a sua potencialização na tradução do romance feita por John Gledson. Os conceitos de hierarquia social e da escala da inferioridade social são forte legado da herança colonial no Brasil. Da mesma forma, o futuro dos brasileiros que foram profundamente marginalizados não poderia estar isento das cicatrizes do passado; eles estão destinados a ver sua liberdade como limitada a palavras mortas.

**Palavras-chave:** Hatoum, tradução, local, desenvolvimento, Amazônia.

Many a man thinks he is buying pleasure, when he is really selling himself to it (Benjamin Franklin).

### Introduction

#### Can the subaltern speak?

Marina Silva once wrote that Brazilian Amerindians are generally victims of an unchangeable coloniser eye that still survives in the face of Imperialism. In her critique she also suggests that normativity has the lingering habit of eliminating what we do not know nor understand; it would be less detrimental and more civilised to allow and respect the occurrence of diverging world views, of other thinking logics, manners of living, of being, and existing in the globe (SILVA, 2012, p. 3). Of course she is right, but that would jeopardise Western homogenising agenda, which endeavors to convince the world that the best for the Amazon would be its development, or rather, the best chance for turning such initially questionable process into an inevitable path for the region.

According to Mary Louise Pratt (1992, p. 153), the marginalisation of the Amazon and its natives' ability to reconstruct mainstream notions have been systematically evaded by hegemonic discourses of progress which tend to reduce social impoverishment to a temporary by-product of development, thus reproducing it systematically. Since Amazonians are not generally given the chance to speak and so that the issue could be tackled with sensibility, "[...] it is not only justifiable to talk about translated literature, but rather imperative to do so" (EVEN-ZOHAR, 1990, p. 46). Bearing in mind that "[...] discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle" (FOUCAULT, 1981, p. 53). I would like to rethink this problem by analysing mainly Milton Hatoum's literary treatments of Western discourses of progress and development, and its potentialisation in John

Gledson's translation of the novel, in *The Brothers'* (2002) portrait of the Amazon.

The corpus for this investigation is, therefore, the 2000 novel written by Hatoum, originally named *Dois Irmãos*, translated by John Gledson in 2002. I have chosen to work with the English translation as my main corpus in as much as my thesis proposes the dismantling of a hegemonic discourse – both colonial and neocolonial – which, as Mary Louise Pratt pinpoints and exemplifies in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), has been promoted mainly by the Anglophone culture – initially due to British expansionist objectives and later as a result of the dominant industrial capacity of the US during the post-war period. Hatoum's translated text, thus, transgresses national boundaries as it becomes inserted within the Anglophone literary realm including brand-new discursive Amazonian positions in the globalising world map. This counter-hegemonic text coming from the marginalised Amazon becomes, through translation, potentially able to debunk taken-for-granted reductive discourses uttered by hegemony, since it is inserted into the polysystem of the English-speaking literary market.

This is because *The Brothers* (2002) reaches regions where more privileged discourses have already been institutionalised and deemed satisfactory, and affects peoples who would never be reached if the novel remained restricted to the artificial-but politically powerful-frontiers of its 'original' country and language. If those frontiers already hamper the proliferation of marginalised discourses inside Brazil, internationally this matter gets even worse. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the traditional seclusion of Brazilian subaltern discourses, the contemporary boost in the scenario of the country's literature translated into English might contribute for such picture to be changed. After all "[...] foreign works [...] include possibly [...] new models of reality to replace the old and established ones [...]" (EVEN-ZOHAR, 1990, p. 47).

Therefore, and endorsing the interconnection between language and relations of power proposed by theorists such as Kanavillil Rajagopalan (2005) and Stuart Hall (1996), John Gledson's translation allows Hatoum's perspective to be retextualised in the gist of Imperial tradition. Thence, if the contemporary notions of progress and development have been mainly constructed in English, it is in English too that they must be reconstructed. According to Edwin Gentzler (1999, p. 260)

[...] translation has been shown to be a marginal activity in the imperialistic phase of any given culture [...but...] is one of the primary means of introducing new ideas and stimulating cultural change.

Hatoum's narrative is developed through the observations of Nael, a narrator who realises the dichotomies represented by the twin brothers who foreground the story. So the specific topic of the thesis concerns the discourse of hegemonic temporality and spatiality as challenged by him through his representation of the differences between them. While Yaqub, regarded by the narrator as the 'educated' one, is in the process of "[...] becoming more refined", since he grows up personifying "[...] everything that was modern" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 53), Omar, deemed as the 'savage' one, does not really care about becoming more educated or civilised, he does not yearn for the 'changes' that Yaqub so eagerly expects.

