

The Dynamic Imbrication Of The Rhizome And The State Apparatus In The
Development Of Transnational Subjectivities In Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*
And Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life Of Oscar Wao*

by

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This paper could not have happened without Sam, my parents and caffeine

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Abstract

Oscar, in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and Sammar, in *The Translator*, move within and against multiple state spaces. They represent two different ways of understanding the dialogic interaction between the openness of the rhizome and the ideological or restrictive function of the state apparatus for transnational subjects. Each subjective position functions to deterritorialize the repressive apparatus of the state: by Negative or Relative deterritorialization in *The Translator*, which enables divergent, excluded modes of thinking to be interpellated into the state, but only so as to enable them to be closed back off into pre-given, ideological authority of the state; and, by Absolute deterritorialization in *Oscar Wao*, which forms a space of openness and connectivity that circumvents the effectiveness of the state to produce and then crush the othered individual. Sammar and Oscar are indicative of potential subjective positions within an increasingly globalized context.

List Of Abbreviations Used

ISA	Ideological State Apparatus
RSA	Repressive State Apparatus
BwO	the Body without Organs
<i>Oscar Wao</i>	<i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i>

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Chapter 1- Introduction

Both Sammar, in *The Translator*, and Oscar, in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, represent the production of subjectivity for individuals who move within multiple nations and between multiple nation-states and, as such, each character has an individual subjectivity that is determined through the interaction and imbrication of two distinct problematics. Each problematic, or “the underlying structure [of a theory] which renders possible the raising of certain questions in a particular form, while ruling out the raising of others” (Callinicos 35), is able to correspond to either an ideological, closed-off function or to a rhizomatic, opening-up function. Which of the two potential functions the problematic of the individual subject—specifically, the problematics of Sammar and Oscar—will correspond to is determined by the interaction of their primary problematic with an additional, external problematic. The reason that this is able to occur is twofold: first, it emerges from the binary and dialogic form of the postcolonial novel—specifically, those depicting *transnational* subjects—in that as a category the postcolonial always involves dialogues between the colonizer and colonized, for example (amongst many other such binaries); and second, when two particular problematics are pushed together or brought to bear upon one another, they destabilize the power takeover of meaning that ideologies produce within a subject’s potential understandings by defamiliarizing what is obscured and made to seem natural. Thus, the character of the two novels being analyzed puts two (or more) problematics in dialogue, and the dialogue between them has the potential to reveal the real conditions of an individual subject’s existence within the state that

the ideology of that state, which works to sustain the dominance of those who have power within it, obscures. The way in which this is able to occur will emerge through an analysis of the theories that I am employing, specifically by engaging with Althusser's theory of the dialectic relation between the openness of science and the closed-off space of ideology, re-articulating the dialectic that switches it towards a dialogic understanding and then exploring the way in which the rhizome opens up space (which will be the focus of my first chapter).

Before I proceed further, I need to establish some additional terms. The distinction between nation and state is made with particular clarity by Bill Ashcroft in a note for his essay, "Transnation": "The distinction [...] is between [...] the historical, multi-ethnic cultural complex that we may call the nation, occupying the political, geographical, legal *structures* that constitute the state" (84). Throughout the narrative of each text, Sammar and Oscar shift subjective positions from a condition of alienation to one of relative integration and freedom. The subject position that each inhabits at the end of their respective texts then shifts their position within the state from one that could be categorized as diasporic towards what Ashcroft refers to as the 'transnation.' Ashcroft categorizes the diaspora as "a community [that is] understood as fundamentally absent from the nation, crippled by absence, loss and alienation" (74), whereas the transnation is able to circumvent the alienation, etc., of the diaspora because its "mobility and in-betweenness" (74) renders the displacement of the diasporic community impermanent and transitory. The transnation functions as "a relation between states, a crossing of borders or a cultural or political interplay between cultures" that forms through "migrating *outside* of the state [but] that *begins*

within the nation” (73). The transnation treats space like felt—a smooth “‘anti-fabric’ [...] obtained by rolling the block of fibres back and forth, entangling, rather than weaving them”—unlike the striated space of the state, which Ashcroft compares to a “textile fabric composed of interwoven vertical and horizontal components” (79). Moreover, it is embedded within what Deleuze and Guattari variably refer to as the rhizome, the body without organs (BwO) and the nomad (space).

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the image of the rhizome, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a model for the structural and relational multiplicity of the text. The rhizome is a “subterranean stem [with multiple bulbs, and] is absolutely different from roots [...]” (Deleuze and Guattari 6). The root of a tree is an image, for Deleuze and Guattari, that always proceeds within a binary logic of dichotomy—that is, the one becomes two, the two becomes four, etc—which retains a “principal unity” (5). The important difference within the rhizome is that it “ceaselessly establishes *connections [...] to anything other*” (my emphasis) and thus it is able to overcome the notion of a principal unity because it envelops multiplicity and otherness into interrelated networks that do not “fix an order” (7). The rhizome traces paths through smooth space that are not stratified or contoured; instead, it forms “multiplicities of masses or packs” that are composed of diagonal lines that diverge. The diagonal “[...] frees itself, breaks or twists [...]and] passes *between* things, *between* points” (505). This allows the rhizomatic model to incorporate disparity without producing dichotomies or eliminating opposition. The body without organs is constituted by individuated and heterogeneous assemblages of systems. Its formation is “in the production of intensities beginning at a degree zero, in the matter of variation, in the

medium of becoming or transformation, and in the smoothing of space” (507). The BwO is endowed with a rhizomatic potential for open, fluid interplay that varies, not in number or as a dichotomy (progressing from a principal unity in sub-sets), but rather in intensity, flow, admixture—the swirl of particles or “abstract line[s] without contour” (507). Moreover, although the nomad follows routes, these paths do not operate like a “sedentary road”; instead, “the nomadic trajectory [...] *distributes people [...] in an open space*, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating” (380). Nomad space is the “desert, steppe, or sea” (506) that encroaches on the divided and gridded spaces of roads and agriculture, and it functions as a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

The transnation forms such a smooth space, which “[...] exists alongside, between, even within the striated space of the state” (80)—e.g., the diagonal cuts through the grid, the desert encroaches on the cultivated land. The spatial dichotomy that Ashcroft points to here is also derived from Deleuze and Guattari. Brian Massumi, in his foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*, succinctly defines these two spaces: “State space is ‘striated,’ or gridded. Movement in it is confined as by gravity to a horizontal plane, and limited by the order of that plane to preset paths between fixed and identifiable points. Nomad space is ‘smooth,’ or open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to any other” (xiii). Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari clarify the components of each space: “the variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of the smooth spaces of the rhizome type [...]. The nomad, nomad space, is localized and not delimited”; the striated space, conversely, is both “limited and limiting”—it is limited by the fixed relation of its parts, and limiting in its

relation to the smooth space, “whose growth it slows or prevents, and which it restricts or places outside” (Deleuze and Guattari 382).

The openness of the smooth space then is within and against the restrictive or interpellative structures of the striated state, which produce essential categories that fix the open-ended subjective possibilities of the smooth space into discrete positions. Deleuze and Guattari express this structural coupling through an analogy: “smooth or nomad space lies between two striated spaces: that of the forest, with its gravitational verticals, and that of agriculture with its grids and generalized parallels [...]” (384). As such, the forest and cultivated land function to delimit and control the nomad space, which inversely functions “like a wedge” to produce “*divergence*,” to disrupt these limits and prescribed routes. The two spaces then are not distinct, separate possibilities, but instead, they are imbricated at a structural level, and as such, each forms within and against the other: the smooth space attempts to open up new subjective possibilities by dissolving the fixed and essentialized categories produced by the state—i.e., subject positions that are legally, socially or culturally represented—and the state then attempts to close-off the smooth space and to re-appropriate these divergent subject positions by forming new categories, laws, sub-cultures or institutions.

For Ashcroft, the two spaces also are enfolded; however, where the transnation is able to effectively “extend beyond the geographical, political, administrative and even imaginative boundary of the state,” the state is treated as a monolithic and static force. The state does function within a binary logic of centre and periphery, and national self and other; nevertheless, I contend—following

Althusser's conception of the ideological state apparatus—that the state's exertion of power is both able to adapt to and envelop new disruptions to its authority, and that this ability need not be conceptualized as unequivocally sinister or counterproductive to the formation of integrative and positive subject positions. The hegemony of the state can positively envelop the multiplicity and hope of the transnation into its system of category and control. That is, although it works to sustain and support the structures of the state, not all forms of interpellation function to restrict or confine the subject within the state—e.g., legal reconstitution can produce new freedoms, and new opportunities; an expanding cultural lexicon can facilitate transgressive discourse or personal expression through or in relation to art or media, etc.

