

SPATIAL BOUNDARIES AND THE COLONIAL PROJECT

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Through readings of works by Jules Verne, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Patrick Chamoiseau and Michael Haneke this dissertation argues that to understand colonialism – an exercise in spatial expansion – one must analyze the interaction of space with the colonial subject. Central to this thesis is the territorial fetish of the colonial project that defined the world as an extension of European frontiers. I show how by following imaginary histories, these colonially-generated spatial paradigms limit the definition of the world to its physical expanse, reducing all markers of plurality to a conquerable unit of spatial territory. I argue that the key to understanding the knowledge that shaped both the colonizing and the colonized subject lies in deciphering the operations that provoke and sustain the conception of such a temporally defined geography. This space, once produced, becomes an element in its own perpetuation. While tracing the resonance of space with questions of nationalism, gender, race and other aspects of identity, I pay special attention to the influence of historical conditions contemporary to these spatial reconfigurations.

The first chapter reveals how Verne's novel presents colonial structures that produce a globally homogenized network of infrastructure necessary to cash in on the commodity of time. The second chapter focuses on the interrelatedness of location and identity in the short story "Toba Tek Singh" where the protagonist subverts the newly formed border between India and Pakistan to assert his own identity. The chapter on *Texaco* discusses how the woman protagonist exerts her identity within a spatial

context and thus is able to imbricate her presence and history into the postcolonial debate. The last chapter studies Haneke's film *Caché*, and takes up the issue of France's return to its colonial past. This chapter argues for understanding the interaction between the colonial subject and colonial history in order to dismantle the space of otherness. The colonial spaces in the Urdu short story "Toba Tek Singh" and the French works *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, *Texaco* and *Caché* resist appropriation and offer radical reconfigurations that critique any notion of space as a neutral entity.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mohit Chandna was born in New Delhi, India on March 19, 1976. He graduated from Jawaharlal Nehru University with a BA in French literature. After completing his Masters in French Literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University he enrolled for his graduate studies at Cornell University in 2002. He got a second Masters in 2005 and a Ph.D. from Cornell University in 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2005, as *banlieues* (French suburbs) all over France burned, the world press attempted to explain the crisis. Ranging from government apathy, a partisan police force, or the deep-seated racism of French society, the press advanced many explanations of the fiery and riotous aftermath of the death of two minority teenage boys, electrocuted in the alleged attempt to escape the police. In this journalistic profusion of analyses and commentary, an article¹ in *The New York Times Magazine* caught my attention. It zeroed in on city planning as the culprit.

The famous Swiss architect Le Corbusier, the article stated, had designed the *banlieues* to keep the poor working-class clustered around the city in huge high rises. Placed on the periphery, these soaring “apartments, he thought, would finally give sunlight and fresh air to city laborers, who had been trapped in narrow and fetid back streets since the dawn of urbanization.” Unfortunately, his noble intentions notwithstanding the spatial distribution became a trigger for social discord and laid the groundwork for the eventual ghettoization of urban France. Poverty and unemployed disgruntled youth made for a dangerous cocktail in shape of fiery petrol bombs that lit up the French suburbs.

What the article does not elaborate is that the line dividing the *banlieue* from the city stands not only as a rendition of the economic difference between two classes, but also very clearly, as a racial divide. The majority of the underprivileged *banlieue* dwellers are non-white immigrants from the former French occupied territories and

¹ Christopher Caldwell, “Revolting High Rises,” [The New York Times Magazine on the Web](http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9805E6DB1F3EF934A15752C1A9639C8B63&page_wanted=all) 27 Nov. 2005, 11 June 2009
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9805E6DB1F3EF934A15752C1A9639C8B63&page_wanted=all>.

their French offspring. The simple spatial appellation of a French *banlieue* – no longer a passively demarcated space – is the indicator of a constellation of colonial influences. The recent unrest that started in the *banlieues* spread from the margins to the center, highlighting the changed signification of spatial domains. It has forced the French to re-assess their colonial history.

This colonially marked border taking on a life of its own and exacting revenge could have been a statement of exaggeration had it not been for Marseille going unscathed during the riots. Unlike most French cities, Marseille “is turned inside out, so that ‘inner city’ and ‘suburbia’ retain their American connotations.” Despite “one of the heaviest concentrations of immigrants’ children in France” (Caldwell), this port city, owing to the absence of a historically generated colonial periphery, was spared the violence that besieged most of urban France. No *banlieue* meant no violence. With no *banlieue* to act as a carrier of colonial history, Marseille was spared the social conflict.

The process of intensive colonization towards the end of the nineteenth-century – to which Jules Verne’s novel *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* testifies – has not ended with the liberation of colonies and the formation of new nation states. The global vision that undergirds this ideological project of colonial space remains pertinent even today. What happened in France after Algeria won its independence in 1962 when all the administrative techniques employed to manage the colonies – techniques of spatial abstraction, also on display in Verne’s work – were brought back home was the perpetuation of “a form of interior colonialism”² that contributed to neoracism in France allowing it to maintain continued superiority over its former colonies. Even more importantly this interior colonialism serves to explain

² Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1995) 7.

France's contemporary colonial engagement. Those spatial practices that kept the colonies at a disadvantage were now implemented within France with not very dissimilar results – and the 2005 unrest in the French *banlieues* is only a testament to this continued presence of colonialism.

Colonization that is found in today's Paris as it is found in London, where Phileas Fogg, the protagonist of Verne's novel *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, started his journey around the world, is also found in Bishan Singh's Toba Tek Singh in the eponymous short story "Toba Tek Singh." The obliteration that colonization carried out "there" in the realm of the 'Other' at another time is present now and here – and indeed everywhere. Verne details the exploits of an English gentleman, testifying to the setting up of this global colonial space, as much as he also prepares the ground for the return of the repressed that is to take place in the twenty-first century film *Caché* where it is colonial guilt that assails the characters. But if the colonial paradigm imposes a spatial understanding, it does not take away our power to assert alternative cartographies. Assessing colonial spaces, questioning the parameters they impose and bringing forth its constant presence both in the subjugation by the colonizer and as a point of resistance by the colonized has occupied much of literature written on colonialism.

Édouard Glissant, resorting to the concept "étendue," offers one such move to overcome the debilitating definitiveness that a colonizing modernity had imposed upon the world. "Étendue" encapsulates the interconnections that bind the globe together as it also allows articulating various histories that populate it: "L'étendue n'est pas d'espace, elle est aussi son propre temps rêvé."³ The dictionary definition of the word "étendue" presents it as a property of bodies to be placed in a larger space

³ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) 71.

and to occupy a part of it (“Propriété fondamentale des corps d'être situés dans l'espace et d'en occuper une certaine partie”⁴). “Étendues” are unique perspectives that define the physical space in such a way that each “étendue” understands the world and its own placement within it differently. At the same time, these various divergent “étendues” overlap as they delineate each other from their respective points of view.

As Jacques Coursil explains:

Ainsi, le monde est une réalité physique qui contient des humains qui à leur tour contiennent des représentations de ce monde ... il y a une multiplicité d'étendues ... La somme de ces points de vue différents et de leur étendue respective qui se recouvrent comme des pureaux d'ardoises, débordent la surface du globe.⁵

It must be noted, that the above explanation – about “étendue” being a spatial conception – seems to contradict the idea of the first part of Glissant’s quote; “étendue” is not of topographical space (“l'étendue n'est pas d'espace”). Although a consideration of “aussi” – in the second half of Glissant’s quote – verifies Coursil’s explanation. Thus Glissant’s quote should be read as: “Expanse [extending] is not merely space; it is also its own dreamed time.”⁶ The translation tells us that apart from a perception of the space of the globe “étendue” *also* constitutes a “dreamed time”. A reference to time itself brings in the question of temporality, of history. The above conception is understood as time that is not only dreamed up – an imaginary time – but also a time of desire, wherein the “étendue” conceives of it as the ideal time. Each “étendue” dreams *up* history, perceiving the history of the globe according to its own

⁴ “Etendue,” Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé, Le Trésor de la langue française, 28 June 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

⁵ Jacques Coursil, “La Catégorie de la relation dans les essais d’Edouard Glissant: Philosophie d’une poétique,” Poétiques d’Edouard Glissant: actes du colloque international, Paris-Sorbonne, 11-13 mars 1998, compiled by Jacques Chevrier (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999) 90.

⁶ Edouard Glissant, Poetics of Relation, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The university of Michigan Press, 1990) 58. Translator’s parentheses.

conceptions and dreams *of* a desired ideal future. Coursil's explanation elaborates further on the dreamed time: "Une étendue, topique de récits, est une mémoire et cette mémoire, pour chaque culture, chaque monde, est le lieu du temps"(90).

Emphasis on *each* culture and *each* world ("chaque culture, chaque monde") signifies the existence of more than just one world or culture, which also reflects on "étendue," which then becomes defined as only *one* of the many worlds possible within the geographical space of the globe. The mirroring usage of "culture" and "monde" – "chaque culture" and "chaque monde" tells us that each culture constitutes a world in its own right. 'Each' culture – i.e. 'each' world – thus can be said to have its own "étendue." "[R]écits" describes "étendue" as a function of narratives and stories and thereby presents it as a space that is both narrated and one that narrates. Being in the plural, "récits" tells us of "étendue" as an existence of plurality. They define the world in their plurality, as they themselves are conjured up by a plurality of "récits." Presenting it as a site of time – "lieu de mémoire" – each "étendue" is determined by its respective "mémoire" (memory), which for an "étendue" becomes its history. In saying that "memoire" is the site of time, Coursil implies that this memory – that which has been selectively retained as an understanding of history – becomes the basis of the individual culture's understanding of time and as such the basis for defining the topographical space of the globe and the other "étendues."

Apart from the territorial conquests, colonization presented another spatial monopolization – by fashioning a world focalized through and revolving around the European perspective – thereby scripting a uni-polar discourse that spreads outwards as an extension of the European frontier. Coursil explains how Glissant already spatializes the colonizer-colonized relationship when he explains colonization as a function of "étendue," in which the "[o]ccident ne peut se concevoir sans la maîtrise de l'étendue" and as such describes the world from its own rigid angle of view. "Ainsi

sur la planète, il y a un monde qui se prend pour le Monde. Le projet Occident projette l'étendue comme un absolu" (95). Massey gives further contours to this spatialization:

Once understood as more than the history of Europe's own adventures, it is possible to appreciate how the previous way of telling the story (with Europe at its centre) was powered by the way in which the process was experienced *within* Europe; told from the point of view of Europe as the protagonist. Spatialising that story enables an understanding of its positionality, its geographical embeddedness; an understanding of the spatiality of the production of knowledge itself. (*For Space* 63)

Massey's comment about the importance of geography in knowledge creation contrasts a world defined by unidirectional linear time – of 'History' – against one that exists in a multiplicity of spaces. This prismatic view defies the earlier urge to flatten differences and accepts a multi-dimensional subjectivity. This "is a move away from the imagination of space as a continuous surface that the colonizer, as the only active agent, crosses to find the to-be-colonised simply 'there'. This would be space not as smooth surface but as the sphere of coexistence of a multiplicity of trajectories" (*For Space* 63). While this reveals how geography plays a vital role in defining the knowledge that shapes the colonized subject who is "simply 'there'," it also explains why Glissant in his countermove in response to this "continuous surface" is so insistent on a "coexistence of a multiplicity" in his spatialized understanding of the world. With its attention to a multiplicity of influences on spatiality, its demand for taking into consideration the numerous histories, Glissant's longstanding engagement with space at a conceptual level has also been a focus of writings on colonialism.

The colonial deterritorialization that resulted in slavery and forced migrations are in Glissant's discourse translated into a non-binary empowering form of spatiality. Similarly, readings of spatiality in this dissertation also gesture towards what Edward Soja calls "a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of

perspectives.”⁷ This “openness” is an enriching response to a geography disfigured by colonialism. Once the cause of space has been unshackled from its perceived passivity can one harness its dynamic energies: Glissant and Soja have registered the impossibility of a non-multiple space, re-inscribing the colonial project instead within an open-ended spatial paradigm that is one of possibilities. Nation-states, built on the belief of a single identity, could never satisfy this need for a dynamic interactive space that respects and recognizes the influences of a plurality of identities.

To get back to Glissant’s quote: “L’étendue n’est pas d’espace, elle est aussi son propre temps rêvé.” I would like to study these various “étendues” – sites at which geography is formed as a function of both space (“espace”) and time (“temps rêvé”); the historical circumstances that go into their making, and how they interact with each other and influence the geographical world. I use the term geography to understand it as the realm that would interest a social geographer. Hence, varying from one narrative to another, in this dissertation, geography will encompass divergent topographies. In “Toba Tek Singh,” for example, geography manifests itself through political entities of emerging nations and boundaries, and in *Texaco* it comprises a resettled hutment and its spatial relationship with other urban entities. While in *Around the World in 80 Days*, the understanding of geography presents the conception of the pre-colonial world, for *Caché* – a film about the post-colonial experience space entails a postmodern synergetic vision. In the linguistic realm, geography is to be understood as a performative language; a language shaped by, and which in turn creates spaces of social relations. Reading this geography allows a better understanding of the processes that map spaces of social relations while elucidating the processes that influence our articulation of these geographies.

⁷ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996) 5.

Certainly, it is important to recognize the literary works of my dissertation and the common colonial background they discuss, but these works also present spatial instances of a social reality. Much as in the example of Kristin Ross' spatial conclusions, I lay special stress towards understanding the knowledge that shaped both the colonizing and the colonized subject in order to decipher the operations that provoke and sustain the conception of such a temporally defined geography as moments of "synchronic history".⁸ These spaces manifest the "*displacement* of the political onto seemingly peripheral areas of everyday life — [which could be] the organization of space and time, changes in lived rhythms and social ambiances" (*Transformation* 39). Ross evokes Marx's idea of "displacement" to see everyday spaces in Rimbaud's poetry as "adjacent—side-by-side" sites on which the transformations in larger spatial usages are displaced. Similarly the spatiality presented in this dissertation also demonstrates "synchronic history". Ross' work deals with space and spatial usage as belonging to a larger paradigm of social relations. This "social space" puts on display a "synchronic history" of contemporary political practices and becomes an active element in its own perpetuation. Decidedly "*not* a static reality" (*Transformation* 42), Ross' "social space" (*Transformation* 36) chiming in with Massey's idea that "space unfolds as interaction" is clearly an invitation to conceive of "space ... as active, generative." Space "as created by an interaction," as "something that our bodies reactivate, and which through this reactivation, in turn modifies and transforms us" (*Transformation* 42). In order to appreciate how this mutual reactivation and transformation takes place within the realm of colonial spaces, I find it useful to have a brief discussion of one moment of the short story "Toba Tek

⁸ Kristin Ross, "Rimbaud and the Transformation of Social Space," 50 Years of Yale French Studies: A Commemorative Anthology. Part 2: 1980-1998, spec. issue of Yale French Studies 97 (2000): 37.

Singh.”⁹ This demonstrative moment will show how this study focuses on the equation of interaction between the colonial subject and spatial demarcations. The following reading also gives me the context to elaborate further on what I understand to be the role of space and how it relates to other studies on space.

In 1947 after years of hard-fought struggle the colony of India won its independence from the British Empire. But what was meant to be a celebration of freedom brought about instead unspeakable horrors for the people of the subcontinent. Despite emphatic appeals by those like Mahatma Gandhi (“Before partitioning India, my body will have to be cut into two pieces.”¹⁰) the decision had been taken to divide the colony of India along religious lines. As each religious and non-religious community vociferously argued for a larger share of the land mass, the British, pressed by their concern of speeding up “the partition of the Punjab so as to facilitate their departure from India,”¹¹ hastily wrapped up the Punjab Boundary Commission. The resultant acrimony that would lead to many wars between the dissatisfied India and Pakistan, including the threat of a nuclear conflict, was already taking its human toll.

Working with “ambiguous and unspecific” guidelines¹² the British Government had precipitated the formation of a border that made refugees of 15

⁹ Sa’adat Hasan Manto, “Toba Tek Singh,” trans. Mohammad Asaduddin, For Freedom’s Sake: Selected Stories and Sketches, trans. Mohammad Asaduddin et.al. compiled by Mohammad Asaduddin (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001) 140-148.

¹⁰ “The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi,” BBC Online Network 29 January 1998, 21 March 2009 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/50664.stm>>.

¹¹ Alexander Painter, “Reconsidering the Partition of South Asia: Government Sources and Oral History,” Sagar 16 (Spring 2006): 11. Read also for arguments that each side presented to claim a larger geographical share.

¹² In “Reconsidering the Partition,” to support his opinion (“Mountbatten listing ambiguous and unspecific other factors as a decisive condition for Partition fast became a point where opinions clashed.”) Painter cites the telegram written by the last Viceroy of British India Louis Mountbatten to the Boundary Commission: “The Boundary Commission is instructed to demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of the Punjab based on ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims. In doing so it will also take into consideration other factors” (3).

million¹³ people. And of course, the unprepared British officials had paid very little attention to “the massive forced migrations of populations” as they had not been “considered effective political options” (Painter 14). “The seventy-two day timetable, 3rd June to 15th August 1947, for both transfer of power and division of the country, was to prove disastrous.”¹⁴ And the rioters confirmed it when they targeted refugees scurrying across the border in search of safety. As mobs hacked trainloads of refugees, death, rape and arson became commonplace and each side tried to outdo the other in this macabre madness. The confusion of the partition was triggering an unparalleled bloodshed at that very moment in history when the political leaders of India and Pakistan were speaking with hope about India’s “Tryst With Destiny”¹⁵ and about Pakistan’s future as a state “with equal rights.”¹⁶

Sa’adat Hassan Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” is part of a copious literary corpus that bears witness to this division and displacement. The short story is set two “or three years after the Partition” (140), when the two new-born countries had perhaps already fought their first war (1947-8) over Kashmir. The governments of India and Pakistan realized that the inmates of mental asylums also needed to be relocated

¹³ The Partition of India, Postcolonial Studies Website project at Emory University, March 21, 2009 <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Part.html>>.

¹⁴ Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K. N. Panikkar, and Sucheta Mahajan, India’s Struggle for Independence (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989) 499.

¹⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, “Tryst With Destiny,” speech, India Perspectives 22.4 (2008), March 20, 2009 <<http://meaindia.nic.in/>> 1. In this famous maiden speech, Delivered on August 14, 1947, the eve of India’s independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India’s first Prime Minister says: “Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.”

¹⁶ Muhammad Ali Jinnah, “Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11th August, 1947,” speech, Government of Pakistan, March 20, 2009 <<http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/Quaid/speech03.htm>>. “If you change your past and work together in a spirit that everyone of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations there will be no end to the progress you will make.”

according to their respective religions. The transfer of inmates across the Wagah border relates the spatial obsession that defined much of the South Asian subcontinent as much as it provides the background for this short story about the death of its protagonist on the border. “Toba Tek Singh” is about an institutionalized individual named Bishan Singh who is to be transferred to India from an asylum in Pakistan.

A Sikh by religion, before losing his mental balance Bishan Singh was a wealthy landowner from a place called Toba Tek Singh. Bishan Singh is called Toba Tek Singh and through his name we already get to know that he is intertwined with his location but how exactly the protagonist of the short story shares the uncertain future of the locales, occupies our attention here. As the inmates of the asylum ascertain their future within these countries, the locations in this story too have come unhinged of the world. With the partition newly demarcating cities, towns and villages, Bishan Singh wants to know the fate of Toba Tek Singh. Both fellow inmates and others hesitate at venturing an answer – his queries only cause bewilderment:

Those who made an attempt to explain got entangled in the confusion that Sialkot, which had earlier been in Hindustan was now reported to be in Pakistan. Who knew whether Lahore, which was now in Pakistan would not go over to Hindustan the following day, or whether the whole of India [Hindustan] would not turn into Pakistan. And who could say with certainty that both Hindustan and Pakistan would not just vanish from the face of the earth altogether someday.¹⁷

If these unsettled, mobile places whose final location rests in the balance, seem surprising, then one need only consider how independence day brought about bizarre scenes in which flags “of both India and Pakistan were flown in villages between Lahore and Amritsar as people of both communities believed that they were on the

¹⁷ “Toba Tek Singh” 144. In the translation of the passage, Asaduddin, without explaining, uses ‘India’ to designate the entity which in the original has been mentioned consistently as ‘Hindustan’. The translator is giving us more than the original communicates. My hypothesis is that Asaduddin is distinguishing between the pre-partition colony of India and the post-partition India. So that, after independence the colony that is ‘India’, is divided into ‘Hindustan’ and ‘Pakistan’.

right side of the border” (Bipan Chandra et. al. 499). In a situation when no one is aware of where they belong, or even where exactly these countries might be, the effects of the border are felt most on Toba Tek Singh: “[T]he visit of Bishan Singh’s neighbor informs the reader of the fate of the village Tobah Tek Singh [which is in Pakistan], but his confused response to Bishan Singh’s query does not communicate that to Bishan Singh.”¹⁸ For this mad man the location of Toba Tek Singh remains forever elusive. Eventually as the Pakistani authorities try to coax him into India, he refuses to cross the border, dying in the no man’s land.

This death can indisputably be read as the re-enactment of the fate of countless victims who had perished in the sub-continental violence, but in the end, where, or who exactly is Toba Tek Singh? What is the relevance of the relationship between Toba Tek Singh, the man, and Toba Tek Singh, the place? Are they both just to be understood as caught up in the divide imposed between India and Pakistan? One last sinister note that testifies to the contemporary relevance of the colonial spatial paradigm. In the underlying question about which of the two – India and/or Pakistan – has the co-ordinates of these locations, should we read a morbid premonition when one conjectures: “who could say with certainty that both Hindustan and Pakistan would not just *vanish* from the face of the earth altogether someday.”¹⁹ For this concern we will have to wait and watch with hope about the still uncertain location of Kashmir.

I choose to introduce the dynamics of my project with “Toba Tek Singh” as it allows us to conceive of space as a social product and shows how in turn space produces the subject. The dynamics of the India-Pakistan border underpin the spatial

¹⁸ Leslie A. Flemming, Another Lonely Voice: The Urdu Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies University of California, 1979) 84.

¹⁹ Emphasis added. All emphases, unless otherwise stated are those of the author.

readings that this research proposes to articulate: to understand how Bishan Singh is multiply enmeshed in India, Pakistan, and Toba Tek Singh, one needs to understand the historical process that produces the India-Pakistan border. Once we see the haste with which the British executed the partition leaving behind a religion-based divide and the imposed migration, then we grasp better how spaces too can be mobile and these locations unstable; unstable because their future is uncertain, and unstable also because they transition into a new cultural reality with nation states as their reference. Overnight the border endows people with religion-based identities and makes them undifferentiated citizens of two nations. The border is then the site at which both the colonial subject as well as colonial space are produced.

In this story the British colonizer's presence is felt through the legacy of the border that although remaining un-mentioned at this moment is determining the colonial subject. "[C]onfusion" lays bare the spatial chaos that overwhelmed the subcontinent and relates the fundamental nature of the border's relationship with the inhabitants. "Who knew" underlines the all-pervading influence on the entire populace – nobody did. Nobody "could say with certainty", and for all "those" attempting a guess, the volatility of the new border causes bewilderment. The border also works to trump temporality. We get to know with certainty where Sialkot "had earlier been" and where Lahore "was". The border, however, equally afflicts the "now" and the "following day" making temporal boundaries resemble the spatial flux. Being a recent creation – an outcome of the then political turmoil – it is the border's status that is uncertain, its ambivalence however, manifests through the spatial destabilization it imposes on other well-defined politico-geographic entities (Lahore, Sialkot, Hindustan, Pakistan).

But, the point here is not alone about the hierarchy in which the tyrannical abstract border that makes Lahore "go over to," accentuates the state of flux and

assigns even India (Hindustan) and Pakistan their place. For that would limit this study to the control exercised by the site of the colonial border. When all the locations – including Toba Tek Singh – are dependent on the border, it no doubt signals a shift in spatial configurations where the new locus of the border emphatically registers its presence by simultaneously dislocating Toba Tek Singh – both the man and the place. With this uncertainty as the background however, the mad man’s queries – about Toba Tek Singh’s location, in turn also about his own location – are an astute reminder of the interplay between spatial divisions and human identity. In this telling not only can these places – Lahore, Sialkot, Hindustan, Pakistan and Toba Tek Singh – become movable but their mobility cannot take place without having an effect on their inhabitants.

The border in this short story, its annihilation of Toba Tek Singh, its staging of a mobile spatiality is a literal reminder that space cannot be conceived as passive. Places that can “go over” and “vanish” counter any move that would impose a definition on them and that would make of them dead, empty spaces, devoid of social life. Unlike the no man’s land in this story, abstracted to the exigencies of the border, these spaces cannot be separated from the dynamics of their production. Neither should the shift from “go over” to “vanish” be understood as an escalation or intensification of movement, rather it speaks of constant evolution and an ongoing process of spatial production.

To say that these places “vanish” is not a linguistic misuse. They do not exist as they are known, and in vanishing they bring forth social structures and processes that inscribe themselves in space. As the definition of these geographies is getting imbued with religious definitions, they “go over” into the realm of these nation states and they do in fact “vanish”. As there is a change in spatial practice so is there a change in spatial understanding; the spatial syntax of the story is now geared towards

the habitants who are one with these spaces. Furthermore, the spatial paradigm of this story anticipates that Toba Tek Singh, vacillating somewhere between two nation states, can only be located in the person of Bishan Singh, co-implicating the local, the global and the colonial subject in a mutually-influencing dynamic process. Space then exists not in isolation but as a point of interaction with social structures in a process of exchange.

Seeing that Toba Tek Singh's identity is being articulated in terms of nation states at a time in history when religious affiliations are determining the border and the border is reinforcing these religious affiliations, then one would have to assert that "[i]f time unfolds as change then space unfolds as interaction. In that sense space is the *social* dimension."²⁰ In fact, Michel Foucault offers a rather uncomplicated lament that scaffolds the central argument of this dissertation: space, he says is to be interpreted as anything but "the dead, the fixed, the inert."²¹ "A whole history," Foucault says, "remains to be written of *spaces* – which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both these terms to be plural) from the great strategies of the geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations" (*Power/Knowledge* 49). We are all part of a global community populated with omnipresent spatial power structures (both meanings intended) that make available the application of "great strategies" as well as afford "little tactics." Foucault's comment reminds us that space remains an all-pervasive influence in our lives and it participates in "economic and political installations" as it is formulated by them. And although it shows that "understanding of spatiality was at the center of all his writings," Foucault

²⁰ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005) 61.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected interview and Other Writings 1972-77*. trans. Colin Gordon et. al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 149-50.

“never developed his conceptualizations of space in great self-conscious detail” (*Thirdspace* 146-9). The interactions of spaces and powers that Foucault recognizes but does not enumerate have been articulated in greater detail by others like Doreen Massey whose work has focused more centrally on space. Massey constructs a matrix wherein spaces exist in inter-relation with each other: “Such a way,” Massey says “of conceptualizing the spatial, moreover, inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism.”²² But what exactly does it mean when I establish my intentions of studying the confluence where space intersects with social relations? This is a question that can be answered by understanding the *production* of space. I use the term production of space in a rather deliberate manner to speak of the landmark work by Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.²³ The title itself encapsulates space as a process when it communicates both the idea of producing (on the ground as well as through discourse) space as well as the production carried out by space.²⁴

²² Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 3.

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

²⁴ Even though reflections on geography as a discipline have been present ever since the 19th century,^a over the last few decades an ever-increasing number of scholars are rethinking the world in spatial terms. Expressions like center, periphery, core, margin, inside, outside, the First World, the Third World, the world and its many worlds are spatial references used in abundance both metaphorically and literally making space and spatiality nodal points of reference. Over the last two decades human geography has undergone such profound changes that it “has transformed ... into one of the most dynamic, innovative and influential of the social sciences.”^b The current thinking on spatiality started taking roots in the last few decades when a number of researchers, almost simultaneously, focused their attention on the way geography was organized and narrated – and the way it had been responding to forces of capital. And Henri Lefebvre has clearly been central to this spatial turn. Without responding to the reproach intended in the assertion that citing Lefebvre “is now *de rigueur* for anyone trained with even a homeopathic dose of critical theory in geography, planning, or architecture,”^c I would like to point to Kahisnka Goonewardena et al.’s statement as an example of Lefebvre’s importance in the field of critical geography. Goonewardena et. al. provide an interesting survey of how the Anglo-American academic circles have “produced” (2) Lefebvre. Broadly dividing Lefebvre’s reception into a “debilitating dualism” they attribute the two broad categories of his readings of “political economy” and “cultural studies” (3) to David Harvey and Edward Soja respectively. Both the “‘postmodern’ appropriations led by Edward Soja that followed the ‘urban political-economic’ renderings centered on David Harvey” are understood by the authors as “a significant abstraction from

The border in the short story, through its dictatorial imposition, demonstrates the continuation of the sort of political system that has led to its creation in the first place. But, and here is the argument of mutual interaction that I have been constructing, this colonially produced border cannot separate the colonized subject from his location, both of whom are intertwined in the name of Toba Tek Singh. What encompasses the border and the two Toba Tek Singhs is what Lefebvre calls “l’espace social” or the social space; the interactive phenomenon that demonstrates that “production of space is a continual process, and that space is always changing as conceptions, perceptions, and lived experiences change.”²⁵ “La pratique spatiale”²⁶ (Spatial Practice) refers to the underlying principles that define our practices and it answers the question: “What is the relationship of space and ideology and social formations?” (Shields 162) “Les représentations de l’espace” or Representations of

Lefebvre’s self-understanding of his own interventions in revolutionary theory and practice.” And when I attest to the fact that Lefebvre “has been, and is, read in often contradictory ways”^d I only do so to point to great opportunities and possibilities that his thoughts offer those working on space as they do for this project as well.

a. For representative writings in Critical geography over the last two centuries see Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings, eds. Harald Bauder and Salvatore Engle-Di Mauro (Praxis (e) Press, 2008), 20 March 2009 <<http://www.praxis-epress.org/CGR/contents.html>>.

b. Barney Warf and Santa Arias, The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives (London; New York: Routledge, 2009) 1.

It is not for nothing that “The Spatial Turn” is the title. As this collection presents representative writings across disciplines that have contributed to the field of human geography the title in itself testifies to the field gaining in prominence over the last two decades.

c. Kahisnka Goonewardena et. al., “On the Production of Henri Lefebvre” in Kahisnka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgram, Christian Schmid, eds., Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre (New York: Routledge, 2008) 5.

d. Rob Shields, Lefebvre, Love, and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics (London; New York: Routledge, 2009) 3.

²⁵ Richard Milgrom, “Lucien Kroll: Design, Difference, Everyday Life” in Kahisnka Goonewardena et. al., 270. To understand further these “three processes” see Mary Pat Brady, Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) n. 18, 208-9.

²⁶ Henri Lefebvre, La Production de l’espace (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1981) 46-57.

space refers to space that the organizers of a society, its planners, its architects and its technocrats conceive, and which becomes the dominant space of a society.

On the other hand “Les espaces de représentation” or “Spaces of Representation” refers to the subterranean and clandestine aspect of social life: “C’est l’espace dominé, donc subi, que tente de modifier et d’appropriier l’imagination”²⁷ (*Production* 49). While the first, “Representations of space,” in search of “order” reigns with its graphs, charts, numbers, maps, drawings and prints, the latter expresses adaptation to, or the resistance against this imposed spatiality. Through the tussle between the imposed space and the subject who inhabits it, this dissertation project hopes to bring forth human space as a process. In other words, spaces – building, borders, urban infrastructure, etc. – can only be analyzed by taking into consideration the processes that shape them, the social realities that interact with them and the manner in which they are perceived and experienced – and it is this dynamic nature of spatiality that the current “spatial turn” in academics has been insistently signaling towards and to which this research hopes to contribute. Spaces inflect people; people inflect spaces. Only once we understand that human identities, desires, histories, perceptions of the world are all formed within and with a spatial interface can we understand the productive process that spatiality entails. The complicity, the opposition, the manipulation, the domination, the rebellion, the submission in human relations is influenced and carried out through, with and most certainly within spaces.

Literary works included in this dissertation present spatial manifestations that are clearly implicit in a process that produces colonial space. It is not only in the way that *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* abstracts human identity by presenting a

²⁷ Translated as: “This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.” *The Production*, trans. Nicholson-Smith, 39.

uniform spatial image of the entire colonial world, but also in the way that *Texaco*, “Toba Tek Singh” and *Caché* raise the relevance of race, gender, colonial definitions and capitalism that the works studied here show that literature and film do not just simply reflect and represent spatial structures. Rather, they present an acute awareness of the historical processes that produce and define space: borders, buildings, roads, nations, islands, etc. in these works are not just “there” as backgrounds that can be depicted but instead through their contested presence, these spaces demand the contextual articulation of a history that resulted in their creation.

If Foucault is right in demanding that power “must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain” and that power “is employed and exercised through a net-like organization” (*Power/Knowledge* 98) then within the spatial matrix these works act as narratives that also produce a discourse of space. As they expand on the meanings and practices of space by demonstrating the various spatial usages, within that “net-like organization” these works present opportunities where the counter forces to dominating spaces can also be exercised with alternative conceptions of space.

Crucial to such an understanding is that spaces do not exist in seclusion from the human subject or even from each other. When Lefebvre talks about “la vie quotidienne d’un habitant d’HLM en banlieue, cas-limite et significatif” and explicitly states that it does not mean we can “laisser de côté les autoroutes et l’aéro-politique” (*Production* 48),²⁸ he clearly points out that no part of the world is in isolation and that what began as the spatial expansion project of colonialism needs to be, and is being, understood spatially. This dissertation too is a part of the process that hopes to advance this understanding. The four chapters that I propose play out rather literally

²⁸ Also quoted in Shields 163.

Lefebvre's appeal when they look at the similarities in the histories, literary techniques and the struggles in works dispersed not only along linguistic traditions but also along different moments of colonial history. When read together they provide instances of how the nuances of one work enrich our understanding of others.

The itinerary that this dissertation proposes begins with the work of a French author writing about the Englishman Phileas Fogg whose adventure has London as its starting point. Of the four chapters of my dissertation, the first, "Time is Money," relies on a close reading of Verne's *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, to comment upon the formation of capital-induced space of colonialism. Here I realign readings on racism and parochialism in the novel alongside a spatial matrix to show how a nascent capitalism, through a spatial reconfiguration, exacerbates the friction of power equations between the colonizer and the colonized. I pay attention to the territorial fetish of the colonial project that defined the world as an extension of European frontiers. By following imaginary histories these spatial paradigms generated by the colonizer limit the definition of the world to its physical expanse, reducing all markers of plurality to a conquerable unit of spatial territory: "smooth surfaces" that Massey describes above as being "simply there." Through the representation of colonies, Hong Kong in particular, I show how colonialism conceived the world – as a graspable entity – confining its definition to mathematical computations, and articulating borders solely in empirical terms by ignoring all plurality. The title of the novel in itself speaks of a space that is "ultimately a mathematical one."²⁹ A journey that gets completed in 'eighty days' is symptomatic of a measurable world whose limits can be computed empirically. And it is just the results of this journey, a world marked by borders, to which the other three chapters react. Through a further reading of Sa'adat Hasan Manto's short story in the second

²⁹ *The Production*, trans. Nicholson-Smith, 1.

chapter – “Limiting Borders: Colonial Frontiers and Toba Tek Singh” – I will bring forth a textual overtone that overcomes the grasp of the colonial paradigm.

Chamoiseau’s novel *Texaco*’s is a story about the space of the margins, where the margins take on both a metaphorical and a topographical meaning. The novel presents residents of a shantytown in struggle against an oil company for land that is situated on the margins of the city of Fort de France. While in the novel, with the victory of the residents the topographical margins get redefined, debates about the definition of the novel’s metaphoric marginality is yet to subside. Criticism on *Texaco* has tended to restrict the implications of the margins of the novel within a limited paradigm of the postmodern, which as a space of articulation abounds with possibilities. My attempt in this third chapter, “*Texaco*: Marie Sophie’s Journey from the Margins to the Center,” has been to read *Texaco* with focus on another corner of the margin where I consider the space of l’en-ville as the woman protagonist’s chosen site of resistance. Reading *Texaco* from a spatial perspective with sensitivity for the history of the woman subject, offers a site where both the spatial margins – the periphery of l’en-ville – and the metaphoric margins – Marie-Sophie’s presence as a woman – converge. After her rape, deciding to wage her war from the fringes of the city, Marie-Sophie literally fuses her marginality with that of the topographical space of the hutment. Thus, for *Texaco*, “these margins ... [become] both sites of repression and sites of resistance.”³⁰ Further, as Marie-Sophie’s rape spurs the creation of the hutment, we can see Barbara Hooper’s argument playing out in the text wherein Hooper “brilliantly elaborates on Lefebvre’s insistent argument that ‘the whole of (social) space proceeds from the body’” (*Thirdspace* 113). My reading emphasizes on

³⁰ bell hooks, “Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness,” Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (Boston: South End Press, 1990) 152. Quoted in Soja 98.

the role of Marie-Sophie's body within the question of identity politics mapped out in *Texaco*.

Reckoning with Marie-Sophie's presence opens up the space of the margins that Chamoiseau portrays and nuances further, wherein, irrespective of the work's alleged essentialist stance, the margins of *Texaco* are read as accommodating other struggles and other modes of resistance. Emphasis on the spatial praxis as it relates to the woman protagonist makes the *Texaco* margins more diverse, vibrant and full of "possibilities", where the margin is "simultaneously central and marginal (and purely neither at the same time), a difficult and risky place on the edge, filled with contradiction and ambiguities, with perils and also with new possibilities: a Thirdspace of political choice."³¹ Envisaging a similar multi-dimensional margin, I show how the woman protagonist exerts her subjectivity and taking the spatial route she is able to imbricate her presence and history into the postcolonial debate. Such a reading offers a site where both the spatial margins (the urban periphery) and the metaphoric margins (Marie-Sophie's presence as a woman) converge.

Having traversed through colonial topographies, it is the space of difference that I wish to highlight in the last chapter: "The French Nation: A Line Drawing of Alienation." Although not contour-less, this space is definitely less tangible as it deals with the synchronic space of difference between Georges and Majid, representatives of the post French-Algerian colonial war in Michael Haneke's award-winning film *Caché*. This film – with its connections to the Parisian unrest of October 1961 – focuses on colonial guilt and permits our understanding of *Caché*'s upper middle class Parisian character Georges Laurent as a colonial product. I contend that his interaction with Majid, who is of Algerian descent, dismantles any claims to a definitive space of

³¹ Soja's (97) elucidation of bell hooks' position.

otherness. The question I raise in my concluding chapter is, how would one understand the formation of a colonial subjectivity without succumbing to the temptation of perpetuating the colonial sign?

Within the postcolonial context, my intention of discovering spaces – tangible and intangible, metaphoric as well as well as literal – clearly necessitates a determination of my own positioning within this extremely vibrant current leftist thought on postcolonial literature; in particular among the partisans of materialist thinking – interested in a historical analysis – and those that prefer the language-inspired critical approaches. In analyzing, for example the colonio-capitalist infrastructure in *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, I trace the creation of the opium-related network in the novel to relate it to the Opium wars. Does this historical analysis preclude me from approaching questions of ‘postcolonial’ identity apparent in *Caché*? In the words of Benita Parry, at stake in this materialist versus textual opposition when analyzing colonialism is:

whether the imperial project is historicized within the determining instance of capitalism’s global trajectory, or uprooted from its material ground and resituated as a cultural phenomenon whose intelligibility and functioning can be recuperated from tendentious readings of texts.³²

In its analyses, this dissertation has assiduously aimed at collating views of colonial literature and investigating questions of identity predicated both on the (post)colonial text current to the present poststructuralist world as well as material history at play in the context of these works. Therefore, testifying to a clear-cut division between the “historicized” and “readings of texts” would be an impossible task; one that would only end up condoning the hierarchy inherent in “procedures which subordinate the

³² Benita Parry, “Beginnings, Affiliations, Disavowals” in Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 8.

real to the cultural and the semiotic” or the other way round. Instead, following Parry I have looked at *Texaco* (and other texts of this dissertation) from a perspective that takes “full account of both the cultural and the semiotic as social practices” while paying attention to the historical reality of slavery and colonialism that preceded the current dialogue (Parry 5).

By setting my sights on the site (both meanings of the term) of resistance that *Texaco* offers, I have discovered a proleptic acceptance of Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s call for a localized response to the ever-growing forces of globalization. The point being that the idiom Créole and the resultant Créole space that *Texaco* highlights, and most critics have focused on, should not take away from the “transnational feminist practice”³³ whose possibility become real in reading the novel through Marie-Sophie’s body. It is not only because the rather literal explanation that since “women are central to the life of neighborhood and communities they assume leadership positions in these struggles” (515) describes Marie-Sophie’s position of leadership within her hutment that Mohanty’s appeal becomes relevant for *Texaco*. It is also the localized nature of her struggle, the “place consciousness” that in Grace Lee Boggs’s words “encourages us to come together around common, local experiences and organize around our hopes for the future of our communities and cities” (Quoted in Mohanty 515), that implicates my reading of this novel, as also Marie-Sophie’s fight, within a global dynamics of resistance – connected to other similar colonial literatures. For *Texaco*’s experience of colonial structures is also a local struggle whose global inferences present in “Toba Tek Singh,” *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* and *Caché*, can and should be approached with Marie-Sophie as one of its elements if true

³³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.2 (2002): 509. I am of course, adapting her model of anticapitalist struggle because of its stress on contextual links which provides the background for the assembling of the works of this dissertation.

appreciation is to be had of her experiences that she shared in common with many other unacknowledged women participants in the colonial struggle.

The guiding principle of “interconnectedness of the histories, experiences, and struggles” (522) in Mohanty’s proposed pedagogy³⁴ of feminist scholarship – “*comparative feminist studies model*” – has been the basis that ties together texts from all over the world dealing with colonialism by Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Patrick Chamoiseau, Michael Haneke and Jules Verne that even in belonging to different colonial contexts – linguistically, geographically and historically – still remain linked within a spatial matrix.³⁵ All of them respond to a spatial anxiety that through its own particular historical and cultural experience also allows an understanding of other similar experiences existing in “interconnectedness”. In other words, just as one cannot study the “British Victorian novel for example, without at the same time considering what the flowering of cultural wealth in England owed to events taking place in India and elsewhere” (Ross, WL 670-1), so is it impossible to appreciate “in isolation” from each other the colonial spatialities of this dissertation. Beyond just the obvious palpable colonial context that forms the backbone of this dissertation, the

³⁴ By “setting up a paradigm of historically and culturally specific ‘common differences’ as the basis for analysis and solidarity,” Mohanty’s preferred model of feminist pedagogy aims at overcoming the “stereotypical terms” and “‘us and them’ attitude” endemic to the other two prevalent models in the US academic scenario: “*feminist-as-explorer*” and “*feminist-as-tourist*”. How the first model is “the pedagogical counterpart of the orientalizing and colonizing Western feminist scholarship of the past decades” (519) and the second “is an inadequate way of building a feminist cross-cultural knowledge base” is discussed in greater detail in Mohanty (516-524).

³⁵ In my quest for finding an archetype that makes it possible to study literature comparatively without tying it down to the insulating confines of a historical period or a geographical area if I have turned towards Chandra Talpade Mohanty, I definitely am not the only one. Ross too, discovered in “women’s studies” the closest model for setting up the World Literature program at the University of California, Santa Cruz: “for like women’s studies we wanted to project an interdisciplinary coherence that was neither that of the historical period nor of the area study” (671). This dissertation too hopes to contribute to a “relational way of thinking about literature and culture” where “Europe or America” cannot be thought of “in isolation of the rest of the world” (670) and have to be inherently studied through their mutually influencing interconnections with other parts of the globe. Kristin Ross, “The World Literature and Cultural Studies Program,” *Critical Inquiry* 19.4 (Summer, 1993).

interconnectedness of the capitalist context (central to the Vernian universe and to the title of *Texaco*), the (fuzzy) nation-state boundaries in “Toba Tek Singh” and *Caché*, the questioning of identity, are just some of the (“conceptual, material, temporal, contextual”³⁶) links that have brought together colonial contexts related to Africa, South Asia, the French Caribbean and indeed the entire globe if Phileas Fogg’s journey around the world is taken at its literal value.