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

Departing from such literary evidences, which shall be further analysed, my hypothesis is that the manifestation and proliferation of diverse discourses through contemporary globalisation does not represent per se a palpable improvement in what concerns the understanding between margin and centre. Such hypothesis is followed by another one, which suggests that the commodification of culture, more specifically the use of literature to conform to the materialism and consumerism of Western society, ends up obliterating the revolutionary potential that supposedly accompanies artistic productions. Igor Kopytoff, in *The cultural biography of things: commodification as process* (1986, p. 73), endorses such a view when he posits that "[...] the

counterdrive to this potential onrush of commoditisation is culture, in the sense that [...] excessive commoditisation is anti-cultural".

If excessive commoditisation is indeed 'anti-cultural', the fact that we live in

[...] a country whose literary community feels maligned for lack of attention, a country whose literary tradition only receives attention for its most commercial [...] productions (GRADESAVER, 1999-2013)

is not something to be praised, let alone to be applauded. Paulo Coelho's successful career is one clear illustration of such 'commercial productions', which are sold in every corner of the planet, even though they do not provoke in the foreign reader any better grasp on the social, political, cultural, or linguistic conditions of any Brazilian region. The writer, who compares the role of literature with that of gardeners or taxi drivers (LIFE POSITIVE, 2000-2013), has already sold more than 100 million literary pieces, which have been translated into 62 languages, in 150 countries. Nevertheless, I dare say it is not his commercial literature that might make any difference for our view on the functioning of Brazilian 'imagined community', but the one produced by less popular but more ambitious writers like the one brought forward in this article.

#### **The subaltern speaking: the future, that never-ending fallacy**

It is exactly because he does not fit in the hegemonic system that the narrator of Hatoum's novel sees its flaws, flaws that every Brazilian has a high predetermined potential to see due to their condition as in-between what is said to be the past and what is said to be the future. Ultimately believing that the only way to keep on moving is the one that 'worked' for developed countries seems to be an Imperial imposition that is mistakenly taken as our only choice. Reaching the climax of the novel, the narrator realises that the idea of future is a lie, and that all those values that he admired for so long in Yaqub's personality were just part of a façade that masks the ideology of expansionist development. He gives up his dreams about a better future:

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

about was the future, and even demanded to know my opinion – the future, that never-ending fallacy (HATOUM, 2002, p. 263).

The fact that Nael 'had no urge to see the sea' shows that, for him, the river Negro is quite enough. One tends to think of the sea as an analogy for greatness, resembling a notion of immeasurable freedom since it is practically devoid of physical boundaries. Leaving the river and 'moving' to the sea, therefore, Yaqub seems to go from one stage to another, overcoming the limited reality of the Amazon to become part of a greater project. This is not necessarily Yaqub's fault since, according to Michael Cronin (2003), the inhabitants of less powerful political units, like the Amazon, are inevitably subjected to what he calls a 'double bind', whereby either you abandon any form of national identification, seeing it as associated with the worst forms of irredentist prejudice, and you embrace the cosmopolitan credo "[...] or you persist with a claim of national specificity and you place yourself outside the cosmopolitan pale, being by definition incapable of openness to the other" (CRONIN, 2003, p. 14).

Nevertheless, if the river might connote the sense of a liquid and intangible Amazonian time and space, so can the sea. Moreover, wanting 'to keep his distance' from the future, that 'never-ending fallacy', Nael seems to be too tired to dream of a better future; maybe tired of occupying a position wherein he cannot be the owner of his life, where he cannot say anything, and where, if he did, no one would listen to it. Actually, Nael has been able to experience quite a good part of such future through his observation of Yaqub's transformation, and "[...] what is new or revealing about our encounter with the present of the future is our changed relationship to the past" (CRONIN, 2003, p. 33). In a way Domingas and Nael are not part of Brazilian promising future; they are only a curiosity related to its savage past. As stated by Johannes Fabian (1983, p. 62):

We never appreciate the primitive as a producer; or, which is the same, in comparing ourselves to the primitive we do not pronounce judgment on what he thinks and does, we merely classify the ways in which he thinks and acts.