My next chapter will trace a line between Althusser's theory of ideology and Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome and the nomad that will portray how the two theories are related, how they work together to produce meaning, and how the postcolonial text is the locus for this production of meaning. To do so, I will establish Althusser's definition not only of ideology, but also of science and the relation of the two to the text. Furthermore, by employing Althusser's image of the text as a middle space between science and ideology (Bennett 12), I will portray how science, and its implicit nature of opening-up and deepening knowledge, is dialogically related to ideology and how this relation occurs in the text, which is, however, a divergence from Althusser's own conception of their relation. In order to illustrate this, I will explore Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic. Finally, I will explore the function of the opening-up that the 'knowledge-effect' of science is able to produce in relation to the state by displaying an analogy between it and the function of deterritorialization in

the rhizomatic and nomad theory of Deleuze and Guattari. The ultimate purpose of this will be to theoretically ground my claim that ideology and the rhizome are structurally imbricated, especially in relation to Althusser's theory of ideology (and how it relates to science), which presents a very different conception of the relationship between the closed-off space of the state and ideology and the open space of the rhizome.

In my third chapter, I will explore how the closed-off space of the state interacts with the openness of the rhizome by analyzing the way in which *The Translator* pairs two distinct problematics—Western Secularism and Islam. The purpose of this analysis will be to explore not only the openings that the text produces, but also the way in which those deterritorializations of the state space are reterritorialized or re-interpellated back into the fabric of the state. Specifically, I will analyze the purpose of the rhizomatic openings the text produces in order to explore its ultimately liberal intent, in that the text does not function to produce a revolution or overhaul of either problematic, but rather functions to produce openings in each ideology to facilitate the hybridization of the problematics of each ideology. Thus, I will argue that the rhizomatic deterritorializations of the ideological function of Sammar's Islamic problematic and Rae's Western Secularism that enables their hybridization within each of the individual subjects proceeds predominately by a process of 'negative' or 'relative' deterritorialization, which renders it a process of deterritorialization followed by a reterritorialization back into an ideologically, pre-given problematic. This is a continuous mode of operation, and thus, proceeds as a process of openings and closings; however, it predominately proceeds by negative

deterritorialization in that its openings function to produce a connectivity to another problematic so as to close it back off into a hybrid subject position. The closings fix points, or produce polycentric subjectivities, for Sammar and Rae that enable them to come together without disavowing Islam or ruining Rae's career as an academic.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, I will turn my focus to Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in order to elucidate the way in which the structure of the text is able to deterritorialize the repressive functions of the state apparatus—both the RSA and ISA. To elaborate, I will explore how the structure of the text is able to circumvent the repressive function of both the ideological state apparatuses of school and the family, and the repressive apparatuses of the government and police force. Specifically, the structure of the text is on a particularly rhizomatic, in that it relates the life of Oscar as a multiplicity of stories that shift between characters and narrators, and breaks chronology, wherein other stories break into Oscar's own story and interrupt the monologic implications of the title. The story, in effect, forms out of the interrelation of the various stories to construct a complex whole that incorporates not only divergent elements of moments of the family history, but also divergent moments of the post-1492, post-contact history of Latin and North America. In doing so, the text represents the dialogic refraction of Oscar's story, whereby it necessitates multiplicity: it explores the relation of the history of Latin America—specifically, the Dominican Republic—with the United States of America that exposes specific ideological functions of both problematics; deconstructs the synchronicity and unitariness of a life story—i.e., that the story of Oscar Wao consists only of Oscar's story—through the cacophony of voices and stories presented within, and, through

the proliferation and openness of the end of the novel; and deconstructs the unity of text by revealing that the story is never fully concluded and, moreover, by revealing the cyclic structure of the text. Specifically, it is Oscar's final letter—which relates that he wrote a novel of the family history (that never arrives) and lost his virginity—that incites Yuniors, the narrator, to construct the text to fill in the blank that is Oscar's lost novel. *Oscar Wao*, conversely to *The Translator*, proceeds predominately by 'absolute' deterritorialization¹, in that it attempts to produce a "new earth" through the construction of the text, which operates through multiplicity and openness, relates the two national spaces, not through rupture, but connectivity and smoothness, and circumvents the repressive function of the state apparatus—both the RSA, police and government, and the ISA, abuse at home and exclusion at school. *Oscar Wao* proceeds predominately by absolute deterritorialization because it attempts to undo all the closings that it is met with, wherein the text is even able to structurally circumvent the closed-off, pre-given nature of its title.

¹ I will provide definitions of and expand on the concepts of 'negative' and 'absolute' deterritorialization in my first chapter and, as such, I will leave any further elucidation until then.

Chapter 2- Imbricating Ideology And Science In Althusser: Establishing The Dialogic Relationship Between The ISA And Rhizome

2.1 Introduction

In this first chapter I want to begin by outlining my theoretical starting points—specifically, Althusser’s theory of literature, science and ideology, and the rhizome and nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari—and to then situate myself within those theories and the broader discourses that surround them. Specifically, this chapter will theoretically ground my claim that the closed-off nature of the state and openness of the rhizome are structurally imbricated. To do so, I will explore how Althusser understands the relationship between the closed-off space of ideology and its dialectical correlate, science, which facilitates the deepening of knowledge by opening the problematic of a theory up to an understanding of its real conditions—i.e., the Marxist problematic of historical materialism opening up history to knowledge (*For Marx* 14). I will, therefore, elucidate Althusser’s dialectical understanding of the relation between ideology and science in order to establish the validity that ideology can be imbricated within a theoretical correlate that is implicitly open. In this regard, I will trace specific arguments made by Althusser (identified in both his own work and interpretations of it by Bennett and Callinicos²) concerning ideology and science and then disagree with specific aspects of his interpretations of the epistemology of science. I will, instead, favour an understanding of the relationship between science and ideology that is dialogic, and which situates the text

² Steven B. Smith, in *Reading Althusser* (101-40) and, to a lesser extent, Philip Goldstein, in *The Politics of Literary Theory: An Introduction to Marxist Criticism* (168-73), also explores the relationship between Science and Ideology; however, for the purpose of this paper, Bennett and Callinicos’s summary and arguments should be sufficient theoretical companions for my own analysis.

as the locus of the knowledge effect that Althusser assigns to the scientificity of theory. The intent of this will be to disavow the separation of science from ideology, thereby producing an *imbrication* at a structural level in their function in such a way that does not reduce epistemology to a subjectivist level. In my reading of Althusser, I then intend to loosely augment or adapt his theory of literature, and specifically, to employ the model he sets up—situating literature in a middle space between science and ideology—by augmenting his dialectical construction of the model, wherein the text will by a particular locus for the dialogic imbrication of science and ideology within a specific theoretical problematic being brought to bear upon another problematic.

Furthermore, I will explore Bakhtin's dialogic theory in order to elucidate what I mean by 'imbricated' and to, moreover, ground that word in a theory of textuality. The ultimate intent will be to explore the theoretical implications of the imbrication of ideology and the rhizome within a text. Specifically, I will relate this to the postcolonial text, which I contend is a particularly effective locus for exploring the dialogic imbrication of the closed-off state and the ideologies that sustain the dominance of those who control it, and the rhizomatic openness of the transnation because of its implicit binary form—that is, by its very name, postcolonial, it pairs multiple problematics, such as pre/post-contact, subject/object or master/slave, etc.

Finally, I will turn to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome and nomad in order to explore the way in which the text is able to open up the rigid, closed-off space of ideology in relation to the individual subject within and across states. Specifically, I will explore the multiplicity of the rhizome and its similarity to the

dialogic network within Bakhtin and the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization within the theory of the nomad in relation to both the image of the nomad and the migrant.

2.2 The Althusserian Conception of the Text and its Relation to Science and Ideology

Tony Bennett, throughout *New Accents: Formalism and Marxism*, outlines the role that Althusser, and Althusserian critics such as Pierre Macherey and Terry Eagleton,³ assign to literature. As Bennett states, the Althusserian theory of literature “[construes] the aesthetic mode [...] as a form of cognition that is mid-way between the ‘knowledge’ of science and ‘misrecognition’ of reality said to be contained in ideology” (12). Later in the text, Bennett again restates this construal of literature for the Althusserians: “literature, it is argued, is installed halfway between ideology and science and, through its formal mechanisms, it is said to work on the terms of seeing posed by ideology so as to parody, invert or reveal them” (108). Literature, as such, derives its function from its relational capacity, which, for Althusser, enables the obscuring or mystifying function of ideology to be made visible (108-9). My intent here is not to be repetitious but to explicitly outline the model that the Althusserians employ in relation to literature. This model will be my theoretical starting point from which to approach the function of ideology, knowledge and Deleuzo-Guattarian deterritorialization in the text.

