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DIASPORIC CROSSROADS IN THE AMERICAS: OF LITERATURE, TRAVEL, MIGRATION, AND IDENTITY

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Abstract

By using an interdisciplinary, intersectional and comparative theoretical approach, this essay problematizes the (re)construction of identity throughout the Americas characterized by hundreds of years of mobility of its peoples. Based on inter-American literatures (fiction) and travel experiences of this essay's author, both mixed in the errantry of writing, the objective is to shed light on the shaded fissures of human existence in specific *zones of nonbeing* (Fanon) in the Americas – zones characterized by forced and willed mobility, errantry and travels with their diverse sides and characteristics between death, (re)birth and the in-between space linking these two extreme points. In the process, this essay problematizes how knowledge is produced in the *dialectical relation* (Ricoeur) between identity and alterity.

Keywords: Inter-American literature; identity/alterity; mobility; travel; diaspora

The mobilities of the world … will actuate a cartography of erratic desires.
*(*Patrick Chamoiseau, *2017)*[1]

Culture and theory are closely connected with life through the flux of people and ideas. They are in motion, iterative development, or, to use Trinh Minh-ha's term, in constant "re-departure" (14). "Traveling theory," according to Edward

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Said (1983, 242), should be used by critics "to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality …." Following Minh-ha's and Said's ideas, the objective of this essay is to link culture, theory, inter-American literature (fiction), and personal travel experiences in a cross-cultural comparative perspective. This process of critical and relational boundary crossings and recrossings by linking a variety of modes of articulation deepens, I believe, our understanding of reality and thus enhances the production of knowledge by opening up transcultural sites of open-ended translation.

The relation between identity and place is fundamental to the way human beings experience and understand life. By being itself a traverse through different phases, life is characterized by journeys within and between different places. My personal journeys redefined the place I was born and grew up in and laid the foundation for my future professional life. Eager to hit the road again after having read Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1973) and *Dharma Bums* (1976), as well as James A. Michener's *The Drifters* (1971), I travelled the Americas from New York to Rio de Janeiro in 1978/1979, taking buses, and hitch-hiking. At the age of nineteen, at the beginning of this trip, I did not know that the following eighteen months would change my life completely. Not only did I enjoy a rare type of freedom after having gotten my high school diploma and worked in factories and construction, but I began to see and understand the (post/neo)colonial underpinnings of a world unknown to most Europeans at that time. While these journeys defied the sense of specific location that society would want to force on me, launching me forever in an in-between space longing to belong to many places, here and there, it was on the Pan-American Highway that I started to be an inter-American scholar, a traveller deeply fascinated by cultures, literatures and landscapes of this continent. Each culture, language, literary text, and place has increased my passionate desire to know more and thus redefined my identity. After narrowly escaping very dangerous situations, climbing mountains up to 6.000,00 meters, trekking on the Santa Cruz Trail in the Peruvian Andes, and penetrating deep into the Amazon jungle with Indigenous guides, it began to dawn on me that whatever we humans are, we are very little, helpless creatures, especially if it comes to survival in nature. Long before reading William Faulkner's seminal piece *Go down, Moses* (1990), especially the section of the 'Bear' in which Ike is being guided into nature by Sam Fathers, I had learned (without consciously knowing as Faulkner would put it) a fundamental lesson: knowledge based only on reason is a unilateral affair. A round-house knowledge needs emotion, desire, adventure, and experience, too. And this we cannot achieve alone. We need the other, to let the other in, to move towards the other, to respect the other, human and nonhuman, in order to grow (with less, Henry David Thoreau would add). Journeys, then, produce and redefine knowledge through a process of learning. In this sense, this essay combines insights from my academic journeys and my road journeys in order to shed light on the shaded fissures of human existence in specific *zones of nonbeing* (Fanon 1967) in the Americas – zones characterized

by forced and willed mobility, errantry and travels with their diverse sides and characteristics between death, (re)birth and the in-between space linking these two extreme points. In the process, it problematizes how knowledge is produced in the *dialectical relation* (Ricoeur 1990) between identity and alterity.