The narrator does not want to leave his 'primitive' mother – who seems to be aware that she, not being 'appreciated as a producer', should not struggle against her condition – and she would never conceive the idea of going away. Domingas does not want to risk a present that is uncomfortable but safe just because of a romanticised idea of 'freedom'. Her past has been obliterated, and her future prospects are far from being as enthralling as the future of

those who, like Yaqub, have the necessary tools to head civilisation. Furthermore, compared to the orphanage where she has lived before Zana bought her, her first 'integration' in the civilised world was much worse than this latter one at the house where she now lives; her memories regarding the nuns who 'educated' and 'civilised' her were hideous enough to make her see Halim and Zana's home as something close to paradise:

A young, pretty woman, her hair in clusters of curls, came to welcome them [Domingas and a nun]. I've brought an Indian girl for you, said the sister. She knows how to do everything, she can read and write properly, but if she's any nuisance, back she'll go to the orphanage and never get out again. [...] Zana took an envelope off the little altar and gave it to the sister. The two of them went to the door and Domingas was left alone, happy to be free of that grim woman. If she'd stayed in the orphanage, she'd have spent her life cleaning the toilets, washing petticoats and sewing. She detested the orphanage and never went to visit the Little Sisters of Jesus. They called her ungrateful and selfish, but she wanted to keep well away from the nuns; she wouldn't even walk along the street where the orphanage was. The sight of the building depressed her. How many times had Sister Damasceno beaten her! You never knew when she'd get the ferule out. She was educating the Indian girls, she said (HATOUM, 2002, p. 69).

Even though Domingas was 'happy to be free' of the orphanage, leaving a physical space does not imply that she left her marginalised condition. In the orphanage or in Zana's house she is but an animal and/or a mechanised tool with no feelings or ambitions – just like a pet, if she's any nuisance, back she would go to the orphanage. Her subalternity, the fact that she is granted as inferior, does not depend on where she is but on her ontological situation within the system. In this excerpt the marginalisation of Amerindians and the obliteration of their culture through their institutionalisation in a system that fails to acknowledge their existence is very well represented here by Sister Damasceno, who euphemistically claims that she is 'educating' Domingas when she beats her for not behaving as a good slave.

Destroying her past, the intention of this kind of 'education' – in the cases used as an ideological gun – is to insert in Domingas's mind a brand-new memory, and a new way of conceiving her possibilities of prospect. Imperialism wants Amerindians to forget their past and their present, it wants them to see themselves no longer as simply different people being forced into poverty and marginalisation, but as a low class of humans that

are being constructively allowed to be accepted as part of development – less in rank if compared to other classes but, still, part of a strikingly beneficial enterprise. In this sense, Anderson (1996, p. 115-116) has suggested that, instead of interacting and reconfiguring previous notions regarding hegemonic views on the world, "[...] the existence of late colonial [and neocolonial] empires [...] appeared to confirm on a global, modern stage antique conceptions of power and privilege".

### **The power of language and memory: singing for the music not to die**

Some things cannot be erased in the previously mentioned process, such as natives' memories and, perhaps more important, their language: "[...] at nightfall, she began to hum one of the songs she'd heard in her childhood, there on the river Jurubaxi, before she lived in the Manaus orphanage" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 237). Domingas is still able to remember the songs she used to listen to when she was a little child. Nael admits to be surprised when he notices that she is even able to sing them: "I'd thought her mouth was sealed, but no: she loosened her tongue and sang, in *nheengatu*, the short refrains of a monotonous melody" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 237). Nael's mother is not only singing a song about her past, but she is also singing it in *nheengatu*, one of the several socially, culturally and politically charged words chosen by Hatoum and which are given a glossary by John Gledson in the translated version (glossary which, on the whole, has the definition and contextualisation of 54 distinct terms).

In this sense Gledson's technique, besides manifesting his respect regarding the hybrid atmosphere that surrounds the original text even though it comes from the margin and is being inserted in the centre, evinces the translator's active manipulation of the English language. If the original novel is already enveloped by a strongly diversified and pluralized discourse, such factor is empowered in the target text, since his English version becomes permeated, from top to bottom, by Amerindian, Portuguese, African and Lebanese words. It would be, thus, a mistake to believe that one can experience language so deeply, as translators do, without unavoidably affecting their mother tongues and/or letting their personal connections with it to influence their choices. According to Cronin (2003), this is not only predictable, but actually very positive. After all, "[...] translation is not only a matter of what we do with other languages. It has also, pointedly, to do with how we experience and think of our own" (CRONIN, 2003, p. 30).

In this specific case the word Gledson is introducing to the English-speaking readers is *Nheengatu*, which concerns a Tupi-Guarani language spoken mainly by the peoples who live alongside the Rio Negro (about 8.000 peoples whose culture still persists in Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia). The 'dialect' is also known as 'Amazonian General Language'. Used initially and mainly for Amerindians' communication with Portuguese missionaries, the language became a kind of 'lingua franca' among several natives who now live in the Amazon. This is because after several distinct tribes were forced to escape to the region their only choice for communicating with previously distant but now close communities was through the *nheengatu* language. Moreover, colonisation has decimated hundreds of languages, and several Amazonian peoples ended up being 'adopted' by the *nheengatu* (OMNIGLOT, 1998-2013).