³ In *A Theory of Literary Production* (60, 130-2) and *Criticism and Ideology* (64-101), respectively.

That being said, in as much as Bennett and several other critics criticize this model, I will not be working with it as such; instead, I intend to produce my own criticisms so as to make specific augmentations to this model in order to not succumb to the same problems. In order to do this, I will have to engage with Althusser's understanding of ideology and science, and then outline my own by addressing gaps or lapses in his theories. Of course new problems may arise from my own augmentation; however, the way in which I intend to augment this theory should hopefully address, or at least enable the addressing of, these concerns. Specifically, I intend to do a symptomatic reading of Althusser's model, or rather, I intend to turn Althusser's model of reading back onto itself; thus, I will employ Althusser's theory of theoretical practice in order to necessitate the self-reflexivity of my own theory in such a way that all readings of a text are also readings of the theoretical mode through which the text is being read. This may still appear oblique now, but this should come into clearer focus as the chapter progresses. Moreover, the efficacy of retaining a model that I intend to overhaul must be questioned. In response, I wish to retain Althusser's model not because of its inherent function, but because by addressing the gaps, contradictions and mystifications of Althusser's model—i.e., by doing a symptomatic reading of Althusser's model—it is able to produce novel ways of approaching Althusser that will enable me to connect the political, textual and the individual subject within the context of my structural model—i.e., the imbrication of ideology and the rhizome.

2.3 Althusser's Dialectic of Ideology and Science

Althusser outlines his theory of Ideology in the essay, “Ideology and State Apparatuses,” which appears in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. In it, Althusser situates ideology within the superstructure of the state, which he depicts through a visual metaphor of a two-tier structure built onto the base or infrastructure. The infrastructure is the “economic base (the ‘unity’ of the productive forces and the relations of production),” whereas the superstructure is composed of the politico-legal level (law and state) and the ideological level (the various religious, political, cultural, ethical, etc., ideologies that compose a state) (129). Bennett provides an effective outline of Althusser’s six main propositions concerning ideology. First, “*ideology has a material existence*,” which contends that human ideas exist only in actions and that these actions are “‘governed’ by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed,” such as a baptism, communion or graduation” (113).⁴ Second, “*ideology functions so as to secure the reproduction of the relations of production*,” which contends that ideology functions to make the subject complicit in their own oppression by ensuring that the “exchange between capital and labour [...] increases the dependency of the worker on capital at the same times as it increases the social power exerted by capital over the worker “ (114-5). Furthermore, “*ideology has no history*” in that ideology, in general, has a “pre-given structure” that is present across all the particular manifestations of an ideology within a given historical moment (115-6). Next, “*ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject*” through the concept of “a Unique or Absolute subject—i.e., God in Christianity or Man in humanism—that confers onto the unique individual the sense of having “a role and a part to play

⁴ Unless otherwise specified, all italics in quotations are the author’s and not my own emphasis.

within a [theological or historical] process” (116). Moreover, “*ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,*” which contends that the function of ideology is to affect a ‘misrecognition’ of “either the real nature of the conditions of their existence or the real nature of their relationship to those conditions” (116-7). Finally, “*ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality*” because it is necessary for acclimatizing the subject “to the demands of their conditions of existence,” and this is necessary even in a communist society.

What this ultimately leads to is that “ideology has *always-already* interpellated individuals as subjects”—that is, that “*individuals are always-already subjects*” (164, my emphasis). This will emerge as a very important feature as I move forward in that it points to the ubiquity, omnipresence and recurrence of ideology. To expand briefly here, however, Althusser substantiates his claim by pointing to Freud and his elucidation of the “ideological ritual that surrounds the expectations of a ‘birth’” (164-5), but I contend that the implications of this proposition extend beyond simply birth, in that the subject is always being hailed and re-interpellated even as they attempt to demystify and make visible the conditions of their existence that ideology obscures. As such, the ‘knowledge-effect’ that Althusser points to within theory may be able to produce an epistemological break discursively, but it cannot effectively do so within any given subject because the subject is abstract, not autonomous from the ‘hail’ of the social totality, and thus any rupture that they have will be impermanent and need continuous re-articulation or reproduction. That is, if one is “always-already a subject” then one will ‘always-already’ be treated as a

subject and as such, re-appropriated into the ideology, which is significant in relation to the text because the text then functions as a mode through which to again see the conditions of one's existence that are obscured in the material practice of existing within the ideologically-structured social totality. The text is only one locus of many that is able to produce this 'knowledge-effect'; however, as seen in Bennett's outline of Formalism (18-43) and Althusser's analysis of Brecht (*For Marx* 131-51), the text's ability to 'defamiliarize' (Bennett 8) or to produce an "alienation-effect" (146) makes it a particularly effective locus for the demystification of the obscuring function of ideology. If this explanation is still inadequate, I will return to it later in more detail and within the broader system of reading I will trace.

Furthermore, ideology itself is composed of two apparatuses⁵: the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). For Althusser, the ISA is on the side of RSA but should not be confused with it, as the RSA consists of the government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons, etc. (136), and the ISA appears "to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions" (136)—i.e., religion (the system of different churches), education (both public and private), family, law (which belongs to both categories), politics (the political system, including the various political parties), trade-unions, communications (press, radio, television and internet [had it existed when Althusser was writing this list]) and culture (literature,⁶ the Arts, sports, etc.). Althusser

⁵ An apparatus is defined by Althusser as a function of state power and as a means of conserving state power that can survive changes unaffected that change the control of state power (*Lenin* 134).

⁶ For Althusser, there is a "distinguishing of the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic, of the 'literary' from the 'non-literary'" (Bennett 12), which would allow literature to function both in a space between science and ideology and as an ideology itself depending on its classification within the aforementioned aesthetic distinctions; however, the conditions that constitute this distinction are rather

outlines a number of key differences between the RSA and the ISA: the RSA is categorized by unity, whereas the ISA is multiple (but still unified) (137); both apparatus function by repression and ideology but the RSA “functions massively and predominately by repression [...], while functioning secondarily by ideology,” whereas the ISA functions inversely to this (138); and finally, the RSA has a unified and centralized organization under the classes in power, whereas the ISA is unified under the sometimes contradictory ideology of the ruling class (139).⁷ Moreover, the role of the RSA “[...] consists essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of the relations of production, which are in the last resort *relations of exploitation*” (142), whereas the ISA functions to obscure the exploitative nature of the relation. For example, the police, and more broadly, law itself, enables the general ability, in a capitalist society, for the proletariat and bourgeois middle class to fulfill their role as consumers, and the ISA compels the subject towards and reinforces this desire to be a consumer—i.e., commercials or product placement in films, etc.

Similarly to ideology, to define science, I will have to establish the definition of a number of terms and to situate it within the broader context of Althusser’s body of work. Specifically, Althusser’s approach to science emerges from his reading of the relation between the *Manuscripts* of 1844 and *Capital*, wherein Althusser’s primary goal is to argue against empiricist epistemology which asserts a direct connection between subject and object (Callinicos 31). This, for Althusser, is the

unclear, and like Macherey, who advocated “for a break from aesthetics” (156-7), I will distinguish myself from Althusser by discussing texts, which, by avoiding aesthetics, all have a latent literary function that can be employed by any given reader within a given social and historical fabric.

⁷ Althusser sums up these points on 141-2 and Alex Callinicos, in *Althusser’s Marxism*, also provides a succinct overview of these three distinctions (64).

product of a particular “*theory of reading*” that contends that “the real is immediately present in the phenomena accessible to our observation” (32) which would, as per Callinicos’s example, produce a reading of alienation that would conflate the meaning of its use in *Capital* to its use in the *Manuscripts*. Althusser asserts the inverse, that knowledge does not work on the real object but on what he refers to as “the *object of knowledge*,” which Callinicos, less convolutedly, refers to as “the thought-object” (32). To clarify: “the thought-object [object of knowledge] is [...] what the concepts of a science are set to work on, as opposed to what the science is to provide knowledge of, the real object” (33); thus, what Althusser is asserting is a difference between the reality of the object and the ways of knowing that reality, which opens science to “continual transformations” and does away with the notion of a pre-given “harmony between thought and reality that precedes the scientist” (33).