Notwithstanding the potential criticism that Talpade Mohanty, with her materialist and real view antithetical to “postmodernist relativism” (511), is likely to level against a concept like rhizome, I still find it very useful to evoke the mutually influencing space that these four works constitute together. As a metaphor, “rhizome” allows me to experience these works, their characters, the underlying colonial issues and defining power paradigms all acting together, as no doubt scattered geographical elements, but also tied together and speaking the (sometimes incoherent) language of colonial history within the same complex network of interconnectedness.

If I have appropriated Glissant’s *relation* (inspired from rhizome) and other similar postmodern identitarian concepts to explicate the rationale behind this dissertation it is not as a rejection of the materialist mode that Parry and Talpade Mohanty advocate. On the contrary, the very coming together of geographically and temporally distanced works of this dissertation communicates how this study could become part of a “curricular strategy ... based on the premise that the local and the global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but exist simultaneously and constitute each other” (522). Or in other words, it is imperative for us to see how *Caché*, in conspicuously underplaying a colonial connection, and “Toba

³⁶ “This curricular strategy is based on the premise that the local and the global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but exist simultaneously and constitute each other. It is then the links, the relationships, between the local and the global that are foregrounded, and these links are conceptual, material, temporal, contextual, and so on” (Talpade Mohanty 521).

Tek Singh,” in not mentioning the colonizer, are as much implicated in the colonial process described in *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* and the struggle outlined against it in *Texaco*.

But the negotiation that results in the choice of these texts exceeds the one between the materialist understanding that has been central to my own political leanings and the epistemic urge that is the hallmark of the poststructuralist era; it is also between my own personal experiences and my academic trajectory. After India’s independence, my grandparents, much like many of their generation were forced to migrate from the ‘other side’ (now Pakistan). Their stories, of this new border’s devastating power and the unspeakable human tragedy it imposed, had weighed heavily upon my formative years much before narratives like “Toba Tek Singh” made these questions important to me. Even as a child, dealing with the confusion associated with my uncertain Punjabi identity, unquestioningly accepting the linguistic peculiarity of my parents, living in Delhi among many other such culturally uprooted families, I learn now, I had already begun questioning the fixity of identity. Theoretical terms that explore the reverberations between Chamoiseau’s multi-layered novel on *Créolité* and the human identity’s response to colonialism in Verne and Haneke’s works have allowed me a comprehensive space of articulation that accommodates not only my academic interests but also a personal trajectory. These reflections result, I suspect at least in part, from my upbringing in a post-independence India, where I was forced to juggle between English and other Indian languages, and reflect unbeknownst to myself, on these issues.

If my academic training, first in an (to the pride of my parents) an English-medium school in postcolonial India and then in French at the university level, has seen me gravitate towards the colonial commonalities across the globe, it is not to portray a particular advantage towards understanding the complexities of questions

raised in this dissertation. Instead, in the spirit of full disclosure, by laying out a genealogical map through a familial lineage and tracing my privileged belonging to “diaspora” within the US academe as originating from my grandparents who were among those “populations who cannot and might not choose to migrate,”³⁷ I also wish to reveal the personal negotiation – and the inevitable linkages – between the material history of colonization (that my grand parents lived through) and the constant questioning of identities (as I did) within this dissertation. To truly achieve Talpade Mohanty’s academic exercise where “each historical experience illuminates the experiences of the others” (522), or in other words to negotiate with the interrelations between Toba Tek Singh’s dead body on the no man’s land between India and Pakistan, and Majid’s self immolation in a film that challenges national identities, I would have to keep revisiting the Wagah border where Toba Tek Singh lies, obstinately dead, against the attempt to resituate him, within (the vocabulary of) a new nation state.

³⁷ In *Internationalism Revisited* a materialist like Parry criticizes privileging the “diaspora” within postcolonial studies, a move belonging to “those infatuated by the liberatory effects of dispersion.” Instead she desires one to “address the material and existential conditions of the relocated communities.” The assertion that “the focus on diaspora leaves in obscurity the vast and vastly impoverished populations who cannot and might not choose to migrate”, brings out more clearly the opposition of my own privileged position against that of my grand parents who were forced to migrate. Benita Parry, “Internationalism Revisited or in Praise of Internationalism,” Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies 5. 2 (July, 2003): 308.

CHAPTER 1

TIME IS MONEY

On Wednesday the 2nd of October in 1872, predictably following “his daily habit” (“sa quotidienne habitude”³⁸), Phileas Fogg left at half-past eleven for the Reform Club, reaching his destination with exact precision taking 575 steps with his right foot and 576 with his left (18-9). Before starting with the newspaper *Morning Chronicle*, the distinguished English gentleman had already read *The Times* and the *Standard*, the latter keeping him busy from 3:45 PM till dinner time. Settling down for a hand of Whist with his fellow club members the discussion turned around to the contents of an article in the *Morning Chronicle*, which were to alter, in many ways, the entire life of this mathematically exact (“mathématiquement exact”; 15), machine-like (“Une véritable mécanique!”; 18) man leading a life regulated (“régulier”; 18) to the very last detail.

Provoked into a heated debate about the possibility of circumnavigating the Earth in eighty days, Phileas Fogg decides to disprove his fellow club members of their erroneous understanding of the expanse of the world and challenges them to a 20,000 pound bet. He sets out to prove that Earth has shrunk (“la terre a diminué”; 23). With his resourceful and loyal servant Passepartout (hired exactly at 11:29 AM: a minute before leaving for his club the very same morning) in tow, Phileas Fogg embarks on a journey that would take him around the world and back to London in a matter of eighty days; that is, as Fogg takes the pains to point out, in 1920 hours or 115,200 minutes (24).

³⁸ Jules Verne, Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2001) 12.

Following his departure on the 2nd of October – at 8:45 PM to be precise – it is only by relying on his qualities of “sang-froid et d’exactitude” (301) that Fogg is able to counterbalance the many dramatic tests that adverse circumstances threw his way along the geographically dispersed stopovers of his itinerary. Navigating his path, mostly through English colonies, in order not to succumb to often encountered adversity, he dipped into his generous purse to hire and at times even buy his transportation. He used “tous les moyens de transport, paquebots, railways, voitures, yachts, bâtiments de commerce, traîneaux, éléphant” (300-1). Fogg returns, as one might expect of him: just on time – with the clock at the Reform Club striking exactly 8:45 p.m. on December 21, 1872 (297). Given that most of his time on the journey is spent traveling in various modes of transportation (most of them steam driven), in many ways the victory was not only Fogg’s but also of mechanization that made the journey possible.

One of the salient features of the journey of this phlegmatic hero is that he is rarely given to observing, focused with chronometric rigidity solely on his objective. Appreciating the local scenery in the journey is a task left mostly to Passepartout or the narrator in the novel’s background. While traveling by ship, for example, Fogg couldn’t be worried to explore the wonders of the Red Sea: “On le voyait rarement sur le pont. Il s’inquiétait peu d’observer cette mer Rouge, si féconde en souvenirs”³⁹ (55).

³⁹ Then, even after getting off of the boat in Bombay, the abundant use of negation for potential places of interest, and an insistence on his clock-like gait, exemplify plainly the indifference of this mechanical personality:

“...de son pas régulier qui battait la seconde comme le pendule d’une horloge astronomique, il se dirigea vers le bureau des passeports. Ainsi donc, des merveilles de Bombay, il ne songeait à rien voir, ni l’hôtel de ville, ni la magnifique bibliothèque, ni les forts, ni les docks, ni le marché au coton, ni les bazars, ni les mosquées, ni les synagogues, ni les églises arméniennes, ni la splendide pagode de Malebar-Hill, ornée de deux tours polygones. Il ne contemplerait ni les chefs-d’oeuvre d’Éléphanta, ni ses mystérieux hypogées, cachés au sud-est de la rade, ni les grottes Kanhérie de l’île Salcette, ces admirables restes de l’architecture bouddhiste! Non ! rien.” (63)

But the reader does notice for sure that from Suez to Bombay to Calcutta to Hong Kong, the novel is in many ways an excuse for showing off the vast English colonial empire. No wonder, that at times the journey takes the adventurers into locales that are nothing but exact replicas of English counties. At other times, the levels of savagery or civilization of the stopovers are functions of their relationship to England.

Oblivious of the scenery, uninterested in people, what then had the eccentric gentleman gained on his quest? Nothing, we are told, except a “charmante femme”(301) – Aouda, a woman from British India the duo had saved from being forcefully consigned to the flames of her husband’s funeral pyre. For Phileas Fogg having spent 19,000 of his 20,000 pounds⁴⁰ bet on the journey itself, maybe the material gains might have been insignificant, for us this net gain of zero that proves that Earth has shrunk (“la terre a diminué”) has accrued a whole wealth of discourse about the planet that while recounting it also creates a globe aligned along new geopolitical axes.

At this point we can stop the novel’s narrative. Details like Passepartout’s capture by the Sioux Indians in America or Fogg’s bravado in the ensuing rescue do not interest us; nor does Inspector Fix’s plans to sabotage Fogg’s venture. Later we will get back to Phileas Fogg falling in love with and marrying Aouda, but for the moment, let us concentrate on the central arguments that this bet about time raises.

Simply put, the contention at the heart of this journey is: time is money. Set in a period where accrual of capital was increasingly becoming a function of clock time, could there be a better metaphor for the commodification of global geography, than a twenty thousand pound bet that negotiates global space in a fixed period of 80 days? This swift passage over space in fixed time, lead by a character that is the very

⁴⁰ The remaining 1,000 pounds he would divide with his servant Passepartout and his nemesis Inspector Fix. Interestingly, right before his journey, Fogg gives away to a beggar woman even the 20 guineas he won during the game only a short while ago in the card game that provoked the bet (30).

embodiment of a clock, critically reduces the status of the globe by reproducing it within the constraints imposed by a clockwork responding to a 20,000 pound investment.

It is not only money that is at stake in the bet, nor is it, as one might make us believe Fogg's financial future,⁴¹ it is rather a discourse on the planet Earth. Among the first works to take the nineteenth-century reader around a globe configured in cartographic terms, Phileas Fogg's circumnavigation around the world rescales global geography along a matrix of colonial capitalism. There is a dramatic resemblance in this journey to the production process that comes to dominate much of the late nineteenth century, and which (as we see later in the chapter) also determines the very genre of Jules Verne's serial fiction.

There is no doubt that in our contemporary world determined by overarching capitalistic structures and demands of a market economy we have moved away "from working *in* time to working *with* time,"⁴² and Phileas Fogg with his near fetishistic attachment to the clock falls on a continuum moving towards the increasing rationalization of time where time itself is a commodity⁴³ and managing time means increasing productivity. In a sense the extreme punctuality and dependence on his own watch as the regulating mechanism for the rest of the world⁴⁴ signals the creation of "a non-temporal time" (Adam 90), which, dissociated from events (eg. diurnal markers of time) is universally applicable and also universally abstracted. If Adam's formulation of such a "universally applicable, abstract, empty and neutral phenomenon that

⁴¹ Fearing momentarily that the Englishman might lose the bet, the text empathizes with him: "Quant à ce gentleman, il était bien et dûment ruiné, et cela au moment où il allait atteindre son but" (282).

⁴² Barbara Adam, *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) 87.

⁴³ For more on commodification of time read Adam 85-91.

⁴⁴ Fogg corrects Passepartout's watch, reminding him: "Vous retardez de quatre minutes" (14).

accords all hours the same value”⁴⁵ is to be accepted then representing travel around Earth exactly in the units of clock time (1920 hours or 115,200 minutes) taken to traverse it in exchange for a sum of money is only a case of commodification of both time and space. No doubt, that a bet, with its inherent components of unpredictability and chance does not provide the requisites of a capitalistic production model, but Fogg’s wager speaks at least to the standardization and rationalization of a universally applicable clock time that becomes the basis of this unique wager.

What we see in this following chapter is a narration of global spatiality being prepared to fulfill the demands of such an abstracted time; colonial structures produce a universally homogenized global network of infrastructure necessary to encash the commodity of time. Spatial structures and geographies in the novel gain their relevance by the degree to which they are rooted in a market economy organized to accommodate the needs of a fast-paced system of transportation – a spatial abstraction which only reinforces the temporal abstraction of clock time

Fogg’s quest for a shrunken Earth (“la terre a diminuée”) might seem a failed mission if one takes the statement at its literal value, but this was the very guiding principle for steam based transport that was, in many ways, diminishing the Earth. For Fogg’s journey the early nineteenth century topos of “[a]nnihilation of time and space”, still seems operational and indeed even shows how “[m]otion was no longer dependent on the conditions of natural space, but on a mechanical power that created its new spatiality.”⁴⁶ Engrossed in himself, Fogg’s indifference is in fact the validation

⁴⁵ Adam 90. Also, for more information on the relevance of clock-time and its relevance to production see pages 80-106.

Mark M. Smith, Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). This work offers a specific example of how clocktime was used to regulate slaves in the American South.

⁴⁶ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 10.

of the very paradigm of fast speed over space that reformulates this Earth. Instead of appreciating the local landscape he single-mindedly focuses on the speed of his journey.

Although Fogg himself might claim no apparent capital accumulation, Verne's novel is in large part a demonstration of the predominant "g nie colonisateur" (140) and the accompanying colonial wealth. Fogg, returning back to London – the point of departure – having gained nothing financially, through his journey displays not only the process and the path taken for the accrual of imperial capital and the acquisition of colonies but also the center that animates this entire process. Indeed, written at the height of colonization, with a world-view that apportions the globe, the novel displays how the entire planet has become a commodity of the process of colonization. As dispersed nodes of trade routes, the relevance of these colonies is defined as a function of their contribution to the interconnected financial network that transports production as well as ploughs capital back to London, further buttressing the colonizer.

Understanding Hong Kong's portrayal in the novel through this equation exemplifies how its presence in this network of Englishness is assured by the demands of a colonially organized narcotic economy. Much like the interrelationship between the entire English fiscal operation and colonization, the role that the product of Opium plays in Hong Kong's establishment is never overtly mentioned. But, when, after the 1842 Opium War, it is responsible for Hong Kong's creation, Opium stands as an example of the larger financial apparatus in *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, where the colonial capital is abundantly displayed without any elaboration of its acquisition. By using 'Opium-silence' as the key term, I intend to explain how through its conspicuous absence, Opium exemplifies an intersection of financial and colonial forces that redefines the global geography in this novel. It is the shrinkage of the globe, and the associated consequences illustrated through Fogg's journey, that

occupy my attention in this chapter. But, how did the literary journey of the author, Jules Verne, fare in a literary world determined by fast paced technological and capitalist forces, is the question I ask in the following section.

Today Jules Verne's name is synonymous with Science Fiction. No study of worth devoted to Science Fiction can afford to overlook his literary influence. As the acknowledged pioneer of the genre, Verne's extensive corpus dominated the latter half of the nineteenth century and carved out the future contours of the genre: "Verne is one of the shapers of modern Science Fiction, an important link in as well as modifier of the chain of its development."⁴⁷

In a career spanning nearly six decades, not only did he faithfully record the advancements of the fast paced industrialization of the nineteenth century ("The exuberant exposition of the burgeoning technological competence of the nineteenth century's latter half is our Verne."⁴⁸) but Verne also accurately predicted the future of some of these developments, earning himself the adjective of "prophète": "Jules Verne bénéficiait d'une enviable réputation de prophète."⁴⁹ Even in accepting Boia's argument that explains Verne's humanly impossible feat of predicting the future by attributing them to his great research ("la matière scientifique de ses romans était extraite de textes de vulgarisation et d'ouvrages encyclopédiques"; 39), one cannot but be impressed by the quasi-predictive nature of Verne's work. The fortuitous similarities between the famous Apollo program and a fictional lunar voyage written by Verne more than a century ago are a case in point:

⁴⁷ Darko Suvin, "Communication in Quantifier Space: The Utopian Liberalism of Jules Verne's Science Fiction," *CLIO: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 4.1 (1974): 69.

⁴⁸ Eugene J. Surowitz, "Other Verne," *The New York Review of Science Fiction* 160 vol. 14 (2001 Dec): 13.

⁴⁹ Lucian Boia, *Jules Verne: Les paradoxes d'un mythe* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2005) 37.

C'est d'ailleurs un lieu commun que de comparer le voyage vernien sur la Lune avec le programme Apollo: dans les deux cas, lancement de Floride, vol autour de la Lune ... récupération dans l'océan... Jules Verne aurait déjà trouvé pour l'essentiel les solutions que les Américains devaient appliquer un siècle plus tard. (Boia 38)

The role of the changing face of technology is abundantly clear, but even more important is to acknowledge how Verne's is a singular example of a literature that interfaces – in more than one way – with technological advances. Verne's work – as serialized fiction – was in itself a product of industrialization that marked much of his epoch and his writing. He wrote during a period in publishing history that allowed him unprecedented access to his readership via the medium of the serialized novel. The centerpiece for this chapter, *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, published as a serial in *Le Temps*,⁵⁰ is an example of changes in the literary landscape that provoke Sainte-Beuve's (Verne's contemporary) to lament the effects of industry on literature:

Chaque époque a sa folie et son ridicule; en littérature nous avons déjà assisté (et trop aidé peut-être) à bien des manies ... mais voici que le masque change; l'industrie pénètre dans le rêve et le fait à son image, tout en se faisant fantastique comme lui...⁵¹

Considering serialized fiction as a symptom of literary degradation, Sainte-Beuve's argument postulates literature and industry as interactive and reflective of one another. This allows us to state that instead of just relating industry, Verne's literature in itself is a re-deployment of the underlying structures that determined much of his contemporary society. Verne's work thus appears as not just relating the material changes in his epoch, but as in itself a reflection and a product of this material reality.

⁵⁰ Jules Verne, "Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours," *Le Temps* 6 novembre - 22 décembre 1872.

⁵¹ Sainte-Beuve, "De la littérature industrielle," in Lise Dumasy, ed., *La querelle du roman feuilleton: littérature, presse et politique: un débat précurseur, 1836 1848* (Grenoble: Université Stendhal, 1999) 28.

Jennifer Hayward, similarly, for instance, co-relates serialized fiction with the capitalist practices in vogue. Such that the serial could be seen as:

paralleling nineteenth-century capitalism in that both require an investment of time and money—along with the confidence that such expenditure will be rewarded in the long run—and both privilege abundance, even excess ... both serial novels and capitalism institutionalize delayed gratification, while the serial re-creates fiction in capitalism's image by providing what is essentially a payment plan for narrative, thus simultaneously increasing audience and profits and lowering costs.⁵²

Hayward provides an eloquent addition to the already sufficient commentary regarding the linkage between serialized literature and capitalism. “Indeed, the confident capitalist framework during the booming years of nineteenth-century economic expansion had a kind of literary analogue in the serial novel.”⁵³ This genre was reflective of the business model contemporary to it, capitalism being a pre-cursor to such a literature and playing the central role in its proliferation. If serial fiction reflects capitalism, and is one (according to Sainte-Beuve) with industry, then I would argue that *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* should be read as a material coordinate of the technological and financial conditions of the late nineteenth century. In its interpretation of the world, Verne's literature displays the technological and economic evolutions, not simply as sources for his fiction, but as the principles that structure his fictional creations. It resituates the world in a terminology of the mechanism that formulated it. In extending Hayward's logic of how “[n]ovels [and Serialized novels] helped to make coherent a radically new social and physical landscape; by organizing random, apparently senseless social relations and economic

⁵² Jennifer Hayward, Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997) 29.

⁵³ Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, The Victorian Serial (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991) 4.

facts into narrative trajectories” (Hayward 30), I see *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* as displaying the relevance of “new social and physical landscape”, and “economic facts”. Speaking metaphorically of the changes brought about by the epoch, Hayward’s assertion of a “new” landscape suggests a moment of production of space. For *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, this “new landscape” is not so much, literally, a ‘newly produced landscape’ but a new framework where the physical landscape acts as the register for its mutual interaction with other spaces of social relations and “economic facts”.

Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours wasn’t the only fictional opportunity Jules Verne took for exploration. Aided with the fast changing face of technologies, his characters virtually carved hitherto unknown spaces. Apart from mastering the infinite space with a fictional space canon (*De la terre à la lune* published in 1865), Jules Verne’s work virtually traverses several geographies, terrains and turfs. His characters cut through the air in a balloon (*Cinq semaines en ballon* published in 1863), delve deep into the ocean (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* published in 1869) and even burrow their way to the center of the earth (*Voyage au centre de la Terre* published in 1864); journeys hitherto not undertaken by any other writer. His literary profusion equally effortlessly transcended genres creating territories and charting literary boundaries much like the varied spatial exploits of his characters. His oeuvre, boasting of nothing less than 65 novels, is testament to his exceptional artistic acumen: “Jules Verne est également l’auteur de pas moins d’une trentaine de nouvelles, d’une trentaine de pièces de théâtre, mais aussi de poésie, de chansons, d’ouvrages didactiques et même de livrets d’opérettes.”⁵⁴ Of course, the changing face of

⁵⁴ Loïc P. Guyon, “Le voyage ‘Façon Verne’,” *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte/ Cahiers d’histoire des littératures romanes* 26.3-4 (2002): 340.

technology and the industrialization of print made it possible for his large readership to enjoy the adventures of his characters, making Verne *populaire*.

Inasmuch as his contributions gained him notoriety, he spent his life yearning for respect as an accomplished litterateur. Despite challenging the Bible in popularity (“il fut longtemps l’auteur le plus traduit au monde...après Lénine et la Bible.”⁵⁵) and triggering a slew of ongoing worldwide academic interest (“Des dizaines de livres, des piles d’études universitaires, des milliers d’articles en français, en anglais, en russe, en espagnol, en italien, en arabe, en japonais, en chinois, en suédois, en allemand, en polonais et même ... en kinyarwanda et en swahili...”⁵⁶), Verne’s overwhelming success never gained him acceptance as a literary equal among his peers. Lucian Boia commences his book on Jules Verne, with a note of regret by the legendary author of Science Fiction: “Le grand regret de ma vie est que je n’ai jamais compté dans la littérature française.”⁵⁷

The disappointment accentuates the irony of Verne’s literary career. One of the most read French authors and “the most translated of all French writers,”⁵⁸ he only found praise from a few (“un voyageur instruit qui est en même temps un conteur spirituel”⁵⁹), and was largely shouldered out from the canon of French literature. Much like most of Verne’s contemporaries, even Emile Zola, in a gross underestimation of

⁵⁵ Patrick Avrane, prologue, Jules Verne (Paris: Editions Stock, 1997) 8.

⁵⁶ Roger Maudhuy, La Face cachée (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 2005) 15.

⁵⁷ Robert Sherard, Jules Verne, sa vie et son travail racontés par lui-même (1894) in Entretiens avec Jules Verne, compiled by Daniel Compère and Jean-Michel Margot (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1998) 83. Quoted in Boia 11.

⁵⁸ David Platten, “A Hitchhiker’s Guide to Paris: Paris au XXe siècle,” in Edmund Smyth, ed., Jules Verne: Narratives of Modernity (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000) 78.

⁵⁹ Vivien de Saint-Martin, “Histoire du capitaine Hatteras,” Année Géographique (1864) 270. Quoted in Arthur B. Evans, “Jules Verne and the French Literary Canon,” in Narratives of Modernity 12. I reproduce here some arguments from Evan’s article where he analyses Verne’s work in relation to the French literary canon.

Verne's *Les Voyages Extraordinaires* classifies it as "sans aucune importance dans le mouvement littéraire contemporain."⁶⁰ While Zola displays a lack of perception and appreciation towards this nascent genre, Verne's readers flooded him with adulation. The celebrating welcome offered by Marius Topin, another contemporary, helps elucidate the paradox Verne presents in the lament quoted above. Topin hails Verne:

M. Verne est le romancier le plus populaire de notre temps et, nous l'ajoutons avec joie, le plus justement populaire. Il est de ceux qui honorent leurs lecteurs, car rien n'est sorti de sa plume qui ne soit sain, substantiel, et élevé.⁶¹

Playing on the two meanings of the word "populaire" Topin's enthusiastic reception accounts both for Verne's success and his marginalization. One signification of the double insistence of "populaire" ("Qui a la faveur du peuple, de l'opinion publique; qui est connu, aimé, apprécié du plus grand nombre.") explains the admiration and patronage Verne received from his large readership, and yet another ("Qui est propre aux couches les plus modestes de la société, au peuple et qui est inusité par les gens cultivés et la bourgeoisie."⁶²) explains why the intellectual elite purposefully shunned his work. Its easy accessibility by the 'people' – the commoner – condemned Verne's work to the margins of the nineteenth-century bourgeois French society that was yet to fully understand the reach of Science Fiction.

In all fairness, Zola did not have the advantage of hindsight that allows us to analyze the literary transformations the nineteenth-century world was undergoing. The effects of technological advancements not fully comprehended by his contemporary literary milieu, only made the situation more complex. Many of Verne's other

⁶⁰ Emile Zola, "Jules Verne," *Le Figaro littéraire* 22 Dec. 1878. Quoted in Evans, *Narratives of Modernity* 14.

⁶¹ de Saint-Martin 270. Quoted in Evans 13.

⁶² "Populaire," *Le Trésor*, 22 Nov. 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

contemporaries probably hastened to group his Science Fiction with the three “popular” genres (serial novel, scientific novel and children’s literature) emblematic of the times. Little did they imagine Verne’s popularity far outstripping the reputation of all those three genres combined. Consequently, Verne got banished to the realm of para-literature. Boia details Verne’s acquisition of the adjective “populaire” and the evolution of the three associated genres under a particular set of historical circumstances. The quote also serves to recognize the coupling of these genres with Verne’s name and allows a better understanding of the exact characteristics of Verne’s literature:

L’œuvre vernienne se trouvait au carrefour de trois genres, tous les trois considérés comme appartenant – pour utiliser une terminologie ultérieure – à la ‘para-littérature’, sinon, tout franchement, à une ‘sous-littérature’. C’était un mélange réunissant vulgarisation scientifique, roman populaire et littérature enfantine. Trois genres très caractéristiques des évolutions et de l’esprit du XIX^e siècle. La science, la technologie et le progrès se trouvent au cœur de l’époque ; à partir surtout de 1850, la vulgarisation s’affirme en force, y compris avec son prolongement littéraire, le ‘roman scientifique’. Le public s’élargit: les conditions sont mûres pour une ‘industrialisation’ de la littérature, exprimée principalement par le roman-feuilleton et son intrigue tout aussi superficielle qu’habillement agencée (tandis que le théâtre, dans la même veine, connaît la vogue du vaudeville). Enfin l’enfant gagne une place mieux définie dans l’imaginaire social de l’époque, et son éducation est conçue d’une manière plus systématique, avec une bibliographie spécialisée à l’appui ; la littérature enfantine, comme domaine autonome, figure elle-aussi parmi les inventions du XIX^e siècle. (Boia 14-15)

The appearance of Verne’s unique literature defied all contemporary definitions. Coming up as a conundrum it forced thinkers to present it not as existing in its own right, i.e. an affirmative presence, but rather as a point of accumulation for multiple genres. Not surprisingly, Verne’s oeuvre replicated the fate of its marginalized components – all of which were aimed at the ordinary public – making him thus a pariah – albeit a famous one with a large readership. It made his work “littérature-

populaire” – ‘populaire’ in both terms of the word. In addition Verne’s principal preoccupation with geography makes it important for us to see how exactly his literature apprehends geography and then passes on to its readership. Boia represents Verne’s literature as one about spatial exploits:

Jules Verne a eu deux passions dans sa vie: le théâtre ... Deuxième passion: la géographie, avec sa partie appliquée, les voyages voyager sur la carte, voyager par les livres, voyager en écrivant. (Boia 26-29)

Tout Jules Verne est là. Tout chez lui est prétexte pour la géographie et pour une intrigue combinant des destins individuels, et beaucoup moins ou pas du tout des problèmes d’ordre social ou national. (Boia 96)

As much as the wide academic corpus devoted to spatial pertinence validates Boia’s emphasis on the geographical aspect in Verne’s work, to share his assessment about the absence of the social and national realm risks missing out on the richness of Vernian literature. By basing his argument on a correspondence with his editor Hetzel, where Verne defends his literature, Boia succumbs to Verne’s definition of himself and thus universalizes the author’s understanding of his own work. Boia’s usage of geography, in being limited to a grammar of cartography (“la carte”) that facilitates travel, alerts us to Verne’s own understanding of global space as composed solely of a physical topography. Whereas, I contend that instead of being non-existent, these realms actively claim relevance in the Vernian universe. In fact, a more just representation of Verne’s Science Fiction would communicate the national and the social enmeshed within geography and subsumed by it in such a way that the spatial, while retaining prominence, acts as a marker of social relations. My interest lies in figuring out how Vernian geography was a register of social equations and even more importantly, his manner of fashioning and perpetuating the colonial project. For my study it would be important to understand the circumstances under which the Vernian

space was created, its contours, the way it was communicated, and how, for instance, this literature – born under the frenetic glare of industrialization – determined by the industrial outlook of modernity perceived and used global space as a tool of colonialism.

The title of arguably Verne's most well-known work *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* exemplifies my contention. This title is a general testament to perception of space under modernity and a specific example of Vernian geography in action. Presenting the relevance of a book title, Gérard Genette, in *Paratexts*, speaks about its four functions. Of these, the “descriptive function”⁶³ has among its other possible purposes, the work of presenting the “subject matter” of the text. The title for Verne's oeuvre ‘describes’ the outline of Phileas Fogg's adventure: a rich eccentric Englishman who, after an impulsive bet with his fellow club members, undertakes a journey around the world that he successfully completes in eighty days. But more importantly, this title also carries out another function – the “connotative” function (*Paratexts* 89). As the name suggests, it refers to “semantic effects ... secondary effects that may supplement ... the primary description. These effects can be called *connotative* because they stem from the *manner* in which the ... title does its denoting” (89). And it must be added here that these “connotative features” are “the features most laden with intentions but also most fraught with unintended effects, possible traces of an individual or collective unconscious” (91).

As if to replicate the importance Genette accords to a title, Jean Chesneaux writes about Verne's work:

⁶³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 79.

Un titre de roman ... est partie intégrante de l'œuvre ... un message par lequel l'auteur présente son texte à ses futurs lecteurs et donne par avance la note, la résonance.⁶⁴

And since “les titres des romans de Jules Verne” in particular “représentent un corpus original et riche, à la mesure de cette œuvre même” (Chesneaux, *Titres* 25), discovering the ‘richness’ of the title is imperative, before any further analysis of the novel.

Fogg’s victory, narrated in this novel published at the height of colonial conquest calls for a reading that takes into account the desire for the colonial spatial domination. The title tells us of the world as a quantifiable entity; conquerable and already conquered in its consumable finite geographical limits. To look closely:

Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours

It is a novel, centered literally on the ‘world’. The word “monde”, (world) being the fourth word, falls at the center of the three-part, seven-word title. The other two parts – “Le tour du” and “en quatre-vingts jours” while encapsulating “monde” also capture and summarize within themselves how the novel envisages the world.

The world, it is to be noted, is “*le monde*”. The connotations of this definite article go beyond its grammatical function of presenting the unique physical reality of “le monde”. It tells us that the novel visualizes the world solely from the point of view of its geographical space and secondly, it introduces us to a conception of the world as being one that does not allow for plurality and forecloses, from the title itself, the existence of multiplicity. This ‘world’ is not a world of cultures, of languages. It is one where all markers of plurality get incorporated within, defined by and subjugated to the expanse of a physical space.

⁶⁴ Jean Chesneaux, “Les Titres des romans verniens: variantes, résonances et occurrences,” in Jean-Pierre Picot and Christian Robin, eds., *Actes du colloque de Cerisy, Jules Verne: cent ans après* (Rennes: Terre de Brume, 2005): 25.

It is interesting to note that “tour” encapsulates within it the idea of both a measurement of a circular body (“Circonférence d'un corps, d'un lieu plus ou moins circulaire; mesure de cette circonférence.”), and also a movement around a circular body (“Mouvement, déplacement (à peu près) circulaire où l'on revient au point de départ.”⁶⁵). So when the title talks about a “tour” of the world, not only it presents a world that one circles around in a matter of eighty days, but also a world that is measurable in eighty days. Tour is a unit of measurement quantifying and capturing the world.

The number eighty stands in clear contrast and opposition to the unitary aspect endowed to the space of this world presented as the one and only possible – “le monde”. Eighty miniaturizes further the contours of the world by assigning a finite figure to the project. Since it is in traversing only the physical expanse of the world that the journey is completed in eighty days, “quatre-vingts” reinforces the presentation of the world solely as a physical reality defined by its geographical spread.

The idea of going ‘around’ the world tells firstly of an agglomeration of technological and scientific advances which allowed for the world to be measured and mapped; and secondly of a synchronization of scientific accomplishments that made possible a feat demanding dominance over land and water. Presenting a world of technological advances, the novel’s title ties in closely with Boia’s argument – Verne’s work takes birth under an explosion of technological inventions – and instantly necessitates a look at the influence of these advances. Contrasting the spatially defined unitary world against the carefully arrived sum of eighty days, speaks of space quantifiable in measures of time; i.e. an equation where time clearly trumps

⁶⁵ “Tour,” *Le Trésor*, 22 Nov 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

space, thus allowing us to enter into an ongoing debate about the relationship of time and space and their relative importance.

A number of Vernian scholars, reacting to a corpus devoted entirely to traveling, have undertaken studies attempting explanations and analysis of this space. In *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle*, Chris Bongie,⁶⁶ reads time and space in Verne's work as a confluence that sets up exoticism. The key to Bongie's exoticism is Frederic Jameson's understanding of the concept of 'value'. Basing himself on Weber, Jameson narrates the evolution of the traditional society to a materialistic, money based modern economy. With all activities considered equal in a social setup, in the case of the traditional society "each activity there is 'symbolically unique so that the level of abstraction upon which they could be compared with one another is never attained'" (Bongie 7). But with the advent of capitalism, the common denominator of labor power provides the unit of measurement against which the relative worth of all activities can be mutually compared. In speaking in terms of 'value' then, we are engaging in a historical process of rationalization that draws "all activities and institutions together onto a single plane of equivalence and thereby erasing whatever qualitative differences might once have distinguished them" (Bongie 7).

It is only once it has ceased to exist that an absence (or as Jameson calls it: its "afterimage") is used to hypothesize 'value's past existence. The paradox of this posthumous entity of 'value' is that its disappearance is a prerequisite for its recognition. That is to say, during the passage from traditional to a capitalist economy "value is at once lost (as reality) and gained (as abstraction); the precondition of every

⁶⁶ Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

idea of value turns out to be ‘the systematic exclusion of ‘value’ by the new logic of capitalist social organization’” (Bongie 8).

The exotic idea works along similar lines. Central to its belief is a superior past, whose lost values have to be revived in the future. Confronted with the discovery of the masses in the aftermath of the French Revolution, the subject of modernity finds its individuality subjugated to a gathering of indistinguishable individuals. Exoticism seeks to rediscover this lost individual, whose existence has become possible, ironically, with the discovery of its loss. This “post-revolutionary individual is in his very essence an afterimage, always alienated from experience and tradition” (Bongie 13), and unlike an imagined past in which an original subjectivity had the possibility of an authentic experience of fellow beings, for the nineteenth-century European subject the advancing modernity with its mechanization and its social institutions is eliminating all prospects of going back to the past.

Exoticism offers an escape route from this annihilating modernity. In its flight the subject seeks to relive original experience in locales far removed from continental Europe, untouched by the spreading peril of mechanical capitalism, where individuality has not been eroded and one can still revive the imagined glorious times of an invented history, with the hope of reliving them in the future. In an exploratory exercise, exoticism prospects across space for a temporal confluence of past and the future. It is a circular move of temporality that is realized in spaces of ‘otherness’.

This presentation, presumes the world divided along the lines of technology with human subjectivity a function of the spreading industrialization. Such a world is a gratification post, made to order for realizing the dreams of its onlooker where the ‘Other’s’ existence is justified in its utility for the Self. Human subjectivity too takes on a universal appearance and it is presumed to be the same all over the world such that traversing space makes it possible for one to assume its predetermined essence.

And history in this equation is a fiction responding to the desires of its reader and only serves to contort further the uni-polar presentation of the world. It is a selectively chosen image of the past highlighting those reference points that validate the vantage position of the present. The search of an original individuality is one such strategy of an insecure subject that responds to the obliterating pressures of modernity. Desirous of rediscovering itself, it looks towards the past to seek a more stable subjectivity.

Written in 1872 at the height of colonial expansion, *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours*, abounds in similar discursive practices that rearrange political and social boundaries. Much akin to the nineteenth century flavor, this novel is firm in its commitment to advancing colonialism as a means of spreading values of civilization. For my work it is clear that “If space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history*” (*Production* 46). Developing on the head start given to my project by Bongie’s exoticism, I will dwell on other similar intersections at which space and history meet in this novel to explore how and to what extent the two are responsible for these rearrangements; i.e. to evaluate the exact parameters of the “productive process”.

That is to say, how the definition of time and space evolves in the novel and the change this provokes in the world-view commanded by them. I will pay special attention to paradigms that trigger these repositionings, in particular, the role played by colonialism. As much as I will ascertain the validity for *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* of the spatial and temporal hypotheses already advanced (like exoticism) for Verne’s work, I will also attempt proposing a few hypotheses of my own elaborating on questions of alterity related to time and space as they develop during Fogg’s journey through unknown territories.

Often associated with qualities like “sang-froid et d'exactitude” (300) it is Fogg’s defining characteristic of eccentricity that displays the interaction of the novel’s characters with spatial concerns and debates at play in the title. Darko Suvin points out that all “of Verne’s protagonists are passionate incarnations of the story’s theme ... Fogg of Anglo-Saxon coolness and chronometric precision in traversing time and space.”⁶⁷ P. Schulman’s discussion about spatial and temporal connotations of Fogg’s dominant quality of “excentrique” reinforces Suvin’s claim of the novel’s protagonist being an embodiment of the novel.⁶⁸ Used twelve times, he states the words (excentrique and excentricité) are overdetermined in their usage for Fogg. Basing himself on one of the definitions of “excentrique” (“des cercles dont les centres ne se rapportent pas”) Schulman justifiably presents Fogg’s adventure as two voyages: “celui qui est purement mathématique (80 jours) caractérisé par le désir ardent de triompher et de contrôler le temps ... et le véritable voyage, c’est-à-dire, plein de découvertes et de pays exotiques bien loin du centre londonien caractérisé par l’acte d’élargir son propre sens de l’espace géographique.”⁶⁹

By making Fogg the center of his argument, Schulman’s quote allows an important connection. Firstly that London as the center is opposed to the larger geographic space, the exact location of which is incidental to its raison d’être of

⁶⁷ Darko Suvin, “Communication in Quantified Space: The Utopian Liberalism of Jules Verne’s Science Fiction,” CLIO: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History 4.1 (Oct. 1974): 61.

⁶⁸ This adjective aside, an interpretation reads Phileas Fogg’s first name as the very representation of travel. Composed of *filer* (‘to tail’) and *as* (‘ace’): “he’s an ace tailed round the world”. Jules Verne, Around the World in Eighty Days, trans. William Butcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 215.

Interestingly, despite there being no precise indications to the origins of the character of Fogg, it is believed that Verne was inspired from William Perry Fogg, an American businessman who published in 1872 a book titled *Round the World* that dealt with his extensive travels around the world. Read: Peter Costello, Jules Verne: Inventor of Science Fiction (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978) 119-120.

⁶⁹ P. Schulman, “Autour de l’excentricité de Phileas Fogg et du Capitaine Nemo,” Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne 123 (3rd trimestre 1997): 34.

enriching Fogg's knowledge base. More than the logo-centric nature of the novel, this gestures also at the dual process deployed of overpowering both time and space. But is Fogg the only 'excentrique' who starts on a lonely journey from London to expand his knowledge?

What about Passepartout whose very name reads like 'passeport', connoting international mobility, and literally means a master key that allows access to every door? One has to concede that when Passepartout's very introduction in the novel comes across as possessing multiple skills, one expects him already to be Fogg's passport to success in this adventure around the world. After all before seeking employment with Fogg, Passepartout had already been "chanteur ambulant, écuyer dans un cirque, faisant de la voltige comme Léotard, et dansant sur la corde comme Blondin ... professeur de gymnastique ... et ... sergent de pompiers, à Paris" (12). Indeed, it is only through Passepartout's resourceful help that Fogg is able to navigate his way around the world. Apart from many other episodes, Passepartout's skills are central in Aouda's rescue in India, seeking an employment with a Japanese troupe thus enabling him to reunite with his master, and also in saving the life of his companions during an attack by the Sioux in America. And, does the fact that it is Passepartout who literally drags his master across to the Reform Club at the very last minute, not say something about him being the master-key to the Reform Club and a passport to Fogg's victory?

No doubt, Ray Bradbury's idea of seeing the duo as two complements of "thinking and doing"⁷⁰ accentuates the reasons for the pairing. The combination of these near polar opposites, where Fogg's sometimes purposeful indifference is

⁷⁰ Ray Bradbury, introduction, Jules Verne, Around the World in Eighty Days (Los Angeles: Plantin Press, 1962) ix.

contrasted by Passepartout's near intrusive interest in the local,⁷¹ brings together "the two halves of man." But, this combination of two halves is also conjoined in their other identity of colonizers, such that both the English man and his French servant go around the world re-inscribing its definitions in parameters of colonization.

It is not only Fogg but a combination of the two that exhibits traits of yet another connotation of "excentrique" (also spatial) in relation to the world. This definition ("Qui s'écarte d'un point considéré comme centre."⁷²) allows to bring into focus the perceived role of these destinations into the argument to conclude that the duo in this eccentric voyage around the globe deflects its eccentricity on to its destinations. That is, these locations are de-centered, pulled away from their being to conform with that of the travelers in the novel. These locales are dislodged from their own axes and are defined from the traveler's perspective.

This becomes clearer by Passepartout's queries in the following exchange. In his attempts to ascertain the exact location of India, he divulges the computing matrix used to reckon with spatial alterity. This dialogue allows me to articulate the backbone of the issues at play in the novel:

- Est-ce loin Bombay ? demanda Passepartout.
— Assez loin, répondit l'agent. Il vous faut encore une dizaine de jours de mer.
— Et où prenez-vous Bombay ?
— Dans l'Inde.
— En Asie ?
— Naturellement.
— Diable ! C'est que je vais vous dire... il y a une chose qui me tracasse... c'est mon bec !
— Quel bec ?
— Mon bec de gaz que j'ai oublié d'éteindre et qui brûle à mon compte. Or, j'ai calculé que j'en avais pour deux shillings par vingt-

⁷¹ As Fogg is always engrossed in himself, if and what he's "thinking" no one knows but Passepartout's many "doings" provide for several humorous interludes. His troubles with the law, after he enters a Hindu temple wearing his footwear, in contravention of custom, is only an example (66-7 and 109-117).