Nael, on the other hand, has no proper contact with the language. If it represents a chief feature of his mother's history, and even if the song she sings carries any important message, for him it is nothing more than a hazy "[...] lullaby echoing through [his] nights" (HATOUM, 2002, p. 237). This is because linguistic homogeneity has been continuously forced and reinforced in the Amazon, and, for those who believe that such process has no impact on the lives of 'caboclos' like Nael, Hobsbawm (1996, p. 1071) informs us that "[...] linguistic homogeneity in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual areas can be achieved only by mass compulsion, expulsion, or genocide". Nevertheless, notwithstanding such normative endeavours, the results shall never satisfy hegemony inasmuch as "[...] particular languages can die or be wiped out, but there was and is no possibility of humankind's general linguistic unification" (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 35).

Eduardo Galeano (1997) alerts us to the fact that, applied as tools for homogenising those who do not want to be homogenised, people like Sister Damasceno lie to us about the past as they lie to us about the present:

[...] they mask the face of reality. They force the oppressed victims to absorb an alien, desiccated, sterile memory fabricated by the oppressor, so that they will resign themselves to a life that isn't theirs as if it were the only one possible (GALEANO, 1997, p. 264).

These processes have been and are still explained in terms of giving people equal rights. This would mean that the institutionalisation of those who do not seem to belong to the system, like Domingas,

Nael, and Omar, aims at providing them with the same tools, opportunities and prospects that neoliberal enterprises so often allege that they are the only ones which are supplied.

Domingas's institutionalisation, then, would mean her access to better quality of life, education, healthcare systems, and all the other assets that our capitalist contemporaneity is so pompous about – and that expansionist discourses are so sure to exist only within the Western Imperial tradition. She would, therefore, no longer be isolated in her inferiority, she would become part of a globalised reality where selflessness reigns, and everything she once said to just a few would now be seemingly heard by a much larger number of people. Domingas and Nael show us what happens to those who are, theoretically, so smoothly and receptively incorporated by Imperialism. However, the historical analysis carried out by Stein and Stein (1970) exposes the fallacious nature of this fairy tale:

[T]he inherent promise of equality or citizenship in the new polity, was to legislate out of existence wherever possible what were considered holdovers of the colonial regime of protected enclaves of privilege. Indians would now [...] have no special taxes or courts; in theory they would participate as citizens with full political rights and responsibilities. No longer would there be Indians and non-Indians, but only rich and poor. Laudable objectives, but to Indian communities this equally threatened the mechanisms that protected them against the skills of those better prepared for the competitive individualism of a Liberal economy and polity. Those reared in the tradition of 'enclave' polities were ill-prepared for juridical equality. Amerindians who abandoned their communities were incorporated as wage labourers; as illiterates or domestics, they were conveniently disenfranchised by the new constitutions. Those who remained in their communities sought protection in further isolation, or reacted in hopeless revolt [...]. In any event, the political participation of Amerindians was minimised (STEIN; STEIN, 1970, p. 162, italics added).

Domingas, thus, is no longer only an Amerindian, but also, and more importantly, a poor Amerindian; her role is determined by the Western expansionist enterprise based – like most of the things in a neoliberal society – on a hierarchical model that needs to be respected. Igor Kopytoff (1986) poses that this class status, a 'gift' given by colonialism, has a very sagacious internal logic which aims at reaching

[...] the universal acceptance of money whenever it has been introduced into non-monetized societies and its inexorable conquest of the internal economy

of these societies, regardless of initial rejection and of individual unhappiness about it (KOPYTOFF, 1986, p. 72).

Nael and his mother represent the most important class of such process: the poorest ones, those who are most needed – in a system which depends desperately on the accumulation of capital. ‘Development’ is to be carried through time and space on the backs of those who do not get its benefits.

The slavery abolition act does not mean much to Amazonian natives. During the narrative we find out that Domingas herself worked for Zana’s family seven days a week, since her childhood and until her death:

Once, [...] she [Domingas] asked Zana if she could have Sunday off. Her mistress was surprised, but let her go, so long as she didn’t come back late. It was the only time I went out of Manaus with my mother (HATOUM, 2002, p. 65).

In fact, Hatoum’s novel raises several issues and makes the readers ask themselves many questions, one of these questions regarding how institutionalised in the Western world the Amerindians are, and how they shall be. Is there such a thing as segregation? Is there such a thing as integration? Galeano (1997, p. 49-50). claims that:

The Amerindian society of our times does not exist in a vacuum, outside the general framework of the Latin American economy. There are, it is true, Brazilian tribes still sealed within the jungle, totally isolated from the world [...]; but in general the Indians are incorporated into the system of production and the consumer market, even if indirectly. They participate in an economic and social order which assigns them the role of victim — the most exploited of the exploited.