The effect of this within Althusser’s understanding is twofold: there is no reading of a text that does not include some kind of theoretical understanding, which, as such, even implicitly, contributes to the “determin[ation of] the character of the reading” (33); and, consequently, “the application of Marxist theory to Marx himself appears to be the absolute precondition of an understanding of Marx and at the same time as the precondition even of the constitution and development of Marxist philosophy” (34). What we are then left with as readers of Althusser is a semi-convoluted account of Marxism that necessitates itself as a precondition of its own existence. The way out of this convoluted postulation, for Callinicos, begins through the concept of the problematic—the identity of which arises not out of “specific propositions” or the intent of the author, but from the theoretical structure, “at the

level of [...] ‘*the objective internal reference system of its particular theme, the system of questions commanding the answers given*’” (qtd. in Callinicos, 34).⁸ The problematic is able to resolve the aforementioned proposition that Marxism is its own precondition because a problematic “renders possible the raising of certain questions in a particular form, while ruling out the raising of others,” which then renders the understandings that it produces a product of the problematic itself and not a product of the innate quality of any given reader (35). The range of questions it can pose then delimits the possible readings that a theory can produce. The effect of this is that “the problematic of the theory is objective” in that it is neither determined by the intrinsic qualities of a given reader nor “reducible to the beliefs of the author of the theory” (35).

This in itself, however, is not enough: a “*symptomatic reading*” is necessary, which functions as the means by which the objectivity of the problematic of a theory may be identified (35). Callinicos elaborates:

It is called symptomatic because the problematic of a theory is complex and contradictory, involving dislocations between different levels. These contradictions are reflected on the text’s surface, as symptoms of a complex structure in gaps, lapses, silences, absences, which are determined by the way in which the contradictory levels of the theory are articulated upon each other. (35)

⁸ See also Miriam Glucksmann’s *Structuralist analysis in contemporary social thought*, 3-8.

Furthermore, as Callinicos quotes of Althusser (from *Reading Capital* with Étienne Balibar), the symptomatic reading ““divulges the undivulged even in the text it reads, and in the same moment relates it to a *different text*, present as a necessary absence of the first”” (35). Thus, a symptomatic reading attempts to account not just for the content expressly conveyed through the text, but also its absences, contradictions and dialogues with other texts to produce a reading that is able to recognize and transgress the function of ideology within the text. The symptomatic reading in itself, however, is inadequate to effectively produce a knowledge-effect; instead, it is the nature of the problematic that the symptomatic reading is operating within that enables an attainment of a reading that corresponds to knowledge. It is, therefore, the relational function of the two—the problematic and the symptomatic reading—that is able to make the text epistemologically productive, wherein the symptomatic reading is the apparatus through which to approach and parse the text, but the problematic itself sets the limits of the questions it can formulate and, consequently, it sets the limits of the “gaps, lapses, silences, [and] absences” (35) that could be possibly read for or the limits of the types of questions and answers that could be produced from those gaps, etc. It is this that elucidates, in part, why Marxist theory is the precondition of an understanding of Marx: one can only understand Marx by understanding the Marxist problematic and its inflection of the possible questions and meanings that Marxism can produce.

Science, however, is defined by Althusser as producing “a deepening [of] the knowledges it produces, in a process of continual internal transformation” (38); so, if the problematic sets the limit of the types of questions it produces, how can a

problematic function with scientificity? The answer is that the functional definition of the problematic that I have previously provided needs to be refined to account for the way in which an ideological problematic will function—that is, put forward its problems—and, in contradistinction, how a scientific problematic will function. First, for the problematic of a theoretical ideology:

The manner in which problems are posed in an ideology is such as to render it impossible for a continuous deepening and development of the theory to take place, limiting the ideology to confirming its own suppositions, which in the last instance pertain not to the theory itself but to the social reality external to it. (38)

And, science, conversely, is defined by its ability “[...] to render it possible for it to develop, deepening the knowledges it produces, in a process of continual internal transformation, which at times will involve [a] thoroughgoing recasting of the problematic such as the revolution in theoretical physics inaugurated by Einstein” (38). For Althusser, the thesis that “*theory is autonomous*” is essential to this distinction between ideology and science, as “theoretical practice is a distinct and autonomous practice which is not reducible to the other instances of the social formation,” unlike ideology, which is “subordinated to [...] the situation and interests of a particular class” (54). The autonomy of theory functions to ensure that the validity of the theory is dependent only on its own internal mechanisms for justification, and not on extrinsic factors such as class concerns—i.e., physics and chemistry contain objective justifications that will not differ whether it is functioning within a bourgeois or a proletarian problematic (55). Callinicos argues that in order

for the autonomy of theory to avoid subjectivism or ideology, “the process whereby the objective knowledges of the real are produced takes place entirely *in thought*” (55); however, this is not meant to abstract the sciences from material reality. For Althusser, the abstract is able to correspond to the concrete through “the general theory of practice” (56).

Theoretical practice, within Althusser’s conception of it, is composed of “three bodies of concepts”—Generalities I, II and III (56). Generality I is “the body of *concepts*,” which is the abstract, and ideological or theoretical, raw material that the process will transform into the concrete—i.e., that will correspond with the real. Generality II is the problematic of the theory, and thereby it constitutes the range of problems that the theory can articulate. Finally, Generality III is the “‘concrete-in-thought,’” which is the consequence of this articulation of the raw material—i.e., it is “the knowledge that is produced by the work of Generality II on Generality I, of the concepts defined by the problematic on the pre-existing theories that constitute the pre-history [...]” (56). The effect of this for Althusser is that Generality I and III do not share the same constitution but rather are related to each other only as an effect of the transformation that the problematic produces on the raw material; thus, there is not a direct connection between the raw material or the ideologically inflected pre-history of a science and the ‘concrete-in-thought’ knowledge of a theory.

Althusser refers to the aforementioned “thoroughgoing recasting of the problematic” as an epistemological break, and it is essential to the scientificity of Marxism—which is itself an effective example of how Althusser envisions the function of a science and its relation to an epistemological break. For Althusser, the

epistemological break that occurs within Marx's work is between the *Manuscripts* of 1844 and Marx's work that followed. The epistemological break is an essential concept within Althusser's argument for the scientificity of Marxism in that, by moving away from Humanism, Marx was able to open up history to objective knowledge—an objective scientificity (*For Marx* 14)—which emerges from Althusser's symptomatic reading of *Capital* that reveals its distinction from the *Manuscripts*. The effect is that it opens up history in such a way that allows it to develop or transform—it opens the problematic to new questions and potentials answers, and does not close-off history by attempting to provide pre-given answers. Its ability to accomplish this arises out of the particular function of Marxist theory as “the ‘theory of theoretical practice’” (58), whereby it is unable to provide a “*general criterion for scientificity*” (59), but it does not succumb to the ideological function of theory that attempts to provide “guarantees” (58) because it concerns itself, not with the knowledge-effect itself, but the mechanisms that produce the knowledge effect (58-9). The reason that this is different from ideological theory is that its theoretical function is not to guarantee knowledge but to be a theory of the way in which theory is able to produce knowledge, which thus renders null a “predetermined relation between [a] theory and its real object” by instead analyzing “the mechanisms responsible for ‘the “*knowledge-effect*” which is the peculiarity of those special products which are knowledges’” (58).

Thus, Althusser has no general criterion for what constitutes scientificity—i.e., what can produce a knowledge-effect; however, Marxism provides a model of how the mechanisms of an epistemological, scientific theory operate:

The role of Marxist philosophy[,] rather than trying vainly to erect itself into the guarantor of the sciences, thereby transforming itself into the spokesman of ideology, Marxist philosophy must be the ‘theory of theoretical practice’— must analyze the mechanisms responsible for the “*knowledge-effect*” which is the peculiarity of those special products which are ‘knowledges’. Marxist philosophy, the theory of theoretical practice, concerns itself with the question of the mechanisms that result in the emergence of theoretical formations that are scientific, i.e. that achieve a genuine cognitive appropriation of the real rather than the mystical reflection of conditions anterior to the theory as do ideologies that masquerade as science. (58-9)

For Althusser, theoretical practice is able to attain this scientificity because it is “its own criterion and contains in itself definite protocols with which to *validate* the quality of its product, i.e. the criteria of the scientificity of the products of theoretical practice” (59). Thus, it is the autonomy of theory that establishes its scientificity, whereby the theory itself is its own precondition for scientificity—Marxist theory is the criterion for, or itself constitutes, the scientificity of Marxist theory, and is the precondition for understanding Marx. The epistemological break, moreover, is the point where Althusser is able to formulate the theory of theoretical practice within Marx’s work, thereby constituting its scientificity through a reading of Marx with Marxist theory that is, as such, able to recognize Marx’s break from his theory’s ideological prehistory of humanism (37-8). There are, however, a number of problems with both the epistemological break and the general concept of scientificity presented by Althusser that I would like to address. I will challenge a number of

Althusser's claims and arguments to gesture away from some of his conclusions, specifically to move away from dialectics towards a dialogic understanding of the relationship between problematics, science and ideology, and the abstract and the concrete. The effect of this will be to move away from Althusser's dialectical understanding of the relationship between the closed-off constitution of ideology and its open correlate, science,⁹ and to argue instead that my imbricated and dialogic conception of science and ideology and, consequently, openness and closed-offness, is a more accurate representation of their relationship.