⁷² "Excentrique," *Le Trésor*, April 20 2006 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

quatre heures, juste six pence de plus que je ne gagne, et vous comprenez que pour peu que le voyage se prolonge... (51-2)

Interrogation about the distance to Bombay, the question about Bombay's location and finally the doubt about India: these queries while supposedly displaying Passepartout's ignorance, reiterate many times over the instability of their destination – the colony of India. This dialogue literally raises questions about its existence. Passepartout's ultimate concern of a few shillings for these queries gives away the colony's triviality. This calculation revolving around a gas burner combined with the reduction of India to the urban center of Bombay gives us reasons to bring in the role of money and urban centers in this vision. What defines and sustains the vision of these distant undefined locales of 'Otherness' are the calculative concerns. This operation of rationalizing alterity, minimizing it to known co-ordinates becomes clearer through the descriptions as Passepartout and Fogg move through India after saving Aouda. In what follows we see how the novel grapples with the unknown landscape of the Indian subcontinent, giving us the beginnings of the formation of the urban landscape. In discovering how industry invades the local landscape and practice, I would have prepared the scaffolding for a discussion later on about its role in the formation of urbanity.

Beginning of India's alterity.

As their train cuts across the Gangetic plane from Benaras to Calcutta the description of Bihar from within a train compartment – “à travers les vitres du wagon” (106) – privileges a technologically advantaged perspective. Apart from the ready cliché of technology working the raw indigenous land, corresponding to the rapid movement of the train, the description accumulates other numerous details typifying the quintessential fetish objects associated with the presentation of the subcontinent; especially the particular attention paid to Hindu spirituality. The holy city of Bénarès –

“l’Athènes de l’Inde” (106) – and the sacred water of the river as the backdrop, a peppering of the names of Hindu divinity completes the perfect ensemble for the pious “Indous” to live in. Creating thus a landscape that is synonymous with the religion of its inhabitants.

Very aptly charting out the changing landscape of India, the description places the train tracks against the backdrop of untamed nature where ferocious animals and human beings co-exist, taking baths together in the sacred waters (“eaux consacrées”) of Ganga. The two quotes that follow, both part of the same description, register the change in the paradigm that defines space. Of the binary opposition in the description – the train against untamed nature – it is the former that is gaining in force. Conscious of the power of technology and its dominating relationship with the metamorphosing landscape, the description exploits all these elements by bringing them together in a hypothetical question that reiterates the power equation:

Mais de quel œil Brahma, Shiva et Whishnou devaient-ils considérer cette Inde, maintenant ‘britannisée’, lorsque quelque steam-boat passait en hennissant et troublait les eaux consacrées du Gange, effarouchant les mouettes qui volaient à sa surface, les tortues qui pullulaient sur ses bords, et les dévots étendus au long de ses rives ! (107)

Establishing the historical change, “cette Inde” as it stands in its present (“maintenant”) state brings into light another India, by default an earlier India not “britannisée”, a change of state marked by the presence of the steamboat. As the passing train records a moment of transition, the Hindu trinity, associated with the earlier India, is reduced to helplessness and the steam-boat becomes a historical milestone that records the passage to the mechanical. The extent to which its movement over water can disturb the seagulls, the tortoises and the devotees all at the same time communicates the spread of the steamboat’s power and the power of the state of “britannisée” it stands for.

With this for the very first time in the description, a challenge to the native landscape is alluded to and this scene of gentle disturbance of the quaint scenario that remains literally over the surface – it troubles the waters (“troublait les eaux”) – changes to a more aggressive and an overt challenge to the local landscape. In the following quote, the description is associated with the reach of the railway line with the regions served being directly implicated within the English economy. With factories as its points of reference, the movement of the train evokes the movement of the English industry, recording the milestones of its economic prosperity as it also tries to grapple with spatial alterity.

Tout ce panorama défila comme un éclair, et souvent un nuage de vapeur blanche en cacha les détails. À peine les voyageurs purent-ils entrevoir le fort de Chunar, à vingt milles au sud-est de Bénarès, ancienne forteresse des rajahs du Béhar, Ghazepour et ses importantes fabriques d'eau de rose, le tombeau de Lord Cornwallis qui s'élève sur la rive gauche du Gange, la ville fortifiée de Buxar, Patna, grande cité industrielle et commerçante, où se tient le principal marché d'opium de l'Inde, Monghir, ville plus qu'européenne, anglaise comme Manchester ou Birmingham, renommée pour ses fonderies de fer, ses fabriques de taillanderie et d'armes blanches et dont les hautes cheminées encrassaient d'une fumée noire le ciel de Brahma, – un véritable coup de poing dans le pays du rêve ! (107)

The two extremes of the above quote allow for discussion on the nature and importance of the visual in the strengthening of the industry. As the steam power provides locomotion to the train, it is muddying up the view (“un nuage de vapeur blanche en cacha les détails”), which towards the end has been completely taken over by the violence of the factory smoke: “...les hautes cheminées encrassaient d'une fumée noire le ciel de Brahma, – un véritable coup de poing dans le pays du rêve!”

As the scene fluctuates between the locales and the industry, one is made conscious of the priority given the faculty of sight. Be it the movement of the water (“troublait les eaux”), a description of the wildlife (“les tortues qui pullulaient”) or the

people (“dévots étendus”), the presentation, detailed from behind a train window, all prepare for the eventual challenge the industry holds out to the traditional organization of the landscape in the novel. Initially presented visually, it is a landscape described solely from the point of view of the religious everyday practices of the inhabitants. They are living a contourless space, undefined by any capital based markers or political boundaries. Moving from a clear view of the inhabitants to a view hampered by the vapor of the train, the advancing description, as if to demonstrate the power of the industry it presents, progressively cedes place to the industry.

A sky already covered by the over-reaching chimneys (“les hautes cheminées encrassaient”) is completely dominated by the smoke emanating from them. While speaking volumes about the importance of the privileged human faculty of sight in the advancement of industry, it demonstrates how the industry obscures sight itself. Such that it only makes allowance for a view conducive to its growth.

This aggression is better perceived in the interplay between the Hindu divinity Brahma and the factories. It is a moment of spatial transition where the latter muscle their way in, destroying the earlier serenity introducing violence into the landscape. Although identified as “le maître suprême des prêtres et des législateurs” (107), Brahma is better known as the creator of the universe in the Hindu mythology. In receiving a blow from the fist (“un coup de poing”), Brahma’s sky (“le ciel de Brahma”) is forever transformed by the chimney smoke and with it is also signaled an alternate conceptualization of the universe, aligned to the matrix of these factories. The world of the creator is changed.

If, as Lefebvre points out, Nietzsche found the visual to be “predominant in the metaphors and metonyms that constitute abstract thought: idea, vision, clarity, enlightenment and obscurity, the veil, perspective, the mind’s eye, mental scrutiny, the

‘sun of intelligibility’, and so on,”⁷³ then Verne’s (Nietzsche’s contemporary) description with its abundant insistence on the visual only broadens this discovery to include fiction as well.

As a precursor to the impending cartographic move of reconfiguration, this unveils a new space, scaled by and for the proliferating capital. “A further important aspect of spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained in them” (*Production* 75). With the eye as the primary tool of delineation, this space – currently devoid of any territorial signs – is to be mapped for the growth of industry.

From Passepartout’s worries, to an aggressive industry, these are all strategies of abstraction that empty space of its qualitative characteristics reducing it to universally quantifiable co-ordinates. Hampered visibility is a symptom underscoring the increasing “transparency” of this evolving space, which in turn ignores the varied human experience inhabiting it. “Sight and seeing” in Lefebvre’s words, “have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social space, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency” (75-6).

Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours abounds in such machinations where “space appears solely in its reduced form. *Volume* leaves the field to *surface*” (*Production* 313). For the moment, I turn to another strategy of annihilation of social spaces: repetitious spaces. Monghir, with foundries and factories as its sole co-ordinates, also assumes the identity of an English city – a self multiplying space in the novel, which in its many appearances demonstrates the transparency of world space.

⁷³ *The Production*, trans. Nicholson-Smith 139.

Apart from the unfolding of the city as a comparison of Manchester and Birmingham, since what makes this city of Monghir in the Indian subcontinent English (“anglaise”) is its industrial nature, we are also to infer the relationship of synonymy that exists between being English and being industrial, which forces us to consider the interdependence between colonialism and capitalism. And to understand this connection a further exploration of Monghir’s identification as a colonial city “ville” and that which makes it a city is necessary.

Hong Kong, another one of the many transforming locales in the novel, affords us the possibility. In the next section we look at the description of Hong Kong as an illustration of how colonial cities are formed with capitalism as the operating force. This will allow us to appreciate how the seemingly innocuous reference to the opium market makes Monghir part of a larger constellation of geographically dispersed cities, all implicated in an opium economy, interconnected as parts of a commercial machinery. It helps establish cities under nascent capitalism as abstracted spaces, globally homogenized and presented with industrial markers that render them universally similar. They are set in place with the sole objective of increasing productivity. Further the reading records the novel’s fetish of rearticulating the indigenous landscape through a reconfiguration of a spatiality familiar to the colonizer.

Hong Kong’s Formation as an urban colonio-capitalist center

The following quote explains the importance of urban landscape to the colonial project. Being about the formation of cities, it demonstrates how capital induced space is produced. Reproducing itself, this space becomes the main motor of colonialism. The quote enunciates Hong Kong’s colonial presence as another example of capitalist machinations, thus articulating Hong Kong as the result of a coordinated movement

between capitalism and colonialism. It describes Passpartout's impressions about Hong Kong as he disembarks on the island and perceives it as a re-articulation of other English cities. With this long quote I will convey the key spatial issues at play in Verne's novel.

Hong-Kong n'est qu'un îlot, dont le traité de Nanking, après la guerre de 1842, assura la possession à l'Angleterre. En quelques années, le génie colonisateur de la Grande-Bretagne y avait fondé une ville importante et créé un port, le port Victoria. Cette île est située à l'embouchure de la rivière de Canton, et soixante milles seulement la séparent de la cité portugaise de Macao, bâtie sur l'autre rive. Hong-Kong devait nécessairement vaincre Macao dans une lutte commerciale, et maintenant la plus grande partie du transit chinois s'opère par la ville anglaise. Des docks, des hôpitaux, des wharfs, des entrepôts, une cathédrale gothique, un 'government-house', des rues macadamisées, tout ferait croire qu'une des cités commerçantes des comtés de Kent ou de Surrey, traversant le sphéroïde terrestre, est venue ressortir en ce point de la Chine, presque à ses antipodes. Passepartout, les mains dans les poches, se rendit donc vers le port Victoria, regardant les palanquins, les brouettes à voile, encore en faveur dans le Céleste Empire, et toute cette foule de Chinois, de Japonais et d'Européens, qui se pressait dans les rues. À peu de choses près, c'était encore Bombay, Calcutta ou Singapore, que le digne garçon retrouvait sur son parcours. Il y a ainsi comme une traînée de villes anglaises tout autour du monde. (139-40)

The end of the quote – “autour du monde” – distinctly reminds us of the desire projected by the title of the novel, and also talks about the space of the ‘world’ the cities conquer. As “villes anglaises” tell us – it is the cities that go around the world. Cities also become a means to transport the trace – “trainée” (“Trace longue et étroite laissée par une matière pulvérulente, une substance liquide répandue en petite quantité sur le sol ou sur une surface quelconque.”⁷⁴) – of Englishness.

All details work to enhance the city's Englishness both in terms of time and space. Temporally subjugated, the only historical moment the quote records, is 1842:

⁷⁴ “Trainée,” *Le Trésor*, 23 Feb.2006 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

the year when Hong Kong passed into English possession. Spatial details about the small island abound but only those that connect this city to the colonial power. At the two extremes of the quote stand two categories of cities: one – “villes anglaises” – cities that transport Englishness in general – and the other a case in point – Hong Kong. We will see, in what follows, how these two English traits – its history and space – further the existence of an English Hong Kong. As we navigate through the spatial and temporal structures that determine the island, we realize that these paradigms that identify this geography are in themselves fictional creations, set into place by a colonizing vision that privileges only those temporal and spatial milestones consistent with its project of expansion. This blinkered vision would exemplify the matrix the novel deploys to empty out the world, rendering it into an abstraction.

Hong Kong – an English rendition

Presented as a result of Great Britain’s colonial genius (“génie colonisateur”), Hong Kong is depicted as a locus of an enumeration of constructions that remind of Great Britain and its commercial prowess in the counties of Kent or Surrey. During Passetout’s maiden visit, the island is identified using markers that evoke his experiences. Hong Kong too is presented as an English city – “ville anglaise” – to point to Hong Kong as a major port of transit: “...et maintenant la plus grande partie du transit chinois s’opère par la ville anglaise.”

Hong Kong’s definition above reaffirms its presence as another in the chain of English cities and by acknowledging its position of mercantile superiority in the region also evokes the necessary association with business for it to be a successful English city. The term “cités commerçantes” reiterates this. “Cité” is a synonym of “[v]ille” and it evokes the similarity between Hong Kong and other English cities from parallels drawn on the counties of Kent and Surrey. The adjective “commerçantes” is

the link here: commerce is the sole essential characteristic for a city to be defined as English. This is demonstrated by the commercial nature of the spatial constructions enumerated to draw up the association of Englishness (“le port victoria”, “[d]es docks, des hôpitaux, des wharfs, des entrepôts”, un “government-house”, “des rues macadamisées”). “[L]utte commerciale” and “transit chinois” further enrich this business related semantic field.

The essence of Englishness condenses in structures harking to capital and commerce, and multiplies itself through the spatial reproduction of cities. Cities, in this way, not only become re-produced spaces, but also operate as active tools in the further propagation of this capital-infused spatiality through self-replication. They are empowered agents that transmit the commercial essence that made them.

While Hong Kong itself is portrayed as under the command of and as a carrier of English identity, it is the generic city that comes out as victorious. Hong Kong as the stake between two empires, brings out its importance as a space of desire and extends its dimensions of a city much beyond its administrative boundaries. Being of a collectivity that circulates around the world stretches its scope to the entire world: a world already inscribed using the co-ordinates of urban space. The following sentence exemplifies the relative power of these commercial entities through the counties of Kent and Surrey:

...une des cités commerçantes des comtés de Kent ou de Surrey,
traversant le sphéroïde terrestre, est venue ressortir en ce point de la
Chine, presque à ses antipodes.

The “sphéroïde terrestre” communicates the space of planet earth that the cities occupy. The combining usage of the verb “traverser”, to traverse (“Franchir, parcourir quelque chose d'une extrémité à l'autre.”⁷⁵), and the verb “ressortir”, to come out after

⁷⁵ “Traverser,” Le Trésor, 12 Mar 2006 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

going through (“Sortir d'un lieu après y être entré, souvent peu de temps après.”⁷⁶), demonstrates the action of cutting through the globe, and emerging on the other side of Earth at its “antipode”. “[A]ntipode” (“[En parlant d'un lieu] Situé en un point diamétralement opposé à un autre point de la surface du globe”⁷⁷) articulates the ability of the cities to establish themselves at the two geographical extremes, showing their vast reach and power, and the extent of their growing spatial domination over the planet. The actions of “traverser” and “ressortir” communicate a veritable notion of cities in movement propelled by capitalism in a controllable physical world. Their respective sentence positions also address the power equation: the cities are in an active subject position with the world as their object. Combined with the adventurer’s movement across the surface of land and water, the cities’ momentum establishes complete authority over Earth. There is a distinct parallel to be drawn between the two movements, which goes beyond the obvious use of “autour du monde” for both. It is the study of this other parallel ‘tour’ that holds the key to understanding the adventurer’s voyage around the world. When this spatial ‘world tour’ of cities is described as already accomplished during Passepartout’s visit, it points to the fact that the spatial movement has preceded the adventurers. Colonial cities, commercially propelled and long time in motion, have outrun the competitors in going around the world.

As much as this highlights the power of the cities, it also presents the reason that facilitates travel undertaken by Passepartout and his fellow travelers. They follow a route set up by the very same commercial infrastructure used to maintain a stronghold over colonies. This permits perusal of colonial space at every point in their voyage. As a result a parallel can be easily drawn between cities of different parts of

⁷⁶ “Ressortir,” Le Trésor, 12 Mar 2006 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

⁷⁷ “Antipode,” Le Trésor, 12 Mar 2006 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

the world: be it Hong Kong and “une des cités commerçantes des comtés de Kent ou de Surrey”, or “Bombay, Calcutta ou Singapore”.

That is to say that it is a world that is shrinking as the infrastructure is gaining in expanse with the cities cradling the infrastructure. At least, this is the contention that stands at the root of the bet triggering the voyage at the center of the novel. Phileas Fogg, during a card game with his fellow club members counters a claim about Earth being vast: “Elle l’était autrefois...” he contests – that Earth was vast in another time. As important it is to take into consideration the two time slices of a present and a juxtaposed past this comment draws up, even more significant is the question raised about the size of Earth. As Andrew Stuart rightly queries: “Comment, autrefois! Est-ce que la terre a diminué par hasard?”

Stuart’s skeptical interrogation about Earth’s size receives a reply in the positive and the reason for this shrinkage is attributed to the speed of travel that allows one to cover distances much faster. The geographical expanse is inversely proportional to the increasing velocity of travel. This speed of means of transport becomes the historical marker differentiating the “autrefois” of a larger Earth from the present. This temporal distinction with technology at its root is a recurrent trope in the novel and its prevalence becomes evident when Gauthier Ralph, another card player, joins his voice with Fogg’s: “La terre a diminué, puisqu’on la parcourt maintenant dix fois plus vite qu’il y a cent ans.”

The proportional logic – between the decreasing size and the increasing speed – crystallizes in the interrelation expressed between the increasing (“dix fois plus”) speed (“vite”) and the reduction of Earth’s dimensions. It is the rate of speed that opposes the present “maintenant” to the past “il y a cent ans”. And in this case, with the increasing speed “dix fois plus vite”, as the only separation between the present “maintenant” and the past “il y a cent ans”, the rate of velocity is literally a designator

of history. What Ralph refers to is the significance of the new faster means of travel to a world contemporary to them, the infrastructure for which is being set-up by the self-replicating urban space. In fact, it is the establishment of the railway-network in the English colony of India that triggers Fogg's journey. Following the publication in the *Morning Chronicle*, of a hypothetical calculation claiming possible a trip around the world in 80 days, Phileas Fogg challenges the skepticism of his fellow card playing club members and wagers half of his wealth to the project:

- En quatre-vingts jours seulement, dit Phileas Fogg.
- En effet, messieurs, ajouta John Sullivan, quatre-vingts jours, depuis que la section entre Rothal et Allahabad a été ouverte sur le 'Great-Indian peninsular railway', et voici le calcul établi par le *Morning Chronicle* (23)

The simultaneity between the setting up of the infrastructure and the world's "shrinkage" is clear. As a necessary precedent to the bet, the railroad is an example of the colonial infrastructure as an essential precursor to the changing discourse of the planet. This is a moment of the incorporation of the world within the terminology of technology, which establishes a "dominated space", and lays the groundwork for a "meshwork" that is the culmination point of an assemblage that the railways have helped complete. The simultaneous conclusion of the railways and the beginning of the adventure around the world is not a coincidence. It is rather a predictable corollary, which predicates a journey that could potentially empty the global space of its meaning, imposing on it instead an essence that can be calculated. What the *Morning Chronicle* then presents through its calculations of the global distance, is an example of dominated space that "is usually closed, sterilized, emptied out." The globe, with these calculations, has been reduced to an achievable number. In Lefebvrian terms, this domination of space through the increasing spread of technology exemplifies the introduction of "a new form into a pre-existing space – generally a rectilinear or

rectangular form such as a meshwork or chequerwork” (*Production* 165). In the novel the colonial encounter with the ‘Other’ is determined by the increasing role of the infrastructural meshwork. Hong Kong illustrates the dynamics of such a mapping process and a study of the articulation of its means of transportation uncovers a matrix deployed towards dominating not only the colonized but also other competing colonizers.

Already valorized many times over, the English supremacy in the region takes on a mercantile character when Hong Kong is victorious over Macao in a hypothetical commercial battle (“devait nécessairement vaincre Macao dans une lutte commerciale”). Having arrived first, the Portuguese were the ones to set up Macao – the oldest European port in China – in 1557.⁷⁸ Eventually when the British did get to China, despite being the later entrants, they surpassed the other colonizers – Portuguese and the Dutch, “becoming the dominant European country trading with China” (Grasso 28).

Situating Hong Kong vis-à-vis Macao and putting the two in a conflicting commercial position brings to the fore an entire colonial history where Hong Kong is a reminder of Great Britain’s simultaneous victory over China and rival Portugal in a battle of territories. Hong Kong’s definition through a perceived inadequacy of defining ‘Others’, takes on a distinct infrastructural character in the distance of sixty miles offered by the Canton River between the two cities. This is more than just a physical separation, as the waterway evokes the maritime prowess of Great Britain that navigated it into a position of advantage in the region. For, during the Opium War the “[c]hinese military was no match for the steam powered ships and superior

⁷⁸ “The Portuguese, the first European traders to arrive, were restricted by the Ming dynasty to Macao, a fortified port the Portuguese built near the Chinese city of Guangzhou.” June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power* (New York: An East Gate Book, 2004) 28.

firepower of the British” (Grasso 38). Given the very same waterway also propelled Britain to the position of commercial leader, it is little wonder that the infrastructure of Hong Kong evoking Englishness is also replete with constructions that support this maritime movement (Des docks, des wharfs, des entrepôts). As a result we see: “une plus grande partie du transit chinois s’opère par la ville anglaise.”

Serving as the foundation stone for the English colonial expedition, the river as separation aggrandizes the colonizer’s position. While the constructions serve to anchor Hong Kong into an image of Englishness, this image is fixed into a state of perpetual greatness by the means of a ‘constructed’ distance, which, as it becomes the basis of Hong Kong’s continued mercantile success, also serves to isolate Macao on the “other” bank (“l’autre rive”) of the river. This “other” side should also be understood as the other side of the prosperity the river signifies, and also the humbled side of this commercial battle, not endowed with tools of maritime commerce. Separated by a distance, by the role Macao plays in highlighting Hong Kong’s contours, it has in effect been rendered inseparable. It acts as another pillar whose presence in inferiority is a necessary corollary for anchoring Hong Kong’s glorification in constructed structures. What Hong Kong and Macao in their hierarchy establish is the subservience of the local geography that has been carved to the demands of a commercially defined Englishness.

In this portrayal of Hong Kong as a major port of “transit” – it is to be understood – lies the necessarily commercial character of an English city and also by default Hong Kong as an example of a successful English city par excellence. “[T]ransit” also brings to our attention the other means of transport. The roads – “rues” where the list enumerating English constructions culminates – take the

adjective “macademisées” from their Scottish inventor McAdam⁷⁹ – a reference that links Hong Kong’s commercial progress, once again, to Great Britain highlighting the latter’s “génie colonisateur”.

The means of transport described in Hong Kong serve to draw a binary opposition. The association of non-mechanical “palanquins” and wind-driven wheelbarrows (“les brouettes à voile”) with an ancient name for China⁸⁰ – “céleste empire” – that evokes divinity (“Qui appartient à Dieu, qui vient de Dieu, divin.”) is clearly in contrast to modern infrastructure in Hong Kong, conducive to the movement of mechanized transport. This association of temporal opposition of the means of transport, simultaneously exoticises and relegates to the past all that is non-mechanical, and celebrates all that reinforces Hong Kong in the hypothetical “lutte commerciale”. In the same degree as this preference concretizes Gauthier Ralph’s earlier stated contention⁸¹ about the interrelation between Earth’s size and the changing face of transportation, it displays means of transportation as the shaping mechanism of a new Earth. Not only as means of displacement over space that reduce travel time, they are also temporal milestones that document the passage to a new Earth of reduced dimensions.

The adverb of time “encore” (still) crystallizes the temporal separation between the two kinds of transports. “[E]ncore en faveur” (still in use in China) draws

⁷⁹ “roads and highways,” Encyclopædia Britannica Online, Encyclopædia Britannica, 28 Mar. 2006 <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-71902>>.

In road building “[t]he greatest advance came from John Loudon McAdam, born in 1756 at Ayr in Scotland. McAdam began his road-building career in 1787 but reached major heights after 1804, when he was appointed general surveyor for Bristol, then the most important port city in England.”

⁸⁰ “Céleste,” Le Trésor, 28 Mar 2006 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

Also “Celestial,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, Oxford English Dictionary, 28 Mar. 2006 <<http://oed.com/>>.

“*the Celestial Empire*: a translation of one of the native names for China.”

⁸¹ “La terre a diminué, puisqu’on la parcourt maintenant dix fois plus vite qu’il y a cent ans.”

an inter-relation between Hong Kong and another hypothetical point of reference, which by the context is the superior Great Britain, where similar means are no more in use. Another possibility is that the adverb signals an imminent change in China whereby such transport is to lose usage. In a quote where Hong Kong's current commercial prosperity is ascribed to English-type transport, the adverb establishes a chronology of superiority where manual labor predates and eventually cedes place to the mechanical force – associated with the ameliorating power of the colonizer.

“[E]ncore” tells us that elsewhere these manually propelled transports are a part of history, as much as they belong to the present in Hong Kong. The level of mechanization of transport communicates firstly that transports relating to capitalism become a gauge for history, whereby the only criteria for judging an object of interest is its relevance to productivity. Hong Kong's presentation as a commercial success only substantiates this. It is also important to note that the adverb reinforces the role, as already seen, of transport speed as temporal milestones.

Secondly, this is an ameliorative history, where moving towards the future assures improvement over the past. Hong Kong's movement to its much-improved present “maintenant” is presented as “Génie colonisater's” work of a few years “en quelques années” where it enabled structures conducive to the traffic of these transports. The two oppositional transports are designators of a past and a colonial present. And as their host, Hong Kong finds itself suspended in a state of anachronism. Its landscape witnesses the co-existence of two distinct moments of history on the same temporal plane such that its presence becomes an excuse for England's aggrandizement. Alternatively, this is a de-historicized Hong Kong, disengaged from its own historical trajectory that displays a moment of motion towards the colonizer's temporal plane. This shift in the genealogy of identity is also a moment of temporal

subservience to England, whereby the island is established in a hierarchy, situated as a transition leading towards the colonizer.

The evolving inter-relationships of the nouns – that evoke Hong Kong and England – illustrate the former’s dependence on Great Britain. As progressively the work of the “génie colonisateur” is explicated in the quote, we see amplification of the colonizer’s dimensions as communicated through its toponyms: England (“Angleterre”) at the end of the first sentence, changes to Great Britain (“Grande Bretagne”). It is England that takes possession of the island but it is Great Britain’s ‘colonial genius’ – the subject of the second sentence – that transforms Hong Kong by establishing (“fondé”) and creating (“créé”) an important city.

Though used synonymously, the two terms – Angleterre and Grande Bretagne – designate different entities. “England strictly refers to a single political division of Great Britain, but it is commonly substituted for (Great) Britain ...”⁸² and in the quote, the replacement, plays an important role with the prefix “Grande”, already making evident its increasing stature vis-à-vis Hong Kong. With the increase of the influence of colonial power, the physical dimensions used to refer to it also increase. Today, as when Jules Verne wrote, Great Britain, is the island that has England as one of its components. The World Encyclopedia explains Great Britain:

Island of Britain, comprising England, Scotland, and Wales. Wales united with England in 1536. The Act of Union (1707) united Scotland with England, and the Act of Union (1801) established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.⁸³

⁸² “Britain,” Oxford Reference Online, Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage, ed. Robert Allen, 1999, Oxford University Press, Cornell University. 7 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t30.e434>>.

⁸³ “Great Britain,” Oxford Reference Online, World Encyclopedia, Oxford University Press, 7 Feb. 2006 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e4847>>.

From a much smaller England as its dominator, the substitution pits Hong Kong against another island, Britain – the largest island of Europe with its landmass of 88,700 square miles⁸⁴ – which dwarfs further the contours of the “îlot”.

Hong Kong is not left untouched by its association with Great Britain’s growing stature. The diminutive “îlot” (“Très petite île.”⁸⁵) at the beginning, as the “possession” of England leaves us in no doubt about their power relationship. But Hong Kong too evolves – from the diminutive at the beginning of the first sentence to the “île” that starts the third sentence. While they are synonymous, and nothing distinguishes the usage of the two terms,⁸⁶ the second sentence – that lies between the two usages – ascribes the enhancement to the colonial genius (“génie colonisateur”) of “Grande-Bretagne” that sets up (“fonder”) an important city (“ville importante”). The addition of the city explains the changeover.

The adjective “importante” sheds a positive light on the power of “le génie colonisateur” of the English and refers us to the reason for this “importance”: a port anointed with an English name – le port Victoria. The right to name reflects the extent of the control over the island. And with this naming, the work of “le génie colonisateur” is complete: “Le port Victoria” as the very last words in the second sentence lays the ground work for the “îlot” to become a bigger “cette île” at the beginning of the next sentence.

In the new interconnected colonial world, the reduction of the two to the status of an island is a sign of intercontinental interdependence, which connecting the two

⁸⁴ “largest islands,” *Oxford Reference Online*, 7 Feb. 2006
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e15057>>

⁸⁵ “îlot,” *Le Trésor*, Feb 6 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

⁸⁶ “île,” *Le Trésor*, Feb 6 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.
“Aucun caractère vraiment spécifique ne différencie les petites îles des îlots ou des îlets ... seule la coutume semble leur attribuer l'un de ces termes en particulier.”

colonial entities also aptly describes the indispensability of Hong Kong's existence as a diminutive that in its juxtaposition augments further Great Britain's contours of a larger island. This hierarchy of size is only one part of the equation of colonial spatiality, the other part draws out the necessity of viewing the colonized territory as conquerable and secondary to the colonizer. Before we go on to understanding how this equation typifies much of the novel's desire in projecting the colonized territory, a quick word about the narrator-like voice in the background of the novel that unfolds this paradigm and creates through the literary structure its own sense of temporality and temporal understanding.

Michel Foucault assesses Verne's text as made complete by different speakers in the background, recounting the narrative. The elaborate unfolding above of Hong Kong related details – both spatial and temporal – reminds us of one of these body-less (“voix sans corps”) voices. It links the novel to the world of the reader inasmuch as it enumerates details and events from the reader's world. Foucault describes:

Plus extérieur encore aux formes visibles de la fable, un discours la ressaisit dans sa totalité et la rapporte à un autre système de récit, à une autre chronologie objective ou, en tous cas, à un temps qui est celui du lecteur lui-même. Cette voix entièrement ‘hors fable’ indique les repères historiques ... Cette voix est celle du récitant absolu: la première personne de l'écrivain (mais neutralisée), notant dans les marges de son récit ce qu'il est nécessaire de savoir pour l'utiliser aisément.⁸⁷

The “voix sans corps” thus becomes active as details are enumerated in the presentation of Hong Kong via co-ordinates that recall Great Britain. From historical signposts of 1842 and the ‘treaty of Nanking’ to the spatial reminders of a “ville anglaise” characteristic of the counties of “Kent ou de Surrey”, all locate a universe familiar to the reader.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, “Jules Verne,” *L'Arc* 29 (1966): 7-8.

This alternative chronology that serves as a background to the narrative puts the ‘neutralized author’ in a tacit understanding with the reader regarding a mutually accepted sense of historical occurrences that Foucault calls a “chronologie objective”. In acknowledging one of the author’s “répères historiques” of 1842, the reader is in direct conversation with Verne and his work while responding to a time frame exterior to the narrative of 80 days. This piggybacking by the fictional of the historically verifiable, scaffolds Benedict Anderson’s notion of “empty time” – one of the principal ideas of nationalism. It is a perceived temporal simultaneity that forms the backdrop of the nationalistic feeling shared by individuals identifying themselves with and living in the same political boundaries of a nation. Anderson explains:

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically, through homogenous, empty time is a precise analog of the empty time of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.⁸⁸

Anderson explicates his concept through literary texts that present details verifiable by the reader. This, he says, creates “empty time”, a common chronology where both the fiction and the reader co-exist. By analogy, according to Anderson, the very same idea is manifest in a nation when the nationalistic feeling claims right to a common temporal unfolding for all its citizens. In the present case, ‘empty time’ comes across both as a literary occurrence and as a testimony to the British sense of nationalism as it clearly postulates the island of Hong Kong as an extension of British history and political boundaries.

Colonial landmarks, enumerated as words in plural (“Des docks, des hôpitaux...”), show the enormity of the growing influence of the British and attest to the reproducibility of social space. The plurality of these common nouns takes over

⁸⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991) 26.

the uniqueness of Hong Kong. These lexical items are easily replicable from the location of one proper noun – Kent or Surrey – to another – Hong Kong. Thus the colonized space resembles Kent or Surrey – rendering the island a site of re-creation of British nationhood. Of the constructions, a “cathédrale gothique” and a “government-house” stand out because of their mention in the singular. As this allows us to dwell on the role of the monotheistic nature of Christianity brought over to this part of the hemisphere, and the sovereign British rule – that governs both Great Britain and its colonies – it also points to an interrelation that is typical of the representation of the colonial reality, where much of government work in colonies was carried out in consonance with the church. But for now instead of digressing further into how this also typifies the way most colonizing literature sees colonies as either units for the spread of religion or governance, let’s get back to the very first moment of contact between Hong Kong and its colonizer.

Understanding the Opium of the Opium War

“Hong-Kong n’est qu’un îlot, dont le traité de Nanking, après la guerre de 1842, assura la possession à l’Angleterre”, is all the novel tells us about Hong Kong’s origins. This very first sentence of the large quote we have been discussing has two place names at its extremities, where the first – Hong Kong – is subordinated to the latter - Angleterre. Apart from the net of spatial markers that ties Hong Kong to its colonizer, it is the war – “guerre de 1842” – in between the two ends of this sentence that clarifies Hong Kong’s status as a “possession” of England. As it mediates in this sentence between the two colonial entities, this war (and its ensuing consequences) is at work in much of this novel’s knowledge of Hong Kong. In fact, it is the understanding of not one but two wars that allows us a better comprehension of the island. While it is the second, a hypothetical commercial battle (“devait vaincre

Macao”) that sustains the results of the first war by maintaining Great Britain’s supremacy and Hong Kong’s existence as a port of commerce (“la plus grande partie du transit chinois s’opère par la ville anglaise”), it is the first – the bloody battle of 1842 culminating in the “traité de Nanking” – that is of interest to us because it forced China to cede Hong Kong to the English, who turned it into a commercial port.

Beyond just exhibiting the superior English force, this conflict laid the groundwork for the eventual shape the region would take. More than in the exact dynamics of the English victory, my interest lies in opium, the trigger of this war. Now, a seemingly unrelated objection jumps out as we speak of the interdependence between Hong Kong and England. How is it possible to detail the existence of Hong Kong without accounting for the role of “English Opium”? I say seemingly unrelated because the way Hong Kong-English connection has been unproblematically relayed in the novel with no references to the key component of opium, one would have no reason to probe the link. Indeed, apart from ignoring the role played by Opium in the islands passage from China to England when Aouda’s passage from India to Europe too is marked by and even facilitated through an itinerary prepared by an opium economy, the importance of analyzing the role the drug plays in this voyage around the world becomes self-evident. Much in contrast to the criticism in the novel of the apparent ills of colonialism like Opium, all moves associated with the drug in *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* are thoroughly implicated in its propagation – a proliferation that is never overtly accounted and which always operates in a surreptitiousness that I call Opium silence. In raising these questions I hope to illustrate, firstly, that the silence of opium is the founding principle in operation in the novel’s description of Hong Kong. And secondly, that this silence is nothing but a parallel of the opium related historic reality at play in the region. What I wish to enunciate is that opium could only have been present in the novel through its

conspicuous absence. This paradoxical manifestation of opium, the reasons for its silence and its implications for colonial subjectivity, is what I chart out in the discussion that follows about Hong Kong's origins.

The central idea of the above quote is that Hong Kong is indistinguishable from any of the other English cities from the counties of Kent or Surrey. With a list of over dozen place names⁸⁹ and an even more copious enumeration of spatial markers,⁹⁰ the quote successfully establishes Hong Kong's credentials as an English space. Though, how the island came to be English and the exact beginnings of this association has been relegated to a single historical event; the war of 1842, a date that stands out in its sketchiness.

If there were any doubts about the power equation between the two entities of the colonizer and the colonized then this date puts them to rest as its interests in Hong Kong go only so far as the island's association with England. For the purposes of this novel, Hong Kong's origins lie in the moment when it came in contact with the colonizer. Interestingly, the war that resulted in the treaty of Nanking actually started in 1840 and it is its culmination date of 1842 that figures in the quote. Curiously enough, while this date privileges only the year of contact between the two entities, it also raises the question of why apart from the final result of the English being the vanquisher, no further details regarding the reasons for the commencement of hostilities or its continuation are forthcoming?

Of the many consequences of this war, the only one brought to light is the concession of Hong Kong to England. In this construction-heavy reference to Hong

⁸⁹ Hong-Kong, Nanking, l'Angleterre, Grande-Bretagne, le port Victoria, rivière de Canton, la cité portugaise de Macao, comtés de Kent ou de Surrey, Chine, le Céleste Empire, Bombay, Calcutta and Singapore.

⁹⁰ îlot, port, île, l'embouchure, l'autre rive, ville, des docks, des hôpitaux, des wharfs, des entrepôts, une cathédrale gothique, un "government-house", des rues macadamisées, cités, sphéroïde terrestre, ce point, antipodes, les rues etc,

Kong, the sole temporal reminder of the island's history too has been presented as a reference to a spatial takeover. While it speaks volumes of the spatial obsession of the colonial project, Hong Kong's presentation is a case in particular of temporal subversion to suit the demands of a spatial venture. The war of 1842 as a point in history is important only in so much so as it allows for an explanation of spatial supremacy over the island. This way Hong Kong's spatiality and history both exist as replications of the English identity.

The war of 1842 is in fact better known as the first of a set of two Opium wars that changed the shape of the colonial map in the region. As the name suggests, opium was at the root of this war and thus was instrumental in the formation of the island. Yet, in a quote about Hong Kong's foundation, in a move symptomatic of this novel, not only has its role been overlooked, the word opium itself has been omitted from a name – the Opium War – in which it has earned a permanent place. But why ignore the one product that had clearly been fiscally more important to the British government (and the colonial project, one might add) than even the health of the English subjects?

Before England definitively regulated Opium's use in the early twentieth century, profits accrued from it overshadowed any considerations of restricting Opium's usage in the English society. So much so that during "the nineteenth century opiates were probably more extensively employed in England than in any other European country"⁹¹ (167). While China's first edict banning usage of Opium "appears to have been issued in 1729,"⁹² England continued ignoring the drug's

⁹¹ Elizabeth Lomax, "Uses and Abuses of Opiates in Nineteenth Century England," Bulletin of the History of Medicine 47.2 (1973): 167–176.

⁹² Michael Greenberg, British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1951) 110.

nefarious effects despite the fact that “opium and its preparations were responsible for more premature deaths than any other chemical agents” (Lomax 168).

Looking at the praise the medical journals heaped on opium, one might think that the medical community was unaware of its ill effects. On the contrary, these journals carried “almost as many references to the toxic nature of opium” (Lomax 168). It wasn’t the lack of resistance against opium that allowed its proliferation, it was rather the business interests of the pharmaceutical community that prevailed, even over the loss of human lives. Nobody wanted to restrict a drug whose exceeding popularity was the cause of an increasing pharmaceutical business. “Even the government was not disinterested, since it supported the lucrative opium trade between India and China, without regard to the health of people of either country” (Lomax 176).

The government was slow to recognize the fallouts of an unregulated drug that, as was to be expected, caused many deaths, with a particularly devastating effect on the infant population. Lomax explains how ignorant and poor working mothers from manufacturing districts liberally employed opium as an infant sedative. If the 1839 coroners’ returns from England and Wales are anything to go by, of the 182 people who died of opium poisoning in 1836 and 1837, 72 were children. The English legislature did present a bill in 1857, and passed a much watered-down version in 1868 but the final legislative reprieve was to come later in the form of the Pharmacy Act of 1908. Most of nineteenth-century England used economics as the sole guide while dealing with Opium domestically and adopted the same approach overseas in relationship with its colonies. The British government had a monopoly over opium production in India (Greenberg 105) and it forced the Chinese to buy the drug. Almost to the very moment the above statistics on opium-related infant deaths were being

collected, England was preparing the groundwork for the beginning of the first opium war in 1840.

Going by the dynamics of the colonial lens – as demonstrated in the uniquely ‘English’ construction of Hong Kong – the economic visualization of the world too had to follow the same logic. If William Jardine, a leading opium trader could find cause (in the same year 1840) to defend his character in repeated declarations of both houses of the English Parliament that “it was financially inexpedient to abolish the trade,”⁹³ then one can well imagine the devastating effect opium might have had on English colonies. While within England, opium caused the deaths of many infants (and more), the desire to even out the balance sheet through opium was seen having a far more damaging effect for England’s colonies.

Opium’s significance should be obvious from the fact that the map-altering first Opium War was a direct result of the illegal opium trade by English traders in China.⁹⁴ June Grasso et al. point out how initially they were restricted to the port city and forced to trade with the Chinese on their terms. The lop-sided trade dynamics worked against the British: “while there was a large British demand for Chinese goods – especially tea – there was little Chinese interest in British goods.” But as their position strengthened, the foreign traders, taking advantage of the weak political situation in China, compensated for their loss by trading illegal opium: “The British and other Europeans ultimately solved their trade deficit problems by selling the Chinese opium ... The opium trade probably had become the largest commerce of its kind in a single commodity in the world” (Grasso 29).

⁹³ J. Phipps, introduction, A Practical Treatise on the China and Eastern Trade (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1835). Quoted in Greenberg 104.

⁹⁴ “The British arrived in China in 1637 and were permitted to establish a trading post at the city of Guangzhou” (Grasso 28).

Throughout the course of these business dealings the battle lines were drawn, not so much on territorial boundaries, but along a debate on the right to sell opium. As the various Chinese edicts reiterated their determination on the morality of the question (“the destructive and ensnaring vice” – 1799 edict; Greenberg 110) the British government’s sole concern with profitability overrode even the business interests of its own citizens. In the run up to the 1840 war, tired with increasing restrictions by China on the Opium traders, Jardine repeatedly exhorted the British government to act militarily in order to secure favorable commercial conditions. Implicit was the demand for an imposition of the trader’s interest on the Chinese sovereignty. The government, however, would have none of it. In a letter sent out as reply in 1835 to one of Jardine’s entreaties, it was made clear, not surprisingly, that the government was “not prepared to take such a step so long as the revenues which derived from the China trade continued to be provided” (Greenberg 197). But once it was understood that opium trade was at a risk of coming to a standstill and in turn paralyzing the entire trade with China, the government had to step in and assert for dealings on English terms. Over time, the “[i]llicit opium traffic” combined with the “British insistence on regulating trading relations on the basis of Western law, became an internal political issue” (Grasso 36-37), which would later on result into a military conflict that the British forces won. The treaty of Nanking (the treaty the above quote refers to) that followed the war is referred to as one of the “unequal treaties’ that opened China to imperialist exploitation.” And some of the clauses “were particularly injurious to China and were accepted only because the mandarins were at the wrong end of the gun.” More importantly, for the purposes of our argument, it is noteworthy that, “Five ports were opened for trade, gunboats and foreign residence ... [and] Hong Kong was ceded to the British and was made a free and open port” (Grasso 39).

This treaty is a perfect example of English capitalist machinations conquering the space of the world. The very existence of Hong Kong as a part of the British Empire takes place through the use of force, and with an eye on the balance sheet. After its acquisition the island played a pivotal role in opium trade. The English made sure that “Hong Kong remained the first port of call for vessels from India and the center from which the drug was relayed to the mainland.”⁹⁵ What followed as Hong Kong’s success story, the novel has already relayed to us: “En quelques années, le génie colonisateur de la Grande-Bretagne y avait fondé une ville importante et crée un port, le port Victoria.”