Even those tribes ‘sealed within the jungle’ are, somehow, already interconnected with everyone else. Just the fact that there are people writing about them, discussing their existence, translating and/or broadcasting their discourses, already implies that ‘isolation’ is a very tricky word for us to use in a globalised planet. When objectively institutionalised, the indigenous culture becomes an exotic product, and, as Galeano has argued, Amerindians like Domingas and ‘caboclos’ like Nael become part of the largest class of people generated by ‘development’. The poorest and most exploited by a self-destructive neoliberalism that we insist to endorse, notwithstanding its evident drawbacks.

Galeano (1997, p. 103) asks a witty question: “Is the prosperity of a class really identifiable with the well-being of a country”? Is the well-being of a few

privileged regions of Brazil really identifiable with the well-being of them all? This would be, indeed, preposterous, but it is exactly for that reason that the necessity of our ‘imagined community consciousness’ is so essential for the functioning of the country. In this sense, and “[...] regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail [...], the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 10). Neoliberal societies are filled with regions similar to the Amazon and with people such as Nael and his mother who function both as agents and products of development. They are needed so that money would flow not to their benefit but to the benefit of others.

They are given the illusion of hope that development is democratic, they are institutionalised and made to believe that they are to be ‘equally’ integrated, that they are going to belong to a system which belongs to others – the same lie underlying the processes of catechization during colonisation when those who could never be ‘saved’ had, controversially, to be Christianised. In doing so Neo-imperialism beguiles ‘primitive’ people like Domingas with schools, clothes, education and tales until they are tamed well enough as to forget such things and be enslaved anew by this innovative and ‘civilised’ developmentalist order:

Domingas, the shriveled Indian girl, half slave, half nurse, ‘desperate to be free’, as she said to me once, tired, defeated, caught up in the family’s spell, and not much different from the other maids in the neighbourhood, taught to read and write and educated by the nuns in the missions, but all of them living at the back of some house, right next to the fence or the wall, where they slept with their dreams of freedom (HATOUM, 2002, p. 59, italics added).

This excerpt exposes Domingas identity as being ‘half’ many things and, consequently, as essentially incomplete. She is half nurse and half slave because, despite slavery had been abolished in theory, her life as a ‘workwoman’ shows that reality is pretty different from what is claimed in documents which she has never seen. No one can say Domingas is a ‘slave’, slavery is no more, and there are no physical manacles and chains impeding her free will, her personal choices concerning her expectations. The problem is that, heretofore, this discussion has never left the theoretical and discursive level; discourse is the only thing that has suffered noteworthy inflections from the colonial period to the neocolonial one.

As Stein and Stein (1970, p. 184-185) have stated, the concepts of social hierarchy and the scale of social inferiority were, as we have seen, a deeply

rooted part of the colonial heritage, "[...] the elite continued the colonial heritage of racial discrimination, only now it was buttressed by the sociology of capitalism and imperialism". Accordingly, the future of those who have been so deeply marginalised has no possibility of being devoid of the scars of their past. Discrimination is not only able to thrive in the neoliberal contemporaneity but it has actually become an important characteristic for its maintenance. Nael's comment in this excerpt implies that what the system gives to the other maids in the neighborhood, whose histories might be pretty similar to Domingas's, is hope – impalpable, intangible, and foolish hope. They too see their freedom as limited to 'words'; that is, to the discursive level. They too do not know if it is more advisable to struggle for staying or to struggle for leaving, to make their realities into a dream or to make their dreams into reality, Nael's indignation is a response to such an issue:

'Desperate to be free': dead words. No one can free themselves with words alone. She [Domingas] stayed here in the house, dreaming of freedom that receded into the future. One day, I said to her: To hell with dreams; if you don't make a move, you'll get a dig in the ribs from death, and in death there are no dreams. Our dreams are all here and she looked at me, brimful of words she'd stored up, with the urgent desire to say something. But she didn't have the courage – or rather, she had and she hadn't. Hesitant, she preferred to give in, did nothing, and was overtaken by inertia (HATOUM, 2002, p. 60, italics added).

Domingas's lack of mobility, 'overtaken by inertia', somehow impinges upon the idea that the postmodern Latin American is free to follow any future paths. It is exactly the lack of choice that makes it so difficult for her to move, to think about a next step. Her hesitancy confuses and unsettles the reader who is unable to understand how she can be brave enough to say something and, at the same time, not brave enough to do the same thing. Nothing can characterise better the uncertain nature of Domingas than the uncertainty of her inner feelings. Just like it does with everyone else, the system has modeled her uncertainty; the walls of Neo-Imperialism impede her from leaving.