2.4 Criticisms of the Epistemological Break and the General Theory of Scientificity

In the "Introduction: Today" to *For Marx*, Althusser states that the "epistemological break" divides Marx's thought into two essential periods: the 'ideological' period *before*, and the scientific period *after*, the break in 1845" (34, my emphasis); however, even as he tries to produce two discrete categories, the second category of the two, 'after', instantly breaks apart into a further subdivision—between the transitional and the mature work. Althusser actually breaks Marx's work into four distinct epochs: "Marx's early works" (his ideological, early writings), "the works of the break," "the transitional works" and "Marx's mature work," which are, moreover, inadequate and fracture into further subdivisions (33-8).

⁹ To restate: the character of science is openness because it facilitates a "*deepening* [of] the knowledges it produces" (38, my emphasis), which is to say that it expands the theory by problematizing it further and, thus, opening it up to new knowledges by expanding the limits of the problematic (and not by providing any specific details or answers).

What this illustrates is that the image of a 'break' that Althusser is trying to establish is really a false image; when it is actually tested, it reveals fractures and subdivisions. What these subdivisions point to is that the epistemological break is not a pivot dividing two discrete categories. Instead, Althusser's categories reveal the progressive and culminating process or build-up of Marx's work, wherein eras, as designated by Althusser, are dependent on the work that preceded them and are linked together by those works, in that the epistemological break arises out of the distinctness of "Marx's early work" from the works that followed. Thus, the categories of pre- and post-break only emerge through the dialogic relation of the totality of Marx's work. The categories or epochs that Althusser identifies then may be distinct within Marx's work, but they are not autonomous from each other; instead, they dialogically produce the distinctness of one another through their bilateral—back and forth—relation. Consequently, the ideological cannot be excised from the scientific, and as such, a theory can still produce a knowledge-effect while being fully imbricated at the level of its production with ideology because their difference can only be seen post hoc through their relation. This does not mean that epistemology is ideological but it does point away from the move that Althusser makes in distinguishing Generality I from Generality III by necessitating a transformation, wherein I contend that Generality III only finds salience in its relation to Generality I and not through any process of transformation, in that the transformation can only be seen through the relation of the two.

Althusser's categories, and specifically, his image of the break, then performs a mystifying function in that it obscures the relational and dependent nature of these

categories. This seems to be because Althusser is attempting to decisively establish the scientificity of Marxism, and as such, is trying to establish as much distance between the ideological prehistory and the post-break scientific Marxist theory; however, the anxiety is needless because the relation that I am addressing does not conflate the science of Marxism with ideology, but instead, is only meant to point towards a different understanding of the production of scientificity. Furthermore, the constant fracturing of the categories points to their ineffectiveness to actually capture the development of Marx's philosophy. The categories may be able to broadly trace a line through Marxism but, like a line of best fit through a non-linear equation, it leaves out the nuances, divergences and outliers within Marxist theory and constructs it in such a way that conceals its messiness for the sake of investing it with greater authority. The point is that, while not being reducible to ideology, ideology cannot be untangled from the scientific, post-break work that emerges within "Marx's mature work," especially if Althusser wants to conflate Marxist knowledge with the scientificity of mathematics and physics.

To illustrate this point further, the pre-history of physics—specifically within the early development of physics, such as the innovations of Kepler that "recast the problematic of astronomy (Callinicos 57)—is so essential to the epistemological break that Kepler was able to usher in that speaking of them as distinct categories is incoherent. Specifically, the work of Tycho Brahe was essential to the work that Kepler did, in that he would not have been able to accomplish what he did without the expansive and meticulous observations recorded by Brahe, who moreover occupied a kingdom in northern Denmark (now a part of Sweden) that enabled him to make such

observations (consequently, excluding Kepler from a similar vantage point or ability to make similar observations). The system that Brahe used this material to devise was fundamentally ideological in that it could not conceptualize the universe outside of the geocentric, Christian model that he accepted as a pre-given, essential truth; however, inasmuch as his model was ideological, it still enabled a deepening of knowledge and aided in the opening up of the universe to knowledge.¹⁰ Moreover, despite the ideological refraction of Brahe's work, his model was able to eliminate the theory of "rotating crystalline spheres" that carried the planets in orbit, which was employed both in the geocentric model and in Copernicus's heliocentric model; thus, Brahe's model itself produced a deepening of scientific knowledge despite its ideological formulation. Brahe, therefore, devised a model that was at once ideological and scientific, yet Althusser's model seems incapable of accounting for this as anything more than the ideological pre-history of physics.

Brahe's theory most likely constitutes, not "a new science in [the] process of self-constitution," but, in Althusser, "the prescientific *theoretical* ideologies that occupy the 'terrain' in which [that new science] is establishing itself" (*For Marx* 13); however, assigning a break between Brahe and Kepler misses the progressive nature of their science in that Kepler refined Brahe (inasmuch as Brahe refined parts of Copernican theory). That is, Kepler was able to take the specifics of Brahe's data and reconfigure it into a model that properly accounted for the elliptical orbits of planets, because of its imbrication with its ideological prehistory and not its break from it,

¹⁰ See "Tycho Brahe" wikipedia.org for a summary explanation of Brahe and his quantitative influence on Kepler.

wherein inasmuch as Kepler recast the problematic that he inherited from Brahe, Brahe's work was intrinsic to this recasting.

The point that I am attempting to illustrate with this example is less that Brahe should be admitted into science or that another category should be added to account for the imbrication of ideology and science, but instead that the concept of the epistemological break is fundamentally inadequate in its cleanness. The image of a break evokes a pre- and post- separation that misses the messiness of scientific development, wherein scientific epistemology is fraught with ideology, error, misinterpretation, etc. even as it opens up or deepens knowledge, and it operates through a process, in that it develops in relation to what preceded it—refining mistakes and extracting the useful, correct or applicable knowledge from the theories that preceded it. The issue is not that Althusser does not know this—i.e., practice is a *process* of transformation—but that the concept of the epistemological break obscures this process, wherein it contends that science breaks from “the ideology that had preceded it” (Callinicos 37) as if what is presented on the other side of the break then necessarily corresponds to knowledge and is distinct from the content of the pre-history—that there is no “identity of essence between Generalities I and III” (56). Yet, the issue that this example points to is that the raw data or material of Brahe's model is also present in Kepler's model; thus, despite the break from Brahe, Kepler's model, which could be said to constitute Generality III, still contains what appears to be the essence of Brahe's model, which could be considered Generality I.

The example of Brahe and the criticism that science is more a process than a break is not necessarily problematic for Althusser because he is less concerned with

“particular results arrived at” in science—such as, Newton’s laws of motion—“than in *the way in which* they are arrived at”—such as, Lakatos’s heuristics, “the theoretical structures that made [a scientific] discovery possible” (Callinicos 54). The problem, however, is that Althusser does not exclusively apply the concept of the epistemological break to mathematics or physics, but instead, opens it up to include Marx’s epistemological break from liberal humanism, which he contends opened up history to objective knowledge through the problematic of historical materialism (*For Marx* 14). I do not want to refute this claim, as I agree that Marx was able to produce a new problematic, historical materialism, capable of revealing certain mystifying functions of bourgeois capitalist ideology, such as fetishism; however, the problem for me is in the associative effect produced by Althusser’s use of science, and specifically the comparisons he makes in the second part of “To My English Readers” (which precedes *For Marx*). Althusser contends that “Marx ‘opened up’ for scientific knowledge a new ‘continent,’ that of *history* – just as Thales opened up the ‘continents of mathematics for scientific knowledge, and Galileo opened up the ‘continent’ of physical nature for scientific knowledge” (14). For Althusser, the implication of this claim is that

Just as the foundation of mathematics by Thales ‘induced’ the birth of Platonic philosophy, [and] just as the foundation of physics by Galileo ‘induced’ the birth of Cartesian philosophy, etc., so the foundation of the science of history by Marx has ‘induced’ the birth of a new, theoretically and practically revolutionary philosophy, Marxist philosophy or dialectical materialism. (14)

I contend, however, that there is a further implication that arises out of Althusser's comparison, and it is here that I find a deeper problem: Althusser is contending that all sciences can be treated the same, specifically that Thales mathematics and Galileo's physics cannot be equated to Marx's philosophy. I am willing to accept that their mechanisms may produce a similar opening up of knowledge, perhaps even that their structure is homologous—that the “*way in which*” they arrive at answers is structurally the same (54)—but I cannot accept that this then renders Marx's theoretical work, specifically his conclusions concerning the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat (54), conflatable with the mathematics and physics of Thales and Galileo. This again can be refuted by falling back on the claim that Althusser is not interested in such details but rather those mechanisms that comprise the structure of the theory; however, at this point I can not accept that argument because the scientificity of Thales and Galileo is constituted within the very details of their mathematics and physics.