Of all the consequences of an English Hong Kong, the most significant was the opium generated economic turnaround of English India. By the time the crown assumed control of India in 1858, “the opium revenue, next to that from land and salt, was the largest single increment to the Indian treasury, aggregating something over one-seventh of its total income” (Owen 282-3). In the entire discussion, what is of interest is that the representation of Hong Kong – dedicated to the ‘colonizing genius’ of the English – glorifies abundantly its great advances and conspicuously ignores opium’s role in describing both Hong Kong’s origins, and its economic transformation. That Hong Kong played the clinching role in assuring the colony of India a substantial portion of its income would have furthered glorified the English colonial genius. Yet, all mention of opium in this topographical rearrangement has been omitted. Or has it?

⁹⁵ David Edward Owen, British Opium Policy in China and India (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1968) 194.

The Opium Run

It would be too simplistic to presume that this is a selective positive presentation of the English empire, which, by presenting the effortless triumph over Hong Kong ignores all opposition and advances the image of an unopposed colonizer. That, it is no doubt the case, but there is more to it. A closer look reveals that Opium is more than present in the novel. Similar to the secretive yet rampant Opium contraband that led to the colonization of the region, this quote too creates an invisible spatial net held in place by the silent English Opium. Apart from the obvious reference of the Opium triggered 1842 war, what entrenches the quote further into a drug related economy are the colonial cities it references – all of them (Hong Kong, Calcutta, Bombay and Singapore) directly enmeshed in proliferating the English trade of Opium in China.

As mentioned, “[A]fter the emperor’s edict of 1729, the East India Company decided not to jeopardize its lucrative role in the tea trade by continuing to carry opium to China.” And although “Opium could be grown in India only with the Honorable Company’s permission” (Janin 37), it was “private ... traders ... based in India or Western firms based in China ... [that] bought the drug at government auctions in Calcutta and arranged for its onward shipment to China” (Janin 57). Hong Kong, occupied by the English within China, in itself extremely significant to the trade, could not compete with the Indian city:

Le statut et l’emplacement de l’île de Hong Kong ... firent, après la première guerre de l’Opium (1839-1842) la seconde place boursière de la marchandise opium après Calcutta. (Le Failler 44)

Calcutta as a spatial benchmark demonstrates its importance – the city boasted the unique advantage of a seaport facilitating the shipping from India – a distinction it shared with Bombay. Of the two major varieties, the “opium produced in Bengal ...

was sent to Calcutta to be auctioned off” and the Malwa opium from the “native states of central and western India”, “[a]fter it had reached Bombay ... was transhipped to China” (Janin 38-9).

While it drained China of its resources and caused an outcry on grounds of morality,⁹⁶ for English India Opium brought a much needed economic boom: “la Chine devint déficitaire au profit de l’Inde” (Le Failler 34). Even Karl Marx, pointed out how Opium generated money resulted in a richer colonial population capable of buying the increasing British exports.⁹⁷ “L’Inde anglaise s’érigeait, sur le marché legal ... Le fantastique marché chinois était sa chasse gardée” (Le Failler 42). Singapore, the fourth and the final English city, with its location on the Opium route between Calcutta and China, was only a logical stop for clippers of the drug trade:

La flotte de *clippers* faisant le trajet Calcutta – Singapour – Chine double entre 1842 et 1858 ... cet intervalle qui s’étend entre les deux guerres de l’opium fut l’âge d’or des grands marchands. (Le Failler 45)

While Singapore’s contribution, as is obvious, was significant to the trade, opium’s benefits to the island were not insignificant either:

Il n’est pas excessif de considérer le trafic de l’opium comme le commerce fondateur de la colonie en ce sens où il y était de loin, pendant le XIXe siècle, le plus important le plus disputé des négoce. (Le Failler 46)

This all-around economic success was the product of a mandatory passage of Opium through these cities – the unmentioned, the unspoken – as it turned around the British empire’s economic health (Le Failler 33-4), its trade was always carried out

⁹⁶ Read Philippe Le Failler, Monopole et prohibition de l’Opium en Indochine (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001). In particular read chapter 1. “La question de l’Opium en Extrême-Orient” for further discussions on India – China Opium link.

⁹⁷ Karl Marx, New York Daily Tribune, 20 and 25 sept. 1858. Quoted in Le Failler, 34.

surreptitiously. The passage, establishing Hong Kong as a result of the 1842 war, gives primacy to Opium and seems to be winking at the reader with the inclusion of spatial indicators implicated in its production and transport. Positioning the spatial designators alongside the temporal marker undoes the clandestine nature of the trade. Juxtaposing multiple locales and reading them from an Opium perspective facilitates the understanding of their mutual interaction. Dispersed over an empire, when assembled together, the interplay between these cities illustrates the making of space articulated as a process, where one contributes to the other, much like each link making up the totality of a chain. So when Hong Kong is described as yet another element in a series “encore Bombay, Calcutta ou Singapore” the idea is also to understand these cities as implicated in Hong Kong’s creation as much as the latter is another of their link. A passage describing the spread of a colonial capitalism presents also the attendant spatial abstraction. In describing the initiation of cities into a capitalist globe, it simultaneously produces a landscape ready for measuring and scaling. They are appropriated into a matrix of hierarchy that reorganizes them in terms of their relevance to the opium trade and the fiscal demands of the colonizing power. Hong Kong reminds of the point of origination of this trade – Kent and Surrey – and not the other way round.

This is a classic example of a moment at which the production of a space – Hong Kong – dominoes into the creation of a new subjectivity. The description continues unceasingly to reconstitute alterity when it recognizes the existence of different identities (Chinese, Japanese, European), but also empties them of all meaning by presenting Hong Kong as resembling very closely (“à peu de chose près”) a string of indistinguishable spaces. If despite their existence, it is the island’s dissimilarity that is accentuated, then it goes automatically to say that the sum of their individual differences remains subservient to the unproblematic similarity at the global

scale imposed by this “traînée de villes anglaises” of which Hong Kong is an indistinguishable part. This paradoxical identity creation exemplifies the dislocation carried out by abstract spaces on human subjectivities. While Chinese, Japanese and Europeans might exist on the island of Hong Kong, what matters is their contribution to the enhancement of over-arching British capitalism. Similarly, as it attests to the existence of Hong Kong’s uniqueness in the two means of transport (“palanquins” and “les brouettes à voile”) not found elsewhere, the description also almost instantaneously finds a means of dislodging this alterity by articulating identity in terms of structures of Britishness.

Apart from demonstrating the economic transformation of the region, this depri(a)vation of identity through structures underscores the relevance of spatial markers to subjectivity formation while revealing the beginnings of abstraction of space where spaces, and in turn subjectivities, are homogenized into an exchangeable similarity, such that one can be replaced by another and understanding one entails the understanding of all. So when a war fought for the continuation of British trade in Opium forces these scattered elements into a chain of uniformity, they all exemplify homogenization imposed by abstract space that “subsumes and unites scattered fragments or elements by force” (Lefebvre, *Production* 308).

This apparent contradiction of a simultaneous homogenization and hierarchy of locales, that I have been discussing over the last two paragraphs, provides an eloquent instance of the paradox of abstract spaces. For in resembling closely (“à peu de chose près”) and not exactly, this displays how abstract space “is *not* homogeneous; it simply *has* homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its ‘lens’” (Lefebvre, *Production* 287). Hong Kong illustrates the coming into being of an alternate matrix, which, as we have seen, aims at the “reduction of the ‘real’” (*Production* 287) into surfaces of constructions; endowing it with “the flatness of a mirror, of an image”, ordered “under

the absolute cold gaze” of Passepartout who walks by “regardant” such that it is his “lens” (both vision and perspective) that orders Hong Kong into an accumulation of constructions.

With the neutralizing of each annexed spatial component such an operation sets into motion the intrinsic repetitiveness of spaces of capitalism. As a new entrant into a world organized around urbanity, Hong Kong displays all the characteristics of a modern city. Belonging to a growing English capitalism that centers around Opium, through their similarity, the constructions on the island and the island itself reproduce the inherent repetition associated with such spaces of abstraction. For, there “is no need to subject modern towns, their outskirts and new buildings, to careful scrutiny in order to reach the conclusion that everything here resembles everything else” (Lefebvre, *Production* 75).

To recapitulate, the silence on opium’s relevance in the articulation of these cities re-deploys its conspicuous presence in every aspect of the region: without opium there would be no basis for the colonial city; they would not exist, let alone existing in inter-relation with each other. If opium were any other product, its omission would hardly be a cause of concern, but the silence of the quote in this matter, as I have been insisting, remachinates the dynamics of opium’s absence. Always the motor that propels business in the region, it is never recognized, and even as it causes the war, opium retains its surreptitious existence.

To end the first Opium War in order to avoid further loss and to “end hostilities, the Chinese were forced to sign the unequal Treaty of Nanking,”⁹⁸ which as the quote reminds us was responsible for the formation of an English Hong Kong. Since we know that “the treaty never mentioned opium, however, the war effectively

⁹⁸ Curtis Marez, Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 46.

protected drug interests” (Marez 24), then it would be safe to read Verne’s novel as a literal enunciation of the politico-geographical language contemporary to him. Once again, the literary level, in obfuscating its presence is only re-establishing opium’s correspondence to real life. This rearticulates the region in a terminology, I call the ‘Opium silence’, that would perpetuate China’s “semicolonial status”.

To be fair, it is not as if the novel is completely oblivious of the nefarious effects of opium. Describing a smoking den in Hong Kong not only does *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* exclaim how the English business “vend annuellement pour deux cent soixante millions de francs de cette funeste drogue qui s'appelle l'opium!” but also holds opium squarely responsible for the health of “millions” – all of whom were affected by one of the most harmful vices known to the human nature (“un des plus funestes vices de la nature humaine”; 143). Although an apparently genuine criticism against opium, this does not in any way contradict its workings in the formation of Hong Kong.

In a novel where the overall portrayal of English superiority presents a predictable corollary of Verne’s beliefs that colonization “is one of the aspects of progress,”⁹⁹ this seeming criticism reflects the true nature of the paradigm that Verne utilizes to deal with ideas of colonial “otherness”. We could accept this objection to the “English” trade as another natural assertion of Verne’s “anglophobic chauvinism” (Cheseneaux 121), but this contradictory opinion explains how he accepts colonial rule “as an unavoidable and accomplished fact, or rather, as a necessary fact of history” (Cheseneaux 122). Despite all its ills – opium most likely included – colonialism for Verne presents the opportunity of taking “possession of nature, to exploit new territories in the interests of economic and technical progress”

⁹⁹ Jean Cheseneaux, *The Political and Social Ideas of Jules Verne*, trans. Thomas Wikeley (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972) 123.

(Cheseneaux 26). Although, a firm believer in the principles of humanitarian idealism, Verne “cannot bring himself in the end to decide that principles of liberty should be extended systematically to all colonial peoples” (Cheseneaux 23-4). And Hong Kong, in this equation becomes an unavoidable and imminent product of this opium generated colonialism.

And yet, for us, the above reasoning is still insufficient for one crucial reason: the two mutually disparate presentations – ills of opium and the formation of Hong Kong – are laid out in the novel with nothing mediating between them. That they are complementary products operating in the same mechanism in the creation of Hong Kong, is simplistically portrayed with no attempts at making the connections. In a restricted presentation Verne’s novel completely discounts the colonial process by only partially acknowledging Opium’s presence. And this way, Hong Kong remains a colonial accomplishment having no apparent relation to the Opium trade – opium, in the novel, must necessarily be portrayed as an unrelated detail. What, might we ask then, provokes such a presentation?

Opium: The Serialized Killer

It should really not be a matter of surprise that Jules Verne’s novel, published in serialized form, documents the colonial victory without mentioning the opium wars. Not only Verne, but even his literary colleagues experimenting with serialized genre in England were representing the triumphant march of civilization in Asia without any reference to those historical events. Curtis Marez points out how, instead of reckoning with the historical reality, opium den narratives in the English mass culture circumvent the associated violence by almost never mentioning the Opium Wars (Marez 60). Two worldviews come to meet in the Opium Den narratives where facts are made acceptable through their transformation into fiction. This striking omission then falls

into a pattern defining the enabling condition of literary works contemporary to Verne. Much like the Opium den literature, Verne's novel "exists side by side with" the knowledge of British conquest, "but it denies the history of conquest by splitting from it" (Marez 69). No doubt, as disavowal, it fits into the larger picture of literature devoted to the English colonial project. In an articulation that recounts the formation of Hong Kong, the opium war of 1842 as a force that overtly fashions the colonial map is not only conspicuous by its absence, but it is through its absence that it displays the exact dynamics of the English undertaking in the region.

Within this same dynamics, Inspector Fix embodies the role of the English conqueror as he exploits Opium to jeopardize the adventurer's journey by intoxicating Passepartout, hoping thus to delay their departure from Hong Kong. As a victim, Passepartout is playing a fixed script where he has no chance of winning against the monopoly of the English inspector over the usage of opium in Hong Kong. For after all, who better to understand manipulating Opium than an English inspector – a representative of the English authority.¹⁰⁰ Situated in the colonial territory of Hong Kong, this opium den mediates between the historical fact and its presentation by reanimating the paradigm of the drug's presence. As if to remind us that Opium always acts in silence, Fix too – clandestinely – "slips" into Passepartout's hands an opium pipe ("Fix en glissa une dans la main de Passepartout"; 149), thus effectively separating the servant from his master, at least for a part of the journey. The power dynamics of the region demand that the Englishman's power be on display and in effect on the island of Hong Kong.

This apparent linkage between Opium and Hong Kong, could have been passed off as a literary coincidence, had it not been for Aouda's liberation – not only

¹⁰⁰ Acting in the name of the queen, he would later arrest Phileas Fogg: "Au nom de la reine, je vous arrête!" (279)

from the superstitious fury of the indigeneous people but also from the grasp of opium. Similar to the demands of the political power structure that assures the English nationality of Fix a command over opium, is also the racial typification that the drug imposes. In what follows we discover how Aouda rises further along a Vernian ladder of racial hierarchy, as she purges herself by taking the opium route. Hong Kong plays the decisive role of launching her towards Europe.

The Opium Race

Curtis Marez provides the beginnings of a racial equation that negotiates the evolution of the exotic in Aouda. What is at stake, Marez implies, is a clear racial division effected by the opium dens. As if affirming Marez's conclusion, we have Inspector Fix who, just like the other English observers in these narratives, keeps his distance from opium consumption. While completely controlling and benefiting from imposing opium on unwilling victims (the English gain fiscally through the Chinese and Fix benefits by delaying Passepartout), the colonialists themselves "symbolically recoil from direct participation in the imperial system the opium den represents" (Marez 64).

In the same spectrum, Aouda's rescue comes across as a liberation not only from death but also from opium. Traveling from India to Europe, Aouda, presented as "blanche comme une Européenne" (86), displays the racial characteristics associated with the exposure of women to opium. In the Opium Den narratives, the English women "seem especially prone to Asian capture". Falling for opium is a sure way for white women to be denigrated into fulfilling the vices of Chinese men. It would seem that their association with the drug is inversely proportional to the loss of their racial status: "cohabitation with opium-smoking Asian men caused certain women to shed their whiteness and assume a degraded new 'Oriental' visage" (Marez 65). In Aouda's

case, however, this journey is carried out in the opposite direction, such that in moving away from opium (and opium-smoking Asian men) she finds her companion in a white man.

As a sati, before being consigned to the flames of her husband's funeral pyre she was subjected to the fumes of opium and hashish ("enivrée de la fumée du chanvre et de l'opium"; 89). Aouda is rendered in a state where she can barely support herself and she is presented to the reader as an intoxicated woman in the clutches of the Brahmins. To set her free, then, would not only mean liberating her but also bridling the power of opium. This happens when the opium-induced intoxication of the "Indians" allows the adventurers to make possible Aouda's rescue:

Suivant leur habitude, ces Indiens devaient être plongés dans l'épaisse ivresse du 'hang' -- opium liquide, mélangé d'une infusion de chanvre --, et il serait peut-être possible de se glisser entre eux jusqu'au temple.
(92)

Her introduction in the novel happens at a moment when she is in the grasp of opium. The drug plays a liberating role when it allows for the rescuers to take advantage of the intoxication of Aouda's relatives. This display of opium in the cause of "whiteness" does not of course surprise us, for that has been the underlying theme of what I have already said, but this backward movement, though, does point equally to the ready availability of the indigenous people, not only as "gueux" (Passepartout's curse as he hears of the human sacrifice) but also as categorizable human beings that exist in hierarchies. They are a blundering savage people that celebrate the idea of human sacrifice, and then display their complete ineptitude in carrying it out. There is no doubt that these practices, and many others of such order, did plague the Bundelkhand region during the historical period described in the novel. Regardless of their veracity, what interests us is the interrelation drawn between the absence of English control and the presence of these practices. For the English have "aucune

influence sur ces contrées sauvages”, otherwise they would have been able to rid them of these “barbares coutumes”. That, at least, is the impression given in the exchange between Phileas Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty:

- Comment! reprit Phileas Fogg, sans que sa voix trahît la moindre émotion, ces barbares coutumes subsistent encore dans l’Inde, et les Anglais n’ont pu les détruire ?
- Dans la plus grande partie de l’Inde, répondit Sir Francis Cromarty, ces sacrifices ne s’accomplissent plus, mais nous n’avons aucune influence sur ces contrées sauvages, et principalement sur ce territoire du Bundelkund. (88)

In turning to a country where the scale of civilization (in this case, savagery) is a function of the English control, Verne’s novel essentially posits a worldview whose operation is already manifest in formation of other geographic locales. Much like Hong Kong’s presentation as a product of English control, Bundelkhand’s savagery embodies the consequences of the absence of such a control. This, no doubt, is emblematic of much of exoticizing colonial literature, that while perceives the uncontrollable and the inexplicable as a threat, it also appreciates all that is suitably white – as happens with Aouda’s whiteness.

Throughout the course of her rescue and her eventual marriage proposal to Fix, it is in Aouda’s dissociation from opium that she achieves affinity with Europe. Needless to say, her fundamentally European physical characteristics and upbringing tipped the scales in her favor. She was after all “une charmante femme dans toute l’acception européenne du mot.” What is different about her, and what attracts her savior is that her education has transformed her (“transformée par l’éducation” – an absolutely English education of course “absolument anglaise”; 91) into a woman who speaks English “avec une grande pureté” (103). But what exactly is she transformed from? While the text never explicitly states so, Phileas Fogg’s remorseful regret for having brought her to England, amplifies India’s position as a dangerous land for

Aouda: “contrée, devenue si dangereuse” (289). A product of and changing towards Europe, Aouda is the embodiment of transformation in process, who in responding to the pushes and pulls of colonial opium follows its geographic trajectory towards her ultimate Europeanization in England.

We notice that Aouda reaches her natural state of Europeanization by the distance she puts between herself and opium. Instead of losing “whiteness” owing to affinity with the drug, she gains Europe as she is liberated, and thus verifies the posited natural correlation between identity and opium. Let us have a quick look at the identity confusion in play in the novel. Predictably enough, Aouda (an *almost* European woman), even when identified with the indigenous people, belongs to the most elevated of all racial categories: “Elle était, en effet, de cette race qui tient le premier rang parmi les races indigènes” (118). How Parsi, a religious category, might conform to the definition of a race is a question that necessarily begs discussion but this detour risks to take us away from the geographical analysis of opium. Suffice to say that in this hierarchy lies the Gobineau-like racism,¹⁰¹ very much contemporary to Verne, that reduced the world to a hierarchy of species. And since it initiates us into a realm where Europe and European identities hold sway, it is natural that Verne’s universe would subscribe to such a view as Aouda proves. Her apparent superiority is reinforced in her parentage, which – not surprisingly – is a function of the English government’s recognition. It is because she is related to the cousin of a well known Parsi, Sir James Jejeebhoy, “anobli par le gouvernement anglais”, that she can hope to find refuge in Hong Kong.

This small island of Hong Kong seems to be occupying a disproportionately large space in the novel’s topography. It is in Hong Kong that Aouda’s decision to

¹⁰¹ Arthur Gobineau, Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1940).

continue to England is taken for her, doubly underscoring the city's relevance to the opium map. In Hong Kong (that completely English city) where she hopes to find support from a relative (another "honorable" Parsi man named Jejeeh; 139), she learns of him having shifted base to Europe – Holland.

The possibility of this adventure presupposes a centrifugal world, moving away from the center, and its every move verifying the center's existence. In this case Aouda's itinerary passes through Hong Kong to London. As the island displays signs of its determining matrix, Hong Kong also justifies its own role within the grid. If Hong Kong had been an isolated creation, Aouda's passage would have generated little thought, but Hong Kong as an agent of Englishness, as shown in our discussion, is an exercise in infectious mutation and thus, has to garner reinforcing elements. This would explain why Aouda's decision for her onward journey to Europe is made for her in Hong Kong. And as events prove instead of being a temporary stop, London – where the besotted Fogg stays – becomes her future home.

Identified already as superior among the indigenous people, Aouda, instead of just remaining "like" – "comme" une Européenne ("l'eût crue Européenne"; 91) – she justifiably owns the adjective "Européenne". And Hong Kong, presented this far as a mediated identity – a construct – becomes a mediator between a dangerous India and London – where a stable subjectivity emanates. Setting the foundation stone for Aouda's transformation in a locale that in and of itself defines transformation, the two ends of a topographical spectrum that she traverses is displayed: from "ces contrées sauvages" (88) of India to the "contrées civilisées" (192) of San Francisco, New York and London. And in between the two ends are located not only the sojourns of this journey but also a definition of the process that triggers their creation. The journey animates a center that, while redefining these spaces, also pushes them to a state of abstraction, institutionalizing its own relevance. So, in moving (or perhaps being

pulled up), in a way up the spatial ladder, Aouda retraces and reinforces the flow of the power of the center.

In this entire equation, as much as Hong Kong holds a justifiably substantial position, its deployment as a recreation of Englishness adequately models the prevalent pattern of representing alternate spatial identity during this voyage. While “Hong-Kong” refigures elsewhere as “absolument anglaise” (106), and Calcutta as “la ville européenne” (110), there are yet other spatial ‘Others’ that exist as extensions of the colonizer. Yokohama for example: “une cité absolument européenne, couvrait de ses rues, de ses places, de ses docks, de ses entrepôts, tout l'espace compris depuis le promontoire du Traité jusqu'à la rivière. Là, comme à Hong-Kong, comme à Calcutta...” (174).

With “européenne” as its key trait, this presentation situates the Japanese city with a nearly identical enumeration and establishes it via other colonial cities, reproducing the Hong Kong paradigm. Monghir too, as seen earlier in India, while recalls the importance of colonial industry, finds itself articulated through – once again – as a replication of the English cities of Manchester and Birmingham.

Monghir, ville plus qu'européenne, anglaise comme Manchester ou Birmingham, renommée pour ses fonderies de fer, ses fabriques de taillanderie et d'armes blanches... (107)

At the risk of overstating the obvious, Monghir’s presentation with its factories displays all Hong-Kong symptoms. Not to mention that the reason for the city’s importance is its “marché d’opium”, which also gains it a place in the opium economy.

What emerges from the above discussion about the various cities is a consistent pattern where it is a “European” identity – defined commercially – that provides the precondition for the understanding of spatial alterity. It acts both as an

explanation of the economic backbone of these locales as well as a readymade homogenizing spatial matrix through which these locales are endowed with interchangeable features. This uni-layered approach proposes a clear link between Hong Kong's prosperity – both technical as well as financial – and the colonizer's power. It is in the exploitation of the familiar that a unified approach has been adopted to all that is strange and new.

As the perceived mimicry of these colonized spaces glorifies their colonial powers, the undermining of other aspects of these locales, exemplified through Hong Kong's imperfections and its undefined temporality, is a perfect example of an inter-relation between the two colonial entities as described by Homi Bhabha. It fits well with his analysis of the expectation of colonial mimicry from the 'Other'. It is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable 'Other', as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 235). "[N]ot quite" because this desire postulates the colonized subject as a "partial" presence within the colonizer's construct, which confronted with unfamiliar coordinates can only reckon with the known, treating the slippage as an undesired sedimentation:

By 'partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'. It is as if the very emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself. (Bhabha 235-6)

Well aligned with Bhabha's hypothesis, the representation of Hong Kong as mimicking the colonizer disavows colonial subjectivity, dispossessing it of its independent signification. Beyond fabricating an incomprehensible locale, this appropriates Hong Kong within the economy of Englishness, articulating it through a semantic field of mechanization. While it celebrates that part of Hong Kong familiar to it making it another reason for Englishness' plenitude, all that escapes comprehension is relegated to an "autrefois," another time associated with an

antiquated China. This way the identity is redistributed along an axis that while desiring a familiar makes no allowances for the unfamiliar and the spatial 'Other' is forever disarmed of its difference. Hong Kong as colonial mimicry thus is produced "at the site of interdiction" such that apart from "what is known and is permissible ... [there is also] that which though known must be kept concealed" (Bhabha 239).

Historically speaking, Bhabha points to such an articulation of perceived exclusivity of the self as symptomatic of Verne's epoch. "The colonial discourse that articulates an *interdictory* 'otherness' is precisely the 'other scene' of this nineteenth-century European desire for an authentic historical consciousness" (Bhabha 240).

Till this point we have touched upon the interweaving influences of temporal and spatial components onto colonial territories that rearrange these alterities into an infrastructure necessary for the accumulation of capital. Moving through unknown territories, at times even in violation of local conventions, Fogg's forays are never transgressions, for they always anticipate, and indeed actively participate in the creation of a spatial 'sameness' through the operations of a capital-induced colonialism.

Fogg's fortuitous and surprising (even to him) climactic victory that forms the defining moment of the novel is a result of a collusion – as would befit such a novel – between the units of time and global geography. During the entire journey across the world, Fogg is followed by Inspector Fix who has confused the former with a robber responsible for robbing the Bank of England of 55,000 pounds. But, lacking a proper warrant, Fix is forced to constantly tail Fogg in the hope of eventually arresting him on British soil.¹⁰² This dual necessity of a warrant and English territory is only

¹⁰² "En effet, Hong-Kong était encore une terre anglaise, mais la dernière qui se rencontrât sur le parcours. Au-delà, la Chine, le Japon, l'Amérique offraient un refuge à peu près assuré au sieur Fogg. A Hong-Kong, s'il y trouvait enfin le mandat d'arrestation qui courait évidemment après lui, Fix arrêterait Fogg et le remettrait entre les mains de la police locale. Nulle difficulté. Mais après Hong-Kong, un

fulfilled once Fogg lands at the Liverpool dock (279).¹⁰³ What follows, once the misunderstanding is sorted out and Fogg released, is a moment of literary ruse where the reader is made to share Fogg's momentary disappointment of losing the bet by a delay of five minutes. The story deceptively states: "Il avait perdu" (284). There is no intervening explanation for the confusion that follows when a couple of chapters later, in a move that only further heightens the tension, Phileas Fogg runs into Reform club at eight forty five with the clock striking the fifty-seventh second on the 21st of December and exclaims: "Me voici, messieurs" (295). It is to be understood that he won the bet.

The all-powerful trump however is revealed in the last chapter. In traveling towards east Fogg and his companions had unconsciously ("inconsciemment"; 299) gained a day, and without ever realizing it, had arrived, not on the final day of the bet, as they had thought, but instead a day before. To be fair to Verne's literary talents, the intervening period of perceived financial ruin also serves the purpose of revealing Fogg's and Aouda's affection towards each other.

The eventual marriage between Fogg from civilized London and Aouda from a savage unregulated part of India is a biological union that connects two disparate units of the English empire, perpetuating a new order that is the direct result of this new spatio-temporal paradigm.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, a white man bringing back to London a

simple mandat d'arrestation ne suffirait plus. Il faudrait un acte d'extradition. De là retards, lenteurs, obstacles de toute nature, dont le coquin profiterait pour échapper définitivement. Si l'opération manquait à Hong-Kong, il serait, sinon impossible, du moins bien difficile, de la reprendre avec quelque chance de succès" (121).

¹⁰³ Though, before Liverpool, Fix could have arrested Fogg even at the port of Queenstown. Why, he allows Fogg to continue to Liverpool via Dublin without carrying out his duties, and why despite having "une envie féroce d'arrêter le sieur Fogg", he doesn't detain Fogg is left unexplained by the text: "Quel combat se livrait donc en lui ? Était-il revenu sur le compte de Mr. Fogg ? Comprenait-il enfin qu'il s'était trompé?" (279)

¹⁰⁴ Bongie sees a similar "biological foundation for the perpetuation of a political order" (*Exotic* 60) in the marriage of Michel Strogoff, the hero of Verne's eponymous novel, and his faithful assistant Nadia. Through the symbolic exchange of vows the hero and the heroine perpetuate the imperial order that they helped restore.

“thoroughly assimilated Aouda” (a europeanised woman) could only be yet another example of “reduction of alterity to sameness.”¹⁰⁵ The above calculations and the marriage appearing concomitantly as they do, reinforce each other in conserving the result of this journey whereby the very enabling actors demonstrate by example their subservience to the new order. The reality of the all powerful forces of this coloni-capitalist globe is no longer in question for them; as its very last components, their acceptance of defeat validates the power their presence has been machinating across the globe. Instead of being the triggers of action, as they have been till this point, the couple find themselves submitting to the possibility of pecuniary failure. But, just as they prepare to fight the resulting indigence by combining forces,¹⁰⁶ the spatio-temporal collusion reveals itself, declaring Fogg to be the winner of the bet.

It is interesting that the earnestness of this declaration of love towards Aouda, perhaps Fogg’s only display of human emotions, takes place at a moment when his mathematical error has been revealed. Although, it does give us grounds to claim a relationship of conflict between the emotional and the calculative,¹⁰⁷ even more revelatory is the role of this new spatio-temporal paradigm that trumps even the clock-like mathematical Fogg. Here is the calculation of the unaccounted twenty-four hours that led to Fogg’s victory:

¹⁰⁵ Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 28.

¹⁰⁶ The following exchange prefigures Aouda’s marriage proposal to Fogg. Aouda says: “On dit cependant qu’à deux la misère elle-même est supportable encore!” To which Fogg replies: “On le dit madame” (290).

¹⁰⁷ “A modern stoic like Mr. Fogg knows that the surest way to discipline passion is to discipline time: decide what you want or ought to do during the day, then always do it at exactly the same moment every day, and passion will give you no trouble.” W. H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962) 141.

Fogg’s uncharacteristic emotional display falls on a continuum of the inverse relationship that Auden draws above between human emotions and discipline. The moment of realization that time can’t be controlled is also the moment of Fogg’s emotional unraveling.

Or, on compte trois cent soixante degrés sur la circonférence terrestre, et ces trois cent soixante degrés, multipliés par quatre minutes, donnent précisément vingt-quatre heures, -- c'est-à-dire ce jour inconsciemment gagné. (299)

Fittingly, the one day that accounts for his victory is the product of the crossing of the spatial understanding of Earth's surface in terms of its meridians with a newly found temporal consciousness of hours and minutes. The resultant territorial circumference ("circonférence terrestre") is not just literally the topographical span, but rather a collectivity of three hundred and sixty homogenized degrees, all of which have been rendered uniform by the equal time gained ("quatre minutes") in crossing them. Placed against the backdrop of a remapped Earth that responds to the temporal demands of a nascent-capitalistic thinking, this calculation is the final blow to all ideas of alterity. This calculation represents the ultimate abstraction of global spatiality as it has drastically moved from the other calculation that initiated the journey at the beginning of the novel.¹⁰⁸ From a world that in having to facilitate transportation acknowledges the existence of a toponymical multiplicity (London, Bombay, Yokohama, San Francisco etc.), this new world is literally flattened out into a universal familiarity of numbers – both temporal as well as spatial. This newly created reality of the globe is a topography of desire. It is a space that articulates a de-recognition and the simultaneous institution of an alternate, numerically defined understanding of the

¹⁰⁸ "-- En effet, messieurs, ajouta John Sullivan, quatre-vingts jours, depuis que la section entre Rothal et Allahabad a été ouverte sur le 'Great-Indian peninsular railway', et voici le calcul établi par le Morning Chronicle:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| De Londres à Suez par le Mont-Cenis et Brindisi, railways et paquebots..... | 7 jours |
| De Suez à Bombay, paquebot..... | 13 -- |
| De Bombay à Calcutta, railway..... | 3 -- |
| De Calcutta à Hong-Kong (Chine), paquebot..... | 13 -- |
| De Hong-Kong à Yokohama (Japon), paquebot..... | 6 -- |
| De Yokohama à San Francisco, paquebot..... | 22 -- |
| De San Francisco New York, railroad..... | 7 -- |
| De New York à Londres, paquebot et railway..... | 9 -- |
| Total..... | 80 jours" |

(*Le Tour* 23)

globe. To explore this space of desire means reckoning with the power of a paradigm that disallows contact with subjectivities beyond its realm, and accounts only for a Fogg-Aouda like self-reinforcing union. It also means accepting a model of production that not only allows uniquely self-profiting transactions but also commands ignoring completely all ideas of alternate subjectivity, resulting, as I have been trying to argue, in a complete effacement of the 'Other'. To experience this space means constantly living at the cost of the 'Other', to find validation by inserting the self into emptied out definitions of the 'Other'.

The title of the novel *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* claims a journey in eighty days and yet, as the clinching moment reveals, Fogg takes eighty-one days to reach his destination. Through these two compatible yet contradictory numbers, the novel makes a significant statement about the malleability both of the world and its reader. It would only befit to end this chapter, where I portrayed the workings of a capitalistic structure deployed for the advancement of colonialism, by reading a similar exploitative intention in the title. Having spent 19,000 of his 20,000 pound bet, Phileas Fogg, even after dividing the booty with his companions is left with some small change, but the reader, baited with the false possibility of an eighty day journey portrayed in the title, is left shortchanged when the novel switches instead to an eighty one day adventure.

CHAPTER 2

LIMITING BORDERS: COLONIAL FRONTIERS AND TOBA TEK SINGH

Sa'adat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" is a "savagely funny story, a perfect metaphor for the greater insanity of history,"¹⁰⁹ a story that Salman Rushdie calls "Manto's masterpiece" and another critic hails as "a miracle of creation."¹¹⁰ Simply put, this is "among the best known works of fiction about the events of partition."¹¹¹ According to Mohammad Asaduddin, even "after half a century of independence and partition,"¹¹² it is due to this short story, that Sa'adat Hasan Manto has become the "creative writer most frequently alluded to." The protagonist of the story, Bishan Singh alias Toba Tek Singh, too, has taken on a life of his own. Even decades later, to take two random examples, the name serves as inspiration for an eponymous poem "Toba Tek Singh"¹¹³ by the well-known poet Gulzar and presents the People's

¹⁰⁹ Salman Rushdie, "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!," *The New Yorker* 23 June 1997: 52. Context of the quote: "To my own considerable astonishment, however, there is only one Indian writer in translation whom I would place on a par with the Indo-Anglican. (Actually, he's better than most of them.) That is Saadat Hasan Manto, an immensely popular Urdu writer of low-life fictions, whom conservative critics sometimes scorn for his choice of characters and milieus, much as Virginia Woolf snobbishly disparaged the fictional universe of James Joyce's 'Ulysees.' Manto's masterpiece is the short story 'Toba Tek Singh,' a parable of the partition of India, in which it is decided that the lunatics, too, must be partitioned ... In this savagely funny story, a perfect metaphor for the greater insanity of history."

¹¹⁰ Arjun Mahey, "Partition Narratives: Some Observations," in *Translating Partition*, ed. Ravikant and Tarun K Saint (Delhi: Katha, 2001) 148.

¹¹¹ David Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.4 (Nov., 1998): 1084.

¹¹² Asaduddin, introduction, *For Freedom's Sake* x.

¹¹³ Gulzar, "Toba Tek Singh," in *Translating Partition* viii.

Publishing House a title for its short-story collection about the partition – *Kitne Toba Tek Singh*¹¹⁴ (*How Many Toba Tek Singhs*). This is no doubt a “classic case of a fictional character overshadowing its creator” (Assaduddin, ix), but also one that underscores Manto’s creative capabilities and explains Rushdie’s “considerable astonishment,” who writing in 1997 about contemporary Indian literature discovers Manto to be the only “writer in translation whom” he could “place on a par with the Indo-Anglican. (Actually, he’s better than most of them.)” But beyond the still-enduring fame of this story published in 1953 as part of a collection called *Phudne*, the reason “Toba Tek Singh” finds a place in this dissertation is because it talks of the workings of the abstract construct of borders between nations and demonstrates how such a national boundary determined the destiny of the Indian subcontinent by destabilizing its spatial equilibrium.

On the day appointed for exchange of truckloads of human cargo, Bishan Singh repeats his question about Toba Tek Singh’s location to an official at the new-born border. In a tone that suggests mocking condescendence and half-seriousness he is told that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan – at which he refuses to cross the border. “They [Pakistani soldiers] tried their best to persuade him that Toba Tek Singh had already gone to Hindustan or would be sent there immediately” (“Toba Tek Singh” 148) but all attempts at cajoling and physical removal fail and Bishan Singh remains adamantly in place until his death on the no man’s land between the newly formed nations of Pakistan and India. When officials at the border portray Toba Tek Singh as mobile – “gone” or “would be sent there” – it emphasizes this location’s uncertain status and reinforces the general spatial fluidity. When both Toba Tek Singh and

¹¹⁴ *Kitne Toba Tek Singh*, compiled by Bisham Sahni (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1987).

Bishan Singh face spatial relocation at the border – the site of human exchange – a parallel may be drawn between them. Both are determined by the emerging border. With the location qualifying to be sent “immediately” over to the other side, the power of the dividing line is evident – Toba Tek Singh’s status is easily determined. The author scripts the end of the story with Bishan Singh’s death on the no man’s land:

Here behind barbed wires was Hindustan – there [identical] behind barbed wires Pakistan. In between, on the piece of land that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.¹¹⁵

The residents of the asylum typify the reality of the sub-continental subject. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs alike share the same experiences and interact with each other speaking a common language until the border dismantles this equilibrium. “The insane asylum is an obvious symbol of the entire world, and, indeed the institution here, ... is a microcosm of Indian society ... he [Bishan Singh] stands for all refugees, on both sides, who were forced to leave their homes and lost their identities” (Flemming 83-84). The story’s climax presents a border in three parts – the two barbed wires and the land between them. The “barbed wires” suggest an aggression that contrasts the affinity of the asylum. The two sets of barbed wires – on the Indian and the Pakistani sides – highlight the violence of the transformation of mutual empathy into mutual suspicion. Placed in a narrative of border formation and border crossing, the barbed wires suggest that the division is definitive – the border is impassible and is hostile to any attempts of reverse crossover. The two sets of barbed wires come up as a double hurdle. The no man’s land reinforces the impassability of

¹¹⁵ In Urdu “behind barbed wires” is literally written as “barbed wires behind”. While translating this phrase into English one is forced to insert “identical” between “behind” and “barbed wires”. To capture the nuances of syntactical similarity in the two clauses, I follow the word order from the Urdu original. Alternative translation offered by Asaduddin: “Over there, behind the barbed wires, was Hindustan. Over here, behind identical wires, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of land that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh” (148).

the barbed wires – it widens the difference between the countries and their mention also shows their existence as inherent to the integrity of the border.

With “identical” as the key word, the first sentence of the above quote reaffirms the affinity between the two sides and then shows the border nullifying it. The sentence is divided into two parts, each of which respectively talks about the spatial limits of India and Pakistan defined by “barbed wires”. Semantically, the two parts mirror each other thus suggesting a similarity between the two countries. In both the clauses, there is one demonstrative adjective (“here” and “there”), one noun (“Hindustan” and “Pakistan”) and the one phrase (“behind barbed wires”) that are common. Separating the “here” from “there” of the two parts are only the two appellations of Hindustan and Pakistan – signifying how the countries are only separated in name. Moreover, the word “identical” that qualifies the similarity of the “barbed wires” – dividing the two nations – enunciates the paradox of the partition. The two countries are estranged and yet identical. As the hyphen “–” demonstrates: placed between two clauses it relates the work of “barbed wires”, and operates like the no man’s land. Connecting them together, it is common to both clauses, yet this is what separates the two.

Developing on Gyanendra Pandey’s analysis of the importance of place that ensured that “it was the local community that was the vessel through which most Muslims participated in a larger moral order” (1083) David Gilmartin details how for Muslims of pre-partition India “identification with a larger Muslim community was inseparably intertwined with the *particular* identity of the *local* community” (1073). The assertion of Muslim identity (and by extension also for other regional communities) depended heavily on the interactions between the various elements of the proper place where the religious moral order was only one of the many components that composed a larger picture of intricate community interrelations in

which cast and class interests often cross-cut simplistic religion-based divisions. To say that it “was this particularity [of place] that allowed the notion of place to subsume and define the networks of personal, genealogical, familiar, and status relationships—and the local division—in relation to which moral community experienced and enacted in everyday life” (1083-4), to lay stress, by extension, on the intervention of Toba Tek Singh between India and Pakistan is, in the same gesture, to open up the conflictual reality of India’s partition. The conflict between the new nation states that it engendered given that “the territorial reality of partition had destroyed the essential cultural meaning of that sense of place” (1064), but also the conflict between territories and place, between nation states and local community, that a short story like “Toba Tek Singh” signals.

Gone with this new divisive border is the similarity between the places in India and Pakistan that the text exudes. Instead of being identified with the place Toba Tek Singh, the dead Bishan Singh is now contained within the border. The “partition of territory” for Manto’s story, as Gilmartin rightly points out: “in this telling, becomes the antithesis of place, of community, and ultimately of humanity” (1085). Now the border is the most important marker of subjectivity formation and this political scale that divides is literally drawn over this dead body. This replay of the horror of dead bodies associated with its creation also presents the subject as synonymous with this political site.

The madness of partition did not lie in the surprisingly brief period of less than three months devoted to ascertaining the boundaries of the two nations (from “the inception of the Boundary Commission”¹¹⁶ on June 5, 1947 to the creation of Pakistan

¹¹⁶ Alexander Painter, “Reconsidering the Partition of South Asia: Government Sources and Oral History,” *Sagar* 16 (Spring 2006): 10.

and India on August 14 and 15, 1947 respectively), nor can one say it lay in the arbitrary importance accorded “population figures” over other potential factors like “economic interests”, “religious considerations” and the “basic principle of contiguity” (Painter 6) in a process that “in such an arbitrary and thoughtless manner”¹¹⁷ decided the largest recorded exodus in human history, instead it is the unanchoring of spatial locations that destabilizes a historically created subjectivity to which they were intricately connected that demands attention in “Toba Tek Singh.”

Bishan Singh’s insufficiently answered queries to his fellow inmates about Toba Tek Singh’s location find no resolution either in the stuttered reply of his friend Fazal Deen who has come to visit him for the first time ever as preparations are being completed for Bishan Singh’s transfer. No doubt himself a resident of Toba Tek Singh, (probably a neighbor, if one goes by the conversation about the cattle left to him by Bishan Singh’s emigrating family) Fazal Deen, initially when confronted with the question, “Where is Toba Tek Singh,” is startled and states, “It’s where it was,” and when pressed further if it was in Pakistan or Hindustan, can only utter in a flustered manner: “In Hindustan – no, no In Pakistan.”

Toba Tek Singh’s location changing from a locus-less “where it was,” to one that now depends on the nation states of India and Pakistan, reflects a paradoxical dislocation that although identifying its unchanged geographical position signals its movement to the uncertain territory (going by Fazal Deen’s hesitation) of these newly formed countries; as also it demonstrates its passage from a vocabulary of mutual inter-comprehension that underlies the universal understanding of a statement like “where it was” shared by a Muslim and a Sikh man about a place once inhabited together, towards a segregationist impulse that is at the very heart of this story and of

¹¹⁷ Asaduddin, introduction, *For Freedom’s Sake* XXXIV.

the two entities of India and Pakistan that choose to divide the madmen. Bishan Singh's often-repeated question is the niggling textual reminder of a Toba Tek Singh that even in remaining "where it was" is of uncertain location.