I stumbled into South America by chance. My travel plans in 1978/1979, after hitch-hiking from New York to San Francisco, were laid out to get a job in the kitchen of a cargo ship and hit the South Pacific, following in the footsteps of Paul Gauguin. As this did not work out, I decided to cross the Rio Grande and see what Mexico is like. After one month in the state of Jalisco, learning Spanish and digging San Miguel de Allende's artist scene, I moved south, intrigued by the Maya-Quiché culture which I had started to study. After several hiking trips around the San Cristobal de las Casas region in Chiapas, I travelled to the Lago de Atitlán in Guatemala where, according to the legend of the Maya-Quiché one of their most holy treasures lies submerged. Surrounded by Indigenous villages, I thought, it may be a wonderful place to read the Popul Vuh, get in contact with Indigenous people and relax, swimming in the lake. Again, as in the Chiapas region, I was somehow blinded by the colors, smells and customs that fascinated me in an exotic way, unable to understand their deeper meanings. At the beginning, I only thought about taking pictures of everything I saw, especially of Indigenous people with their colorful clothes. At one moment, walking and daydreaming, I came upon three Maya women washing their clothes at the lakeshore. They were dressed in their huipils embroidered with Quetzal symbols. What a wonderful present, so authentic I thought, wanting to take photos of the washing scene. But before I was able to take the pictures, the three women had pelted me with angry shouts and stones, making it crystal clear to me that they did not want their pictures to be taken. So, instead of capturing them in images, I was running away, afraid of being hit by stones. A tourist qua neocolonial intruder, I did not understand then that I had imposed my will on people who think that taking their picture is equivalent to taking their soul. Later, I felt deeply ashamed of not having had the decency to ask them for permission. Thirty seven years later, in 2014, hiking in the Cordillera Blanca region of Huaraz, Peru, my wife and I came upon a family planting corn. A picturesque scene with *campesinos* using a wooden plough drawn by an ox framed by the impressive snow and glacier-covered mountain range of the Andes. This time I asked in broken Quetchua whether they would allow me to take some pictures, but they shouted 'no' accompanied by vehement gestures. As we were tired from the four-hour hike at the high Andean altitudes, we decided to lie down on a grassy plot quite far away from the sowing scene, eat our lunch and enjoy the scenery. We were careful not to disturb this *milieu de mémoire*, as Pierre Nora (1989) would argue, since ploughing and sowing is a ritual, religious activity that nourishes body and soul.

In his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford (1997), in paying attention to the situations created by the forces of globalization, argues that "… if contemporary migrant populations are not to appear as mute, passive straws in the political-economic winds, we need to

listen to a wide range of 'travel stories' …" (38). Movement between and within communities, regions, nations, and continents is not a new occurrence. What has changed is the number of people on the move.[2] The enormous increase in both national and international population mobility – people in search of work, security, and/or well-being, pushed or pulled by political, economic, or personal reasons, expelled by natural disasters, wars and other types of violence – combined with heightened flows of information and communication via the worldwide web and social media have translated into an increased contact and relationship between people(s) and cultures.

However, this does not necessarily mean that intercultural understanding is on the rise. According to the narrative voice of an elderly woman in Toni Morrison's novel *Love* (2003), today's world is a place where "tongues work all by themselves with no help from the mind" (3), where "all is known and nothing understood" (4); that is, a place where increasing circulation of information does not necessarily translate into more knowledge. In their frantic public concentration on diverse parts of their bodies, their obsession with images of these, this midwife ponders, people, especially women, become fragmented and alienated from their true natural selves. Balthazar Bodule-Jules, the protagonist in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Biblique des derniers gestes* (2002) seems to be in dialogue with Morrison's narrator, arguing that in order to counter modern fragmentation and alienation as a result of our contemporary neoliberal ideology driven by relentless consumerism for the sake of an ever-increasing maximization of profit, it is necessary to supplement one phenomenon with another, to think the self and the other simultaneously in their heterogeneous dislocations and relocations:

> It is necessary to know … how to imagine the world, the places, invent the histories! … Invent this foundational memory that one cultivates deep in one's heart and that dictates its principle of openness to the powers of this world! Learn how to do this! For each place, each hut, each woman imagine their prolongations in the constellations of places, … huts, … or perfumes; one calling the other, the other present in a thousand others. Proceed like this, wandering from prolongation to prolongation until you feel the most human possible (278-279).[3]

This imaginary act of joining the self and the other is, according to Chamoiseau's narrator an act of freedom in so far as the liberation of the self within and through the other – transforming them into mobile actors moving toward, within and across each other – implies the possibility of alternative ways of thinking, acting and relating. One could argue that this acceptance and reception of difference is a process of consciousness-raising and identity (re)construction through individual and collective imagination, intuition and memory, creating an interrelated, open, dynamic relationship between the diverse elements of the biota. While not always fully graspable in nature or outcome, the manifold forms

of human and nonhuman (im)mobility, both physical and imaginary, constitute an existential quintessence. The art of a creative, meaningful life is to juggle them, to move between the here and the there, the past and the present, the diverse phenomena without getting stuck in between.

Not to get stuck in between! How is this possible in a violence-ridden continent called the Americas; a continent imbued with a "*memoria sequestrada*" (Galeano 1982, 12) that writers try to reimagine by revealing what has been distorted and silenced in what Glissant (1992) has described as "the confusion of time … this exploded, suffered time … linked to transferred space" (144). How not to get stuck in the inter-American nepantla space of in-betweenness where layers of (neo)colonial problems constitute a broken equation of subject, language, ethos, worldview and episteme within and between specific geographical settings? How not to get confused in this epistemic ambivalence, as Ralph Ellison's nameless narrator confesses in *Invisible Man* (1952)? How to find home qua (re)construction of identity in an atmosphere characterized by what Walter (2021) calls "transferred lives within transferred spaces" (66)?

Since the foundation of the American continent diverse migratory phases, both willed and forced, have shaped its population and environment: the arrival and development of indigenous cultures, European conquest and colonization, the journeys of the Beat authors and Che Guevara as well as more recent (trans) national migrations, to name just a few. The bloody underside of nation building in the Americas, characterized by genocide, enslavement, plantation system, liberation struggles, land grabbing, and institutionalized forms and practices of racist and sexist discrimination, among others, makes it necessary to place the issue of identity within the borderlands of place and space shaped in the churny waters of mobility – a type of movement characterized by dislocation and relocation with mixed roots and routes that very often obfuscate fixed origins and final endings. Many Pan-American writers, such as Marlene Nourbese-Philip, Maryse Condé, Jamaica Kincaid, Eliane Potiguara, Antônio Torres, Conceição Evaristo, Bernard Assiniwi, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, among others, express a sense of orphanhood through their narrative voices based on the fact that the nation includes some and excludes others, pushing them into unhomely margins. Otherness, then, whether cultural, racial, ethnic, or sexual, constitutes the interior alterity that marks the limits of multicultural nation-states in the Americas. For many fictional characters on the move home is not a specific place but a "homing desire," which, according to Avtar Brah (1996), "is not the same thing as desire for a 'homeland'" (180). Let me exemplify this with excerpts from three literary texts written by authors from Canada, the United States and Brazil.

In *La Brûlerie* (2004), Émile Ollivier structures his plot on the theme that suffuses his entire work, namely exile, an existence between spaces, places, times and cultures. Ollivier's critical view of Canada's harmonious multicultural cohabitation reveals the slippery transcultural liminality of intercultural existence as in this passage with respect to Haitian immigrants: "Shipwrecked people doomed to errantry" (70-71) unable to "find the osmosis, the happy symbiosis"

(123) between their past experience, the lived present and the desired future, these (im)migrants move from one displacement to the next within a "society afraid of everything that is different" (142).[4]

A migrant character in Tomás Rivera's … *Y no se lo tragó la tierra/ … And the earth did not part* (1977) has this to say about a life on the move: "When we arrive, when we arrive. At this point, quite frankly, I'm tired of always arriving someplace. Arriving is the same as leaving because as soon as we arrive …. Maybe I should say when we don't arrive because that's the plain truth. We never really arrive anywhere …" (115).