Marx's problematic enables the possibility of scientificity, but this does not ensure that its details are themselves scientific; instead the scientificity emerges from its particular usage, which differs from Galileo and, even more so, from Thales, where the scientificity is established in the particular findings of each man—that is, by its very definition, the interior angles of a triangle equal 180 degrees, but it seems far less certain that the inevitable conclusion of class struggle is proletarian revolution. This does not mean that Marx is wrong in this or any other particular instance; however, what it does do is obscure the nature of Marxist theory by endowing it with a mathematic certainty that is not inherent to its type of theorization,

which can then potentially obscure those details which are ideologically produced (even if that ideology is itself Marxist). The scientificity of the Marxist problematic then is not in itself but in its relation to other problematics—specifically, the bourgeois Capitalism of Smith and Ricardo (Callinicos 36)—which is different than Thales or Galileo, who establish the scientificity of their theories in the very quantifiable details of that theory.

The main problem that I can see in the comparison resides in a disjunction, not between the structure of physics and history, but in the subject of both. Specifically, Marx was able to free himself “from the teleology of the negation of the negation,” or the Hegelian dialectic, by viewing history as a “process without a subject, [that is] history motored by the peculiar articulations of the contradictions internal to it” and not by a correspondence to God, Man or, as was the case for Hegel, the Absolute Idea (68-9). The effect of this is threefold: first, “history is a process whose end is not fixed in its origins, although the particular overdetermined relation of its contradictions will weight its development in a particular direction” (69); second, it removes any notion of human nature, specifically any “explanatory role in the science of history” (69); and lastly, “the role that human individuals play in history as *individuals* is that of the embodiment of the process, not as its subject” (70). This is the point where ideology functions, in that it produces an imaginary relationship between the individual and history that makes them believe that “history was made for them” (70). The driving force of history then becomes class struggle, as history is the function of “the struggles between different and opposed classes” (71). The idea that history does not have a subject, and as such, is not tied to what

came before does not seem problematic to me; however, how does this correspond to its scientificity and the category of the sciences in general?

I believe that this notion of history being subjectless, and specifically, the third point that supports it, necessitates the theory of theoretical practice, in that the scientificity of Marxism is that it reveals that history is not made for the individual by making visible ideology's obscuring of this fact through the analysis of the *process* of history. That is, history is driven not by a subject but by a process, and as such, to understand it—i.e., to make visible its knowledge of reality—is to understand the process, whereby the theory of theoretical practice is the tool to do so, as it analyzes not details, but the mechanisms by which a theory reaches its answers—its process. The question is then: is science subjectless? I do not believe that the conventional categories of science—such as physics, chemistry, biology, geography, etc.—could possibly be considered subjectless—as each science seems to make its subject some component of the natural world. This I believe is a fundamental difference between science and Marxist theory, which is not fatal to Althusser's argument but does necessitate a revision of its understandings of science and its relation to Marxism as such. The effect is, as I have stated above, that Marxism, as the theory of theoretical practice, cannot constitute its scientificity in itself, whereas Galileo's theories can (that is, in their reproduction, or the repetition of the very process by which the results were attained); instead, the scientificity of the theory of theoretical practice emerges through an analysis of the process by which it, as a problematic, is brought to bear on another problematic—that is, its scientificity emerges through its relation to another problematic.

The epistemological salience of Marx's historical materialism then is not in the problematic itself or the symptomatic reading that it produces, but in the symptomatic reading that Marx's problematic is able to produce in relation to an external or other problematic—i.e., the bourgeois capitalist problematic (36-7); thus, in as much as the problematic and its symptomatic reading are necessary components of scientificity, they are not sufficient components, in that their ability to produce a 'knowledge-effect' is necessarily dependent on the specific relation to another problematic. This is a slight divergence from Althusser, who employs a circular logic for understanding the scientificity of historical materialism, which contends, in Callinicos's words, that "symptomatic readings such as Althusser's reading of Marx are rendered possible by historical materialism itself" (38); thus, the theory of historical materialism is the precondition for a symptomatic reading of historical materialism, which renders its scientificity or 'knowledge-effect' a product of historical materialism. The problem that arises for me here, however, is that this logic does not produce the same conclusion—i.e. that historical materialism is the precondition for scientificity—when more than one problematic is concerned—i.e. this argument does not properly explain the 'knowledge-effect' of historical materialism in relation to bourgeois capitalism that Callinicos outlines (36-7). The precondition of a symptomatic reading of a compound problematic—i.e. historical materialism and Ricardian bourgeois capitalism—is not historical materialism, but the relation of historical materialism and bourgeois capitalism, which as such renders bourgeois capitalism a necessary component of the 'knowledge-effect' that is

produced in a similar fashion to Brahe's necessity within Kepler's ability to generate knowledge of planetary orbits.

The difficulty of such a reading, however, now becomes avoiding slipping into a view of Marxist theory that renders it dependent on factors external to it for its scientificity, which would contradict the autonomy of theory. The solution to this problem cannot be attained through dialectics, as Marxist theory would depend on the external problematic to produce a knowledge-effect. A dialogic approach, however, could provide a way of relating two problematics without rendering either dependent on the other for scientificity because the dialogic relation will not require a transformation, as practice does, but rather each problematic will refract the other with their meanings. The 'knowledge-effect' would, therefore, emerge through an analysis of the process of relation—i.e., the gaps and contradictions that are revealed through the imbrication of problematics—which would render the qualification of scientific validity exclusive to the internal components of the theory—that is, theoretical practice would remain “its own criterion [...] with which to *validate*” its scientificity (59). Moreover, this would not guarantee the scientificity of any given theory; instead, the 'knowledge-effect' would be the product of the given relation of problematics that would become visible through an analysis of the process by which one problematic was brought to bear upon another—i.e., Marxism's symptomatic reading of bourgeois capitalism. Furthermore, the effect of this is that it de-essentializes Marxist theory itself, and instead, employs its mechanisms of analysis without necessitating that the Marxist problematic, or its conclusions, be employed; thus, an Islamic problematic could be brought to bear upon Western Secularism, for

example, in such a way that would produce a ‘knowledge-effect.’ Or, as Rancière points out: Comtean and Durkeimian sociology are able to effect a symptomatic reading of Marxism that reveals holes in its view of the social totality, such as its inability to account for the “*securing [of] social cohesion in general*” (qtd. in Callinicos 101). Thus, it is the specific relation of one problematic being brought to bear on another specific problematic that drives the symptomatic reading and not anything intrinsic to the Marxist problematic itself. What makes Marxist theory and Althusser necessary, however, is within the concept of the theory of theoretical practice, which entails an analysis of the mechanisms by which one problematic operates on another rather than particulars of any one reading, such as Althusser’s reading of Marx. The model that Althusser employs then becomes transferable, in that its structure can be made to function between different problematics.