But lest this be misunderstood as a submission to the forces of the border which would allow the insulating protection of definitive separation, the end of the narrative also opens up an interactive space whose synonymity with Toba Tek Singh affords the possibility of change. So, going back to the culminating moment of "Toba Tek Singh":

Here behind barbed wires was Hindustan – there [identical] behind barbed wires Pakistan. In between, on the piece of land that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.

Leslie A. Flemming explains how Bishan Singh's death on the border allows him to reach his place of desire:

[H]ere Manto has used a delicately ambiguous ending in which the phrase 'lay Tobah Tek Singh,' refers both to the *man* nicknamed Tobah Tek Singh stretched out on the ground and to the piece of ground itself, which has become for him the *place* Tobah Tek Singh, where he most wants to be. Thus, in his death, he has finally reached his home in Tobah Tek Singh. (84)

Although in dying Bishan Singh, no doubt reaches, as Fleming points out, "his home", more significantly his death works against the purpose of the border. The refusal to cross the border and the stabilization of Bishan Singh's homeland negates the mobility that the border imposes on individuals and on places. Next, as the border dissolves, we also see the collapse of the spatial oppositions created by it. The first of these oppositions comes up as the two countries – India and Pakistan – that Manto describes as extensions of the "barbed wires". The author places himself between "here" and "there" and speaks from the perspective of the no man's land. While choosing the same spot as the dead man aligns the author with Bishan Singh and establishes

Manto's sympathies with the dead man's cause, his specific reference to the "barbed wires" also tells us of the dependence of these countries on what the "barbed wires" stand for – the border.

The other opposition is between a place name and a place having no name. The name of Toba Tek Singh is of an unknown location, and its spatial mobility is presented through the person of Bishan Singh. Conversely "this piece of land" – though spatially demarcated by "barbed wires" on both sides – is nameless ("that had no name"). Bishan Singh's death brings about their meeting, unifying their difference and causing the border to collapse: Toba Tek Singh finds a location at the same time as the no man's land finds a name. Without a valid border, the two countries cease to exist. Toba Tek Singh (alias Bishan Singh) lying on the no man's land acts as a refusal to exist within the economy of the border – both have been annexed from the daunting containment of the "barbed wires".

As a parable for the process of partition Bishan Singh's permanent quest for Toba Tek Singh's location can, as Ramu Nagappan points out, definitely be seen as explaining Rushdie's interest in Manto. It after all presents an idea "that fills Rushdie's own oeuvre: the idea of home."¹¹⁸ In addition to Nagappan's postulation I would argue that as a form of "political critique, [when] 'Toba Tek Singh' explodes the key terms 'territory' and 'nation' that underlay both the rationale for Partition and the construction of national consciousness" (78), it does so by this recurring textual quest for the entity of Toba Tek Singh that can't be possibility located in either Pakistan or Hindustan. Besides becoming a "metaphor for the predicament of dislocation, citizenship, and national belonging" (Nagappan 88- 9), that challenges

¹¹⁸ Ramu Nagappan, *Speaking Havoc: Social Suffering and South Asian Narratives* (Seattle: U of Washington Press, 2005) 87.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah's (Pakistan's founder) and Jawaharlal Nehru's (India's first Prime Minister) ideas of a nation, this short story shows also the interrelatedness of location and identity.

In an insistence on the eponymous state of the place and the man, the homophonic and homonymous entities of Toba Tek Singh should not be understood as undifferentiated replicas of each other, but instead as good explanations of the dual play of the word "incontournable"¹¹⁹ in Glissant's often-quoted refrain of "lieu est incontournable"¹²⁰ – variously translated as "Place cannot be ignored" or "place cannot be avoided" or "place is uncircumventable" The word "incontournable" means, as J. M. Dash points out that "lieu" "place can neither be gotten rid of nor can its contours even become fully known."

In being quizzed about its location, just as one has trouble giving the contours of Toba Tek Singh (despite paradoxically locating it in Bishan Singh the interlocutor), so do the authorities realize the futility of ignoring the location of Toba Tek Singh, as well as of their attempts to relocate Bishan Singh. When Bishan Singh is finally told by the Pakistani officer at the border that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan, his intransigent refusal to go away from the no man's land, where he eventually dies – lying down after remaining on his swollen feet for fifteen years – is the refusal to recognize the decoupling of identity and location that would concede to nation state the power to define Toba Tek Singh – both the man and the place. In other words, this location of Toba Tek Singh demands attention to its undefinability. Despite numerous

¹¹⁹ Dash says: "...as Glissant never ceases to affirm, 'le lieu est incontournable' - meaning that place can neither be gotten rid of nor can its contours even become fully known" (113). J M Dash, rev. of Soundings in French Caribbean Writing since 1950, the Shock of Space and Time, by Mary Gallagher, International Fiction Review 32.1-2 (2005): 112-114.

Bongie translates this as "sense of place is uncircumventable." Chris Bongie, Islands and Exiles: the Creole Identities of Post/colonial Literature (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 434.

¹²⁰ Edouard Glissant, Tout-Monde (Paris: Gallimard, 1993) 513.

implorations by Bishan Singh, the God in the asylum – an inmate with this self-pleasing delusion – refuses to decide on Toba Tek Singh’s location. He was no doubt “very busy because he had to issue numerous other orders” (145). Contrasted against God’s inaction that kept Toba Tek Singh in a state of constant limbo, Bishan Singh’s death supplants the awaited speech act as it finally anchors Toba Tek Singh on the border. Counteracting the many futile implorations against an indecision that located Toba Tek Singh “neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan” because God hadn’t “yet issued the orders,” Bishan Singh’s interjection between the two countries also marks yet another border – that of contested ontology where the dynamics of identity are being determined. With its creation, as this border stands as a reminder of the material history that formed it, so does Toba Tek Singh’s conception as placed on the frontiers of these two countries show their limits (both meanings) and signals the realignment of the battle lines of identitarian struggle alongside national boundaries where the simple religion-based classification underpinning the story stands negated. Instead of it vacillating as a function of India and Pakistan, thus forcing all to constantly reposition it, Toba Tek Singh as realigned along the axis of Bishan Singh’s subjectivity re-emerges as a contesting site that fractures these nation states as the determining paradigm.

But if this change is carried out at the border at sunrise with Bishan Singh’s death, it definitely has not happened overnight. Even at those moments when Bishan Singh’s body seemed dominated it was manifesting its allegiance to a historical process imbued with a transformative potential. His body, in instinctive tune with the visitations of his friends and family, has been registering both space and the passage of time. Once a month he would “somehow sense” and “tell the guard that it was time for his ‘visit’. He would give himself a good bath, scrub his body with soap, oil his hair and comb it, and ask for the clothes he only wore for these visits” (145). The usual un-

groomed “sparse and scraggly” (144) *kes*,¹²¹ because he bathed very little are in contrast with his primness that results from an intuitive ablution schedule. This should not have been called the story of a madman who “had no notion of the passage of time, what day or month it was or how many years had passed” (145). Instead the instinctive covering of his body in new clothes uncovers a social dynamic where Bishan Singh through his bodily awareness and preparation displays on his body an inherently automatic social space that clocks his moments of communion with and within a social context, in effect exemplifying Ross’ spatial understanding of Marxist displacement, such that the true effect of events (like the Commune of Paris) is to be felt on the changes provoked in the “lived rhythms and social ambiances” (*Rimbaud* 39). Bishan Singh’s body, no doubt exists as one such space, because it promises the ability to register an evolving social dynamics, to recall the historical content that has forever been in motion to shape its contours. His interactions with his old neighbor Fazal Deen do just this by identifying him as a larger space that exists within an ever-evolving historical context.

Initially, “all spruced up” Bishan Singh “would go to see his visitors” (145). “[A] few days before the exchange” though, when Fazal Deen came to visit, contrasting his instinctive sociality, Bishan Singh “turned away to one side and then started to leave but the guards stopped him” (146). The absence of the intuition (the guards had to inform him: “This is your friend Fazal Deen. He has come to see you”; 146) is already particularly surprising. The hitherto unforeseen bodily refusal – “turned away” – only reinforces this lack of corporeal preparation that has accompanied such visits. This un-present effaced body, devoid of the earlier societal connection comes up on the backdrop of the spatial “confusion” that has caused, as I

¹²¹ Allowing one’s *Kes*, or hair, to grow without any hindrances is an integral part of the Sikh religion.

pointed out earlier, the destabilization of Sialkot and Lahore, and even India and Pakistan. The absent body at a moment of similar search for Toba Tek Singh's bearings, signals a coordinate-less analogous space that through this refusal, or rather its inability of social connection, registers the larger spatial un-anchoring. These mutual ties with the larger spatial context are especially relevant because they lay the groundwork for understanding Bishan Singh's body as the container of sociality that has the reciprocal ability of extending itself against the violence, to contain the political space that has been destabilizing it. A transactional geography, Bishan Singh's body is the site at which the definitions of the political and private space are dissolved; a site that while aptly demonstrating the loss of an earlier connection with Fazal Deen is also a site of action that makes feasible the re-location of Toba Tek Singh.

During his stay at the asylum Bishan Singh had not slept a wink and not even once did he lay down to rest. In his "feet and ankles [that] were swollen from standing all the time" (144), exists an eternal mobility within the familiar confines of the asylum. The reticent "swollen" feet and ankles are suggestive of an exhaustion in progress. The socially mutable hair that can be washed and the body that is bathed, is replicated in the constant vigilance of this swelling that through an incessant movement (of fifteen years) gathers in its increasing volume a social preparedness. The impending relocation across the border displays and justifies the need for this attenuated awareness. A part of Bishan Singh's madness, these un-reposed legs are the redemptive solution to the spatial relations of which they stand as reminders. Connected to the social body of Bishan Singh, they complete the picture of the human body as a bi-directional osmosis that is reflecting and reflects back upon the larger spatial context to which it belongs.

Manto's is a story of transformation that is written along the loss of what Gilmartin calls the "cultural meaning of that sense of place" (1064). This physical contact that reflects back upon and transforms the border by locating Toba Tek Singh also reminds us that these nation states with their barbed wires of exclusion cannot in fact, in their divisive efforts, override the definitions of human lived space "as something which our bodies reactivate, and which through this reactivation, in turn modifies and transforms us" (*Rimbaud* 42). It is the synonymy between the no man's land and the colonial subject that has drawn our attention. The death that locates Toba Tek Singh also marks the border as the site of cross over into the territory of action where the process of locating Toba Tek Singh illustrates how exactly to limit the border.

Bishan Singh on learning that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan goes and stands resolutely "on his swollen legs at a spot in the middle in a posture that seemed to suggest that no power [on earth]¹²² could now move him from there" (148). Right before sunrise, he emits a deafening cry and soldiers discover him dead "lying on his face" after remaining "on his legs, day and night for fifteen years."

The madman infiltrates the separatist border to reveal its madness as also he disrupts it: the dead body "lying on his face" through its contact reminds us of considering it in spatial definitions as it realigns the border. Much beyond a simplistic change in posture, this definitive fusion is the permeation of that piece of land with Toba Tek Singh's (and Bishan Singh's) history. The border as a stand-alone captor of spatial definitions is as exhausted as are the analogous swollen legs. Both Bishan Singh and the border stop existing in favor of this relocated Toba Tek Singh on the no

¹²² No mention of "earth" is to be found in the original Urdu text. I put "on earth" in parentheses to highlight its presence, introduced by the translator, perhaps to accentuate the degree of this "power." And, although in a spatial context where the larger definition of space is in question this "world" presents a great opportunity to comment on this "power," I choose to respect the constraints imposed by the original Urdu story.

man's land. It is their mutual collapsing into each other that brings out the fusing of two analogous spaces and also displays not only their mutual interaction but also the question of space in general that cannot exist in exclusion of human spatiality.

At the border, Bishan Singh's body has undergone a liberating transformation. It is no longer the disoriented detached space whose sort is being whimsically decided by the all-powerful border. The spatial "confusion" of the beginning of the story has found a solution through the direct implication of Bishan Singh's body in the (re)production of (a new) space. In the movement pulling Bishan Singh towards itself one can trace both the line of power and the border's workings. But, the fusion with the border deploys the reverse inflection of the human onto the spatial. At stake is not the replacement of one dominant spatiality for another – the demands of the colonial subject dictating topography instead of the other way round. Instead the border, in this tight binding of the corporeal and the topographical, also a binding of the coordinateless Toba Tek Singh with the fixed border, is to be understood as resituated within a larger paradigm of space where it stands analogous to Bishan Singh's body; both of them contained in each other.

The opposition dominant in this story – between a local place contained in Bishan Singh and the overpowering colonial spatiality exercised by the border; between the nation state and the dislocated Toba Tek Singh; between the desire of a spatial religious homogenization defined by the barbed wires and the multiplicity of the asylum – gets diffused into a space where the colonial operation of a determinative spatiality is converted to this larger reciprocating one. Such that even in distinguishing the man, the topography and the border we cannot separate them from each other.

The concluding paragraph of the story aptly demonstrates this evolution towards understanding of the mutual containment of the colonial subject and colonial space: "Bishan Singh" of the third-last sentence becomes a "man...lying on his face."

The ambiguity of the culminating sentence (“In between, on a bit of land that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.”) that makes it impossible to say if it was Toba Tek Singh the man or Toba Tek Singh the village that lay there dissolves the tension that has till this time in the story been central to the tiff between Toba Tek Singh and the border.

If this moment in its ambiguity brings all the Toba Tek Singhs (the story, the place, and Bishan Singh) to their ends thereby also illustrating – rather literally – Ross’ point above about social space “as something which our bodies reactivate, and which through this reactivation, in turn modifies and transforms us,” it does so simultaneously by answering the ethico-political question of how to inhabit a space forever changed by colonialism but that still demands articulation. In this light, the ambiguity among the various Toba Tek Singhs results not so much in an uncertain articulation but rather in the possibility of constructing multiple strategic spatialities such that none can exist without reckoning with the others.

The question mark that such a signifier as Toba Tek Singh has become at this point in the story, in its forever shifting relationship with multiple signifieds becomes especially relevant for the postcolonial context. It accommodates the articulation of a forever-changing social spatiality that cannot be enunciated after the introduction of this dominating border. It is towards a purposefully constructed space of literature and language that “Toba Tek Singh” is gesturing, where in order to engage with a social space that is much beyond topography one has to strategically (re)locate Toba Tek Singh working at the frontiers – both linguistic as well as political – that are the legacy of a colonial world.

In understanding the textual implications of this short story, it is the eponymous nature of the story and the protagonist that interests me. The question isn’t only about the paradoxical recounting, where with each passing word “Toba Tek Singh” the story finds its footing by ensuring that the location of Toba Tek Singh is

rendered increasingly ambiguous, neither is it about Bishan Singh's ironical search in a work with a title of an entity whose name he himself embodies. Saying that the "person becomes the place" and "towards the end of the story ... it is difficult to distinguish one from the other,"¹²³ is an insufficient statement that ignores the opening up of the literary as yet another site of struggle, which although differentiated from the other two Toba Tek Singhs is located via and indeed due to them. Differentiated also from the newly christened material site of the border, the story contests it by its very eponymous nature; both from within the border by fracturing its integrity (in naming the no man's land Toba Tek Singh) and from without (by commenting textually on the divisive Indo-Pak border).

That Toba Tek Singh can be moved and (re)moved and yet remain located throughout the story, and indeed due to the story itself, presents a remarkable opportunity of appreciating the indomitable multiple valence of the colonial subject Toba Tek Singh. Because Toba Tek Singh is first and foremost a multi-layered existence, trying to understand it, apprehend it by precisely locating it definitively and absolutely within an absolutist colonial matrix is impossible, is how I would read the slippery meanings of Toba Tek Singh. The many more layers it opens up are also the many more battle-fronts opposing the formation of the border as the ultimate and the only consequence of the colonial project. A story that presents a colonial subject who challenges the transformation imposed in crossing over the border, it also signals the cross over into the zone of performative language that even in recounting the grounding of the border within the dynamics of colonial identity offers an insight into its groundlessness through the realm of literature.

¹²³ Asaduddin, introduction, *For Freedom's Sake* XXXV.

If the concluding moment insists on the distinct ambiguity between the man and the place Toba Tek Singh, establishing their common ends at the border, it cannot do so without simultaneously meeting the ends of the short story. The emancipation that Toba Tek Singh's death presents is anticipated already in the title that even in presenting Toba Tek Singh's dislocation disrupts it by immortalizing both entities through the story "Toba Tek Singh." Paradoxically, in remaining antithetical to the very interruption of Toba Tek Singh that justifies its presence the story succeeds in calling our attention to a violence without succumbing to it. Toba Tek Singh may die or may remain destabilized, but "Toba Tek Singh" annuls their absence as it firmly establishes itself as "Toba Tek Singh" the literary work by subverting Toba Tek Singh's end to reach the end of the narrative.

In deploying the violence that kills Toba Tek Singh towards its own completion, the story "Toba Tek Singh" achieves its plenitude through a performative move that not only cancels the effect of this violence it also signals the literary as the site of a unique event that internally disrupts the very violence by deploying it against itself, thus becoming a loyal companion rival to this violence – the literary ends (with) this violence. Although the fatal energies of this violence forever remain on display, this ending provides for harnessing its reductive forces to build an alternative ending to the colonial story – an ending where "Toba Tek Singh" narrating (through and) of Toba Tek Singh's colonial death, calls our attention, not to a hollowed out subjectivity, but to the insubordinate assertion in terms other than those used by a violent colonial subjugation.

Jonathan Culler points out that "literary critics have embraced the notion of the performative as one that helps to characterize literary discourse"¹²⁴ and inherent in this

¹²⁴ "Literary critics have embraced the notion of the performative as one that helps to characterize literary discourse. Theorists have long asserted that we must attend to what literary language does as much as to what it says, and the concept of the performative provides a linguistic and philosophical justification for this idea: there is a class of utterances that above all do something. Like the

notion of the performative is the conception “of literature as an act or event” then it becomes easy to understand “Toba Tek Singh” as an emancipatory performative speech act that takes “its place among the acts of language that transform the world” (Culler 96). “Toba Tek Singh” is a literary act that founds one of many zones of resistance that “transform the world” by defying the imposed change in subjectivity implicit in crossing an arbitrary and imposed border.

Through the merging of the location, the man and the story we have the site of literature that retains Toba Tek Singh in a state of invincibility and contests any attempts at its stability. Bishan Singh’s numerous questions about the location of Toba Tek Singh are not the search of a lost homeland. For even as some readers with a regional geo-political familiarity might know that it is Pakistan, the new border ensures that Toba Tek Singh is forever lost; it cannot be located in essence but only re-located as a site of strategic contestation identifying “a discursively produced resurgent subjectivity that is volatile, polyglot and unconcerned with discovering the persistence of an original state.”¹²⁵ What Parry’s conception reminds us and what “Toba Tek Singh” performatively demonstrates is not an uncontaminated Toba Tek Singh where Bishan Singh’s origins lie, but the space over which the colonial subject has to be imperatively re-invented, to negate the colonial power while exhausting the colonizing paradigm and at the same time retaining local specificity. “Toba Tek Singh” is just such a fictional space that best displays how to affirm a topographical space without its negatory frontiers. If the postcolonial nation-states bound, through

performative, the literary utterance does not refer to a prior state of affairs and is not true or false. The literary utterance too creates the state of affairs to which it refers, in several respects... The notion of literature as performative contributes to a defence of literature: literature is not frivolous pseudo-statements but takes its place among the acts of language that transform the world, bringing into being the things that they name.” Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 96.

¹²⁵ Benita Parry, “Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism,” in Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004): 39.

their limiting borders the subject's identity, the literary alternative abounds in possibilities and reminds us of the ethical postcolonial necessity of producing a purposefully fictional subjectivity (upending the violence without reproducing an essence) that disrupts internally the hegemonic colonialism within (and with) whose boundaries one is enduring.

CHAPTER 3

TEXACO: MARIE SOPHIE'S JOURNEY FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER

Texaco,¹²⁶ Patrick Chamoiseau's third novel, hit the Parisian literary scene in 1992 and earned him the prestigious Prix Goncourt thereby ensuring him a permanent place in the annals of literature. In Parisian intellectual circles, *Texaco* has also been the cause of many discussions. Some have seen Chamoiseau's innovative literature as a further proof of his belonging to the French tradition. They have called *Texaco* "une affirmation d'appartenance à la culture française dans sa diversité."¹²⁷ Yet others point out in his work an intellectual and a political desire that yearns to separate Martinican literature from all signs of the exterior. "'Chamoiseau' symbolise dans la Martinique des années 1990, plus encore qu'une école littéraire, un mouvement politique... qui se propose... d' 'exorciser' la littérature martiniquaise 'de la vieille fatalité de l'extériorité'."¹²⁸ These varying reviews testify that with *Texaco* Chamoiseau has become "incontestablement un des auteurs les plus prometteurs de la jeune garde antillaise."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). Quotations from *Texaco* appear with their corresponding page numbers.

¹²⁷ Josyane Savigneau, "Chamoiseau, le 'marqueur de paroles'," *Le Monde des livres* 04 Sept. 1992.

¹²⁸ Joseph Nnadi, "Mémoire d'Afrique, mémoire biblique: la congruence des mythes du nègre dans *Texaco* de Patrick Chamoiseau," *Études Francophones* 15.1 (2000): 75.

¹²⁹ Kathleen Gyssels, "Du titre au roman: *Texaco* de Patrick Chamoiseau," *Roman 20-50: Revue d'Étude du Roman du XX^e siècle* 20 (Dec.1995): 121.

Texaco opens with an urban planner – working to dismantle a hutment - being hit on his head by a stone. The injured government employee is taken to Marie-Sophie Laborieux, the protagonist. From this point on Marie-Sophie starts recounting her story. She takes the reader forward with a spin back into time, starting with the killing of her slave grandfather at the hands of his master. It is a story that spans over four hundred pages and recounts the loves, lives and travails of Marie-Sophie and her father. The protagonist spends the last leg of her life setting up and saving her hutment - Texaco; “...avec pour seule arme la persuasion de ma parole, qui devrais mener seule – à mon âge – la décisive bataille pour la survie de Texaco” (38).

The title Texaco as spatial and linguistic appropriation

Texaco, the title of the novel, is a signifier at the intersection of several signifieds. It is the name of the oil company that has its oil depots on the beach of the island of Martinique. Marie-Sophie on discovering the site and enamored by its “magical”¹³⁰ qualities, decides to make it home, and she sets up her hutment there. These oil depots and the land on which they are placed both belong to a French-speaking white man who is determined to have Marie-Sophie evicted. Her relentless efforts to come back ensure her victory over the “oil-béké”¹³¹ and forces him to sell his land to the town council. The inhabitants of the hutment succeed in appropriating the oil company land.

The company goes but the name remains – the hutment is called Texaco. With Texaco as the name for both the oil depot and the hutment, the title of the novel

¹³⁰ “Le ciel. La mer. La terre. Les mornes. Les vents. L’endroit était magique” (326).

¹³¹ “**békés** white Creoles of Martinique, descendants of old established colonial planter families. Fluent in Creole, they speak accented French” (Glossary 397).
Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

becomes the signifier of their struggle. By using the company's name the residents are able to extend their topographical victory to the toponym. From being passively designated by the name, they snatch it from the oil company to use as their own. Instead of the name naming the topography, the resident's struggle and their ensuing victory, gets projected on to the name.

To start with, Texaco is the name of an American oil company but as the novel closes, this name belongs to the Creole speaking inhabitants of the hutment, thus showing their appropriation of Texaco within a Creole reality. The name of the novel then represents not a nominal category but a process – that of a reversal of appropriation. The process encompasses within it the struggle of how a hutment wrests naming power from a far more powerful entity. The real victory in the novel, comes not with the occupation of the land, but through a subversion of the signifier that defines it.

The process of appropriation described in the plot of the novel is analogous to its writing process. Throughout the novel, the reader faces a mixture of both French and Martinican Creole. Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo and Elizabeth Wilson point out that “one of the major effects of the novel is the way in which he (Chamoiseau) plays with/on languages. The text is replete with puns, word-play, a variety of linguistic registers, code-switching, blurring the distinctions and complicating the relationship between French and Martinican Creole, creating what Milan Kundera in an earlier review of Chamoiseau's work called ‘Chamoisified¹³² French’.”¹³³

¹³² “Celui-ci a pris à l'égard du français une liberté qu'aucun de ses contemporains en France ne peut même imaginer oser prendre ... Chamoiseau n'a pas fait un compromis entre le français et le créole en les mélangeant. Sa langue, c'est le français, bien que transformé ; non pas créolisé (aucun Martiniquais ne parle comme ça) mais chamoisé...” Milan Kundera, “Beau comme une rencontre multiple,” *Infini* 34 (Summer 1991): 58.

N'zengou-Tayo has something similar in mind: “...Chamoiseau plays with both French and Creole, stitching the two languages in linguistic ‘quilt’ that allows a pattern for the emergence of his own style.”

Marie-José N'zengou-Tayo, “Literature and Diglossia: The Poetics of French and Creole ‘Interlect’ in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 43.4 (1997): 94.

Appropriating Creole

In his earlier novels, *Chronique des Sept Misères*¹³⁴ and *Solibo Magnifique*,¹³⁵ Chamoiseau raises issues associated with the Creole language and culture. In both these novels — written in French — he explores Creole’s relationship with French. He crystallizes his position in *Eloge de la Créolité*,¹³⁶ an essay that Chamoiseau co-authored with Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant. N’zengou-Tayo and Wilson point out how this essay later became the basis of *Texaco*: “Chamoiseau is faithful to the aims set out in their manifesto (*Eloge*).” Jacques Coursil also suggests that *Eloge* appears as another character in *Texaco*. “Ce personnage implicite s’appelle ‘Eloge de la Créolité’.”¹³⁷

Incidentally the very usage of the word “creole” to speak of “Créolité” in *Eloge* stands as an example of how appropriation is carried out in the novel *Texaco*. Creole as a noun, refers to both a particular idiom¹³⁸ and a subject. H. Adlai Murdoch,¹³⁹ relying on the definition given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, proffers

¹³³ Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo and Elizabeth Wilson, “Translators on a Tight Rope: The Challenges of Translating Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*,” *TTR: Traduction, terminologie, rédaction: Etudes sur le texte et ses transformations* 13.2 (2000): 90-1.

¹³⁴ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chronique des sept misères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

¹³⁵ Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo magnifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

¹³⁶ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). Henceforth referred to as *Eloge*.

¹³⁷ Jacques Coursil, “L’Eloge de la muette,” *Césure, 11, Revue de la convention psychanalytique* (1997): 149-166.

¹³⁸ “La notion de *créole* a évolué avec les connaissances linguistiques; d’abord péj. (*cf.* étymol. et hist.), le mot désigne aujourd’hui un système linguistique autonome, d’origine mixte, issu du contact d’une langue européenne avec des langues indigènes ou importées (Antilles), devenu langue maternelle et langue principale d’une communauté (p. oppos. à *pidgin* et à *sabir*).” “Creole,” *Le Trésor*, 10 March 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

¹³⁹ H. Adlai Murdoch, *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001).

a Creole subject defined in its racial ambivalence: ““In the West Indies and other parts of America, Mauritius, etc.: *orig.* a person born and naturalized in the country, but of European (usually Spanish or French) or of African Negro race: the name having no connotation of colour, and in its reference to origin being distinguished on the one hand from born in Europe (or Africa), and on the other hand from aboriginal.’ In this way a creole person can be either white or black, colonizer or colonized, articulating an essential ambiguity” (4).

A consultation of *Le Trésor de la Langue Française* gives us a different definition of ‘Creole’: “(Personne) qui est de race blanche, d’ascendance européenne, originaire des plus anciennes colonies d’outre-mer. *Planteur créole, populations créoles; un créole, une créole... —P. ext. Nègre, noir créole.* Né dans les colonies (et non en Afrique).” Both the definitions jointly validate Murdoch’s claim of a Creole subject marked by “essential ambiguity.” OED’s definition projects an ambiguity with reference to race by positing an equality between all those it designates, be it “white or black, colonizer or colonized.” In recognizing both “race blanche” and “noire” *Le Trésor de la Langue Française* too addresses a racially ambivalent Creole subject. But this latter definition also embodies a race hierarchy – it gives primacy to the white subject and defines a black Creole as its extension. This difference between two dictionaries, one French and one English, should not be passed off as the result of dissimilar world views. While on the one hand it justifies Coursil’s advice for prudence (“La légitimité ou illégitimité de l’emploi du mot ‘créole’ en dehors de la sphère littéraire fait appel à la compétence du sujet parlant” ; 164). On the other hand, it also serves to strengthen Murdoch’s conclusion. It shows how the ambiguity of a Creole subject can assume different forms.

Racial ambivalence though, wasn’t always what defined the usage of ‘creole’. According to Confiant, up until the appearance of *Eloge*, this word had clear racial

connotations. While in its adjectival form it covered all aspects of Martinican life, as a noun creole spoke only of a white subject. Before *Eloge*:

...the word Creole was booby-trapped. French dictionaries defined Creole as ‘a white person of pure race born in the Antilles’; the Bekes-white Martinicans-had monopolized the term, so for most Martinicans, Creole meant ‘white.’ They didn’t see any contradiction in refusing to call themselves Creole although they called their cuisine, their songs, even their language Creole. So we had to explain to them. ‘Everything you do is Creole; the proof is that you speak Creole; you call your jewelry Creole, you call your clothes Creole; it’s not Bekes who do that, it’s you!’¹⁴⁰

In this remark we are told that the notion of Creole presented a contradiction. It spoke only partially of the Martinican ground reality, and thus became a site that manifested racial imbalance. Confiant talks of redefining Creole to re-align it with the Martinican reality. Chamoiseau et. al, the authors of *Eloge*, subvert this word from its contemporary usage to divest it of all racial connotations and make it the basis of their identity. The implications of this shift get reflected in the opening sentence of *Eloge*:

Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons
Créoles. (13)

The above quote, in trying to contrast “Créole” with other racial identities, seems to advocate creole essentialism. The authors of the *Eloge*, point to the contrary by saying that they use the state of being Creole – “Creolité” – to distance themselves from all ideas of essence and of racial identities. As Luciano C. Picanço tells us; “Créole, ainsi, définit ce qu’ils sont par l’exclusion des totalitarismes divisionnaires pratiquées par l’idéologie occidentale. Créole est un terme de réunion de divers composants et de répulsion de la prééminence d’un composant sur les autres. On est créole indépendamment des quantités raciales, culturelles, sociales et autres qui la

¹⁴⁰ Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Jean Bernabé, interview with Lucien Taylor “Créolité Bites: A Conversation with Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphael Confiant, and Jean Bernabé,” *Transition* 74 (Summer 1997): 133.

composent. La créolisation doit être envisagée à partir de son côté culturel, identitaire et social, et jamais ayant comme base le racial.”¹⁴¹ It must also be pointed out that this “Créolité”, the key component of *Eloge*, is determined by the idiom Creole: “Notre culture créole ... Véritable galaxie en formation autour de la langue créole comme noyau, la Créolité connaît ...” (*Eloge* 34).

In Confiant’s quote the signifier “créole”, employed to demonstrate racial equality in *Eloge*, is appropriated and subverted from its French dictionary usage. This manipulation signals the linguistic strategy of *Texaco* that is reflected in the essay’s opening. The first sentence of *Eloge*, though talking about the authors distancing themselves from Europe and placing Creole at the heart of their identity, is itself written in French. It is reminiscent of the way the name of the novel, *Texaco*, works. The name of a big multinational company is staked as a signifier to designate the placement of a hutment. Correspondingly, in *Texaco*, Chamoiseau uses French to speak of creoleness. The novel abounds in Creole phrases and a syntactical structure meant to perplex its reader. In an interview¹⁴² conducted with one of the English translators of *Texaco*, Chamoiseau talks of how Creole is used in the novel to communicate the opacity of Martinican Creole identity for others.

...speaking of *Texaco*, many people say: ‘I don’t understand,’ ‘some of the things are beyond my reach,’ ... and so on. People don’t accept the fact that a narration may have opaque, unintelligible, untranslatable zones which are maybe true for me and do correspond to realities which mean nothing to them, which are opaque to them. And so I had to impose certain things. In that spirit, I don’t put glossaries in my books, ... I include the Creole words as they are. I don’t translate them, etc. (347)

¹⁴¹ Luciano C. Picanço, Vers un concept de littérature nationale martiniquaise: Evolution de la littérature martiniquaise au XXème siècle—Une étude sur l’oeuvre d’Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau et Raphaël Confiant (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 74.

¹⁴² Patrick Chamoiseau, interview with Rose-Myriam Réjouis, “A reader in the Room: Rose-Myriam Réjouis Meets Patrick Chamoiseau,” Callaloo 22.2 (1999).

Coursil would describe Chamoiseau's approach in *Texaco*, as symptomatic of Antillean literature, where "la littérature antillaise est bilingue (français, anglais). C'est une langue double dont l'une est muette: elle s'écrit en français, le créole jouant le rôle de la muette"(149). *Texaco*, takes the project Chamoiseau demarcates in *Eloge de la Créolité* to its logical conclusion by making French sing the praise of its silent partner, Creole. Similarly, the title of the novel stands as a testament to how the hutment of *Texaco*, silences the company *Texaco* by subverting its name.

Another word, which mirrors the process of appropriation projected by Creole and the title of the novel, is *En-ville*. This Creole expression is not to be confused as an exact translation of the French signifier *Ville*. It means "Literally, the 'In-city'" (*Texaco*. trans., Translators' note, 3). It should mostly be understood as a part of the urban space – the center around which exist, as in the case of this novel, the various slum quarters. Marqueur de Paroles, the putative author inscribed in the narrative of the novel takes the trouble to explain the significance of "En-ville."

La langue créole ne dit pas 'la ville', elle dit 'l'En-ville': *Man ka désann an-vil, I ka rété an-vil, Misté sé jan an-vil, An-vil Fodfwans...*¹⁴³ L'En-ville désigne ainsi non pas une géographie urbaine bien repérable, mais essentiellement un contenu, donc, une sorte de projet. Et ce projet, ici, était d'exister. (422)

The quote above tells us that *En-ville* has to be understood as the spatial rendition of an affective aspiration. It is not a place but an idea, a venture, an undertaking i.e. a project. Coursil suggests that the signifier *En-ville* communicates Creole's yearning to take over both the city and the French language in the same move. "Un simple trait de nasalité différencie la sémantique des deux langues: 'lavil' (français, aspect affectum) est un lieu, 'lãvil' (créole, aspect effectum), une conquête, un désir. Dans cette guerre

¹⁴³ Translators of *Texaco* translate this Creole sentence as: "I am going down to City, He lives in city. This fellow is from City, from Fort-de-France" (*Texaco* trans., 386).

de quartier, métaphore du conflit des langues, le français sort marqué par la trace de la muette” (162). En-ville represents a triumph over “ville” and thus over the French idiom. In a novel devoted to spatial conflict, this usage makes us aware of the desire to replicate this linguistic victory over the topographical space that the word Ville designates.

Texaco-A spatial metaphor

In addressing a French “marqué par la trace de la muette” Coursil is clearly giving us another definition for the adjective “chamoisified” proposed by Milan Kundera. More importantly when Coursil signals the existence of this spatial war as a metaphor for a linguistic conflict, he conveys that the relationship shared by Creole and French could be better understood by taking into consideration the location of the hutment of Texaco vis-à-vis the city of Fort de France. We notice that “the Town Hall [is] located at the heart of power in the affluent ‘centre-ville’ while Texaco sprawls miserably around the periphery of the town”¹⁴⁴ in the mangrove swamp on the fringes (“nos cases échassières dans la mangrove visqueuse”; 28). A clear correspondence is established between Texaco’s spatial orientation in relation to En-ville and the linguistic association between Creole and French. The periphery/center arrangement metaphorically denotes the marginal relationship of Creole to French. This spatial representation of the linguistic connection is made explicit by one of the notes written by the Urban Planner to Marqueur de Paroles:

Au centre, une logique urbaine occidentale, alignée, ordonnée, forte comme la langue française. De l’autre, le foisonnement ouvert de la langue créole dans la logique de Texaco. Mêlant ces deux langues,

¹⁴⁴ Lorna Milne, “From Créolité to Diversalité: The Postcolonial Subject in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*,” ed. Paul Giffort and Johnnie Gratton, *Subject Matters: Subject and Self in French Literature from Descartes to the present* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000) 166.

rêvant de toutes les langues, la ville créole parle en secret un langage
neuf et ne craint plus Babel. (242-243)

A spatial replication of the center-periphery relationship between the two languages is made abundantly obvious in the above quote where En-ville with its penchant to organize and its yearning for order represents the French culture, whereas, Texaco located in the outskirts (“bordure d’En-ville”; 416) is described by the excessive abundance of Creole.¹⁴⁵ One of Ti-Cirique’s notes to the *Marqueur de Paroles*, while establishing that the hutment signifies Creole, further nuances this spatial equation. This self-described “Universal” character in desiring to use “un français plus français que celui des Français” presents us the French language as a representative of the “Universal”. “A écrire ... l’on m’eût vu *Universel*, ... exaltant d’un français plus français que celui des Français, les profondeurs du pourquoi de l’homme ... mais nullement comme tu le fais, encossé dans les nègreries de ta Créolité ou dans le fibrociment décrépi des murs de Texaco” (19).

It is with the acceptance of the peripheral spatial entity of the hutment into En-ville (“...l’En-ville intégrerait l’âme de Texaco”; 417), that the novel meets its objective. A relationship based on hierarchy is eradicated, and as Lorna Milne points out, the hutment will be “different from – but equal to – the metropolitan Center” (167). The novel shows us how in many ways the periphery is able to assert its equality with the center. Milne’s conclusion about the spatiality of the novel also stands for the linguistic binary proposed by it – Creole, which comes from the margins is recognized as an equal and is to be reconciled with the center – French. *Texaco* makes the margin the center of our agenda and shows it to us by making the

¹⁴⁵ It must also be noted that duRivage sees in the Mangrove swamp a metaphor for the Creole people: “The mangrove swamp is also the metaphor for the hybridity of Creole society. It is a place where land and sea, animal and vegetable meet. Because of these contradictions, it is a metaphor for the Créole people.” Françoise duRivage, “*Texaco*: From the Hills to the Mangrove Swamps,” *Thamyris* 6.1 (Spring 1999) 41.

topographical space represent metaphorically the relationship between the two idioms at stake.

A Performative Literary Space

As if in a performative moment, the literary space of the novel *Texaco* too is shown replicating this relationship of the periphery to the center. The broad agenda of the story of the novel – the struggle being fought for the margins of the city of Fort de France – has been laid out in the novel’s “edge” – i.e in its epigraph. “I will define the epigraph roughly as a quotation placed *en exergue* [in the exergue] ... at the *edge* of the work, generally closest to the text” (Genette, *Paratexts* 144). Since “the use of an epigraph is always a mute gesture whose interpretation is left up to the reader” (156), let us point to this “edge” as a site which “consists of commenting on the *text*, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes” (157). Chamoiseau uses quotes by two authors, Edouard Glissant and Hector Bianciotti, as epigraph, to announce the parameters of his work.

Que rappellera ici le scribe qui ne rappelle à travers elle le sévère
destin de toutes ces femmes condamnées aux maternités perpétuelles,
expertes à déchiffrer les prophéties du vent, des crépuscules ou du halo
brumeux qui parfois semble émaner de la lune, pour prévoir le temps
de chaque jour et les travaux à entreprendre ; ces femmes qui, luttant à
l'égal des hommes pour leur subsistance, firent ce qu'on appelle une
patrie et que les calendriers réduisent à quelques dates bruyantes, à
certaines vanités dont souvent les rues portent le nom? (11)

Hector Bianciotti

La ville était le sanctuaire de la parole, du geste, du combat.

*

Gibier...tu n'est qu'un nèg-bouk: c'est de là qu'il faut parler!...

Edouard Glissant

Of the three quotes the last two belong to Glissant and alert us to the strong affinity that Chamoiseau shares with the former, a fact verified by the dedication at the beginning of the book:

Pour Édouard Glissant

Pour Véra Kundera

... o estimés... (9)

As is often true for Chamoiseau's other works, the major framework of *Texaco* too is based on Glissant's thoughts: "En ce qui concerne les sources, ... la source des sources qu'est l'oeuvre de Glissant, la plupart des thèses qu'énonce *Texaco* ..." ¹⁴⁶ In fact it has also been pointed out that apart from being quoted in the epigraph, Glissant's presence in Chamoiseau's work manifests itself in many other ways. Delphine Perret elaborates: "... 'marqueur de paroles', personnage d'ethnographe inspiré de Glissant et mis en scène par Chamoiseau dans certains de ses romans, qui montre de temps à autre ce qu'il est en train de faire dans le texte même." ¹⁴⁷ Serving as homage to Glissant's contribution in Chamoiseau's work, this set of two quotes prepares the reader for the broad theoretical paradigm of *Texaco* and informs us of the novel's major preoccupations. They jointly attest to concerns with space and language:

La ville était le sanctuaire de la parole, du geste, du combat. (11)

The epigraph above inscribes the implications of Glissant's spatiality, as it comes up in *Texaco*. Divided into two parts it defines "city" in relation to the two concepts of "parole" and "combat." The second part of the quote ("de la parole, du geste et du combat"), enunciates the link between "parole" and "combat," and places the idea of their relation literally at its center – on the word "geste". Apart from meaning

¹⁴⁶ Richard Burton, Le Roman marron: Etudes sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997) 193.

¹⁴⁷ Delphine Perret, La Créolité: Espace de Création (Martinique: Ibis Rouge Editions, 2001) 13.

gesture,¹⁴⁸ geste alludes to the existence of the gallant actions of an epic hero and also the oral tradition associated with the recounting of these epics. “Geste”, by referring to the orality of the *chanson de geste*, helps us choose from among the number of definitions that “parole” conjures up. This parole is speech – orality associated with the heroic gesture.

The idea of combat, evoking the existence of an adversary, is closely related to the first part of the quote. The city offers a safe haven, a sanctuary, a chance at the resolution of conflicts. Syntactically, placed at the sentence-final position – the opposite end from “ville” – “combat” is connected to the first part of the quote by the “sanctuaire de la parole”, the sanctuary provided by oral speech. In other words, the city becomes a shelter, providing space for combat through the spoken word and ensuing action.

The similarity between this quote and Marie-Sophie’s project does not escape the reader. The protagonist of the novel wants acceptance by En-ville. Armed with the force of her words, she’s fighting for the survival and reconciliation of Texaco with the urban center: “avec pour seule arme la persuasion de ma parole, qui devrais mener seule – à mon âge – la décisive bataille pour la survie de Texaco” (38). Needless to say, she’s the epic hero in question for this novel, defined by her grand actions.

A juxtaposition of Marie-Sophie’s quote and the epigraph reveals the existence of a similar interaction between topographical space and language that the title of the novel already brought up. As Marie-Sophie points out, her conquest of l’En-ville comes about through her words (“notre conquête de l’En-ville ... contant ma vie” ; 38). Moreover, as I discussed above, one must remember that Texaco’s spatial orientation is an emblem for the correlation between the two linguistic idioms. This

¹⁴⁸ “...the French word *geste* means both “gesture” and *geste* as in *chanson de geste*, a collection of epic poems centered around the same hero” *Texaco* trans. Glossary, 399.

puts forth, an empowered oral speech defined as “arme.” Of the two binaries – spatiality (En-ville/periphery) and language (French/Creole) – it is the latter that is more important since it wins over space. Of the two appropriations presented in the title of the novel, the linguistic triumph takes precedence and is metaphorically presented through the spatial conflict. The novel should be read as topographical space representing the power of speech and not the reverse.

The definition and contours of this speech get further defined by Glissant’s second quote.