Torto Arado (2018) and S*alvar o Fogo* (2023) by Itamar Vieira Junior delineate the harsh reality of wretched landless Brazilians in search of a piece of land and dignity of life. The author problematizes the issue of land ownership throughout Brazilian history as one of the crucial reasons for violence and injustice. Those who work the earth in both novels are not the proprietors, but those from which the proprietors had stolen the land because they did not have written proof of land ownership (2018, 228). Exploited and without regular education, these landless *quilombolas* become migrants moving from one farm to the next in search of work (2023, 209).

What links these three examples in their difference is that identity construction in diasporic conditions is extremely complex. Human mobility, characterized by *transferred lives within transferred spaces*, seems to be a transplacement orchestrated by and between nation-states that undermines a stable basis of legality: living on the move because of necessity makes it difficult to establish a socially and politically dignified life in an economic environment of ruthless maximization of capital. This Möbius strip linking the needs and desires of people on the move implies the question of "who is responsible" for what? In Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), this question echoes throughout the story line and receives, typical of Morrison's writing, no quick, clear-cut answer, but opens a postcolonial crossroads made up of a tangled, messy network of issues and agents sharing responsibility for a generalized although differently lived and enacted orphanhood, the rotting roots of which are buried in the slave trade, plantation system as well as in the genocide of Native Americans at the hands of European settlers. This total aggression upon which the United States was built, a process that continues to write violent chapters in the present, the novel's plot suggests, imprisons people(s), places and spaces in a time-space continuum in which a traumatic memory prevents "historical consciousness" from becoming collective memory (Glissant 61-62). Instead of a harmonious multi/transcultural community, North Americans became "orphans" characterized by a "withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild" (Morrison 160). This entire colonial mess, characterized by what Bob Marley (1973) called 'burnin and lootin," then, can be seen in *A Mercy* as responsible for Florens' suffering for never seeing her mother again after being sold, combined with an enormous difficulty in constructing her identity and developing self-esteem, and Lina's grieving about the decimation of her tribe by smallpox.

If we may agree upon the fact that migrancy/mobility/travel/errancy constitute crucial phenomena of the contemporary phase of globalization, and that the diverse forms and practices of otherization (racism, sexism, etc.) as well as subalternization (outsourcing, short-term, unstable contracts, precarious work conditions, lack of social security, to name just a few) have been changing throughout the decades but do not disappear, then the ongoing violation of basic (non)human rights contributes to the nontranslation of deterritorialization into reterritorialization. The diverse forms of this violence, illegal, semi-official, and/or institutionalized, prolong and exacerbate the circles of in-betweenness stemming from the past into present-day schizo-walks transforming mobility into a perverse and often barbaric transcultural nightmare on the hyphen: never-ending circles of broken origins and deferred arrivals spiraling into the abyss of a continuous existential in-betweenness caused by national policies homogenizing cultural and identitarian plurality. A dilemma acted out within and through the transcultural fissures undermining seemingly static multicultural nation-states as can be witnessed, for example, in Jacques Poulin's novel *Volkswagen Blues* (1998). Whereas Pitsémine is unable to name her identity as either Native Canadian or white and thus confirms her ethnic in-betweenness as a form of lack, Jack affirms her identitarian unbelonging as a new and positive something; a something, however, which he, too, is unable to designate.

Thus, the cultural/epistemic space of in-betweenness constitutes the terrain of identity formation in different ways throughout the Americas. Whether called transculturation, hybridity, *créolisation*, amalgamation, *mestizaje* or conflictive heterogeneity, among others, the elements of different cultural epistemes have met in a conflictive historical process rather than by harmonious mixture, which makes for the heteroclite, fragmented configuration of cultures, societies and their epistemes in the Americas.