This then leads to one final question: if scientificity emerges relationally and not, as in the dialectic, through transformation, how then does the in-thought process appropriate the real—that is, how does the cognitive relation of problematics correspond to the real object that is being thought of? For Althusser, the theory of theoretical practice is able to attain scientificity, that is it “can cognitively appropriate its real object despite the fact that it takes place completely in thought because thought and the real are homologous—they possess an identical structure, that of practice” (76). This, of course, presents a further complication for my dialogic argument. This is possible because practice, in Althusser, necessarily involves a process of transformation; however, in order to retain the autonomy of its theory, the dialogic cannot involve a process of transformation, otherwise each problematic

would be dependent on an external factor—that is, the other problematic it is being brought to bear upon—to produce knowledge of the real, which would render it ideological and not scientific in an Althusserian sense. The solution to this is twofold: first, cognitive theory and the real are not homologous but imbricated, in that the thought is of the real and real is only perceived in thought; however, this is basically idealism and fundamentally inadequate on its own to actually ensure any correspondence between the real and the in-thought. This is where the second aspect of the solution is necessary: the theory of theoretical practice necessitates that scientificity emerges through the analysis of the mechanisms of a theory; thus, in the least convoluted terms possible, the scientificity of a theory—i.e., its ability to “cognitively appropriate its real object despite the fact that [the process] takes place completely in thought” (76)—emerges from the analysis of the symptomatic reading of one problematic by another. It is able to appropriate the real then, not because they correspond in any necessary way, but because, by analyzing the “gaps, lapses, silences, absences” (35) that the symptomatic reading reveals within a problematic, the obscuring function of an ideology can be revealed, and thus, effect a demystification of “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their *real* conditions of existence” (63, my emphasis). Thus, no one problematic or relation of problematics can guarantee scientificity; instead, the scientificity only emerges as an effect of the analysis of the symptomatic reading. Moreover, the cognitive in-thought is able to appropriate the real through the process of the symptomatic reading, which can reveal the real conditions of an individual’s existence that are obscured by the function of ideology and, therefore, make the function of those ideologies

transgressable—either by dismantling the ideology permanently or transforming it into something more beneficial to the given individual or group interest.¹¹ Thus, it is not the imbrication of ideology and the rhizome that functions in the texts to reveal the mystifying effects of ideology, but rather it is the analysis of the defamiliarization effect that their pairing produces that is able to reveal (some of) the real conditions of the individual subject within their social existence in the state. A better elaboration of the dialogic will hopefully make this previous point clearer, specifically how the dialogic is able to blend the thought and the real, or two distinct problematics, without transforming them.

2.5 Bakhtin and *The Dialogic Imagination*

Michael Holquist, the editor and co-translator of Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, provides a glossary of Bakhtin's key terms at the end of the four essays. I will cite and summarize some of these terms in order to clarify some of my particular usages in the previous section and to provide a more refined knowledge of dialogics as I move forward and continue to employ Bakhtin. I will define heteroglossia, dialogism, dialogization, hybridization, polyglossia and refraction, which I will then expand upon to formulate an analogy with transnational subjectivity and the category of postcolonial literature in order to connect the conclusions that I

¹¹ This is after the fact—that is, after the real conditions have been revealed—and thus, despite the claim that the real conditions of existence are used to the benefit of the individual or group, this claim is not ideological because the function of the theory is not “subordinated to [...] the situation and interests of a particular class” (54), only the transgression of the ideology is—the science itself is not, but the way that knowledge is used has the potential to be (i.e., Richard Dawkins employs evolutionary theory to support atheism).

have drawn from my analysis of Althusser to Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the rhizome and the nomad.

First, heteroglossia is the “matrices of forces,” such as the “social, historical, meteorological, physiological” factors of the given moment that constitute the conditions of the meaning of a particular utterance. Heteroglossia conceptualizes meaning in a way that is similar to the problematic in Althusser, in that it contends that the given subject will be within the given conditions of their social totality and that this will set the limits of the potential meanings of an utterance. The heteroglot, therefore, is the conceptualization of the complex network of conditions that constitute the meanings of an utterance that are “practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve” (428). Certain conditions—such as the weather—may change frequently, whereas other conditions—such as religion or politics—may appear to have a general level of stability. This stability occurs when one or more of the conditions experiences a power takeover, or an overdetermination or overcoding, of its meaning by a particular arrangement within or between the matrices of conditions that constitute its meaning—i.e., the power takeover of Freedom by Democracy (specifically, the Democracy of American neo-imperialism, vis-à-vis Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.); however, this power-takeover occurs only through the obscuring of the heteroglot nature of meaning—i.e., its dialogic multiplicity and connectivity—which is inherent to the function of ideology.

Dialogism functions as the “epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia” and, as such, it conceptualizes the broader structure of relation within which various meanings have the potential to engage in “constant interaction,” or

dialogue, and thus “have the potential of conditioning other [meanings]” within the heteroglot structures of the given society (426). Dialogism then functions as the broader relation of meanings that orient within a particular expression “at the moment of utterance” (426). The ‘dialogic imperative’—the pre-existing ‘language world’ and its relation to those who inhabit its space (those within the language)—ensures that there is never any “actual monologue,” and, thus, when there is a power takeover of any given meaning—that purports to a monologue or unitariness—it is only “relative to the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism” (426)—that is, it must suppress that force.

The dialogization of language occurs when “a word, discourse, language or culture [...] becomes [...] aware of competing definitions for the same things” (427). Hybridization marks “the mixing, within a single concrete utterance, of two or more different linguistic consciousnesses, often widely separated by time,” and therefore hybrids “can be read as belonging simultaneously to two or more systems [...]” (429). Next, polyglossia is “the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system” (431). Finally, refraction signifies the way in which the word that has its origin in an individual subject, such as the author of a text, is intersected with the heteroglot meanings inherent to both its use and reception. Thus, the word in its utterance is refracted by the history of its use and the reader’s (limited or extensive) knowledge of those uses—i.e., the word functions like “a ray of light on a trajectory to both an object and receiver” where “both paths are strewn with previous claims that slow up, distort, refract the intention of the word” (432).

Although the link may not be direct and to make it may diverge from Bakhtin's intent, I believe that the language of Bakhtin's dialogic theory can function as an effective analogue for the condition of the transnational subject within the state, and the implicit social totality of the state. The analogy is this: each state is a language that the individual subject engages with through particular interactions, or utterances. The state as a social space is a dialogism that produces a set of problematics out of the heteroglossia of the social totality—that is, the problematic is the theoretical mode by which individual subjects understand their relations to the various components of the social totality, and the limits of the understandings that those problematics can generate are set within the delimiting obstruction of the heteroglossia of the society produced by the ideology of the given state (i.e., its overcoded understandings of particular meanings that are made to seem natural, unique and particular to the subjectivity of the individual within that state). Within this type of state space, the transnational subject is a polyglot, whose primary problematics—those generated by the dominant ideology that produced them as a subject—undergoes dialogization as their original problematics become refracted by the new problematics that they are within. This enables the transnational subject to either form a hybridized subjectivity or to analyze the overdetermined dialogues of either their original or new problematic.

This analogy probably is able to say very little about the actual lived experience of someone moving between and across states, and moreover, refracts the meaning of Bakhtin's work with an understanding of subjectivity that is not necessarily implicit to it; however, I contend that my analogy finds epistemological

saliency within the context of the postcolonial novel, which is itself a hybrid of subjective and textual dialogism. Postcolonial theory is wrought with binaries that produce meaning out of their dialogues, such as pre-/post- contact or colonization, subject/object, orient/occident (East/West), Master-Slave, colonizer/colonized, etc., that the postcolonial novel¹² puts into dialogue textually through either direct or indirect, primary, secondary or tertiary discourse. Looking directly at Bakhtin should help clarify this point further:

Any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in the obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the “light” of alien words that have already been spoken about it. [...] The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group. (276)

Of course Bakhtin, here, is talking broadly about all discourse; however, within the context of the relations of the postcolonial novel, there is a power take-over—overcoding, overconditioning or overdetermination—of meaning by the discourse of imperialism, and implicitly, the states that enforce the imperial discourse. This overdetermination can function ideologically by either naturalizing imperialism, the

¹² By the postcolonial novel I mean any novel that has or could be read within postcolonial theory or in relation to its binaries that are outlined above, which can include those texts dialogically related to any text that has been explicitly categorized as postcolonial (such as pretext and contexts like *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*). As such, my use of postcolonial should not be viewed as creating an explicit category so much as pointing to a type of reading or understanding that is open to diverse texts and understandings.

state or the state's right to exert force over its subjects or by totalizing imperialism and, thereby, reducing all national discourse to its dialogic relation to the dominant state or the ideologies of imperialism. The pairing of problematics can, however, also function epistemologically, in that it can reveal the falsity of the overdetermination by exposing the interconnected and complex nature of subjectivity, and thus de-essentialize the power-takeover of subjectivity by the dominant ideology of the state or the imperial powers.

Thus, in the postcolonial text, ideology and the rhizome are structurally imbricated in that the pairing of the multiple problematics of the text closes-off meaning by situating the subject within the pre-given, vertical authority of the state, or that renders the subjectivity of the individual open by moving the subject into the smooth, open space of the rhizome through the recognition of the multiplicity of subjectivity that ideology seeks to obscure. The postcolonial text then is a locus for the dialogic interplay between problematics that, I posit, is a better way to understand how the theory of theoretical practice is able to generate actual scientificity—i.e., dialogic, not dialectic. To better understand this opening up in a context that is not explicitly scientific but rather in better correspondence with the lived experience of the individual subject within the state, I will now turn to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, and its concept of the rhizome and the nomad.