A labyrinth of uncertainties is formed by the structure of development, which turns this whole process into a maze hard to find the way out. It is not easy to simply separate Domingas's life into blocks of pleasant and unpleasant moments since cruelty has permeated her past, present, and will probably permeate her future. Her family is dead,

her tribe annihilated, her history destabilised. She has nowhere to go; she has nothing but her son waiting for her to wake up every morning. Perhaps this is one of the basic principles for such unfair and self-destructive system to effectively feed itself: it makes marginalised people like Domingas keep moving due to their need to take care of someone else – in this case, Nael.

It is hard to describe Domingas and the other maids Nael observes everyday as 'independent', on their way to becoming ultimately 'autonomous'. This fact makes the reader stop and think about such an issue. This thinking requires some level of deep reflection, though, since the Imperialist media, developmentalist advertising, biased information, perfunctory literature, together with the neoliberal habits of the contemporary world do not want the reader to ponder upon abstract ideas such as 'independence' – actually it does not want the reader to ponder upon anything. Like Domingas's 'dead words', we are living surrounded by several of them: independence, autonomy, democracy, equality, 'free' market, etc. Such words would require an ideological shift that has happened only superficially from the colonial Amazon to the postcolonial one. In this excerpt Nael's insight baffles readers' historical perception regarding Amerindians independence before, during, and after colonisation; those who promised to show natives and 'caboclos' the road to paradise have actually given them a lift to hell.

If the 'ex-natives' – since not only their temporal condition has been altered but even their space cannot be really called theirs any longer –, just like Domingas, are hopelessly working for their whole lives as domestic slaves in the present free, democratic, independent, and liberal society, perhaps things were not so worse in the past as the readers have learned in school. When Western Imperialist education and media address matters such as the 'discovery' of Brazil, its independence and abolition of slavery, certain things are taken for granted, and Nael's insights seem to expose what media advertisement repeatedly conceals. In fact, by the time the imagined community's imaginary reached the Amazon, the entire planet's curved surface had been subjected to a geometrical grid

[...] which squared off empty seas and unexplored regions in measured boxes. The task of, as it were, 'filling in' the boxes was to be accomplished by explorers, surveyors, and military forces (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 132).

According to Williams, for the most humble of the natives, especially those of settled habits, their supposed independence made life on the whole even

more difficult. "After independence they were deprived of most of their lands, and debt serfdom in various parts had only replaced the related systems of colonial days" (WILLIAMS, 1930, p. 806-807). Therefore 'maybe' it would be unfair to conclude that Domingas's dreams did not occur due to her laziness or ignorance for not trying to change her life concretely, materially. Actually there was nothing triggering her actions, her will; she had nowhere to go, no time or place for her to feel comfortable in.

This might seem dramatic, but one must take into account that Domingas and Nael occupy a very particular and inescapable position; they are part of

[...] a growing, and now very large, body of officially invisible denizens for whom special terms had to be devised in our tragic century: 'stateless,' 'apatriate,' 'illegal immigrant,' or whatever (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 1066, italics added).

The narrator's mother can handle living in the dreadful conditions where she finds herself, she is just trying to learn how to deal more properly with the fact that there is such a thing called poverty and richness – new epistemes brought by development which were previously unknown to her – and, more importantly, that she is an important part of the former and must eagerly aspirate her transition to the latter. In the end, Domingas is just trying to get used to the commodification of everything that surrounds her – and that, in the past, seemed to be priceless. We(st) know that, sooner or later, she will be able to do that. For we have clearly been.

#### Final remarks: can the subaltern be heard?

Hatoum's novel emphasises the fact that there has been no ending for colonialism. The colonial nature of the contemporary experience of Amazonian natives and 'caboclos' – such as Nael and Domingas – does, in a way, show that postcolonialism is not at all what comes 'after' the colonialism of the Amazon; it is, on the contrary, what stands for the institutionalisation of such colonialism in a hegemonic, however modern, episteme. In other words it feeds the system and it keeps it alive. The contemporary contextual moment might now be different, but the exploitation and animalisation of people like Domingas have not been left behind, it has only been re-systematised afresh in the terms of Latin American postmodernity.