This does not mean that the dance of entangled cultural fusion and fissure to the rhythms of capitalist tunes does not imply niches of successful and humane survival as exemplified in the rise of world music, ayahuasca journeys to Peru and Mexico, and the spread of Sumac Kawsay, good living well beyond its Andean birthplace. What it means is that, apart from particular phenomena becoming part of consumer culture and thus enabling some a decent or even opulent living, contemporary diasporic transculture – the forever-in-the-making traverse of cultures within a hierarchical hegemonic framework – turns nation-states in the Americas into an in-between space of contradictory cultural epistemes. Expressed through languages that are classified within a hierarchical system, these epistemes are rooted in memories that differ in terms of race/ethnicity, region, culture, history, gender, and experience. As such, they constitute the performative dance on the multi-ethnic hyphen that imbues multiculture with transmobility and thereby defers its static, fixed materialization.

In 2014, on our way back from a hiking trip in the Ancash region, Peru, we got lost, having forgotten which one of the many trails leads back to Huaraz. After having stumbled around for about an hour, we saw an Indigenous woman

sitting at a crossroad. I explained to her in Spanish that my Quetchua was very limited and we were lost on our way back to Huaraz, asking her whether she could please help us. She did not hesitate to tell us in her broken Spanish. I thanked her, wished her well and we were ready to go, when she invited us to sit down next to her. "I wonder," she said, "Why are more and more of you guys coming here, walking around, watching us?" "What is so interesting here for you to take a long journey instead of doing this at home where you live?" I admit that these questions totally caught me off guard; what helped was her friendly, astute smile. She saw that I was struggling for words and added, "See, I cannot visit the place you come from. I cannot even live in this other world down there," pointing in the direction of Huaraz, the Spanish-speaking world. The following conversation lasted about thirty minutes and had an enormous impact on me and my wife. As an artist working with ceramics and a literature professor with a main focus on cultural/postcolonial studies, we tried to explain our interest in and fascination with both the culture and natural beauty of the Ancash region. But, how to deal with the colossal injustice hovering over and casting shadows on our coming together? We were tourists satisfying our whims, and she was a woman discriminated for being Indian. The most stunning remark was that she felt neither fully at home in her Indigenous culture nor in the Spanish world of a nation, Peru, that has not been able to bridge its ethnic divide. In short, the woman who helped us find our way back articulated the multidimensional tensions resulting from diverse forms and practices of otherization imploding nation-states in the Americas, rendering them, according to Antonio Cornejo-Polar (2000, 147), heterogeneous, "dismembered" entities that enact, albeit in different forms, their traumatic past in the present. One of the reasons hampering a harmonious multicultural cohesiveness in Peru and throughout the Americas is the continuous in-betweenness of Indigenous peoples. While in-betweenness characterizes diverse types of intercultural zones of contact, as this travel episode reveals, it is important to distinguish between different types of in-betweenness: ours was definitely different from the one of the Indigenous woman. Yet, all types deal with the reciprocal relation between identity and alterity and are constituted by and imbued with diverse types of memory. In *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), Paul Ricoeur, problematizing Aristoteles and Levinas, describes this reciprocal relation between identity and alterity as a "dialectical relation" (310).[5]

By being developed in and nourished by the passage of time, memory is situated in a spatial frame: the act of remembering always happens in a specific physical place/space constituted by sociocultural relations. In other words, memory always needs an exterior object, and/or the image of this object triggered and received by the five senses. These objects function as mnemonic markers capable of conferring order and sense on the events and recollections of our lived experience. In this sense, the imaginary reproduction of space and its objects is fundamental to the continuous maintenance and (re)construction of identity, both individual and collective, since it is through imaginary recreation that space is transformed into places. In other words, the lived experience of human

beings hinges on memory. Yet, by being exposed to the lights and shadows of the changing weather of our lives guided by diverse feelings, desires and interests – functioning through fissures determined by time, place, and individual/collective manners according to Chamoiseau (2002) -- memory, as important as it is to a more or less balanced and stabilized functioning of life, constitutes a slippery semiotic ground made up of a seething turmoil of fact and invention, dissolution and conception. This mnemonic in-betweenness is heightened through traumatic experience and forced mobility in that the normal process of recollection is interrupted and deviated into sudden, uncontrolled eruptions (Caruth 1996). In this sense, transnational/diasporic memory contributes to the creation of a mobile and fractal transcultural discontinuity. Rooted and routed, memory symbolizes, albeit in different ways and contexts, in-betweenness per se.