Gibier...tu n’est qu’un nèg-bouk: c’est de là qu’il faut parler!... (11)

The quote refers to Chamoiseau as “Gibier.”¹⁴⁹ By this reference, Glissant acknowledges the dialogue the two authors are engaged in. This address, suggesting a familiarity, reinforces the affinity between the two authors – a fact further verified by the usage of the informal pronoun “tu.” Interestingly, Chamoiseau quotes Glissant in the epigraph of *Texaco*, and the translators of the novel point out¹⁵⁰ that Glissant too names Chamoiseau “Gibier” in the epigraph of one his works. This dialogue then becomes not only about the recognition of margins, but also an intertextual dialogue being conducted in the margins of literature.

¹⁴⁹ Gibier, in French means game, including birds: “Tout animal que l'on chasse, le plus souvent pour sa chair. 1. *Terme générique, subst. coll., gén. au sing.* Ensemble des animaux sauvages à chair comestible estimée, en particulier oiseaux et mammifères à sang chaud.”

Le Trésor, 28 March 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

Glissant in addressing Chamoiseau as Gibier is playing on the presence of “Oiseau” (which in English means bird) in the names of both Chamoiseau and Oiseau-de-Cham, the putative author of *Texaco*.

Translators of *Texaco* explain the name Oiseau de Cham as:

“(lit., Bird of Shem ; phon., Bird of the Field) the shadowy (and unacknowledged) figure of the author. Appearing in previous works of Chamoiseau, he is always cast as a marginal character struggling with a study of martinican life (fr.Afterword). *Oiseau de Cham* is a word play on Chamoiseau (Cham-oiseau), the author’s name. The storyteller’s play on his own name is a traditional motif.” *Texaco* trans. Glossary, 400.

¹⁵⁰ “In one of the book’s epigraphs, Edouard Glissant, author of the seminal *Caribbean Discourse*, participates in that play by calling Chamoiseau (or Oiseau de Cham) “game.” *Texaco* trans. Glossary, 400.

The first thing that stands out in this sentence written in French is the use of the word “nèg-bouk” (city-blackman). The word is in Creole, followed by an instruction (“il faut”) to speak (“parler”) from the position of “nèg-bouk”¹⁵¹ – it defines the subjectivity Chamoiseau needs to assume in his work. The “là” then becomes doubly endowed; Chamoiseau must speak from the position of a “nèg-bouk,” a city black man defined by the idiom Creole. Secondly, the “là” specifically shows how he can, by speaking, reflect his subjectivity of a “nèg-bouk” – exactly as it has been done in this quote – by creolizing his French. Moreover, the inclusion of the quote above as an apostrophe, also acts as an injunction to the reader, putting the reader in a dialogue with the novel. It informs us, as it instructs Chamoiseau, about both the language and the subjectivity that the word “nèg-bouk” presents.

Additionally, “nèg-bouk,” brings up afresh the space of “Ville,” which, as Glissant’s earlier quote shows us, makes available the possibility of struggle through the spoken word. With an instruction to speak as a *city*-blackman, the “là” reiterates the importance of this urban space on subjectivity formation. Richard Burton notes that Chamoiseau seems to characterize the city as a true zone of resistance whereas Glissant is anti-city, he sees in it a factor that causes assimilation with France (“Assimilation dont le lieu même est la ville”; Burton 80). Elucidating the difference in conceptualization of the ‘Ville’ by the two authors, Burton points out: “Cela suffit pour indiquer que la vision romanesque et politique de Glissant est *anti-urbaine* en principe...il faudra attendre Patrick Chamoiseau pour qu’un écrivain martiniquais s’attache à vraiment comprendre la Ville et à déceler les comportements marrons qui se dessinent dans le centre même du système du pouvoir” (81). In ending the

¹⁵¹ Although it must be pointed out that là could also evoke “Gibier”. “‘You, game...are nothing but a city-blackman: that’s where you have to speak from!...’ a quotation from Edouard Glissant, because of the ambiguity of the English word, ‘game’ gives the reader no clue that it refers here to ‘gibier’ ...” (*Translators on a Tight Rope* 93).

epigraphs with a quote as an instruction, and furthering the discourse from thereon, Chamoiseau seemingly takes over the baton from Glissant.

The two epigraphs by Glissant jointly comment on the importance of the relation between spatiality and language. *Texaco*'s is a geography that reflects the movements of an idiom. From being a physically abstract space, the quotes suggest the invocation of city as both a product and a metaphoric designator. More specifically, they highlight the performative of space, which registers the force of language – space is influenced and becomes at the same time an influencing factor in the novel *Texaco*. These two quotes only verify the stakes the title *Texaco* has demonstrated for us – the novel is the site of both linguistic and spatial manifestation.

Marie-Sophie as Texaco

And this dual implication of the title has rightly been recognized by the large corpus of research devoted to illuminating the importance of space and language in *Texaco*.¹⁵² But this title also stands as the signifier for yet another entity – Marie-Sophie. On discovering for the first time the oil company's property, the protagonist decides to make it her home. Concurrently she also gives herself a secret name: "*Je me nommai un nom secret*" (326), which is revealed only at the end of the novel to be that of the oil company *Texaco* ("...que jamais en aucun temps, ...on n'enlève à ce lieu son nom de TEXACO...nom secret qui – je te l'avoue enfin – n'est autre que celui-là"; 417-8). This self-christening adds another dimension to the meaning of the already multi-layered title of the novel. Beyond language and space, *Texaco* also becomes the signifier that cradles Marie-Sophie's presence as yet another signified within it.

¹⁵² For a sampling of research on space see: Christine Chivallon, "Espace et identité créole chez Patrick Chamoiseau," *Notre librairie: Revue du livre: Afrique, Caraïbes, Océan Indien* 127 (July-Sept. 1996): 86-108. For language see: N'zengou-Tayo, *Literature and Diglossia*.

Milne is among the few who recognize the importance of this self-christening. She takes stock of it to show how this adds to the definition of the “ideal subject” projected in *Texaco*. According to Milne, the name being projected back onto the place after having been appropriated by Marie-Sophie, articulates the importance of history in subjectivity formation:

...the history and location of identity and the identity itself are inseparable ... The last revelation of Marie-Sophie’s story consecrates this intimate connection between history and identity, expressed through location, when, as we know, she finally admits that her secret ‘nom de guerre’ is in fact ‘Texaco’. Thus the name which was already attached to the place is first appropriated by Marie-Sophie and then passed back to the location through her: once again, as with the construction of Texaco’s huts, the material to hand, taken over and adapted for use by the protagonist, resurfaces anew, as a symbolic expression of the subject. In the course of this metaphorical detour via Marie-Sophie’s purposes, however, the word ‘Texaco’ has been transformed, for it now, ‘irradiates’ an extra layer of meaning forged out of the personal and collective history associated with it. (Milne 173)

Milne articulates that this reverse naming endows the site with the history of the subject – this “metaphorical detour” shows Marie-Sophie’s personal history becoming a part of the site she inhabits. However, her identity as a woman remains overlooked. I would like to take the discussion proposed in the following quote in a slightly different direction to suit the purposes of my argument.

It has to be noted that Marie-Sophie does not stand just as a subject but as a ‘woman-subject’ who links herself to a topographical site by a name. While transposing the appellation of Texaco back onto the site, she also brings her personal experience – that of a woman – to the foreground. Space then becomes a site of manifestation of the individual narrative of this woman. And it is this interaction between the topography and the woman-subject represented in Marie-Sophie that I wish to explore further.

Bianciotti's quote in the epigraph verifies this link and spells out the parameters involved in understanding this relationship. While Glissant's quotes point us in the direction of language and space, Bianciotti's quote allows us to perceive a gendered topography. It gives primacy to the history of women and also establishes at the same time a connection between women and the space they inhabit. The importance accorded to the link between womanhood and space is attested by the prominence given the quote, placed as the first among three epigraphs.

At this point we need to note that *Texaco* is being written by a character called Oiseau de Cham (also referred to in the novel as Marqueur de Parole) who acts as a scribe to Marie Sophie. As we have seen, Oiseau de Cham is an anagram of Chamoiseau.¹⁵³ The author appoints himself as scribe to the protagonist Marie-Sophie. It is this scribe who supposedly composes the novel based mostly on what Marie-Sophie recounts from her "collective memory" (34). "Ce 'Marqueur de Paroles', n'est pas un tabellion qui note ce qui se dit, mais un transfert écrivain ce qui ne peut pas se dire" (Coursil 162). The scribe becomes a medium vehicle between the speaker of the novel and the reader – he's where the orality becomes the written word.

A gendered space

Chamoiseau opens his novel with a quote from Bianciotti¹⁵⁴ that questions the ability of a 'scribe' to talk about women. This only leads us to believe that the author

¹⁵³ See footnote 27.

¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, Bianciotti himself has experienced the travails of linguistic differentiation: "Il a été élevé dans la crainte de ne pas parler assez bien la langue du pays. Ses parents avaient souffert de ne pas posséder l'espagnol et si, entre eux, ils utilisaient le dialecte piémontais, ils en interdisaient l'usage à leurs enfants. Ainsi peut-on dire qu'il n'a pas eu de langue maternelle, car elle lui fut interdite, et l'espagnol, imposé."

The web site also tells us that he discovered and adopted French language much later in his life. So much so that, due to his contributions "Il a été élu à l'Académie française, le 18 janvier 1996, au fauteuil d'André Frossard (2^e fauteuil)." *Académie française*, Académie française, 28 March 2005 <<http://www.academie-francaise.fr/immortels/base/academiciens/fiche.asp?param=689>>.

is questioning his own ability at being able to express the story recounted by the woman protagonist.

Que rappellera ici le scribe qui ne rappelle à travers elle le sévère destin de toutes ces femmes condamnées aux maternités perpétuelles, expertes à déchiffrer les prophéties du vent, des crépuscules ou du halo brumeux qui parfois semble émaner de la lune, pour prévoir le temps de chaque jour et les travaux à entreprendre ; ces femmes qui, luttant à l'égal des hommes pour leur subsistance, firent ce qu'on appelle une patrie et que les calendriers réduisent à quelques dates bruyantes, à certaines vanités dont souvent les rues portent le nom? (11)

The quote above talks about the spatial implications of women in relationship to men. It is important to note that this quote refers to one particular woman who speaks through herself the plight of other women sharing with her the ignominy of imposed pregnancies. Already encumbered by perpetual pregnancies, the women who are seen struggling beside men to establish a space, are betrayed by that very space. In speaking about the condemnation of these unrelenting pregnancies, we are referring to a womanhood that does not have control over the body. Clearly, in the quote, the status of women is one of being condemned and therefore of having no control over their own bodies.

This is despite the fact that women struggle equally alongside (“luttant à l'égal”) men. Obviating of this equality indicates a possible injustice – a suspicion which is verified by the betrayal meted out to women by the very space they helped establish (“firent ...une patrie”). The resultant politico-geographic space, described as fatherland (“patrie”), is incorporated into the patriarchal system. This spatial injustice is heightened when all the fatherland allows is the insolent superficiality of a few roads named after women. Illustrating a “sévère destin,” Bianciotti presents women encumbered not only spatially but also temporally. “Destin” indicates they're predestined to an uncertain duration of travails, as the calendar of her “patrie” proves –

it allocates them the vainglory of a few deceptive moments (“dates bruyantes”) as recompense.

Yet at the very outset, the Bianciotti quote depicts empowered women, the extent of whose authority is elucidated by the usage of the verb “rappeler”. The verb means to recall, and with its usage we are bringing into play a history that these women have endured. Apart from a scribe, this quote talks of one representative woman (“elle”) who reminds of other women “ces femmes” like her (“qui ne rappelle à travers elle ... de ces femmes”). So when the verb is used twice – once for the scribe in the future tense and for this woman in present tense – it also serves to draw a comparison between the two. It underscores the authoritative presence of this woman who, despite her travails and struggles, excels at speaking for other women - an act she already performs better than the scribe would (“Que rappellera ici le scribe”).

Additionally, referring to women as “experts” at understanding the prophecies of nature, endows them with a special knowledge and implies an affinity between the women and the space that they inhabit. This is more than a simple reiteration of the assumed classical association between women and nature. It is on the contrary the manifestation of women’s perspicacity as a reader (“déchiffrer”) of nature, who use their expertise to determine beforehand (“prévoir”) the work that has to be undertaken (“les travaux à entreprendre”).

One, however, wonders if “travaux” could be read differently. In this quote about forced maternity, could the word “travaux,” not imply a woman in labor (une femme “en travail”¹⁵⁵)? In exerting her expertise to determining her “travaux,” we are

¹⁵⁵ Une femme “En travail” is a woman “En train d’accoucher.” Le Trésor, 28 March 2005 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

Does “travail” not remind us, due to its etymology, of the travails associated with child birth: “Travailler. D’abord ‘tourmenter, peiner, souffrir’, notamment en parlant d’une femme qui va accoucher, vers 1170, seuls sens du mot jusqu’au XVI^e s.”

“Travailler,” Bloch, Oscar and W. von Wartburg, Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

informed here of a woman who has the ability to control the ignominy of enforced maternity. Both interpretations of the word “travaux” call for a symbiotic relation of women with nature as their expertise entitles them to a special power. This adds on to the definition of an empowered woman we had seen earlier – one who is able to recount better than the scribe.

Additionally, in showing us a space that can be made – “firent une patrie” – it encapsulates a space that allows for the possibility of being fashioned according to the forces applied to it. In the ‘making’ of this land, we are saying that “organization, use, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation and experience.”¹⁵⁶ In other words we are addressing a space that reflects the society and its evolutions. In the case of Bianciotti’s quote, we see this evolution taking two forms. The first one being a shift as a result of a successful struggle carried out together by the man and the woman. Both were able to ‘make’ this land as their own, a fact communicated by the verb ‘faire’ conjugated in the third person plural form of the present tense. The second moment at which the change over land is reflected is when the result of this struggle conforms to the society’s patriarchal aspect in the ‘making’ of “patrie”. It is a gendered land organized to the woman’s disadvantage, which stands as a reminder of her subjugation.

From being an entity coveted by both the man and the woman in the beginning, the land became an entity on which the woman no longer had any say – it became “patrie”. Space illustrates dominion over women in the patriarchal system. In presenting these moments of the ‘making’ of the land, it also enunciates the possibility of further transformation of space. It shows land as a changeable entity – it is not fixed. “More specifically, ... [this] comment indicates the sociality of this spatial

¹⁵⁶ Edward Soja, “The Socio-Spatial Dialectic,” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 70 (June 1989): 210. Quoted in Brady 5.

change, a change that registers space as performative, shifting the grammar of land from passive noun (as object) to active verb (as doing); space is processual, it changes” (Brady 5) according to influences acting on it.

Apart from presenting a space that can be made into different entities, Bianciotti’s quote depicts an empowered woman who was betrayed by space. Does it then mean that the next ‘making’ of this space will correct this imbalance by reflecting the existence of this woman within its change? The ‘making’ of the land articulates a prediction of a turning of the tide in her favor. Could this explain the dedication of the novel, which respects equally a man and a woman, while linking them in the word, “estimés”:

Pour Édouard Glissant

Pour Véra Kundera

...ô estimés... (9)

This homage – to a novel that talks about a struggle being held in the margins of the city – shows us the margins of the literary space of this novel asserting equally the existence of a man and a woman.

To summarize, Bianciotti talks about unjustified organization of land, and also presents the possibility of a remedy to this spatial disorganization. We discover *Texaco* echoing the very same considerations as Bianciotti’s epigraph. The novel wants to redefine its conception of space so as to better appreciate the contours of the marginal spatial entity of Texaco:

L’urbaniste occidental voit dans Texaco une tumeur à l’ordre urbain

(...) Non, il nous faut congédier l’Occident et réapprendre à lire:

réapprendre à inventer la ville. (296)

From wanting to destroy the hutment, the novel moves towards a spatial reorganization that accepts its wholesome presence within it. Moreover, ‘inventing’ (“inventer”) of the city, echoes well with the making (“fient”) of land that the epigraph proposes. As the spatial aspect of the epigraph gets mirrored in the novel, the question for us to ask is if *Texaco* also replicates the powerful women presented in the epigraph. If it does, what is then the kind of interaction that the space in the novel shares with “ces femmes”?

Interestingly in presenting “ces femmes,” Bianciotti’s epigraph lays emphasis on one of their traits – forced perpetual maternity – by specially spelling it out. As if to confirm this aspect of “ces femmes” of the epigraph, several women in *Texaco* are characterized by their copious procreation. Be it Marie-Sophie’s neighbor from Enville -Sylphénise, “une malheureuse qui vivait à côté avec sept enfants” (264) or be it a habitant from Texaco, Labautière, “qui portait neuf enfants” (332), women in the novel seem to have a generous retinue of children around them. So much so that the women of the hutment of Texaco could be described as “créatures ne vivant que pour être enceintes et exposer des bouquets d’enfants à chaque creux de leurs coudes, jeunes filles ridées au regards sombres...” (33)

Moreover, Bianciotti talks of one woman (“elle”) who stands as an example (“à travers elle”) of the similar predicament of perpetual pregnancies that she shares with “ces femmes”. The life and experiences of Marie-Sophie, the protagonist of *Texaco*, is in conformity with this one representative woman, who in her tryst with Enville, like “ces femmes”, has to deal with multiple unwanted pregnancies – a result of her experiencing both love and rape.

In a quote that speaks of spatial reorganization, presentation of the perpetual pregnancies of “ces femmes” also alerts us to an interaction between a woman’s body

and the space she inhabits. We discover in *Texaco* that the changeover in the spatial arrangement is carried out simultaneously and at times even due to certain expressions of womanhood. The implications brought out by the epigraph suggest that to better understand the entity of *Texaco* and the spatial changes carried out in the novel we need to look at the way in which the women, or rather one woman – Marie-Sophie – has been defined. She is the one who is primarily responsible for bringing about the change in the landscape:

De l'urbaniste, la Dame fit un poète. Ou plutôt: dans l'urbaniste, elle
nomme le poète. A jamais. (374)

Marie-Sophie is both the agent and instrument of this change. Following the parameters of the epigraph, it is this “dame” and her experiences as a woman that should shed light on the spatial organization in *Texaco*. In the quest for realignment of this space it is her presence and her maternal experiences as one of “ces femmes” that tells us about the exact interaction between space and womanhood.

One of the examples through which this interaction gets highlighted is the way pregnancies, and most certainly Marie-Sophie’s pregnancies relate to space. Being one of “ces femmes,” she is condemned to “maternités perpétuelles”, but with one difference – she chooses to remain childless. Ultimately, she has to face sterility due to self-executed abortions. Later on despite her strong desire for a child she cannot have one. Her state of childlessness stands in stark contrast to her name that symbolizes ultimate motherhood (“une femme dont le nom connote la maternité (Marie)”; Burton 191). In his article, Joseph Nnadi talks about *Texaco*’s anti-Christian stance. This contrast could be read as another instance where *Texaco* presents us another “caricature de quelques notions de base du christianisme” (83).

Marie-Sophie’s refusal of maternity could possibly be explained as a rebellion, where Maryse Condé would call it “l’une des formes de protestation les plus

rencontrées chez les romancières antillaises ... comme le projet d'une éventuelle 'guerre de sexes'."¹⁵⁷ To continue in the same vein, Françoise duRivage explains Marie-Sophie's barrenness as "perhaps symbolic of the low birth rate at the time of slavery, as the slaves used abortion and infanticide to spare their children from life in captivity."¹⁵⁸ While both Cilas Kemedjio and duRivage present us with women who use their ability to procreate as a tool against oppression, they do not take into account the interaction indicated by the epigraph between this womanhood and space. Another element we need to take stock of is Marie-Sophie's presence as one of "ces femmes". She cannot be alone in protesting by not giving birth. She speaks for "ces femmes" by being like them. We need to explain how Marie-Sophie can remain childless, while she is a part of "ces femmes" defined in their procreative abundance.

One possible way of reconciling these considerations would be by postulating that Marie-Sophie's "biological infertility is in fact a blessing", it allows her to "both write and create the community of Texaco" (duRivage 42). This latter explanation permits us to show how her experience with pregnancy bears direct spatial implications. The birth of the settlement of Texaco, materializes through the choice exercised by Marie Sophie – the same power of choice that kept her childless. Moreover, it assures her a place within the solidarity of women that the epigraph proposes. One could say that while other women are characterized by giving births, Marie-Sophie, metaphorically, begets Texaco.

The trade off between biological maternity against a spatial one becomes evident. Going by the terminology proposed in the epigraph, she controls her

¹⁵⁷ I am using Kemedjio summary of Condé's position: Cilas Kemedjio, "La femme antillaise face au faubourg et à la durcification dans Texaco de Patrick Chamoiseau et Mélody des faubourgs de Lucie Julia," LittéRéalité 11.2 (Autumn-Winter 1999): 39.

¹⁵⁸ Françoise duRivage, "Texaco: From the Hills to the Mangrove Swamps," Thamyris 6.1 (Spring 1999): 42.

“travaux” and as a result is able to settle the hutment. The injustice to which Bianciotti refers becomes undone. In a single gesture she reclaims the right to her body and a space of her own.

It is from Marie-Sophie’s body that the hutment is born. Furthermore, it is through the understanding of her body that the changes in the landscape of Texaco can be completely comprehended. All of Marie-Sophie’s troubles associated with her state of being a woman – namely, unwanted pregnancies, self-executed abortions, victim of attempted rape and eventually a rape – are those that she faces during her stay in En-ville. A perfect example of the way the space of En-ville plays an important role on her life are the circumstances under which she become a part of the city. She is forced to leave her father’s hut in one of the quarters – called Quartier des Misérables – around the city of Fort de France.

The hut in which they were living had been rented to them by a man called Lonyon. After the death of Idoménee – her mother – Marie-Sophie and her father, Esternome, find themselves in a financial bind. So much so that, “Il devint difficile de payer le dénommé Lonyon” (218). And one day Lonyon’s henchmen nearly beat up the two to death for not being able to pay up. (“Nous aurions été occis ce jour-là si le Major de notre quartier n’était pas apparu” ; 218) Esternome, “ne se remit jamais de ce traitement” (220) and he eventually died. But “La mort de mon Esternome ne désarma nullement ce chien-fer de Lonyon” (222).

In the meantime, Bec-d’Argent, the local strongman who had helped Marie-Sophie and her father earlier against Lonyon’s attempts to evict them, again helps out Marie-Sophie by avenging her against Lonyon’s men – he cuts their ears off. This forces Lonyon to come out and help Marie-Sophie move into the city. “L’oreille coupée de ses Majors me ramena un Lonyon très mielleux. Il surgit un matin grand-

bonne-heure, cravaché par son nouveau devoir: m'aider à empoigner un destin dans l'En-ville. Sa solution était de travailler chez lui, comme personne de maison, jusqu'à ce qu'il me trouve un métier" (225).

The incident described above – Marie Sophie's moving away from her quartier to the city – once again shows the spatial dynamics in the broad spectrum of the story. It is the need to have a space that forces her to enter the city:

...je devais, au bout de ses échecs, sans autre choix possible, tenter à mon tour de pénétrer la ville. (223)

“Pénétrer” is an interesting choice of word vis-à-vis Marie-Sophie's tryst with the city. Much as she chooses to describe her entry into the city as a penetration, her eventual rape – in other words, a forceful penetration – ironically highlights the tragedy of the tryst. In her penetrating the city, the scene is set for her being penetrated.

Marie-Sophie's interaction with Lonyon is emblematic of the effect this space of the city has on her body and her sexuality. After spatially dispossessing Marie-Sophie from Quartier des Misérable, he offers her shelter. Seizing her spatial dependence over him as an advantage, Lonyon deals the first blow during Marie-Sophie's stay in the city — he attempts to rape her. In losing her own space she is likewise losing control over the space of her body. As a corollary, Lonyon's brute power over Marie-Sophie springs from his control over space.

Her entry via Lonyon's home defines the totality of her stay in En-ville and is a prelude to her spatially triggered sexual travails. An attempted rape marks her first stop in the city, and her last refuge at Alcibiade's house culminates in her rape by him. The two attacks mark the beginning and the end of the challenge to Marie-Sophie's sexuality. They contain a spectrum that demonstrates the escalation of hostilities upon her. Apart from the attempted and the eventual rape, she faces unwanted pregnancies, agonizing self-executed abortions and resultant sterility.

Coinciding with the various challenges on her sexuality she confronts, is the fact that all the while, she is resident in a space that is not her own. By losing space on the fringes of En-ville and finding shelter in the city, Marie-Sophie also loses the right to her own body. Her sexuality becomes a site to be claimed. It is as if in ‘penetrating’ the city, it is the city that rapes her.

Burton (192), points out how *Texaco* presents a set of binaries, where the hutment is “feminine” and the city “masculine”. Marie-Sophie’s stay in the city is a perfect example of how the city takes on a masculine aspect. Men as masculine avatars of the city challenge her body several times. These assaults continue right till the moment she does not quit the bounds of En-ville. To guard the sanctity of her body and maintain her control over it, it becomes imperative for Marie-Sophie to move out of the one space that challenges her existence – En-ville. With the setting up the hutment of *Texaco*, she is also finally able to assure herself not only of spatial but also sexual security.

A reading of the following quote, helps us elucidate the exact nature of the relationship between the “masculine” space of En-ville and Marie-Sophie. It explains the circumstances under which Alcibiade rapes her. We notice that Alcibiade is able to rape her not because he presents himself as a more formidable aggressor, but rather because by the time the rape takes place, Marie-Sophie is progressively weakened by the effect of the city. Marie-Sophie’s body literally comes under the control of both the city and the man. Moreover, we learn that her body, which becomes a site to be controlled in many ways by the city, is also the very space from which the decision to rebel against all power – signified by the city – emanates. Her body becomes centre stage for the various politico-spatial debates proposed by the novel; it is a site that is challenged and also the genesis of the hutment of *Texaco*.

Même à présent quand j’y repense, je ne comprends pas ce phénomène qui fit que je ne réagis pas quand il me recouvrit, me déshabilla, et me creva d’un rein sauvage. Son corps invincible me fracassait à grands ahan, m’écartelait, me désossait, me transperçait. Il grognait d’une joie revancharde. Moi qui revenais de l’étreinte de Nelta, je basculai dans une ravine où s’embrouillaient le plaisir, la honte, la douleur, l’envie de mourir, l’envie de tuer et d’être tuée, le sentiment de l’injustice, de ne pas exister, d’être une chienne méprisée, la haine de cet En-ville où je me tournaillais seule, livrée aux sept malheurs sans choisir le chemin. D’avoir été comme ça durant presque deux heures, le jouet flaccide de ce sieur Alcibiade, dut être ce qui m’amena à ne plus jamais me laisser commander par personne, à décider à tout moment, en toute autorité, toute seule, de ce qui était bon pour moi et de ce qu’il fallait faire. (279-80)

The above quote describes Alcibiade’s vengeful (“revancharde”) rape of Marie-Sophie. It presents us with Alcibiade’s actions opposed to Marie-Sophie’s passive silence. It also shows us how this event transforms Marie-Sophie from being a passive victim, to a person of resolve whose strength allows her to face the numerous onslaughts in her quest to save Texaco.

The change of tone can be described in the two verbs used by Marie-Sophie, found at the two extremes of this quote. She moves from her passive state (“je ne réagis pas”) to being a decision maker (“à décider”). As a result of this rape her passivity is represented by all these verbs or actions performed by Alcibiade on her body: “il me recouvrit, me déshabilla, et me creva d’un rein sauvage ... me fracassait ... m’écartelait, me désossait, me transperçait.” She allows his acts of aggression with little realization of her submission. This complete disconnection from the self is communicated by her failure to comprehend her own actions (“Même à présent ... je ne comprends pas ce phénomène”).

Marie-Sophie’s passivity is communicated by the choice of the verbs describing Alcibiade’s aggression – to undress, to quarter, to bone, to penetrate – increasing in domination. His actions range from covering her body (“il me recouvrit”) to the point where he pierces her (“transperçait”). These acts of domination

progressively move inward from the exterior of her body therefore bringing all aspects of Marie-Sophie's body completely under Alcibiade's command.

The gradual intensity of Alcibiade's acts corresponds to the increasing degree of surrender on Marie-Sophie's part. By covering her body with his own (*il me recouvrit*), Alcibiade acts with his own body. Next he undresses ("*me déshabilla*") her and quarters her ("*m'écartelait*") – the actions imply a progression – he's moved on to manipulating her body with his own. The violence reaches its pinnacle when she feels him piercing her ("*me transperçait*"). He conquers her body by piercing and completely shattering it, thus completing the cycle of control. Her passivity is contrasted by and stands against the backdrop of the strength of his body ("*son corps*") communicated by the adjective "invincible" – a contrast that gets starker due to the violence felt in the savage ("*sauvage*") sexual thrust of his "rein".

Of all the verbs described in this sequence, "grognaît" is the last one and the only verb that is unrelated to the violence performed on Marie-Sophie's body. Though seemingly the least potent one, it is actually the most so. It accentuates the aggression defined by the series of verbs ending with "transperçer." Recounting a rape that goes on for about two hours ("*durant presque deux heures*"), the above quote juxtaposes Alcibiade's actions and Marie-Sophie's thoughts. While various verbs delineate fierce movement, there is only one sound – Alcibiade's grunting ("*Il grognait*") – that contrasts Marie-Sophie's passive contemplation. As if in this overtly silent scene of violence the domination takes a singular verbal form representing communication between the aggressor and the victim. All it takes to overpower Marie-Sophie's silence is this incoherent grunting. It is through the vocalization of this expression that the joy ("*joie revancharde*") of Alcibiade's revenge is complete. "Grognaît" echoes Marie-Sophie's muteness, and becomes the most telling of all verbs.

An analysis of the verbal sequence “il me recouvrit” will show us that Marie-Sophie is visually – by virtue of the first person direct pronoun “me” – the object covered and defined by “il” and his action “recouvrit”. “Me” falls between the third person pronoun (“il”) and the verb ‘recouvrir’. The first person direct object pronoun (“me”) communicates and shows its dependence on the verb. “Me,” designating Marie-Sophie, is determined by Alcibiade’s actions. The multiple appearance of “me” in the following verbal sequences adds to Marie-Sophie’s passivity, compounded by numerous act performed on her body.

Marie-Sophie’s passivity in relation to Alcibiade is replicated in her connection with En-ville. She expresses her present misery as a part of her general state of being in the city, that causes her to deal with the “le sentiment de l’injustice, de ne pas exister, d’être une chienne méprisée.” This state of being is not a choice; it is the expression of the rudderless existence that the hatred of the space of city (“haine de cet En-Ville”) imposes upon her. The scene of bodily rape is intimately related to the machinations of the city against her and the fact that she cannot choose among many of its paths (“sans choisir le chemin”). En-ville, by making her feel isolated and anchorless, spatially mirrors the disorienting rape that is finally committed on her body. She is “livrée” – delivered to the misfortunes of the city. This indicates all her current problems are caused by the space of the city – L’En-Ville – that makes her its passive victim. It is her fight with the city that causes Marie-Sophie to drift and wander about (“tournaillais”) all by herself – “seule.”

This word, “seule”, which appears twice in the above quote, is the one that communicates the changeover from the negative passivity of Marie-Sophie to her active self. In the first appearance of “seule”, she’s forced to live alone by the city and by living in it, she is caused to be disoriented by it. The second “seule” is present at the other end of the spectrum and is marked by all qualities positive. In its second

appearance, “seule” is appropriated by Marie-Sophie and not imposed upon her. Able to make a decision at this point, she chooses to remain “seule”, denoting her authority (“en toute autorité”). From not being able to choose a path she decides her own destiny – she will be commanded by none. “Seule”, the second time, is not imposed but is chosen as a result of the rape.

The pronoun “me” also reflects this change in passivity. When it is said, “...qui m’amena à ne plus jamais me laisser commander...”, the quote talks about the change in the person that is Marie-Sophie as well as the pronoun – “me” – that represents her. The pronoun “me” is brought (“m’amena”) into this situation and the pronoun “me” will never be ordered again. From “me” being placed and decided by Alcibiade’s actions, it changes to an independent “moi” that determines all that is good for itself (“ce qui était bon pour moi”).

To better understand this scene, it must be noted that right before this rape, Marie-Sophie had met Félicité Nelta and had made love to him. She moves from the hold of one man (“revenais de l’étreinte de Nelta”) to another’s (“il me recouvrit”). She makes pleasurable love and is sexually violated on the same day. Her varied and opposing emotions – ranging from pleasure (“plaisir”), to shame (“honte”), and ends with pain (“douleur”) – can be explained as a result of the two opposing set of sexual encounters. The two contrasting experiences lead her to face questions of existence - from wanting “to die,” wanting “to kill,” and wanting to “be killed” (“l’envie de mourir, l’envie de tuer et d’être tuée”). And once again her meekness manifests itself by her feeling of inexistence (“de ne pas exister”), when despite the feeling of “injustice” she cannot do anything about her present state.

Her body as the site where the conflict manifests

It would also serve well to remind at this point of the political overtones of this vengeful (“revencharde”) act. Marie-Sophie is raped for openly displaying her political support for Aimé Césaire — the Martinican intellectual and father of the Négritude movement. He appears in *Texaco* as a character holding the post of the mayor of the city of Fort-de-France, the same post he held in real life. In *Texaco* Césaire wins his first elections (1945), voted by people from the hutments sprawled around the city. And Alcibiade, Marie-Sophie’s employer doesn’t hide his disdain for Césaire’s politics: “*Un nègre se disant de l’Afrique, allait administrer la Ville...et communiste en plus!*” (277). Marie-Sophie votes to elect Aimé Césaire and dares thereafter to join a victory procession without her employer’s permission.

The brutal rape of Marie-Sophie highlights the text’s focus on the body as a space that becomes the site where political differences are manifested. Caught between opposite forces, Marie-Sophie’s control over her body is compromised in more than one way – not only is she raped but her body is also rendered a mere tool used to contest political differences. In receiving sexual retribution for a political act, the body literally becomes the archive of a political history. To better understand the above-mentioned travesty and the text’s socio-political moorings, one would need to excavate further this archeology of recorded memories in the space defined by Marie-Sophie’s body.

Significantly, the rape is carried out after the celebration for Césaire’s victory of 1945, a victory that was the first step towards the island of Martinique becoming a French department. Marie-Sophie’s rape, in this backdrop, also points to her body as a space where Chamoiseau’s objections to Césaire’s politics solidify. In *Texaco*, although Alcibiade is opposed to Césaire, there is one similarity between the two that

puts them at odds with the author of *Texaco* — both have been shown seeking assimilation with France.

Alcibiade, who believes in the greatness of colonialism (“*Colonialisme’ suscita de par le monde plus d’avantages que de réels inconvénients*”; 270), enthusiastically preaches a politics of assimilation albeit “modérée” (273).

Assimilation, he says would allow the colonies to grow along with the mother country: “*La Mère-Patrie et ses enfants se fondent ensemble, s’élèvent ensemble... ‘là où est le drapeau, là est la France.’ disait Napoléon !*” (272). While Alcibiade only lauds the idea, it is Césaire who converts it into a reality, as pointed out by Marie-Sophie:

C’est du sieur Alcibiade que j’appriis l’idée de l’assimilation mais c’est Aimé Césaire, notre papa Césaire, qui en porta le projet jusqu’à Parlement de France et nous obtint, à la barbe des békés, d’être des départements français. (274)

In showing Césaire’s work as a continuation of Alcibiade’s, a political similarity is established between the two. Chamoiseau, though extremely respectful of Césaire’s achievements, still chooses to distance himself from the latter’s politics. For one he blames Césaire for Martinique’s departmentalization, which he says made its people dependant on France. Secondly, he also sees in Césaire’s Negritude, an essentialist ideology that calls for the valorization of an African identity. Lucien Taylor describes the objections that the Creolistes (one of whom is Patrick Chamoiseau) have to Césaire’s outlook:

According to the Creolistes, Negritude banishes one construction of the self ... only to usher in another, the idea that Antillean identity is essentially African. ... The Creolistes’ central problem with Césaire is his politics. In 1945, Césaire ran for office ... He won, becoming mayor of Fort-de-France ... he led the legislative battle to make Martinique an official French département. ... In the Creolistes’ eyes, things have gone downhill ever since. ... Within the space of a generation, Martinicans were transformed from self-sufficient producers into welfare-dependant consumers. (*Créolité Bites* 128-9)

Given Chamoiseau's views, it would not be wrong to say that he would equally disapprove both of Césaire and Alcibiade as two different agents of assimilation. At this point we may examine Nelta's role in *Texaco* – a political worker supporting and actively participating to ensure Césaire's victory. Marie-Sophie meets and makes love to Nelta during celebrations that follow Césaire's first election victory of 1945. The following quote describes Marie-Sophie's sexual pleasure enmeshed with the joy of the political victory:

...je poursuivis mon vidé, emportée par un mécanisme sans-manman-ni-papa, qui d'ailleurs me jeta dans les bras de Nelta Félicité, un nègre docker versé en politique, qui ne me lâcha plus, et dans les bras duquel je vaudrai, après vidé ... secouée de folie polissonne, de plaisirs et de cœur agoulou. (278-9)

The first thing that stands out here is Marie-Sophie's passivity. She once again finds herself regulated by forces other than her own volition. She is "emportée" by the "vidé" which throws ("me jeta") her in the arms of Nelta, who in turn takes control of her by not letting her go: "qui ne me lâcha plus". Moreover, when she identifies her love-making as a continuation ("après vidé") to the election victory, a clear connection is drawn between the two moments of rejoicing — one sexual, the other political. This connection gets further credence when we realize that the backdrop of their meeting is a political manifestation.

If we are to go by Chamoiseau's opinion about departmentalization of Martinique in 1946, then the Martinicans are shown celebrating, according to the author of *Texaco*, their eventual downfall. When Marie-Sophie says "je poursuivis mon vidé," she follows the movement of this "vidé" in more than one way – apart from accompanying the celebration she fuses her fortune with that of the 'victorious' parade. Her pleasure of lovemaking that parallels the political pleasure, ironically, becomes a way of celebrating reasons for her imminent ill-fortune — Marie Sophie is

raped for daring to participate in this celebration of assimilation. It is as if, Marie-Sophie's sexual travesty foretells the reader of the political destiny of the habitants of the island. Her body becomes one with the fate of the people of Martinique.

As Marie-Sophie mirrors the joy of the people of the island, her passivity while she enjoys her intercourse as well as when she's raped, reminds us of the passivity of the islanders. She has gladly given herself to someone who wants assimilation — Nelta, Césaire's follower — and then she is taken by force by another — Alcibiade, who wants to be a part of "Mère-Patrie." While being raped, Marie-Sophie, just like the people of the island of Martinique, remains perplexed, not knowing why she does not react to events that affect her body ("je ne comprends pas... que je ne réagis pas"). Her body represents the relationship that the Martinican subject holds with its other — France. In Chamoiseau's postulation, this subject is conquered at the same time as Martinique lays the foundation stone of assimilation with France.

Marie-Sophie's mixed emotions also reflect the passage from pleasure to pain that the islanders have had to traverse: "s'embrouillaient le plaisir, la honte, la douleur." Through the emotional turmoil of her body she speaks of not only her own sentiment of inexistence ("le sentiment de l'injustice, de ne pas exister") but also of that of the Martinicans. They remain from this point subsumed under the larger identity of French. Marie-Sophie's rape, resultant of her political stand, then makes her body the determinant for Martinique's relationship with France as it reflects the spatio-political tensions. It is the point at which France's domination on Martinique gets crystallized.

If we are to consider the effects of sterility on Marie-Sophie's life, the influence of France's domination on her body gains even more credence. As a result of this rape, Marie-Sophie once again becomes pregnant and decides to self-terminate

this unwanted conception. Her repeated abortions including this last one leave her unable to bear a child (“J’avais tant saigné, je m’étais tant abîmée avec cette herbe grasse...que mon ventre avait perdu l’accès au grand mystère”; 297). This rape-induced pregnancy becomes the direct cause of her sterility. Later on, when she does not want Nelta to leave her and go to France, and hopes that she can have him stay by bearing a child (“J’aurais pu retenir Nelta avec un petit Négrillon”; 297), Marie-Sophie finds that despite her repeated attempts, she cannot conceive anymore.

The domination by France becomes doubly manifested on her body. First, the desire of assimilation with France leads to her rape and contributes to her infertility and then, her lover abandons her. Infertility, as regarded by Marie-Sophie, is the cause of her failure to prevent her lover from going to his dream place, France (“Mais le rêve de Nelta c’était de baille-partir. *Partir*, c’était son mot français. ...D’abord, vers la France qui (comme pour nous tous) lui habitait la tête” 295). France overpowers her, leaving her lover-less and childless in one stroke, weakening her, ravishing her, making her alone – “seule.”

Her sexuality is the space on which this spatial conflict is enacted and with the rape as the crescendo, the battle goes France’s way. Our current understanding of her body – denoting the space of the island of Martinique – also influences our understanding of the two appearances of the word “seule” in the rape scene. We have seen in its first appearance, “seule” presents Marie Sophie’s state of confusion and is charged with the injustice committed by the space of En-ville unto her. Apart from being an expression of Marie-Sophie’s regret at not having determined her path in the space of the city (“sans choisir le chemin”), “seule” carries within itself the result of France’s influence – it is indicative of the turmoil caused due to Martinique’s interaction with France. To recapitulate a part of the rape scene:

...la haine de cet En-ville où je me tournaillais seule, livrée aux sept malheurs sans choisir le chemin à décider à tout moment, en toute autorité, toute seule, de ce qui était bon pour moi et de ce qu'il fallait faire. (279-80)

The second “seule,” coming as a counter force to the first “seule,” then acts as one that helps her separate herself from L’En-Ville and as a result, from France. Injustice committed on her body by the spatial entities of France and l’En-Ville, is to be fought by spatial measure. It is from this rape that her decision to set up Texaco takes shape. She adopts a resolve that holds her in good stead when she establishes her hutment of Texaco against perpetual assaults. From not being able to choose her path in the city (“sans choisir le chemin”), she decides to go outside of it and establishes a force to counter the city’s “injustice.” The second “seule” then not only helps her tear away from En-Ville, but also acts as a fitting answer to France’s symbolic rape on the space of her body.

To sum up, we observe first how both the city and the men attack Marie-Sophie, robbing from her the power of controlling her body and space. Secondly, when her body mirrors the island’s political upheavals, it becomes a spatial archive of historical memory: “la femme [antillaise] peut-être considérée comme le lieu où l’histoire à des possibilités de se conserver, de se perpétuer. Les femmes sont la symbolique d’une mémoire possible” (Kemedjio 43). Marie-Sophie also reflects women characters from the works of Glissant. When he writes about the “l’univers de plantation”, “les femmes apparaissent comme le lieu de la conservation de l’histoire” (Kemedjio 42).

In *Texaco*, as a victim of rape, Marie-Sophie becomes synonymous with the whole population of the island. Her body stands at the intersection of a dual reminder. While the rape symbolizes a political event, it also stands as a literal reminder of what is stored in the collective psyche of the women who had to endure a past riddled with

slavery. That was a time when “la femme africaine subit la plus totale des agressions, qui est le viol quotidien et répété d’un équipage de marins rendus déments par l’exercice de leur métier.”¹⁵⁹ Marie-Sophie’s rape encapsulates flashpoints in memory that the slave women retain – that of sexual exploitation and subjugation.