What makes the situation of Nael and his mother – the former being a caboclo and the latter an Amerindian – even more problematic is their lack of what Robert Miles (1993) calls a 'universal

citizenship'. According to the author, race ends up working as one of the several tools that effect the re-dimensioning of meanings and resources to those who can be seen as legitimate citizens by this new order dictated by capitalism. It is not the race of the margin per se that hinders the possibility of fighting against its inevitable exclusion during this process, but the specific instances that mark its impossibility of acquiring the 'universal citizenship' that hegemony seems not only to propagate, but especially to merchandise – both for those who can get it as well as for the ones who never will.

What the author seems to bring up here is the fact that the social structures of some peoples and communities grant them more possibilities of articulation of a more delineated citizenship. This sense of belonging to a community or people actually enacts the very definition by which they are known. The universalisation of citizenship, or the identity of a people as a whole, comes to pass when the imposition of discourses of power establishes an idealised pattern for citizenship that can only be reached when one modulates his/her singularities. In fact, the Westernisation of the Amazon, even though coming from an identifiable and relative locale, is able to universalise a single notion of citizenship that no Amerindian can ever be capable of sharing with a cherry-picked elite. Ironically, this apparent impossibility of universalised citizenship is caused by the very same system that advocates its obliteration.

Pratt (1992, p. 7) argues that, by putting into practice the logical juggling whereby nature is romanticised and 'saved' at the same that it is explored and obliterated, "European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony". Hegemonic inclusive policies, which try to 'secure their innocence' and lack of bias, supposedly give people freedom for them to live as they will, ironically after being convinced that their lives, culture, religion, and tradition are not worth a picayune, and when they decide to go to the city people will gossip: 'See? It was their choice'. This is what happens to Brazilian Amerindians who are taken from their lands, given no prospects, and end up getting only prostitution, drugs and alcohol as a gift from Western culture. Imperialism needs these euphemisms in order not to raise too many questions, in order to envelop its interests with less nasty coverings; as a discourse, it reproduces regimes of unaccountability; there is just one single past, present, and future, and they are clearly divided into closed boxes.



However, and as I think *The Brothers* is able to show, hegemonic discourses might be strong, but they are not deterministic; novels like this one may potentialise the meanings by which developmentalist discourses, whose goal is to master Amazonian time and space, might be ultimately challenged. What one cannot do is ignore them, since, according to Carolyn Merchant (2003), naming the narrative gives people the power to change it,

[...] to move outside it, and to reconstruct it; people as material actors living in a real world can organize that world and their behaviors to bring about change and to break out of the confines of a particular storyline (MERCHANT, 2003, p. 36).

This particular storyline that places Amerindians, their traditions, culture, and milieu in the past of our 'evolved, educated, civilised' and urban society has become a proven fallacy, and if we want to think of possibilities it is from places like the Amazon and from peoples like its inhabitants that the answer may arise.

Nevertheless, Hatoum's novel, for focusing on the Amazon and its inhabitants through descriptions filled with local colours, has contributed for the author's designation by the critics as a 'regionalist' writer. Having been given such label for his 'linguistically deviant' discourse and for his use of a vocabulary so uncommon for those who live in other regions of Brazil, Hatoum rejects the term. According to the author, every writer writes from a locale and his/her productions are only considered 'regional' when such locale does not pertain to one supposedly 'universal' region (COLOMBO, 2009). That is, a writer whose origin, and whose local for him/her to elaborate his fiction is São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro, is potentially and contextually capable of writing 'universally'; but those who are born, for instance, in the North or Northeast of the country, are ineluctably doomed to write about 'regional themes' which have seemingly nothing to do with the nation's 'universal' matters.

Furthermore, if Brazilian literature is still struggling not to remain being internationally weak when compared to other traditions, inside the country such weakness is far from disappearing. Indeed Even-Zohar suggests that the ability of 'weak' literatures to initiate innovations is often less than that of the larger and central literatures, "[...] with the result that a relation of dependency may be established not only in peripheral systems, but in the very center of these 'weak' literatures" (EVEN-ZOHAR, 1990, p. 47-48, italics added). Therefore, the centre of these 'weak' literatures does not rely only on hegemonic discourses coming from the

foreign literary realm to suffocate its 'local writers', since it develops its own domestic margins through such binary divisions that deem some Brazilian pieces 'regional' without pondering upon the political implications of the use of such term.

In Cronin's words (2003, p. 30)

[...] if being a citizen involves an awareness of connectedness beyond the local and the immediate, then it is important to identify mobilising paradigms that can usefully link the local to what lies beyond the local.

My analysis has probably shown what 'lies beyond the local' concerning the experience of Nael and his mother as representatives of a marginalised population bereaved in the temporal and spatial seclusion when/where contemporary society has (mis)placed the Amazon. Their experience is not limited to their region, since their region, like all others, is inserted in a much larger epistemological construction which, especially nowadays, no one would be able to swim against. Hence the social and political beneficial implications of Gledson's translation, for not only acknowledging but also bolstering Hatoum's de- and re-construction of the Amazonian narratology that, on its turn, does not concern only Amazonians, but the whole planet.