Since (trans)national/diasporic memory is what Mieke Baal (1999) has called a conflictive process of connection and, according to Andreas Huyssen (2007) structured performatively, to remember means to explore, examine and search rather than to recuperate something lost and forgotten. Obsessed to render the beat experience as existentially truthful as possible, Sal Paradise, the protagonist in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, symbolizes Kerouac's main activity as beat author. In search of bliss and beatitude, he vows to follow the mad ones, those whose ideas, words, and actions make them "burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars" (9). Inspired by Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady in real life), Paradise and his friends, writers and poets, move between the East and West Coast of the United States driven by their liberal views to break with a conservative bourgeois life style in search of freedom, adventure, otherness, and knowledge. Between roots and routes, Sal Paradise (alias Jack Kerouac) moves on the road through life-as-journey on the *limen* linking and separating, juxtaposing and superimposing his internal and external experience. In the end, what is left of these experiences? What remains after the joyous explosions? Pieces, fragments, or simply nothing but hazy memory traces? Hazy as they may be, I argue, they are the basis for knowledge construction and thus contribute to the (re)constitution of identity through alterity.

At the end of my scholarship year at the California State University, Chico (1983/1984), I extended my stay for three months, traveling in Northern California and working for a farmer, raking almonds. As a German citizen, I was allowed to stay in the United States for ninety days but had no work permit. During twelve months of teaching and studying at CSUC, I had made contact with (il)legal migrant workers through local community initiatives and decided to experience what it is like to work in the fields of California, especially since I was avidly studying Chicano Literature and preparing an M.A. thesis on identity and migration in this academic field. One afternoon, after approximately two weeks working side by side with Mexican field workers, our working routine was suddenly interrupted by the arrival of *La Migra*, the migrant police, in search of illegal workers. I remember that the moment I saw the agents coming, some of my colleagues had already thrown their rakes to the ground and were running. In

a split second I decided not to run and when I was accosted by one of the agents and asked whether I knew one of the Mexicans, I played dumb and said that I did not speak Spanish and thus had only limited contact with them, but that one was called José, another Carlos. He thanked me for the information, and kept running without asking me for my work permit – which I did not have. My English and my skin color saved me from being entangled in a very complex situation that would have involved my university/studies at home. Used by the agrobusiness as cheap labor, migrant workers in the United States and elsewhere in the Americas as well as around the world are criminalized in a capitalist system based on the maximization of profit. Caught between a desire and/or necessity to make it elsewhere and a ruthless barbaric system using them as replaceable merchandise, these migrant workers qua wretched of the world inhabit in-between "zones of nonbeing" (Fanon 8) where injustice and racism constitute institutionalized structures of society. At the core of this exploitation of the labor force is race – a phenomenon that structures the world order (Quijano 1997). Race is a discourse and stratifies societies hierarchically, that is, race does something.

One of the most stunning literary examples of this institutionalized racialization and its mortal effects is Jefferson Tenório's *O avesso da pele* (2020). In the novel, the narrative voice describes the agency of race as follows: "when a white person praises us, we never know whether this is sincere or just a type of piety, or in order not to feel culpability, or even not to be accused of racism. We are unable to evaluate our failures" (85).[6] In other words, in a highly racialized society such as Brazil, non whites, especially Blacks, "are always in doubt about their real capacities. And this is the perversity of racism. It simply hinders you from visiting your own infernos" (86).[7] Thus, according to the narrator, the only possibility to survive under these hellish daily conditions is to "preserve the reverse side" of one's being, "that which nobody sees. … this place where our feelings are. And these feelings keep us alive" (61).[8]

Two other apt examples are Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995) and Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* (2007). Whereas Tenório's novel problematizes the daily killing fields of Brazilian racism, the novels by Viramontes and Castillo delineate the harsh reality of border life by addressing key issues racking the Mexican-American borderlands, such as illegal immigration, organ harvesting, drug trafficking, pesticides and exploitation of field workers, among other themes. By highlighting the link between migration and the drug cartels, the narrative voice in Castillo's *The Guardians* points to the roots of what essayist Naomi Klein (2010) problematized as "disaster capitalism": "With so much money involved, how can anyone ever expect this savagery to stop?" (184) – "… the coyotes and narcos own the desert now" (4). Estrella, one of the characters in Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus*, reflecting upon her reality as a migrant worker "charred by the sun," (57) asks herself whether "people just use you until you're all used up, then rip you into pieces when they're finished using you?" (75) in the United States, "this land," muses Perfecto Flores, "that used his bones for

kindling, … that never once in the thirty years he lived and worked, never once said thank you …" (55).