Let’s go back to a discussion initiated earlier, regarding Milne’s conclusion. The protagonist, after appropriating the company’s name, projects it back on to the future site of the hutment. According to Milne, the act is “a symbolic expression of the subject.” Wherein:

In the course of this metaphorical detour via Marie-Sophie’s purposes, however, the word ‘Texaco’ has been transformed, for it now, ‘irradiates’ an extra layer of meaning forged out of the personal and collective history associated with it. (Milne 173)

Apart from the site reflecting a collective history, we discover that it also gets endowed with the personal accounts of our woman protagonist. Marie-Sophie, with her personal experiences of womanhood, reminds us of the history associated with women like her. Her body — the storehouse of memories — becomes an inextricable part of the hutment of Texaco. It is the physical trauma of Marie-Sophie’s rape, which while enfeebling her, also acts as the catalyst for the creation of the hutment. We are reminded of how “le corps de la femme [martiniquaise] va devenir le lieu de formulation de la résistance aux structures d’oppression” (Kemedjio 38). In enmeshing her experience into the site of Texaco, Marie-Sophie ensures that nobody forgets the slavery related past that targeted these women’s bodies and molded their psyche.

¹⁵⁹ Edouard Glissant, Le Discours antillais (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981) 297.

She also ensures the perpetuation of this memory, when at the end of the novel, she requests of the Urban Planner that her secret name of Texaco be never removed from the hutment: “Je lui demandai une faveur ... que jamais ... on n’enlève à ce lieu son nom de TEXACO ... mon nom secret ... n’est autre que celui-là” (417-8). Firstly, with this act, Marie-Sophie goes beyond the injustice – to which Bianciotti’s epigraph alludes – there are more than just a few road names that recognize a woman’s presence. Moreover, unlike other women characters from literary works of the Antilles, she signals her readiness to face the future without any hesitation.

Maryse-Condé talks about how women writers from the Antilles create a disproportionate number of women characters who do not procreate. This rejection of maternity, as interpreted by Condé, is seen as an apprehension of the women writers regarding facing the future, as reflected by their women characters. Condé says:

Puisque le monde se clôt avec elles, point n’est besoin de s’interroger sur son devenir et ses transformations possibles. Alors on devrait voir là l’expression de l’angoisse devant le futur, de l’impuissance à le définir et à apporter une quelconque solution aux brûlants problèmes des Antilles.¹⁶⁰

Marie-Sophie’s presence seems to counter the anguish of these women writers. The representation of the reluctance of procreation as a fear of the future is transformed. With her secret name and the hutment becoming synonymous, Marie-Sophie’s past is fused with the destiny of the hutment. In requesting that her secret name, Texaco, be not removed from the hutment, she converts her memories and her past into a tool with which she confronts the future and leaves an indelible mark on it. She is able to ensure that the future will be a different one since it will be the one where the hutment of Texaco will recognize the history of Marie-Sophie’s exploited past.

¹⁶⁰ Maryse Condé, *La Parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française* (Paris: Editions l’harmattan, 1979) 46.

CHAPTER 4

THE FRENCH NATION: A LINE DRAWING OF ALIENATION

In the three previous chapters I concentrated mostly on delineating how the presentation of topography is the realization of a subjectivity, whose definition is dependant on the topography it inhabits. Both in Jules Verne's and in Patrick Chamoiseau's works geographical presentations communicate also the insufficiency of contemporary definitions surrounding the colonial subject. As *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* structures an uncomplicated subjectivity that emanates from and is dependant upon the structures of colonialism (and indeed colonial structures), *Texaco*'s very emphasis counters the perceived stability of a prescribed definition to accentuate the complicated nature of the colonial subject through a process predicated on restructuring urban topography. Through their works, placed at different colonial moments, the two authors problematize the very notion of passivity of topographical space to portray a physical presence – not so much a register of social change but an active component that while reflecting social change is also one of its instigators. As I have pointed out before, this topographical space is not an isolated element, instead anytime evoked it activates an entire matrix of interconnections where mutual reflectivity determines that the effects of each change are felt through all nodes of the system. Implicit in this process of counter colonialism, where all are connected to each other in a movement of perpetual change, each space defining as well as being defined, is the impossibility of the definition of a subject or rather the assertion that all definitions are subjective.

It is the unfurling of one such mutually-inflected relationship that is at the center of this chapter. How is one to deal with the formation of a colonial subjectivity without falling to the temptation of definitively defining the colonial sign? But having traversed through the space of topography, this space of difference that I wish to highlight, although not contour-less, is definitely less tangible as it deals with the synchronic space of differences between two colonial subjects as represented through the two central characters Georges Laurent (Daniel Auteuil) and Majid (Maurice Bénichou) in Michael Haneke's award-winning film *Caché*.

Focusing on colonial guilt permits understanding Georges as a colonial product. Covering over the ground of difference in his interaction with Majid (who is of Algerian descent) lays bare any claims to a definitive ontological space of otherness whose apparent stability in *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* anchored a picture of security for the colonizer. This should not simply be understood as a choice between geopolitical space and another space of ontology, but understanding Georges vis-à-vis Majid incorporates also the historicist dimension that determines this social practice of generating difference. As synchronic elements, both the colonizer and the colonized form a mutually influencing equation that is no more than a symptom (albeit an important one) of a conditioning process whose co-ordinates extend over time. The extent to which the two colonial entities are implicated, and how exactly, can only be understood diachronically, as such the thrust remains on understanding the film as an intersection where the space of the human subject interacts with human history. What I am claiming to do is not a "rejection of the proven powers of the historical imagination, nor is it a substitution of a spatialism for historicism." In a way, this follows Michel Foucault's plea "for opening up the historical and tightly interwoven

sociological imaginations to a deeper appreciation for the human life.”¹⁶¹ With “interwoven” as the key term, I would call this chapter an attempt to read the human subject as both spatialized and historized – as the result of a process that is formed over history and in relation to other subjectivities all of whose aggregates form the contemporary moment.

Georges Laurent calls his wife, Anne Laurent (Juliette Binoche), from right outside Majid’s place in an underprivileged neighborhood and lies to her by saying that the said apartment was un-inhabited. What the spectator witnesses (knowing clearly that Georges has indeed met Majid in the same apartment a short while ago) is only one of the many deceptions that form part of the couple’s relationship and that effectively displays the cracks in the household. Even so, for them who have been leading a bourgeois-bohème life of relative material ease in a house full of books in a well-off part of Paris, this conversation is a particular moment when those fissures are being widened by recent terrorizing events that form the crux of the movie’s intrigue. The family has been receiving infantile-like hand drawings and what appear to be anonymous video recordings of the mundane comings and goings of the couple. Despite the active involvement of the authorities and Georges’ best efforts, their author, their motive and even when and from where these images are taken remains unclear to both the viewer and the couple through the end of the film.

Although Georges is convinced of Majid’s involvement in these drawings and recordings, no clear link emerges and even after Majid’s suicide, the cinematic technique of *Caché* leaves one with the impression that clandestine recordings of their lives have continued. Towards the end, an apparent calm has been restored as Georges is shown taking some pills and going off to sleep. Apparent because the culminating

¹⁶¹ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996) 16. I am building here on Soja’s understanding of Foucault.

scene that follows not only forecloses any possibility of a precise solution but also adds another layer to the intrigue by raising suspicion about Georges' and Majid's sons when for the very first time in the film in this last scene they are seen talking to each other in front of Pierrot Laurent's (Lester Makedonsky) school. Only if the dialogues had been audible we could have researched the possibility of them having colluded with each other, but Haneke refuses to fulfill a responsibility he believes lies with the spectator: "J'ai écrit [sic] un vrai dialogue entre les deux [Georges' and Majid's sons] mais je ne vais pas le dire. ... Qu'est-ce qu'ils parlent ça doit rester une question pour le spectateur."¹⁶² Distinctly called into the film's intrigue, the viewer of the film unmistakably understands through Haneke's explication of this last scene what has been obvious throughout the rest of the film: the film titled *Caché* (hidden) might not have disclosed the author of the tapes, but through Haneke's invitation to scrutinize the secret dialogue it implicates the viewer into its authorship. We would do well to pursue later on how this explicit challenge to the viewer appears more implicitly in other ways. And before I hasten to embrace the director's refusal to elaborate on this secret as the dominant model through which I could read the refusal to acknowledge other such hidden secrets of the film, perhaps the question to be asked here should be about its title *Caché* – the overtly hidden element of the film. This title, Khanna rightly points out "asks us to investigate that which is hidden" (242).

In Haneke's refusal to elaborate on the last sequence between the two sons there is an indication that "crucial plot information was apparently hidden within the background activity of the image" (Cousins 223). While the last sequence forces us to read that which has been purposefully secreted, the slow unraveling of Georges' guilt and its connection to a historical event both demand to be read as hidden – in the

¹⁶² Michael Haneke, Interview on *Caché* with Serge Toubiana (DVD, Les Films du Losange, 2005). All quotations by Haneke on *Caché*, unless otherwise stated, are taken from this interview.

sense of being obscure, of not being obvious. In the film's fictional world, the secret has taken the place of prominence, and we may well try to divine the links to a historical event behind the guilt Georges has been hiding, but following Haneke's refusal we are never to know for sure that which has been purposefully hidden.

The Hidden Past

Apart from its adjectival value, *Caché* as the past participle of the French verb 'to hide,' is what further resists any attempts at reconstituting the meaning of the title. One sees neither the subject of hiding – the object that was hidden – nor the subject of the sentence to which this past participle belongs. Who hid what, in other words, is the dominant question. Caught in a bind between the past participle and the adjective, the hidden then appears as a perpetual process that bridges the past to the present and obscures the boundaries between the subject and the object such that one doing the hiding (who, as the unknown subject of the sentence is already hidden) could also be its unknown object. Paradoxically, with what was hidden remaining unknown, whether in the past or the present, the only certainty of something being hidden is what dominates our understanding of the title. Further reading of *Caché* will continuously evoke this ambiguity of the secret but without giving any means to conclude if it is hidden or secreted, nor to say if this hidden does exist – like the dialogue between the two sons – but is meant not to be found. Such complications are not very far from the central intrigue of the film, in which the hidden is present at almost all turns.

The film's many instances of uncovering (Georges' lie about not meeting Majid is soon exposed to Anne Laurent) are largely overshadowed by the number of unresolved hiddens: the most obvious among them is the authorship of clandestine recordings. The second could very well be about Majid's role. And does Pierrot's

suspicion about his mother cheating on his father have any foundation? Is there a link between Anne Laurent's potential infidelity and the guiding intrigue of the film? The forever-secret answers to many such questions then mark the film, making the subjectless act of hiding even more ambiguous. Knowing that the hidden exists, might instantly make evident the necessity of questioning, but the answers are nowhere to be found. And the accumulation of questions only leads the reader into an ever-widening blind spot where the number of hidden elements makes it difficult to define even the very nature of hiddenness. Hence the film as an accruing puzzle only singles out *Caché*, that is to say hid/hidden, as the one known fact. Notwithstanding the film's thriller genre, it is not the whodunit, neither choosing among the many hidden elements coded in the title of the film, but literally what happened or rather the hiding of that which has happened is perhaps what makes the film resist "attempts to read it as a puzzle to be decoded."¹⁶³

Justifiably Jennifer Szalai expresses indignation at the number of critics who respond with unequivocal solutions to questions that Haneke poses and allows to "linger without providing many answers."¹⁶⁴ At the same time, given that the film's "silences are just as informative as its utterances" it shouldn't be a surprise that "it elicits a wide range of responses from so many different perspectives."¹⁶⁵ The viewer then experiences the hidden as an all-pervasive element – *Caché*'s only reality. The manifest invitation in the title to fill in both the subject and the object position of the verb cacher is what allows me to read the different "hidden elements" in my own manner.

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars, introduction, "The *Caché* Dossier," *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 211.

¹⁶⁴ Jennifer Szalai, "Habits of Seeing: The Unsettling Films of Michael Haneke," *Harper's* 315.1890 (2007): 74. More about how "certain critics were determined to assume the answers that Haneke so carefully withheld" can be found on page 74.

¹⁶⁵ Ezra and Sillars, introduction, 211.

Apart from the film's links to the October 1961 Paris Massacre and the purposeful omissions as starting points dictated by the director, there are other "hiddens" and their answers in the film. Whether my attempts at calling the viewer into the equation or trying to focus on the cinematic images as an allegory of history uncovers something, however, connecting the film to debates current in the postcolonial world may at the very least validate the relevance of attempts at answering such questions. As much as firmly placing myself in the position of the reading subject and in choosing among the many "hiddens" allows me to bring out the connections with the all too present subject of colonialism in a film released in the twenty first century, this reading will also reveal me through my choices in the same degree as it will investigate the hidden.

The Family Secret

Writing about the "colonial family romance," Françoise Vergès has pointed out how the "rhetoric of the French revolutionary community of brothers paradoxically justified the subjugation of peoples in the name of *fraternité, liberté, égalité*."¹⁶⁶ Although Vergès presents here the application of familial metaphors deriving from the French Revolution to advance colonialism to presumably disadvantaged brethren in the colonies, in elucidating colonialism as "the invention of men constructing France as the parents of the colonized" (5), she might as well have been thinking of the dysfunctional (colonial) family in *Caché*, which exposes an extremely destabilized set of human relations. Going beyond a lying husband and a potentially cheating wife, this film stands as yet another manifestation of a romance that was never meant to be. As a fiction that was "constructing" in the colonies an unequal family for France, what

¹⁶⁶ Françoise Vergès, Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 4.

Caché displays in its fragmentation is the revelation of this family as nothing but a construct. That colonization for Vergès, “was the expansion of republican brotherhood” (4), is very literally reflected in the childhood relationship of the two characters, Majid and Georges, who entwined in the brotherhood of colonialism, nearly became brothers.

As the war in Algeria raged on, in Paris, on the 17th of October 1961 Maurice Papon, the then head of Parisian police, ordered a violent reprisal against demonstrators of Algerian origin that resulted in the brutal killings of hundreds of people. Indeed, that the exact number of casualties is still uncertain, is perhaps what provides *Caché* its necessary link to the massacre. As Georges reveals, “Il semble que les parents de Majid étaient de ceux-là.” As a result of this massacre Majid is orphaned and since his parents never return from the demonstration, Georges’ parents decide to do the honorable thing for their dead employees by adopting the orphaned son. Resentful of his parents’ decision and envious of the attention given Majid, Georges as a boy, through his lies, ensures the orphan is sent to the charge of the authorities, depriving Majid consequently of the opportunity to rise in life. As *Caché* opens Georges Laurent has attained fame as a TV personality – a successful literary talk-show host – who leads his bourgeois bohème life in a Paris townhouse with beautiful wife Anne Laurent and a son Pierrot. Majid, it would be found out later, has been leading a humble life with his son (Walid Afkir) in one of the low-cost high rise apartments, located on the periphery of Paris and of French society.

If, following Vergès, one is to understand that it was the republican family romance that had initiated the colonial expansion, then in 1961, Maurice Papon’s massacre of people of Algerian descent was already showing that the “fraternal bond dreamed by metropolitan brothers was affected by colonialism and its logic of racism” (Vergès 5). The definitive blow dealt on October 17, 1961 that killed hundreds of

people including Majid's parents was no doubt the most shocking moment, but actions and words aimed specifically and only to control the comings and goings of "Français musulmans" had already started generating the hate that culminated in these killings.

What happened on October 17, 1961, was not only that "tens of thousands of Algerian demonstrators marching in disciplined rank through the heart of the capital in protest against police repression ... defiantly demonstrating en masse in the streets of the capital"¹⁶⁷ were the target of state reprisal. If one follows Jim House and Neil MacMaster's assertion that this was "the bloodiest act of state repression of street protest in Western Europe in modern history" (*Paris* 1), it would be important to point out that this also manifested the deep-seated racism that had taken over the administrative machinery. Desirous of containing the activities of "terroristes algériens," that had been increasingly challenging the French police, Maurice Papon proclaimed a communiqué limiting the movement of all French Muslims:

En vue de mettre un terme sans délai aux agissements criminels des terroristes algériens, des mesures nouvelles viennent d'être décidées par la préfecture de police... il est conseillé de la façon la plus pressante aux travailleurs musulmans algériens de s'abstenir de circuler la nuit dans les rues de Paris et de la banlieue parisienne, et plus particulièrement de 20h 30 à 5h 30 du matin.¹⁶⁸

This initial proclamation is a cautionary warning of what is in store for "French Muslims," who are clubbed together with "terroristes algériens," all of whom when

¹⁶⁷ Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 1.

House and MacMaster contextualize this demonstration by explaining it as part of FLN's desire to exert pressure on de Gaulle's government: "Through a total mobilization of the Algerian community, a pacific demonstration which included women, children, and the elderly, the FLN intended to dramatically show the media and international opinion its uncontested popular support base as the unique voice of Algerian nationalism and reinforce the position of its leadership which was currently engaged in negotiations for independence with de Gaulle's government." For further information on the background and history of October 17, 1961 read House and MacMaster, 1-31.

¹⁶⁸ Maurice Papon's proclamation of October 5, 1961. Cited in Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La Bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991) 85.

being selectively asked to observe a curfew are at an obvious and a significant remove from the rest of the French family. Furthermore, this obvious collective punishment meted out to a group of people recognized officially as French could only be exercised by following a principle of physical segregation:

Cette mesure est fondée sur la responsabilité collective d'une catégorie de citoyens considérés officiellement comme Français...on sait que, pour distinguer un Français musulman d'Algérie d'un Français dit de souche, les policiers se fient à l'apparence physique, au faciès. Le couvre-feu, fondé sur la ségrégation, institue donc le racisme. (Einaudi 86)

Reading Einaudi's criticism, how can one possibly claim the success of the "family romance" of the French Republic, if from the perspective of the French police, the French Muslims from Algeria were very clearly (and perhaps had always been) under suspicion? Papon's attempt at asserting his position presumably against only "terroristes algériens," in effect reveals French Muslims as nothing more than a categorization distinct from the non-Algerian French. Should it be a surprise then that soon thereafter the Parisian police kill (or perhaps commits a fratricide against) hundreds of Algerians on October 17, protesting en-masse against the government? In taking the twentieth century "gradual erosion" in Karen Jacobs' account of "vision's key role in the unfolding narrative of modernity"¹⁶⁹ at a literal level, one does have reason to be surprised by the contradictorily dominant role vision played in this colonial exercise at the start of the sixties. This authority of the visual sets the tone for *Caché* to question its validity – not in the way that would attempt a retelling of this story, but instead a questioning of the very paradigm that determines the operation of the visual. Haneke's personal investment in the manipulative powers of the image ("Nous savons tous, qu'est-ce qu'on [sic] peut manipuler avec, avec l' image.")

¹⁶⁹ Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 7.

already tells us that *Caché* too, much like his other films (“Ça c’était aussi le thème de plusieurs de mes films.”), is going to explore the role of the image as much as it portrays the aftermath of the dismantling of the colonial family, which (re)orphans Majid.

I hesitate to call Majid’s exit from the care of Georges’ family, that follows his parents going missing as his second orphanhood, for the simultaneous collapse of the familial delusion actually signals his third. Majid should be read as symptomatic and representative of the many hundreds who were being treated to Maurice Papon’s segregationist techniques; expatriated to France and then cut off from belonging to the French national family.

Just as France tries to sort out a tumultuous relationship with Algeria and widespread violence in the early nineteen-sixties punctuates debates about the colony’s future vis-à-vis France, Georges’ childhood rejection of his adoptive brother, stands as a metaphoric reminder of the failure of a dysfunctional relationship to achieve ultimate brotherhood. Confronted with the possibility of admitting a sibling to the household, Georges’ inability to share (“Il fallait que je partage tout”) signals a definitive end to the fictional tale of *fraternité*. In the place of this lie, another relationship emerges where both Georges and Majid have to live with the consequences of a child’s lie.

At this moment Majid’s destiny becomes one with the Algerians; implicated in an imagined relationship, their erasure from the colonial family following Papon’s rejection is complete with Georges’ metaphoric refusal. Georges’ hidden guilt has given us an individual element of a larger discursive pattern that needs to be read and understood through Georges. This in no way promises a definitive solution, rather a possibility of speaking about the myth of the larger “family romance” through one localized lie.

While the massacre itself might have taken place decades ago, given that any departure from the acceptable narrative of a happy family was still being actively treated as a guilty family secret shows that the myth of colonial brotherhood did not end with October 1961. Although Papon's actions later received widespread condemnation after a public trial against him, this process of rejection and denial has been a part of the legacy associated with the memory of the October 17, 1961 massacre. Or, at least it is this silence surrounding an un-addressed guilt about the rejection of Algerians in Paris that has propelled Haneke to address the colonial angle of Georges Laurent's rejection of his adoptive brother.

This lie later evolves into Georges' many willful distortions ("petits mensonges," Serge Toubiana calls them in his interview with Haneke), falling on a continuum of exclusionary thinking of creating identities of exclusion based on the purposeful selective exclusion of the past. This denial of history defines the operational dynamics of the French colonial household and is also pivotal to *Caché*. In 2005, the year *Caché* was released, October 17, 1961 was already over forty years old, and there had been only a sketchy reference in France to this "blind spot"¹⁷⁰ in the history of the violent repression that forms the essential backdrop for the film. The initial reluctance to recognize and the subsequent exposure of the culpability of the French authorities are two moments that testify to a change – from denial to acknowledgement – of which *Caché* is an example. That Haneke can release this film in 2005 recognizes the relative willingness to discuss this topic, but that has not always been the case: "The events of 17 October 1961, when a protest against French policy in Algeria sparked a huge police operation in which hundreds of demonstrators were killed or injured, were not acknowledged at the time, nor for decades

¹⁷⁰ Martine Beugnet, "Blind Spot," *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 228.

afterwards.”¹⁷¹ To a certain extent, despite Haneke’s contemporary efforts, even today, as Catherine Wheatley rightly points out “the subject remains taboo.” Most importantly for us the role of the French government in promulgating various laws and regulations hampering the unraveling of facts that would shed light on the extent of French police’s participation, illustrates the mechanism underpinning *Caché*’s association with the past. House and MacMaster describe in greater detail how the French government refused to divulge many pieces of information pertinent to understanding October 1961. Towards the end of 1997,¹⁷² under growing pressure from the French media, even when the initial restrictions placed by the French law on archives were lifted, the French government soon resumed curtailing access to historical facts: “the Socialist led government was backtracking or acting in a secretive manner...Historians were still not allowed to check...through direct access to the original documents, except for three hand-picked historians” (*Paris* 8-9). For although the details that emerged during Papon’s trial for crimes against humanity during the Second World War, amnesty “laws concerning the Algerian war would protect him from any conviction relating to his propagation of and participation in violence at that time.”¹⁷³

Just as the simple search for a resolution of the crimes committed in the past is negated, so remains elusive the question of what happened in Georges’ past in the

¹⁷¹ Catherine Wheatley, “Secrets, Lies & Videotape,” *Sight and Sound* 16.2 (2006): 34.

¹⁷² Interestingly, it was not during a committee or a fact finding mission devoted to October 1961 but during a trial against Papon for his role in the deportation of Jews during the Second World War that the extent of his culpability in October 1961 was known:

“As the French media showed a growing interest in the events of 17 October, so there was also a demand for the opening of the state archives. A rapid shift in this direction occurred as a result of the high-profile trial of Maurice Papon (October 1997-April 1998) for crimes against humanity during the Second World War, during which the prosecution seized the opportunity to launch what the defence lawyers called the ‘trial within a trial’, an exposure of Papon’s repressive role as Paris Prefect of Police in 1961” (*Paris* 8).

¹⁷³ Ranjana Khanna, “From Rue Morgue to Rue des Iris,” *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 240.

movie. In confronting this abandoned project from the past (which is also at the same time a project of abandonment of the past) Haneke's intention is not so much to provide a resolution but to open the door for an alternate ending than the one this story has been mired in: to find a pathway that acknowledges the purposeful ignorance of the very subject so palpably present in the film; to bring forth the hidden guilt associated with a colonial past.

Haneke's treatment is very clearly in conversation with the "historical amnesia" and the "blind spot" (228) that Martine Beugnet is talking about in describing France's dealing with October 17, 1961: "J'étais super choqué," Haneke says "comment on peut avoir...deux cent morts qui sont dans la Seine et personne parle de ça pendant des années?" The search that Haneke is alerting to is not for the reasons for which these two hundred people were floating dead in the Seine, nor is it for the source of the conflict. Neither does his utter disbelief at the massacre translate into activist strategies to counter history-altering efforts like the (eventually unsuccessful) 2005 French law that required schools to show the positive side of French colonialism,¹⁷⁴ nor is it about counterbalancing the preceding silence by providing elucidation in the facts of the event,¹⁷⁵ rather it is to bring to the fore a story of guilt. As Haneke told "Christopher Sharrett in an interview for *Cineaste* in summer 2003, *Hidden* is 'about the French occupation of Algeria on a broad level, but more personally is a story of guilt and the denial of guilt'" (Wheatley 34). The guilt and its denial are historical in nature, of which, I would say 1961 is only an important punctuation mark that had destabilized the foundations of the colonial household. Even today the French government's desire to control and dominate its colonial past

¹⁷⁴ Khanna points out many such attempts propelled by the "fear of technology revealing the essence of French violence in relation to Algerians" (240).

¹⁷⁵ While replying to a question about why only a few words in the film explicitly make the connection with the war of Algeria, Haneke says: "Je voulais pas appuyer sur ce point-là."

attests to Maurice Halbwachs' claim that "the past is constructed not objectively but as myth, in the sense not of fiction, but of a past constructed collectively by a community in such a way as to serve the political claims of that community."¹⁷⁶

What the film insistently recalls and what the title instantly exposes is not a desire to describe the past, a pure replication that allows one to revisit and rediscover the incident in question that would bridge the temporal gap between the present and the past, but an acknowledgement of a hidden from the past that in not being dealt with has taken the form of Georges' guilt. In other words this evocation stands at the opposite end of an experiential cinema that according to Robert Burgoyne in films like *Forrest Gump*, *JFK* and *Saving Private Ryan* "allows individuals to 'experience a bodily, mimetic encounter with a collective past they never actually led'."¹⁷⁷ If one follows Burgoyne's understanding of Alison Landsberg this mimetic encounter involves revisiting a "collective past that they never actually led." Rather *Caché*'s focus is less on experiencing the past than it is with defining it. The entanglement with the past, which in many ways would be an epistemological concern so often associated with postcolonial literature, is not as an attempt at (re)chronicling the events of 1961, but instead of discovering the dynamics that resulted in hiding the colonial past, as well as a hidden from the past. If the film's objective is not to question the past but instead to bring to the fore the dynamics associated with its conception in the present it does so by building on the historical foundation already in place. Instead of working against a created history it works along with it to understand the dynamics of its institution. Georges' unraveling, while only a single event, is singularly important because it gives us access to the very hidden process of historical hiding (and the

¹⁷⁶ I am quoting Gildea's understanding of Halbwachs. Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 10.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Burgoyne, "Memory, History and Digital Imagery in Contemporary Film," *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 225.

hiding of history) as represented in *Caché*. And here, when talking about its dissolution, we can discuss the unfolding of this past and its fundamentally irreconcilable relationship with the present.

A Postcolonial Film

The more I revisit the film the more I am intrigued by the lack of direct commentary on the Algerian war that perhaps marks one of the most violent battles for independence in modern history – French or otherwise. If despite the centrality of the guilt related to the massacre of October 1961 Haneke did not wish to explicitly make the connection with the colonial past (to remind ourselves: “Je voulais pas appuyer sur ce point-là”, he says answering Toubiana’s question about why only a few words in the film connect it to the Algerian war), should this authorial act not call into question the film’s relationship to the colonial past? The answer I think is not that the director is merely trying to focus our attention on the present postcolonial moment where both Majid and Georges, living in Paris, are separated from the colonial past, nor is he in fact talking about the irrelevance of the past. In accepting the irrevocable connection between the guilt and the past, he signals, what I believe to be the driving motif behind this film’s rationale, that of apprehending the temporal connection between the colonial and the postcolonial world.

When it omits any reference to this war and shows it as relevant, *Caché* both testifies to the absence of the past and yet makes it textually possible to approach it. In a Derridian move, I would say, the *Caché* in the title although signaling an absence can only find its relevance in making blatantly present that which is buried and hidden.

As today’s postcolonial reflections have diverged from binary ways of thinking, the continued desire to read this film as “Haneke’s contemporary parable of

Franco-Algerian relations”¹⁷⁸ is nonetheless only a reflection of the very modernity the film seems to be ironically speaking against. Even though Max Silverman claims that Georges and Anne “are not to be read as an allegory of France but only of a certain generation and class of French men and women,” his interpretation of Haneke’s cinematic technique that “breach[es] the world of simulacra...[to] fragment a safe world” does not take away from the oppositional binary he sets up. Evoking Frantz Fanon in a Manichean move to claim that *Caché* “reverses the gaze of the western colonizer and exposes the hidden fears” (Silverman 245), is a recuperation of the modernist vision that overlooks the historical disruption central to *Caché*. Given the title of the film, I rephrase Silverman’s argument that aims to see Georges and Anne as emblems of the French *seal*. Given that cachet is a French homophone of *Caché* and means an official seal, the two characters could be read as testifying to French genuineness.¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, I still see in such a partial “allegory of France” a permanent stabilization of colonial definitions. Establishing Georges and Anne as a particular kind of French couple, despite claims to the contrary, institutes the very ontological stability whose end the title of the film signals. Additionally, this modernist binary gives us an idea of how Fanon would look at the past: a discrete entity, detached from the present whose violent rejection was central to Fanon’s denial of filiation with a wounded colonial past.¹⁸⁰ In her own analysis, Vergès rightly overlooks this history of “progressive development,” based on distancing oneself from a past one can neither receive nor transform, in favor of one where the colonial past is

¹⁷⁸ Max Silverman, "The Empire Looks Back," *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 248.

¹⁷⁹ “Cachet,” *Le Trésor*, 1 May 2008 <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/>>.

“Domaine de la vie administr. Petit objet de métal ou de pierre fine, souvent monté sur un anneau ou un manche, gravé en creux ou en relief d’initiales, d’emblèmes ou d’armes, que l’on imprime sur de la cire (ou autre matière malléable) pour fermer une lettre ou servir de marque distinctive.”

¹⁸⁰ Vergès’ understanding of Fanon.

very much present and relevant to our contemporary times. Neither its role nor its presence today can be denied nor overlooked. Silverman's discussion, steeped in the same binary it seems to criticize, in at least aiming at exposing "the hidden fears and fantasies still at play today in a postcolonial re-run of the colonial encounter" (Silverman 245), provides hope that "the colonial paradigm may be broken by the dialogue and shifting perspectives of a postcolonial paradigm" (Silverman 249). But this conciliatory vision of the future is completely dead for Paul Gilroy who reads Majid's suicide in the film as a dark replay of the colonial natives disappearing "through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence."¹⁸¹ As this reading, in a reconciliatory move, presents this violence as a step "forward from older modernist explorations of the psychological and philosophical ambiguities" (Gilroy 234), it very pertinently connects the film with an understanding of the past in a postcolonial world.

Gilroy wags a reproachful finger at Haneke for perpetuating many of the colonial structures dictated by modernity that offer precious little beyond the simplistic insight that "colonialism brings out the worst in everyone it touches" (Gilroy 235). Gilroy focuses on the implicit meaning that can be drawn from the continuity between the lies of a small child and the duplicity of Georges the adult. In this continuity Gilroy sees a "convenient cop-out" which exonerates complacent adults "as they bear no more responsibility for their resignation, inertia and poisonous choices than a conflicted six year old" (235). But this genealogical continuity between Georges' childhood lie from this "colonial past" to his denial of guilt in the "postcolonial present" lays bare the very modernist gesture Gilroy is trying to criticize and also the very genealogical basis on which he has drawn out the opposition between Georges the colonizer and Majid the colonized. If Gilroy sees in *Caché* a

¹⁸¹ Paul Gilroy, "Shooting Crabs in a Barrel," *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 234.

world fractured by the binary of the colonized/colonizer, colonial/postcolonial, it is no wonder he ominously concludes that following a film like *Caché* another world, “it would seem, is not possible” (Gilroy 235). The objective of seeing beyond this progressive history where the six year old Georges moves from the colonial world to the postcolonial as Georges the adult, is what has prompted me to question the postcolonial focus as an indicator to define *Caché*. The sort of contradictory criticism based on binary oppositions that *Caché* garners, while not surprising in the academic world, does identify the central puzzlement over the definition of *Caché* as a postcolonial work. The two-pronged reasoning that follows allows me to recuperate the postcolonial stance from its binary usage and also to point out how this term is the most appropriate for understanding *Caché*’s engagement with the past. Not only through the debates surrounding its temporal definition, but also through its openness to experimentation, I would argue, ‘postcolonial’ insulates from definitive sedimentation of identity in (and of) *Caché*. As I move to understand how the constantly reformulating temporal alignments are (con)fusing the binary polarities still at play in the colonial world, the national identities in *Caché* are already questioning the definitions of Haneke’s work.

Two well-known French-born actors (Juliette Binoche and Daniel Auteuil) and an Algerian-born actor (Maurice Bénichou) come together to act out an intrigue involving the Parisians Georges Laurent, Anne Laurent and Majid. Can this film be called postcolonial because it is related to an incident during France’s (still enduring) colonial era resulting in the death of Majid’s Algerian parents in a demonstration held in Paris against France’s colonial policies during the Algerian war? If so, then what do we make of the French speaking Austrian director and script writer of *Caché*? And, how does the director’s stated wish to connect the film also to other international

contexts of national guilt (“dark stains on the collective unconscious”¹⁸² of the United States, for example) revise its postcolonial standing?

Needless to say my usage of the term for *Caché* would be as contentious as any of the many other permutations that combine the ‘post’ with the ‘colonial,’ and in as much as it is in part a concession to the unbridgeable polemics it conjures up, it is also at the same time an acknowledgement of what Benita Parry presents as the multi-faceted dimensions of ‘postcolonial.’ The enumeration of definitions (“those denoting a historical transition, a cultural location, a discursive stance, an epochal condition distinguished by the entry into metropolitan cultures of other voices, histories and experiences, and an achieved transition.”¹⁸³) allows one to see, but only a little of, the panorama of lexicon that has given ‘postcolonial’ temporal, spatial, economic, cultural and many other connotations.

While this profusion makes it impossible to comment on all its dimensions, it is the film’s association with a past that ‘postcolonial’ helps me resolve. The sign of the past that I have been referring to in this chapter is with no intention of getting caught in the same past-justifying strategies of linearity that were the hallmark of a colonizing modernity. This colonization saw time linearly and justified its expansionist project by claiming to be further advanced than others on the ladder of a history of progression, which “according to the modernists, is only the scale by which progress ascends, using epochs as its steps.”¹⁸⁴ The postcolonial that *Caché* reveals is

¹⁸²Michael Haneke, “Collective Guilt and Individual Responsibility: An Interview with Michael Haneke,” by Richard Porton, Cineaste: America's Leading Magazine on the Art and Politics of the Cinema, 31.1 (2005): 50.

Explaining why *Caché* is not about a specific French problem, Haneke says: “I don't want my film to be seen as specifically about a French problem. It seems to me that, in every country, there are dark corners—dark stains where questions of collective guilt become important. I'm sure in the United States there are other parallel examples of dark stains on the collective unconscious.”

¹⁸³ Benita Parry, Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique (London, England: Routledge, 2004) 3.

¹⁸⁴ Luis Britto-García, “Critiques of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Counterculture, Revolution,” South Atlantic Quarterly 92.3 (1993): 520.

much closer to Bhabha's usage of the term where (despite its possible criticism¹⁸⁵) postcolonialism does not indicate "sequentiality" (Parry 57), but instead is the indicator of what Bhabha calls the "postmodern condition"¹⁸⁶ – a gesture to a beyond, which in Parry's words also denotes a "disjunctive relationship with that anterior condition by which it is indelibly marked" (Parry 57).

In turning towards Michel Laronde who organizes "postcolonial literatures according to the nature of their ties with the French nation, with its literature and with the French language"¹⁸⁷ I cannot find among three categories of "the new national literatures, the literatures of 'contact,' and the literatures of immigration" one that would accommodate *Caché*. This is not to fault Laronde, whose article looks at the "Literature(s) of Immigration in France," instead it is to point to a new space of articulation that reve(a)ls in a (dis)orderly (con)fusion of boundaries – both temporal as well as spatial – (dis)orienting us towards a multiplicity of discourses. *Caché* is then a case that escapes textbook definitions. It is because of this insistent (ab/pre)sence of borders that *Caché* hides and constantly beckons us to try and uncover that one can read into the film many answers to Khanna's question: "what, exactly is *caché*" (237)? This sort of performative presence in engaging both the temporal and the spatial axes of the postcolonial stands not only as an example of a (atypical) postcolonial work but also a reflection back that constantly seeks to change postcolonial's ever-evolving definition. *Caché*, a film that questions the postcolonial while participating in it, I would argue, postulates an unlimited world determined by limitless boundaries.

¹⁸⁵ Parry is uncomfortable with Bhabha's "disposal of the language model to explain both colonialism's pasts and contemporary 'postcolonial' situations" and discusses on page 57 the criticisms offered against this model.

¹⁸⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 4.

¹⁸⁷ H. Adlai Murdoch, Anne Donadey, and Françoise Lionnet, ed., *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2005) 181-2.

While I attempt to read *Caché* as a postcolonial work in order to delink it from a world solely based on chronological temporal progress, it is also to confess that as contested a term as postcolonial, to be sure, has provided many a theorists the opportunity to create alternate and some times competing paradigms for reading colonial history, at times even seeing in the term a threat to the very research on colonialism. I am not decrying, as do Ella Shohat and Robert Stam for example, the post in the postcolonial, for suggesting an end to the colonial era such that postcolonial “risks obscuring the deformative traces of the colonial hangover in the present, while at the same time delegitimizing research into the precolonial past.”¹⁸⁸ Such a postcolonial if taken seriously, in signaling the end of the colonial, would also ironically mark the continuation of the very modernity based on an idea of chronological progression where the past can be recreated and whose criticism seems at the heart of the term postcolonial as it is used by Bhabha. Examples of such thinking, that fears not appreciating the colonial, are numerous and are for the most part insistent on iterating the presence of the one and the only colonial past, whereas the postcolonial I am talking about functions not so much as a chronological continuity but as a reiterated return, abounding with possibilities. Re-evoking Bhabha:

If the jargon of our times - postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the 'post' to indicate sequentiality....wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices - women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities. (4-5)

¹⁸⁸ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, introduction, Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media ed. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 14.

Simply put, the above quotation counters all anxiety in Shohat and Stam's question that sees a blurring of assignment of perspectives in postcolonial; does the "*post*" indicate the perspective of the ex-colonized (Algerian, for example), the ex-colonizer (in this case French), the ex-colonial-settler (*pied noir*), or the displaced hybrid in the metropole (Algerian in France)" (Shohat and Stam 14)? By postulating multiple histories – "dissonant, even dissident histories" – Bhabha's statement makes answering Shohat and Stam's question very easy: all perspectives gain relevance. Such a thinking brings down the restrictions of "boundaries" and "limits" and opens up the possibility of a multiplicity of perspectives; not the imposition of a definitive choice as Ella and Shohat would want us to make in relation to the French colonial relation with Algeria, thereby privileging only one perspective, but leaving space for a constant challenge and renewal, one that would stall any possibility of fixing and thus essentializing the debate that surrounds the colonial.

Caché, with its multi-pronged investment in the French colonial history would be a perfect subject for Shohat and Stam's question, and the title of the film answers it eloquently with its silence. The issue of a choice between Georges and Majid is strictly immaterial – what does matter is the possibility of constant renewal and also of alternative articulations that keeps it in a state of non-exclusive impermanence. A postcolonial that simultaneously negates while exploring multiple histories does in no way bring us to a comfort zone of a resolution where the hidden can be understood and thus soothe our anxieties about the other important question: "what, exactly is *caché*" (Khanna 237)? Both questions are unanswerable but in this invitation to identify *caché* and to choose among the perspectives we get access to another of the film's foundational obscurities: no different from the hiding and the hidden signaled all throughout the film, a state of perpetual questionability is central to this film, indeed to the kind of postcolonial context that decisively undoes all definitions about

the film. *Caché*, then inhabits a transitory space between several myths, where it is not the impossibility of determining the universal truth but rather the opportunity of drawing several genealogies into the past, much like the postcolonial I have been arguing for and that *Caché* displays.

The relevance of the unease caused by the video cassettes sent to Georges, that nullify the semblance of calm and stability in Georges' bourgeois bohème lifestyle, extends much beyond his household to the realm of multinational politics. No more can such fixed definitions as those of the colonizer and the colonized be taken for granted in a new world defined by an unstable sign – this is the fundamental transformation that I read in the film and see as evident from the opening sequence itself. Temporally speaking *Caché* straddles over two spaces, in which it has become impossible to determine where the past is hidden and the place the present inhabits, for the past appears as the one constant – not a connecting link – but the all pervasive element that marks much of the film: reminding of and yet not directly connected to the colonial past.

The Ever-Present Past

The uniqueness of the first sequence of this film, a scene where Georges watches himself being watched, allows us to move away from the colonial binary that bases all definitions on the 'Other', to probe the relevance of self-representation and self appreciation. Rigging Georges' present with the virus of a colonial past, the first allegorical sequence forms the default imperative for this film's dilemma, as it is dictated by and dictates the process of reconciliation that leads to the dissolution of the colonial guilt to an equation that is better suited to the global context of this film.

Given the background of a colonial family that I have been drawing, it should not be a surprise if I insist on pointing out that the very first sequence of a film that

recounts the destabilization of Georges' life, centers around his townhouse – locus of his familial stability and security. Undoubtedly, this could very well be that instead of assuring their security this townhouse has been securing them inside, making them thus “prisoners of their own making, or at least of their own circumstances.” That these “characters are literally behind bars, and bars” is apparent in the presentation of their townhouse: “the composition of shots of its exterior puts its vertical barred windows center frame; horizontal bars cut across shots; the iron gate clangs.”¹⁸⁹ When the first of the video cassettes – also the very first sequence – of these very bars that form the exterior of the house, finds its way in, the virus that would undo this semblance of security has been introduced. Breaking through, it not only conveys the outside to the sheltered inside it also brings the past into the present. If according to Beugnet the gaze of the video image in *Caché* is to be read as the “objectifying, mechanical yet voyeuristic stare of the surveillance camera,” then the (colonial) household is shaken for good. As a sequence that provides the beginning of the disturbance caused by the clandestine recordings of Georges' life, these shots also establish the lack of temporal unity and the constant question mark about the authorship of visuals that remain as recurrent tropes throughout the film.

Ezra and Sillars have rightly pointed out that the first long establishing shot “disrupts our expectations” by not following “cinematic conventions through the length of take, the static camera and the increasingly ambient noise” (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 218). In addition, this shot provides the guiding principle for the film. The film opens with a well-lit static shot of a townhouse, with sparse passing traffic and the chattering of birds making for some ambient noise. There is a jump cut with the same house being filmed from a different perspective with reduced lighting and reduced

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Ezra and Jane Sillars, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Bringing Terror Home,” *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 215-21.

ambient noise. In this second shot Daniel Auteuil walks out of the house, the frontal static long shot of a townhouse has been replaced by a profile wide shot camera pan that follows Auteuil across the street and back into his house, where after following his wife in, he locks up the door. The sequence cuts back to the well-lit frontal static camera of the townhouse. All this while two voices – Auteuil’s and Binoche’s – continue having a conversation both off and on camera. It is only when the moving images stop and are being reversed as the dialogue between the couple continues off-camera that the viewer has the first inkling of watching a recording within a film. While I will have more to say about how the film keeps the viewer in guessing mode about the source of the visuals on screen, it should suffice to bookmark for the moment this opening sequence as a signature example of how it is only retrospectively that one is able to distinguish if the visual – the second pan shot – belongs to linear narrative time, or is a previously recorded clandestine video.