However, when one ponders upon this sort of Brazilian literature translated into English, there are some issues which cannot be overlooked. Even though projects for disseminating the literary production of the country more efficiently – better late than never – seem to slowly multiply as Brazilian economy gradually grows, the increase on the number of texts which are translated per se has proven not to be enough. Besides assuring the translations of novels like *The Brothers*, there must be some preoccupation about divulging such books, inasmuch as, different from other countries, Brazil does not seem to have a tradition that cares about making its writers well known for foreign readers. This is suggested by Raquel Cozer (2010) who also propounds that hundreds of Brazilian books are indeed being translated, but that the vast majority of them are only printed once and end up taking quite a lot to be – when they surprisingly are – sold (COZER, 2010).

The excessive and anti-cultural commoditisation of the book, mentioned and discussed previously, turns this difficulty into a paradoxical bubbling web: Publishing houses are interested in books which satisfy a certain commercial demand, but commercial demand only exists if people are able to, somehow, get in touch beforehand with the products they might futurely consume. Moreover, what the market 'needs' does not have to concern

necessarily good writers and/or rich narratives. Profitable literature is not a synonym for good literature; it is a synonym for literature capable of being appreciated by a large body of readers, and what this large body of contemporary readers wants is harmless, unobtrusive, innoxious, and ultimately 'neutral' literature (COZER, 2012). *The Brothers* (2002), which proposes new views vis-à-vis old matters, apparently putting into question hegemonic and taken-for-granted notions regarding the Amazon and its development, has much to say about Brazilian culture, society and politics; and it does that not attempting to be 'universal', but, actually, in pretty local terms. Nevertheless, is it possible that Hatoum's assets might also stand for his liabilities in the unfair future of literature if it keeps being headed by the literary market?

Definitely. But it is important not to confuse Hatoum's use of the local, as the starting point for bringing in universal issues, with the exoticisation of the local, its 'pseudo-regionalism'. The difference is clear: The Amazon depicted by Hatoum is a source of meaning, and its natives' discourse deconstructs and reconstructs normative notions regarding the region and its development. When the local is simply romanticised, it works as a mere reflection of hegemonic preconceived narratives: it becomes the passive receptor of previously written tales. The Amazon in *The Brothers* (2002) is somehow able to speak for itself exactly due to the characters' attachment to the local, but such 'attachment' might give Hatoum some trouble if he wants to be read by a large number of people in a society where the local is generally ignored. Again, translating books per se is not enough to promote better understanding among cultures; the relation between commerce and literature must be revisited for such matter to be effectively handled.

I have previously discussed about a Brazilian writer who is very (commercially) successful; but is that a reason for us to celebrate? It would not be wise to disregard the power of his literature, but it is also important to bear in mind that

[...] even though he is inevitably putting Brazil on the map as a center of relevant literature, the books written by Paulo Coelho have no discernible trace of Brazilianness. (GRADESAVER, 1999-2013, p. 1)

Perhaps 'traces of Brazilianness' is not a very good expression to be used herein for it sounds too stereotypical, so maybe we could replace it with what Cronin (2003, p. 12) has called 'traces of difference'. According to the author, in building this bridge between cultures and promoting their encounter through translation

[...] the traces of difference cannot be ignored in a desire to float free of attachment [...]. If there are no singular locations, then there is nothing left to mediate and by extension nothing to translate.

These 'traces of difference' that permeate Hatoum's novel are easily ignored by those writers who do not aim at promoting a better understanding regarding the local. Writing in 'universal' terms – and here I mean Western – they endorse hegemonic discourses for contributing to their maintenance and, as a result, have a guaranteed body of readers who shall not feel challenged by their innocuous literature. The authors who propose other views, other stories, the ones who try to rewrite what has been written by the ethnocentric hands of Imperialism, have a much less smooth path to be taken before their acceptance. It is in this path that Hatoum is walking, on a road that personifies his attempt at recognition – the author himself has already admitted that his greatest ambition is simply to be read (BPP). Nevertheless, such recognition might only arise when we(st) feel interested in allowing other temporal and spatial conceptions to be devised, when we realise that Western thinking is not universal, but as local as the Amazon as constructed by Hatoum. As a matter of fact we all know Brazil, we all know the Amazon; but what Hatoum's narrative shows us is that 'knowing' is quite insufficient; after all, as Einstein once said, any fool can know, the point is to understand.

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