Thus, the crucial common point the novels by Tenório, Viramontes and Castillo make is that besides viewing the other (migrants, people of color, foreigners, etc.) as an effect of economic injustice inherent in neoliberalism and thereby establishing an equivalence between the discourse of human rights and economic justice, we should, perhaps, also think and analyze how neoliberal economic policies produce diverse types and practices of violence that sustain the imperial capitalist system based on the exploitation of the other. In the novels, the other is not seen as a dangerous villain, but a person in danger; not as a threat or source of instability that impairs national borders or social structures, but as a product of systematic processes of exclusion, marginalization and exploitation based on political decisions at national and international levels. As such, the authors problematize the issue of democratic citizenship in Brazil and the United States by means of diverse forms of their characters' social in-betweenness.

The many forms, practices and lived experiences of in-betweenness, then, have an impact on space, place, and identity. An experience rewarding for some and destructive for others at a crossroads where, as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) has remarkably expressed, cultures and their epistemes have to be juggled (79). Not everyone is able, in order to survive, to become "a crossroads" (195), juggling the self with the other in a mutual give and take of identitarian constitution. Since not only fun and adventurous freedom but also solitude and/or violence may accompany mobility/travel/errancy, the road of studies, adventure, and travel, sinuous and challenging, leads to an awakening of knowledge production: a multilateral knowledge necessary for agency to transform the *zone of nonbeing* into a zone of justice, honesty, and human dignity. Thus, knowledge, the process of learning about a specific issue, is enhanced by a combination of reading *and* traveling, or in the words of Janie, the protagonist in Zora Neale Hurston's acclaimed novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1990, 183): "… you got to *go* there tuh *know* there."

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: Does not apply.

End notes

1. Les mobilités du monde … actionneront une cartographie de désirs erratiques. The translations in this essay are mine.
2. According to the UNHCR, currently 123.2 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide. In addition, there are millions of people on the move voluntarily.
3. Il faut savoir ... imaginer le monde, imaginer les lieux, inventer les histoires! ... Inventez-vous cette mémoire fondatrice, que l'on jardine en soi-même et qui dicte son principe d'ouverture aux puissances de ce monde! Apprenez à faire ça! Imaginez pour chaque endroit, chaque case, chaque femme, ses prolongements dans des constellations de lieux, ... de cases, ... ou de parfums, l'un appelant l'autre, l'autre présent dans mille autres, allez comme ça, errant de prolongement en

prolongement, jusqu'à vous sentir le plus humain possible!

4. Des naufragés … voués à l'errance; trouver l'osmose, la symbiose heureuse; société qui a peur de tout ce qui est different.
5. By interweaving hermeneutical processes with phenomenology, Ricœur applies the hermeneutical task to how each self relates to anything that is outside of the self. The emphasis is on the meaning of the self which is gained through encountering the other. Self-knowledge gained through the hermeneutical process is, then, indirectly attained through a dialectical mediation and cannot be constituted in a unidirectional way.
6. "Quando uma pessoa branca nos elogia, nunca sabemos se aquilo é sincero, ou apenas uma espécie de piedade, ou para não se sentir culpada, ou mesmo para não ser acusada de racismo. Não sabemos avaliar nosso fracaso".
7. "… sobrará sempre aquela dúvida sobre suas reais capacidades. E essa é a perversidade do racismo. Porque ele simplesmente te impede de visitar os próprios infernos".
8. "É necessário preservar o avesso … aquilo que ninguém vê. … E é nesse lugar que estão os afetos. E são esses afetos que nos mantém vivos".

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