I could have hastened to point out from the very beginning what the viewer establishes soon afterwards: that these shots belonging to two different moments of the day (well-lit shot – a recording from a few hours ago; dimly-lit shot belongs to the current narrative) form a *mise en abyme* of a couple watching a video recording of themselves, but that would have restricted the sequence to only one reading. This is not only a narrative formed of actual images (the film’s depiction of a temporality contemporaneous to Georges’ life) where the virtual images¹⁹⁰ (the video recordings from a few hours ago) overlap onto the narrative flow, making it seem like the video recordings are separate from the movie. Instead, I want to insist that these recordings seem, at least initially, to be very much a part of a linear narrative such that the second shot only seems like an editorial jump cut, and all three bring together a coherent

¹⁹⁰ I rely on Martine Beugnet’s terms “actual” and “virtual” images to distinguish between the narrative visuals and the clandestine video recordings.

filmic sequence. Such a reading allows for the existence of (at least) two simultaneous possibilities, both leading to different but valid cinematic narratives.

Although this opening sequence does not offer any visuals from Georges' profession, later sections will also give me the opportunity to dwell upon the complications associated with identifying retrospectively yet another set of visuals recorded in the studio of a TV anchor. What this opening sequence does offer through the usage of temporal jump cuts is the continuity between three shots from two different times of the day creating thus, from a temporal perspective, an anachronistic simultaneity of actions that could only seem an obvious impossibility. Yet, cinematically the jump cut that connects two disparate time periods, performs what is the defining motif of the film: it strings together the past and the present into a narrative where instead of one linearly flowing into the other, disconcerting sutures create a narrative simultaneity such that these two moments seem cinematically connected. Nonetheless, once the *mise en abyme* becomes clear and when considered retrospectively, very noticeably these are also two distinct shots of the same house at two different times of the day, and also that the second shot is a recording of the past being replayed in the current time; laying bare contradictorily a perceptible lack of continuity between them. What we have then is the emergence of two distinct narratives, not necessarily oppositional but distinct nonetheless in a way that raises questions about temporal unity and the relationship between the past and the present. This confusion needs to exist, neither explained nor emphasized, but just to be there for the viewer to realize that the "video image does not so much 'puncture' through ... but rather weaves itself" into the narrative. For why else would Haneke shoot "the entire feature in High Definition format" (Beugnet 230) erasing the lines between the clandestine and the narrative video and creating the possibility for reading the two as both a single sequence and two at the same time; as a single continuous narrative and

two discrete narratives at the same time?¹⁹¹ “This questioning of the status of the image – both its temporality and its truth value – is repeated throughout *Caché*” (Ezra and Sillars 218). Or, in other words, from the very first sequence emerges the destabilization of temporal unity, as a destabilized sign that remains the deciding motif throughout the film.

Georges is made to reckon with the force of a past that re-manifests itself at the least expected moment giving us an insight into the opposition that Georges’ present faces from the past and simultaneously establishing the inseparability of the past and the present. In this three-part sequence the fixed shot of the video recording forms the two ends of the sequence, in a way encapsulating the movement shot of a pan that designates the cinematic present. The reason for commencing with the opening shot is no doubt because it provides a literal template of Georges’ life – that is it is the past that forms the connecting points for the present as well as propels it forward, but also because it raises questions about the clandestine nature of these recordings. As the unsolved intrigue that remains the motivating force through the narrative, the un-established authorship of these tapes would also allow me to dwell on their relationship with the viewer.

¹⁹¹ Paul Grainge while talking about *Pleasantville*, a 1990’s film, discusses how digital colorization allows for a “circulation and rearticulation of the past, in and by the present” (216). To extend this argument about digital change distinguishing the past from the present to *Caché*, does Haneke’s technological unity of video format while representing not only two distinct temporal moments but supposedly also two different sources of recording – that of the director and of the hidden recorder – not lead us to the assertion that digital “technology has raised new questions about the ideology of cinematic representation and referentiality and the status of memory is embroiled in these cultural and critical transformations” (216). Raising questions about the intersection of technology and our understanding of history for both *Caché* and *Pleasantville*, “articulates a discourse of cultural remembrance in a moment where the textuality of memory has, itself, become increasingly hyperconscious” (217). Or, in terms important for my own work, how might one figure the text of colonial history in a language that states the reality of the colonial situation without repeating any of its limitations?
Paul Grainge, “Colouring the Past: *Pleasantville* and the Textuality of Media Memory,” *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 220-236.

The changed subject – visuals of Georges’ mother’s house instead of his own – of yet another video-cassette that the couple receive while they are hosting some friends for dinner, has Georges speculating about Majid’s possible involvement. He confesses later to Anne: “Je soupçonnais que c’était lui, pas au début, mais depuis la cassette avec la maison de maman.” To follow the exchange that took place with his mother during this exploratory mission where Georges tries to garner information about Majid is to call into focus the central relationship between memory and history:

Georges: Tu sais de qui j’ai rêvé l’autre jour ?
La mère: Non.
Georges: Majid.
La mère: Qui ça, Majid ?
Georges: Quoi ? Majid !
La mère: Aucune idée.
Georges: Majid, voyons ! Le fils de Hachem. Que vous vouliez adopter.
La mère: Ah, bon !
Georges: Bizarre, non ?
La mère: Comment ça, bizarre ?
Georges: Ben, après toutes ces années.
La mère: C’est pas si bizarre que ça, je rêve souvent de mon enfance.
C’est comme ça quand on vieillit.
Georges: Oui, bon, euh. Je suis pas si vieux que ça.
La mère: Ah... ça vient plus tôt que tu ne crois.
Georges: Tu y penses, parfois ?
La mère: A qui ?
Georges: A Majid.
La mère: Non
Georges: Comment ça ?
La mère: Quoi, comment ça ?
Georges: Ben, comment ça se fait ? Tu penses pas à lui, jamais ?
Pourtant ça a été important cette histoire pour papa et toi à l’époque.
La mère: Il y a longtemps de ça. Et en plus, c’est un mauvais souvenir. Tu es mieux placé pour le savoir.

In this exchange to evoke the traumatic moment from the past, a moment of “lived history” Maurice Halbwachs would say, is not without calling to mind “learned

history”¹⁹² – memory communicated to us externally (such as by history books) about historical events. While historians dealing in “learned history” might have every interest in recreating the exact dynamics of the events of October 17, 1961, Georges’ recollections are of a moment of “lived history,” where the personal memory of what he lived through coincided with another that would later become a part of France’s (censored) history books. It is the purposeful disregard for Georges’ lived history and France’s colonial history that brings them together in *Caché* despite their difference being very much operational. The answer to questions by Georges (“Ben, comment ça se fait ?...Pourtant ça a été important cette histoire”) and by Haneke (“comment on peut avoir...deux cent morts qui sont dans la Seine et personne parle de ça pendant des années?”) about a forgotten past is not sought here, instead in their invocation one has taken the first step towards claiming the traumatic experience.

Such an articulation finds a response in this mother-son conversation on the urgent need for thinking in terms other than of history, a need whose resolution is on display in this exchange between mother and son where Majid’s name appears for the first time in the film. Uttering Majid’s name five times between them recognizes the existence of this “mauvais souvenir” and also very literally brings together Halbwachs’ notions of a collective memory – a recollection. As contrasted to the statement that “History is unitary,”¹⁹³ Halbwachs’ claim that there are “several collective memories” signals the creation of an intricate web of interconnectedness between personal and collected memories that situates Georges’ memories within a larger framework such that Georges while being one point on the collective memory is very much also its contributing component.

¹⁹² Maurice Halbwachs, *Collective memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr., and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980) 57. History, says Halbwachs, is something “of which books and narratives generally give us only a very schematic and incomplete picture.”

¹⁹³ For differences between History and collective memory read Halbwachs 78-87.

I would read this moment where Georges' curiosity about Majid makes him broach the topic and his mother's desire to not talk about it as two memories of different valences making up and demonstrating the existence of a larger collective memory in which Majid's place is being re-carved. Ironically, presenting the remembrance using the past tense ("ça a été important cette histoire") while reinforcing the distance that Georges' mother would like to maintain, also demonstrates the existence of the memory in the present ("c'est un mauvais souvenir") and brings about the possibility of forging a connection with this distant past. In this avoidance that Georges' mother exercises, her efforts at absencing Majid contradictorily revives his memory and signals his presence – as also that of his story – within a community. Her inability to elaborate and her reverting back to Georges – who was hoping for some clarifications – as a carrier of this bad memory ("Tu es mieux placé pour le savoir") point to his centrality and provides him as the starting point.

To attempt to situate this past is to animate a highly subjective process that is marked with such absences as are being experienced by the mother and the son, to prospect in a direction that is forever marked in uncertainty. But in a film that repeatedly questions images and distorts perspectives, this vagueness is an invitation that opens up a new space where one may participate in the continuous restitution and questioning of memory; a space that depends on the pre-requisite of a collectivity allowing a way to extend the mother-son dynamics also to the viewer. In pointing that this remembrance is both relaying a personal milestone that relates to a particular event in his own personal life and also relates to a larger historical remembrance common to a collective memory, I am not saying that I am interested in finding out how this memory was formed, or perhaps what shape it took at a personal or a collective level. And as important as it is to acknowledge the historical rejection

common to both, I would also readily admit the near impossibility of unraveling the entirety of the history associated with October 1961, but this articulation allows me to admit to the existence of a larger collective memory. As much as the larger collective memory exists, it is the prerequisite of the multiplicity that allows to look at Georges' memories as connected to this larger collective memory.

A critic who points out to the futility of such an exercise would be right to question if we can in fact recreate the entirety of a remembrance "by reconstructing a historical conception of it?"¹⁹⁴ Or, in Georges' case, even in relating his personal experiences to those of historical significance, is it truly arguable that the historical event can be recreated? Although Halbwachs is talking about reconstructing a childhood memory personal in nature by recollections of an event known to have happened, in approaching the equation from the opposite direction, I am trying to argue here for addressing the collective framework through Georges' personal remembrances of the past. This past "acts as a framework into which are woven his [a child's] most personal remembrances" (68). And in trying to address this framework through Georges' memory, what I am trying to do is to reconstitute this "framework" by addressing one of its elements. The three-part first sequence of the film sets this possibility up for reading the problematic interconnected temporal opposition between Georges' present and a resurgence from the past, which on a larger scale is about self-perception in relation to the representation of history in contemporary times.

Georges watching himself as someone watched him earlier in the day is a forceful re-inscription into the present of Georges' memory that has been unwittingly colluding with the history of colonialism. This forced auto-surveillance is a reminder

¹⁹⁴ Dynamics of the reconstruction of a memory are discussed in greater detail in Halbwachs 68-71.

that in this continuum of time, one can never disentangle from oneself; the creation of a past and moving across time does not mean the loss of time, it represents on the contrary a self that is formed on the accumulated building blocks of subjectivity that have been formed over time. While it clearly provides a means of accessing the past, this auto-surveillance also speaks of a psychological stranglehold of the ever-present gaze of self-introspection that dispenses with Georges' convenient selective amnesia. Forgetting Majid might seem like the completion of the colonial task but what remains ignored is the role of the person forgetting, who even in this elision of the 'Other' still remains the link between the present and the forgotten. Suspended forever in a zone of overcoming, Georges is the very reminder, if not of the memory, then at least of its forgetting. The comprehension, not only of the colonial subject at hand but all that composed it over time can only be had by a process of contemporaneous unraveling that would explain the dynamics of one's interaction with the 'Other' is why *Caché* can only begin with this three-shot sequence where Georges' past and the present seem to cohabit in shots from different times of the day.

From the opening sequence, in what appears to be a masterful cinematic moment, the pan (the second of the three shot sequence) that operates in the real time of Georges' life, also literally puts Georges at the center of narrative when it follows him across the street and back into his apartment. Georges has perused the perspective that captured his past to reassume the state of the recorded subject, bringing to light in a succinct manner the far more complicated process of introspection that recalibrates the present via the past, today's self through an earlier self, and an imagined self through an other self. By putting himself where the camera could have been, Georges lets know what is soon to become evident to the viewer: that the observed is the observer itself from a different perspective.

Georges' movement – across the street and back – portrays a process of extracting the self from the past to resituate it, dissolving at the same time past's stranglehold. To access the past that defines the way the self is perceived in the present is to have animated also past's problematic association with the present self, and also to accept its determining role in our perception of the present. Indeed, it also diffuses the dynamics of opposition between the two supposedly distinct entities of the past and the future, transforming them from two subsequent elements on the continuum of time into a simultaneous equation where the two are interlinked as mutually influencing juxtapositions. Also, the film's focus on Georges' reactions to these recordings effectively renders moot any queries about the authorship of these videos by attributing all responsibility to his own evasive desire to disclaim what they represented.

What this film about forgetting the colonized 'Other' does in suspending any allusions to an author of these clandestine videos and yet maintaining Georges as the viewer is to remind us of his inability to escape the colonial subject and the subject of colonialism: both being alive in him and even due to him. Georges' isolation is complete, not in a way that would corner him, although that too is happening as we shall discuss later, but as a symptom of colonialism. After the spotlight on his temporal existence, this authorlessness completes Georges' isolation by eliminating all contemporaneous elements of conflict that might disallow comprehension of his role in the evolution of colonialism.

Contrary to how it might be mis-read as a move that leads to the total eradication of the 'Other', this focus on Georges directs us to the definition of the 'Other': ignored and forgotten, lying suppressed all this time, the colonial 'Other' is not a task concluded, but rather a historical layer that regains ground through Georges' memories. The question of who filmed these video recordings remains unanswered

through the end of the film, not because the issue is irrelevant but because of even more importance is Georges' centrality to the entire situation. In a way this reading allows for the obliteration of the 'Other' of Majid, but only with the recognition that Majid is still alive in the memory of the person who forgets. And in this manner the existence of these videos is solely the function of Georges' presence. They are not only of him or about him, but also by him and in being so they point also to his centrality as a link between a forgotten past and the present.

More importantly, this 'self-centered' sequence of Georges anticipates the way in which this colonially inflected story would resolve its relationship with a colonial past. Having validated the presence of the recorded perspective, the pan then follows Georges back to his house where the testament of this past in the form of the clandestine recording awaits him on the VCR – but there will be one change. Instead of just seeing himself being seen, Georges opens the scene for commentary when it is his action of forwarding the cassette that lets it be known that he and the viewer of *Caché* were watching a recording. Till this moment, what was being perceived as a sequence of three shots over linear time, with Georges' fast forwarding, becomes clear, was an assemblage of two different shots from different perspectives and at different points of time. The integrity of a linear history is no more a reality and the colonial subject, as a result, cannot be cast away into a distant, un-related past, from where its excavation as an artifact would evoke a now extinct colonial history. The temporal simultaneity that I claim becomes evident with this reconfiguration that juxtaposes events alongside each other instead of manifesting them in linear succession to create a history of progression. In the act of accelerating the speed of the video-cassette alone the ability to address the past should be amply clear, but in this disclosure it is the possibility of multiple stories that allows Georges to be read simultaneously as the passive subject of surveillance as well as the active pursuer of

an answer about the past and also metaphorically into the past. It is such an understanding that allows Georges' past to be read on a historical axis in order to resituate him within a postcolonial debate of redemptive history that attempts to affirm, without firming up the dimensions of history.

If, indeed, answers are to be sought in (and about) this (postcolonial?) film mired in questions of history, it is not through a search of origins, be they historical or geographical but rather through a strategy of subjective articulation. On receiving the first tape as "Georges and Anne become fixated on discovering where the tape has been shot from – in other words, its geographical point of origin" (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 218), so does Georges follow the video-cassette back to his mother's place and also back to the place where the Georges-Majid interaction began. It is a similar strategy of locating the "point of origin" that occupies my reading of *Caché*'s relocation of history, but with the caveat that such an origin is never to be found and remains in a flux with the knowledge that it exists and needs to be articulated.

Such a looking into the past, does not work to recreate history but does work like a "prophétie du passé,"¹⁹⁵ a "vision renversée d'un trou de mémoire éperdue"¹⁹⁶; a counter-discourse "dont l'objectif n'est pas de refaire l'histoire, mais défaire l'anti-histoire racontée par 'l'Occident', afin de mettre au jour l'espace 'diffracté' de toutes les histoires qui relatent comment les cultures ont vécu et vivent la Relation mondiale." Glissant presents this paradoxical 'prophecy of the past' as a way of problematizing a domain that existed before this unitary world came into being with its unitary linear history in the 16th century. For my reading of *Caché* this offers the

¹⁹⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Discours Antillais*, 132. Quoted in Jacques Coursil, *Etudes post-coloniales francophones*, Unpublished remarks, Cornell University (Fall 2002) 4.

¹⁹⁶ Coursil's understanding of Glissant's "prophétie du passé" (*Etudes* 4).

opportunity of presenting a subjective ‘prophesy’ of a forgotten past associated with October 17, 1961.

Glissant writes about an anti-discourse in the wake of four centuries of a linear colonial history (title of Glissant’s novel *Le Quatrième Siècle* testifies to such a world), the prophesy (etymologically: “pro phaniae, rendre visible par la parole”; Coursil, *Etudes* 4) that occludes the historical linearity is also seen in Georges’ conversation with his mother. Although he confronts his mother’s silence on his travel to this point of origin, in evoking Majid he is prophesizing the past through his memory. Despite himself, Georges is literally making history: through the avoidance and the gingerly hesitation in bringing up Majid, he uncovers the ground of memory. For the mother and the son, history has been exhausted as a means of providing an answer.

Such a practice enjoins us to push the historical narrative to a purposefully indeterminate space, uncertain, unverifiable and constructed; it necessitates the deployment of a vocabulary that allows the discursive space to be forever open. Such temporal destabilization, as this reading of an uncertain memory proposes, goes well against those critics who in postulating the postcolonial rely on its modernity-inspired variant that goes in search of a fixed past and essentializes the postcolonial.

In other words, this postcolonial that I see in *Caché* is not a flat contourless present where any attempt at understanding history is seen with the same suspicion intended for a linear project like colonialism. This would be the kind of postmodern where Bongie sees lacking “the grounds for a belief in radical difference”: such a postmodern if accepted would locate “us in a confusing and complicitous present in which differences have become (un)likenesses” (*Islands* 410). To succumb to such a situation would mean renouncing all attempts at understanding the effect of the past in our present and also our present understanding of history; by extension it would leave

us with unexplained hidden whose continued haunting of our present would prolong the very guilt that assails Georges and also much of the postcolonial world.

Escaping Images

In the very first three part sequence, although Georges fast forwards the clandestine images of himself, he is not in control of these images that create many competing narratives. In raising questions about the monopolization of images, I now turn to the cinematic techniques deployed in *Caché* as an invitation to the viewer for a larger collective solution. Nowhere is this involvement with the viewer more visible in the film than in the confusing opening shot. With Georges' house as the background there is nothing indicating that this shot is not part of the film's narrative time but is instead a recording. Only later is it revealed that *Caché*'s very first frame is a clandestine recording of Georges that he happens to be watching. The distinction between the viewer and the viewed suddenly becomes more nuanced, and the binary split between the two enforced by the cinematic screen is diffused, when from viewing a subject, with the realization that the viewer is watching on the screen Georges who is watching himself on another screen, *Caché*'s viewer too becomes directly implicated in a similar equation.¹⁹⁷

This retrospective understanding of the visuals, in severing momentarily the temporal unity of the narrative, is to be read as an apostrophe to the viewer who can never take these visuals for granted as their authorship remains forever in question.

Are these images part of the film time, or the work of the clandestine recorder, or

¹⁹⁷ In pointing out how and why the film was attractive to a particular kind of viewer, Mark Cousins too speaks about their connection with the characters in the film. *Caché* "made certain types of people and groupings semiconductors for its suture, mystery and anxieties... Not only did it intrigue, but it featured people whose social lives are organized like those of the middle-class, urban, ideas-aware groups that journalists dismissively call the chattering classes... *Caché* held a mirror up to such socio-intellectual networks and showed them anxieties which, to them, were unexpected, clever and stimulating" (224). Mark Cousins, "After the End: Word of Mouth and *Caché*," *Screen* 48.2 (2007): 224.

perhaps even a part of Georges' profession of a TV show host? The viewer of *Caché* is never sure of who is watching whom and thus remains implicated in this game of situating one's perspective.

One scene that explicates these dynamics of the viewer's presence and involvement in the watching comes in the last quarter of the film as Georges is editing his programs. Pierrot goes missing for a night only to return the following morning. Having decided to spend the night at a friend's place he ignored to call his parents, provoking a mini crisis of sorts. The reason I bring up the apparently innocuous conversation between the father and the son the following night after the tenuous calm is restored is not because it could shed additional light on the working of this shaky household (Georges' fatherly concern for example: "Pierrot, ça va bien toi?"), but because of the animated talk show scene that it cuts to. What appears, as soon as the son exits the bathroom, is a shot over Georges' right shoulder of two guests in a talk-show setting discussing the 19th century French poet Rimbaud. Of the four guests these two dominate most of the incoherent conversation and the other two are able to squeeze in a few brief comments. Despite being the host, Georges is silent and he appears in two over the shoulder shots and one cut away where he is nodding understandingly with his hand to his mouth. What follows does not belie any expectations about *Caché*. With Georges' injunction of "Bon bon, stop", the screen freezes (literally on the word "stop"). As Georges' voice is still being heard at the same time as the footage from his show is either being forwarded or reversed, the viewer soon realizes that Georges is on the editing table.

As he edits out the unwanted portions, he complicates a tension about the control over images that has by now become a constant in the film. Contrasting his silence during the interview with the imperative to his editor to stop also problematizes his association with a silent history. These images, which reflect the

views of the participants Georges was interacting with but which nonetheless are under Georges' control, allow him to – literally in this case – recreate by selectively modifying his recollection of the past. As in this case he edits by instructing the editor: “Ça devient trop théorique là. Coupe à ‘on est d’accord sur ça’ et va plus loin quand Teulé parle d’homosexualité...” This sort of altering and obliterating displacements could be commonplace on an editing table but in the light of the combination of Georges' association of denial with his past and his present that is plagued by clandestine unedited moments of his life, this episode in the editing room is to be understood as an accurate presentation of his desire of selective history, one that allows his speech to, if not over-ride and dominate, at least to momentarily prevail over other narratives.

Presenting this editing scene as an example of how “reality is manipulated by TV to be more attractive to viewers,” Michael Haneke provocatively – and perhaps rightly – portrays this as the “terrorism of the mass media today.”¹⁹⁸ In a moment that responds to the very “dumbing down of our societies” that Haneke dreads, this particular scene, in forcing the viewer to re-adjust to a shift in temporal narrative, has already called for a participatory involvement that creates as well as re-interprets the sign of history. One is familiar with the fact that a sign is formed both diachronically (over time) and synchronically (through mutual acceptance by members of the community). If this animated debate over the meaning of Rimbaud is very much a concrete example of how a sign gains universal acceptability then it would not be too far fetched to see in Georges' selective editing a disproportionate investment of his own self. Reading this moment as one of Georges' victory would only be succumbing to the overly powerful pattern of convenient forgetfulness of colonial history that

¹⁹⁸ Karin Badt, “Family Is Hell and So Is the World: Talking to Michael Haneke at Cannes 2005,” Bright Lights Film Journal 50 (2005): (no pagination).

Haneke seems to be challenging. Including the viewer and dissolving this bi-partite equation of Georges watching (and editing) Georges (thus also altering the past) to a tri-partite one where the viewer watches Georges watching Georges instantly liberates the sign of history from a one-sided stranglehold and provides the necessary outlet of a third perspective on the situation. With the viewer into the game, the hidden act of manipulation is not so hidden anymore.

If Georges is revealed through these images, what does the cinematic screen of *Caché* speak of my relationship with it? A shared collective guilt would be Michael Haneke's answer (Porton 50-51). And in a French language film based and produced in France it not just related to France's past but a larger question of "dark stains" that are part of collective human unconscious. To repeat Haneke:

I don't want my film to be seen as specifically about a French problem. It seems to me that, in every country, there are dark corners—dark stains where questions of collective guilt become important. I'm sure in the United States there are other parallel examples of dark stains on the collective unconscious.

Georges represents an individual manifestation of the many different guilts that confluence together to realize the global "collective unconscious" that Haneke evokes in the creation of this movie. This collective should rather be read as an imperative to the viewer from Haneke that involves the relationship between Georges the viewer and Georges the viewed subject. Both as an expression of caution and an act of indictment, Haneke's formulation is best read as a stipulation to undertake a similar excavation of the self to isolate the personal contribution to this collective guilt that would reveal within each of us a zone of images from the past, markers that Haneke calls "dark stains." The resolution of Georges' unspoken complicity with a history of guilt is exemplified in this moment of Georges watching Georges. And in this equation when a collective is evoked, does it not make sense to presume that the viewer too is implicated in a similar relationship with the screen as Georges is with

his? Much like Georges, *Caché*'s viewer is both present and watched in the film and in including the viewer *Caché* has developed a strategy that diffuses all binary divides by dissolving the difference-creating cinematic screen.

The unraveling of Georges' self-awareness is an individual embodiment of the paradigmatic change that uncovers, not so much the historical truth (nor the true history) but instead a process by which this selective history is perceived and perpetuated. Georges' reorganization of personal history through recollection causes for a re-collection both of moments of history as well as of contemporaneous subjects onto the cinematic screen for perusal such that it recasts the perceived distinctions between subjects as well as between temporal divisions: an equation of which the viewing subject is an integral part.

The screen refuses to become complicit in Georges' acts of omission. Indications that this pattern of control and prevarication – about a lie that coincides with October 17, 1961 and also within his household – will soon be brought to an end and start to unravel nearly mid-way into the film. Georges and Anne receive another video cassette, this one shot from a moving car, leading up a road, into a Parisian banlieue (Romainville – to the North East of Paris) and onto a blue front door of an apartment with the number “047” written on it. A suspicious Anne starts making connections with the earlier cassette that showed the house of Georges' mother. In responding to Anne's curiosity about Georges' past (“Qui connaît la maison où t'as passé ton enfance?”) he has not only lied (“Je sais pas”) but through his confession that he suspects the potential sender of the cassettes but would not tell who it is, he isolates himself as the bearer of a secret central to the intrigue of *Caché*. Following an argument where a tearful Anne walks out, Georges does visit the apartment and after a stormy meeting with Majid (where he threatens Majid: “Tu vas regretter, je te jure”) he performs yet another act of commission – he lies by telling Anne he found it empty

and even convincingly adds a story about how further enquiries revealed the apartment to be a store of some sort. But, and here is the un-cooperating screen that this discussion is leading up to, as a forewarning of how these images are no longer going to be his refuge, Anne discovers the contents and the exact conversation that took place at Majid's apartment in another clandestine cassette that unbeknownst to Georges has the recordings of the meeting; forestalling and revealing Georges' pattern of control and denial of the past, which falsifies testimonies and relies on misrepresentations.

Georges might try and explain his distortion by a concern for Anne, but the ubiquitous presence of these stratagems of self-denial adds layers to an already overpowering guilt and also alerts us to the underlying motivation of these isolated acts. Georges' omission of Majid produces a revisionist strategy concerned with recreating a convenient recognition of the past and a complete erasure of the 'Other'. Despite repeated demands from Anne, Georges refuses to elucidate on the possible reasons for Majid's anger against him: "Je ne m'en souviens plus" he retorts back.

That with these recordings the process of reconciliation with the past is taking hold, not allowing any escape route and thus leading Georges to an explosive personal cul-de-sac, is a tacit communication of *Caché*. Georges' world controlled by images, his job as a talk show host and the all-powerful editing table eloquently direct our attention to a process where despite his silence he is able to manipulate images from the past. To reiterate an earlier contention, this system, however, is not as static and passive as this one-way reading might have us believe. The (almost always) long unedited cuts from the clandestine videos counter the urge from the editing table to calibrate temporality by silencing others and confront Georges with moments he desires to escape: a reminder that he is trapped in a constant mode of overcoming and will forever remain the one constant of the past that one desires to negate. From

providing an escape route to Georges, in a seeming game of catching up, just as these videotapes expose the lies he has been telling Anne, these images also slowly escape his control. Even the scene on the editing table, when read retrospectively abounds already in the disruption of manipulation that the video cassette has carried out for Anne.

Suicide and the images from the past

Before he could finish editing the program, Georges receives a phone call, presumably from Majid with a wish to meet him. Georges retraces his steps to apartment no. 47, is received by Majid and led to the same room where the first meeting between the two had taken place. After a visibly irritated Georges refuses the invitation to sit down and reacts sarcastically to Majid's declaration ("Je n'étais pas du tout au courant pour les cassettes.") of not having anything to do with the cassettes follows the most graphic scene of the film. The initial moment of Majid taking out the knife startles Georges, but when he cuts his own throat splattering the wall with blood, more than Georges' complete shock what is noteworthy is the resemblance the blood pattern on the wall bears with the smear of red ink on the anonymous childish drawings they have been receiving along with the cassettes. Offsetting his control on the editing table which Majid's phone call had already interrupted, Majid's body blocking the door of the room, with blood still gushing from his neck against the backdrop of a blood pattern that makes a single canvas of the wall and the door, functions as a continuation of the childish drawings and by blocking Georges' only exit it metaphorically traps Georges – both spatially and temporally – between unwanted and uneditable images.

Georges' bitter confession soon thereafter to his wife, as he returns from his dazed state makes a more explicit connection between the suicide and the drawings

(“Tu te rappelles les dessins? C’était sans doute pour annoncer cette saloperie à l’avance ou bien quoi?”) but more importantly, although it recalls an earlier blood-letting from his childhood it does not say how Majid’s suicide collates these drawings and also Georges’ lies. On Anne’s insistence Georges describes the lies he had used to have Majid kicked out of the house. When a doctor’s examination disproved his first false complaint about Majid coughing up blood (“J’ai raconté à maman qu’il crachait du sang.”) he convinced Majid that his father wanted him to kill an aggressive cock (“Après, je lui dit que papa voulait qu’il tue le coq.”). A Majid covered with blood and the beheaded cock (“Alors il l’a fait. Il lui a coupé la tête... Le coq sautait... Majid était couvert de sang.”) gave Georges the opportunity for another lie: “Et j’ai raconté qu’il avait fait ça pour me faire peur.” And later on, accompanying the video cassettes, Georges receives childlike line drawings depicting, what seem to be, just these two facts: a mouth with a red streak coming out of it and a cock with a red smear that hides its neck. Majid’s suicide by cutting his own neck recalls the blood letting, blood from the mouth and the blood-covered Majid that is central to their shared childhood as well as the drawings.

This suicide as the ultimate text of the past forces an alternative ending to a story that has always had Georges as the starting point. Undoubtedly, there is the possibility that this self immolation “could be interpreted as Haneke’s collusion with the comforting idea that the colonial native can be made to disappear in an instant through the auto-combustive agency of their own violence” (Gilroy 234), but if, instead of a self-erasure it is read as the isolation of a de-stabilized Georges it allows for a focus on Georges’ story of guilt. The blood-splattered enclosure completely sequesters him and surrounds him with images from the past, following the clandestine video recordings that put the spotlight on Georges. The focus is not the ‘Other’, nor can such strategies as turning to the comfort of his editing table allow him

to escape the images of his guilt. What had started with Anne discovering Georges' lie and the contents of his conversation through clandestine video recordings leads for the last time to the same room where circumstances force Georges to reveal on his own the implications of all that he had been denying.

The long cut of the suicide filmed through the fixed camera recalls the clandestine video recording of the earlier meeting about which Georges had lied to his wife. In addition to reinforcing "the film's repeated questioning of the status of the image ... it also lends a sense that Majid's act is historically and ideologically overdetermined, forced into being by the representational power of Georges' fantasy, always already having happened" (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 217). But, in support of my argument that this is not an erasure of the 'Other' rather a removal of the act of othering, I point to the fact that this later incident is not reported through a clandestine video recording.¹⁹⁹

When Georges himself reports the information that a clandestine recording had earlier relayed about another similar meeting, it is a sign that the need for countering a lie is not felt any more. Or, rather the means for this othering are not there. The Georges-centered encounter that the opening shot in the film anticipated has found its completion in this story of colonial past. In isolating Georges' past as the starting point, one has the beginning of a story that begins with Georges and is not based on Majid.

Following the suicide and right before Georges reaches home to confess to his wife he comes out of a cinema hall where the posters adorning the façade "seem to spell out the various domestic and allegorical configurations in which Georges is implicated, as well as the various narrative and generic routes down which *Caché* as a

¹⁹⁹ Throughout the film no reference is made to any recording of this suicide. Even later as Georges has an argument with Majid's unnamed son, his attempts to exonerate himself do not include any mention of such a tape.

film could have gone” (Ezra and Sillars, *Hidden* 217). The point is not that the other two posters – *Les choristes* (based in an orphanage for boys) and *La grande séduction* (about a doctor being wooed by a small village in French Canada) – apart from the four that Ezra and Sillars comment upon – *Deux frères*, *Ma mère*, *Mariages* and *La mauvaise éducation* – do give occasion to bring out the many themes associated with this colonial household that I have been drawing out. Nor is the point that when looked at together they add up as a collectivity of cinema – to which *Caché* too belongs. Instead, coming out of a suicide scene filmed in the single long cut, which resembles (and could be from a) clandestine video, when Georges is seen coming out of the cinema he has joined the viewer, once again in doing what the viewer is doing just at that very moment: watching a film. Could it be that as Beugnet signals going to the cinema after the gruesome self-immolation is a commentary on (the limitations of) cinema, which “is not merely a play on representation but an actual process of thought: contemporary realities are thus thought through the operations of film itself, and refracted through the prism of a specific aesthetic vision” (Beugnet 231). Coming out of the security of the editing room, having witnessed Majid’s suicide in the long (possibly clandestine) shot, it could also be that “he instinctively disappears into the darkened space of the cinema, presumably to allow the flickering images to efface harsh realities” (Siverman 247). While these possibilities explain why he might have gone to the cinema, a simpler question of what did he watch there, in remaining unanswered is perhaps more pertinent for the viewer of *Caché*. In saying that the answer is to be found in cinema (both the artistic genre and the cinema hall), I not only wish to show agreement with Beugnet’s just quoted explanation of cinema as “a process of thought” but also to point to this as another instance of an apostrophe where through the inherent question with an unspecified answer the viewer’s relationship with the cinematic screen is highlighted. *Caché* anticipates, in fact prepares this

unending quest for a stable sign without ever fulfilling it; just like the debate on Rimbaud never reaches its end and the conversation between Majid and Georges' sons is never revealed, the sender(s) of these cassettes remain unknown, so remains unanswered (among others questions) the question of the relationship between Georges and cinema. And it is with a demand to discover this hidden unstable sign that a movie like *Caché* addresses us, questions us, and leaves us aware and yet uncertain of our individual understanding of the past in relationship to the present.

Any attempt at a definitive answer is destined for failure, for, if anything it is not colonization, understood as a fixed sign that needs excavation from the past, but, rather a concession that such a sign exists. This acceptance opens up the interesting reality of unanswerable questions that within themselves carry the paradox of giving evidence to something that happened which can neither be discerned, not recreated but yet needs to be understood. The answer in the film does not lie in the authorship of the tapes, nor in their contents (for, at every moment these tapes only replicate what Georges, and his viewer already know about Georges' life), but instead in accepting the ensuing guilt – that unspoken and unrecognized residue from the past – that they reference.

The imprecise nature of the sign has reflections on the definition of the 'Other', as well as the very perception of our world; a destabilizing dissociation that can be gauged by a brief glance at how Haneke leaves un-addressed the culpability of Georges and Majid as his presumed nemesis. In an interview, where he reflects on the two characters, Haneke questions associating Majid with a position of weakness. Firstly, he equates both characters in his assertion that we "don't know if Georges is telling the truth and we don't know if Majid is telling the truth," and then goes on to add that we "don't really know which one of the characters is lying— just as we don't know in real life" (Porton 50-51). What Haneke reveals is that notwithstanding the

film's (and Haneke's own) sympathies with the cause of the colonial underdog, the world it represents cannot be read from any position of subjective authority that would reproduce fixed notions of colonial identity couched in the comfort of compartmentalized definitions of victim and aggressor. More specifically it is not a simple quest for the existence of the truth/lie binary, but instead the (thrice) repeated affirmation that "we don't know", or, rather, as I have been saying - we can't know.

In short, what these two characters connote through their interrelation – the instability of the referent – takes on a much larger scope (evident also by the all-encompassing "real life" Haneke evokes) that extends to the very genre of cinema. In calling film "an artificial construct," the director is only presenting the ubiquitously tenuous authority of this medium. With the most important question – who is responsible for the images – that remains unanswered through the end, Haneke is pointing to the operating principle in this film that sets out to destabilize the very quest for definitions and ends up raising more questions than answers. This un-assuring construct of the genre, and the complete factual disconnect that marks it, in being "a manipulative form" counters representational authority and presents a picture of confusion. This lack of a clear picture should be distinguished from a lack of engagement on Haneke's part – for this confusion is in itself the answer. At least, that is how I would read the director's comment that postulates the film as "a lie that can reveal the truth" (Porton 50-51). In this off-handed comment that draws a relationship of synonymy between these two opposing terms of truth and lie, I infer a like relationship in *Caché*, where the confusion over the images is what leads to an answer.

CONCLUSION

In the very first chapter of this dissertation I spoke of Jules Verne's description of the Indian landscape. This land of the 'Other' is relayed solely through co-ordinates of industrialization and is obscured away from sight by a screen of "fumée noire" (black smoke) (107) emanating from factories. But this obscure spectacle is also complicit with another smoke screen, that of history. For the Vernian universe, colonial rule is "a necessary fact of history" (Cheseneaux 122). In this linear understanding of time, there is only one path of progress where India is much behind the English and the French, and thus is helped along by this "necessary" colonization. *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* offers a partial definition of progress that conceals all else apart from industrialization, promoting and engaging thus in a spatio-temporal smoke screen.

In this dissertation it has been my objective to look beyond such colonial smoke screens. The works of this dissertation together recount the global story of colonialism. They are interconnected, and reading one enriches the reality of others. The smoke screen of history, for example, present in *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* becomes the starting point for *Caché* where undoing the "blind spot" (Beugnet 228) of history relating to French colonization of Algeria is what propels the film's intrigue.

As I mentioned earlier, the Austrian director Haneke, through his avowed move to connect *Caché* to the "dark stains" on the collective unconscious of "every country" has already taken this Paris-based French-language film away from its national confines. But this does not mean that national boundaries have become irrelevant. If these boundaries are central to forms of oppression so do they become a

point of resistance. In the global interconnection that Haneke indicates, we are to understand that contemporary Paris is as much connected to colonial Algeria as it is to the “dark stains” associated with the “blind spot” of the 17th of October 1961 when hundreds of people of Algerian origin were drowned in the river Seine without any consequences for the perpetrators.

Apart from my obvious interest in understanding the intersection of spaces I have also aimed at questioning the permanence and the containment exercised by fixed definitions of identity. I have concentrated on the zones of contact between identities that apprehend any permanence. The first chapter of this dissertation was begun with the work of a French author writing about an Englishman’s colonial exploits that demonstrated how a uniform colonial space was created across Earth, and the last chapter was about an Austrian director making a French film about French colonialism. I find it useful to end with a poem by the Polish-American Nobel Laureate Czesław Miłosz that nuances the inter-linkages between Paris and the rest of the world. “Bypassing Rue Descartes,”²⁰⁰ is about the narrator’s first entry into the “capital of the world”:

BYPASSING rue Descartes
I descended toward the Seine, shy, a traveler,
A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world.

We were many, from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest,
Saigon and Marrakesh,
Ashamed to remember the customs of our homes,
About which nobody here should ever be told:
The clapping for servants, barefooted girls hurry in,
Dividing food with incantations,
Choral prayers recited by master and household together.
I had left the cloudy provinces behind,
I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.

²⁰⁰ Czesław Miłosz, “Bypassing Rue Descartes,” trans. Renata Gorczynski and Robert Hass, Polish Poetry of the Last Two Decades of Communist Rule, edited and with translations by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991) 26-27.

Soon enough, many from Jassy and Koloshvar, or Saigon or
Marrakesh
Would be killed because they wanted to abolish the customs of their
homes.

Soon enough, their peers were seizing power
In order to kill in the name of the universal, beautiful ideas.

Meanwhile the city behaved in accordance with its nature,
Rustling with throaty laughter in the dark,
Baking long breads and pouring wine into clay pitchers,
Buying fish, lemons, and garlic at street markets,
Indifferent as it was to honor and shame and greatness and glory,
Because that had been done already and had transformed itself
Into monuments representing nobody knows whom,
Into arias hardly audible and into turns of speech.

Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,
As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds
And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons
Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead.

There is no capital of the world, neither here nor anywhere else,
And the abolished customs are restored to their small fame
And now I know that the time of human generations is not like the
time of the earth...

In moving towards the Seine the poem commences at the point where Caché's Majid loses his parents. But the Seine and the road leading to it – "rue Descartes", herald here a spatial reworking, the evocation of a new world that radically redefines the way locations relate to each other. The poem's movement from the beginning to the end speaks of a change away from a world of oppositions.

The spatial hierarchy present between Paris ("capital of the world") and the "cloudy provinces" ("Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest, Saigon and Marrakesh") is accompanied by a parallel hierarchy between "universal, beautiful ideas" and the "customs" that need to be censored ("About which nobody here should ever be told"), evoking the kind of reductive thinking that was at the heart of Phileas Fogg's journey and that presented the world as a function of Europe. *Bypassing*

recognizes the legacy of colonialism, the mores of this divided world. Violence pervades the poem, where the narrator (in contrast to the “capital of the world”) is a “barbarian” and where one kills “in the name of the universal, beautiful ideas.”

It is the second half (from “Again” till “taboo.”) of the poem that articulates an inclusive geography where history becomes central to our understanding of space. If “again” reminds us of a similar interaction with the city in the past, it also brings into focus our iteration of history. The “reeling wheel of seasons” is not linear time. This “wheel” is instead a simultaneous iteration of events both from the past (“empires have fallen”) and the present (“and those once living are now dead”). This temporal simultaneity is accompanied also with the abolition of a global hierarchy (“no capital of the world”) as if to suggest the centrality of an understanding of history in the making of space. Only through a non-linear understanding of time can one look beyond the smoke screen of history and also achieve the spatial equality that surpasses the debilitating compartmentalization that Phileas Fogg imposed upon the world; a compartmentalization inherently linked to the assertion of superiority over the colonized ‘Other’. *Bypassing* articulates the importance of spatial understanding to the creation of identity and then presents a diffused time and space continuum that pervades inequality and rejects any watertight definitions – be they of human beings or of chunks of landmasses on which have been scaled nation states.

It is this counteractive challenge to borders that I have attempted to work towards in this dissertation. *Texaco*, “Toba Tek Singh” and *Caché* in their struggle to redefine spatiality reassert the need for a more inclusive spatial paradigm, the kind that is present in Miłosz’s poem. Soja writes about Thirdspace: “*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete ... everyday life and unending history” (*Thirdspace* 56-57). Just like Soja’s Thirdspace the “wheel” of Miłosz’s poem too, in speaking of this concurrent time and space,

prepares the ground for a space of engagement where the struggle for human space and identity is not shackled by predetermined definitions of history or of other human beings.

Four geographically dispersed works belonging to four different literary traditions, different genres and different moments of colonial history speak together of the centrality of the ever-present colonial borders just as they also attest to the inherent entwinement of these spatial divides with human identity. All chapters in this dissertation have hoped to communicate that anything “which fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledge or exclusive domains ... destroys its meaning and openness” (*Thirdspace* 57). To explore this space is to recognize its inherent openness, to accept the anxiety of constantly changing co-ordinates of human identity. It also means to advance an understanding of literature that recognizes my position as a reader and speaks of the impossibility of offering conclusions and instead offers hypotheses. To explore this space also means to be aware that one inhabits an ever-changing relationship with the ‘Other’; it is to know that Toba Tek Singh is found in both India and Pakistan as well as in the fictional hutment of Texaco. In order to understand this intertwined world of capitals and “foggy provinces” one cannot bypass *rue Descartes*, is what I have hoped to communicate.

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