2.6 The Openness and Connectivity of the Nomad and Rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the image of the rhizome, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a model for the structural and relational multiplicity of the text. The rhizome is a “subterranean stem [with multiple bulbs, and] is absolutely different from roots [...]” (6), and what is inherent to it is that it “ceaselessly establishes connections [...] to anything other” (7), thereby constructing multiplicity and otherness into interrelated networks that do not “fix an order” (7). The rhizome proceeds by divergence—it forms as “multiplicities of masses or packs” tracing along diagonal lines. The diagonal “[...] frees itself, breaks or twists [...] and] passes *between* things, *between* points,” leaves behind contours, edges or vertices and “belongs to the smooth space” (505). Moreover, this multiplicity—specifically, that of the second kind, being “molecular and of the ‘rhizome’ type” (505)—is

at the level of theory, [...] correlative to that of spaces, and vice versa: smooth spaces of the type of desert, steppe, or sea are not without people; they are not depopulated but rather are populated by multiplicities of this second kind (mathematics and music have gone quite far in elaboration of this theory of multiplicities). (506)

The smooth space is then rhizomatic—striated “in all directions,” progressing as “a multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one (5)—and, as such, it proceeds by an “[oscillation] between tree lines that segment and even stratify them, and lines of flight or rupture that carry them away” (506)¹³. Its most fundamental image is that of infinite connectivity—matrices of bulbs

¹³ Thus, inasmuch as Deleuze and Guattari claim that “nature doesn’t work [dialectically]: in nature, roots are taproots [...]” (5), but Fibonacci Sequences—the ancestry of bees, leaves on a stem or a pine cone—rupture the smoothness of such an argument, and the multiplicity vacillates between the formality of the integer sequence and the spirals that it traces in nature.

intersecting and tracing lines to and through one another along subterranean stems. It is, as such, a conception of meaning that is akin to heteroglossia and dialogism.

The body without organs (BwO) substitutes individuated and heterogeneous assemblages of systems. Its formation is “in the production of intensities beginning at a degree zero, in the matter of variation, in the medium of becoming or transformation, and in the smoothing of space” (507). The BwO is linked, by Deleuze and Guattari, with the plane of consistency, which “knows nothing of substance or form” and, instead, proceeds by “[assuring] the consolidation of fuzzy aggregates, in other words, multiplicities of the rhizome type” (507). The relationship between the plane of consistency and the BwO is that of “composer and composed [which] have the same power”—that is, “the line does not have a dimension superior to that of the point, nor the surface to that of line, nor the volume to that of surface, but always an anexact [sic], fractional number of dimensions that constantly increase or decrease with the number of its parts” (507). Ultimately, the plane constitutes “the mode of connection” and, in doing so, it is both the “means of eliminating the empty and cancerous bodies that rival the body without organs [...]” and “[retaining...] only *that which increases the number of connections* at each level of division or composition [...] in descending as well as ascending order” (508). The BwO is then a way of conceiving of the function of systems within a whole that necessitates connectivity; and therefore, it is a way to understand how the various components of the social totality interact with one another in a connected, dialogic manner as opposed to individual parts acting in the whole.

Furthermore, the figure of the nomad for Deleuze and Guattari “has a territory” but the nomad’s movement through this space is incidental, in that, unlike the migrant, who proceeds “principally from one point to another,” the points of a nomad’s movements are only “relays along a trajectory”—points that are reached only to be left behind (380). Moreover, although the nomad follows routes, these paths do not operate like a “sedentary road”; instead, “the nomadic trajectory [...] *distributes people [...] in an open space*, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating” (380). Nomadic space is the “desert, steppe, or sea” (506) that encroaches on the divided and gridded spaces of roads and agriculture. The movement of the nomad is intensive: it “*constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex*, with the possibility of springing up at any point” (381). The effect of this for Deleuze and Guattari is what is most important about the nomad for my argument because, inasmuch as I am interested in the nomad, I am also interested in the counterpoint of the nomad—i.e., the migrant. Deleuze and Guattari state: “if the nomad can be called the Deterritorialization par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization afterwards *as with the migrant [...]*” (381), and this points to both the concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and the different ways that they relate to the nomad and the migrant.

Deterritorialization is a concept that signifies the “operation of the line of flight,” whereby it leaves a territory and ostensibly produces an opening up.¹⁴ The

¹⁴ “The assemblage is also divided along another axis. Its territoriality (content and expression included) is only a first aspect; the other aspect is constituted by *lines of deterritorialization* that cut across it and carry it away. These lines are very diverse: some open the territorial assemblage onto

nomad functions as an idealized image of a permanently open space that can be aspired to but is unattainable for the migrant, who could very well be conflated with the transnational subject, as the migrant is always reterritorialized, and is thus in a constant state of flux and process—always closing at its opening in that the two are concomitant for the migrant in the state. In the case of the state, although it is closed-off, it is not exclusively territorial; instead, “it in fact performs a D [deterritorialization], but one immediately overlaid by reterritorializations [...]” (508); thus, the closed-off nature of the state arises out of the concomitant nature of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which then subjects the individual to this process, wherein the subject can effect openings within the rigid, vertical structure of the state but those openings will always be closed back off by the function of the state—the state will re-interpellate its divergent elements.

This movement—that of deterritorialization and reterritorialization—functions in two ways: it can be either absolute or relative. The absolute conceives of movement through multiplicity and openness, while the relative is movement that is marked off by unity and closed-off space. Thus, the absolute “relates ‘a’ body considered as multiple to a smooth space that it occupies in the manner of a vortex” and, conversely, relative movement “relates a body considered as *One* to a striated space through which it moves, and which it measures with straight lines, if only virtual” (509-10). Moreover, as Deleuze and Guattari clarify, these conceptions of movement correspond to a negative and positive form:

other assemblages [...]. Others operate directly upon the territoriality of the assemblage, and open it onto a land that is eccentric, immemorial, or yet to come [...]. Still others open assemblages onto abstract and cosmic machines that they effectuate” (540-5). The point being that deterritorialization marks a definite form of opening.

D is negative or relative (yet already effective) when it conforms to the second case [relative movement] and operates either by principal reterritorializations that obstruct the lines of flight, or by secondary reterritorializations that segment and work to curtail them. D is absolute when it conforms to the first case and brings about the creation of a new earth, in other words, when it connects lines of flight, raises them to the power of an abstract vital line, or draws a plane of consistency. (510)

This should put into clearer focus the relation between Althusser and Deleuze and Guattari, and how the deterritorialization of the nomad augments a dialogic understanding of the opening up of the closed-off space of ideology. The negative form of deterritorialization is analogous to the function of an ideological problematic, in that it obscures the multiplicity of the social totality to produce a power-takeover of meaning that purports to a unitariness of meaning—those meanings that establish and sustain the dominance of those who hold power (but it is not reducible to those who hold power, as they can be substituted in and out, and the dominant power itself can change). The absolute, moreover, is an effective analogue to science because, in its necessitation of multiplicity, it also necessarily involves a movement into smooth, or better yet, open space, which then makes implicit to the absolute an understanding of deterritorialization that facilitates the deepening of knowledge that is inherent to Althusser's definition of science (Callinicos 38). Thus, what enables the creation of a “new earth,” or a “thoroughgoing recasting of the problematic” (38), is the connecting of multiple lines of flight, or ruptures of the closed-off space of reterritorialization (and the state) that enable a movement outside of that space, and as such,

deterritorialization conceptualizes the way in which the dialogic matrices of Bakhtin are able to open up the closed-off space of ideology into a space of knowledge or scientificity.

The question, however, then becomes: if the individual subject is within the state and thus, within a relative condition—i.e., the condition of ideology, which obscures the multiplicity and openness of the absolute—how is the individual capable of recognizing the absolute and producing a deterritorialization of its space that is not immediately reterritorialized? The answer lies in the function of the absolute and the relative:

Now what complicates everything¹⁵ is that this absolute D necessarily proceeds by way of relative D, precisely because it is not transcendent.

Conversely, relative or negative D itself requires an absolute for its operation: it makes the absolute something “encompassing,” something totalizing that overcodes the earth and then conjugates lines of flight in order to stop them, destroy them—rather than connecting them in order to create. (510)

Thus, in necessitating the function of the absolute for the function of the relative deterritorialization, the absolute is present within and thus extractable from the relative. The symptomatic reading effectively functions to reveal the absolute and its connectivity—to make the matrix of connections visible (not in its totality, but rather

¹⁵ D is negative or relative (yet already effective) when it conforms to the second case [relative movement] and operates either by principal reterritorializations that obstruct the lines of flight, or by secondary reterritorializations that segment and work to curtail them. D is absolute when it conforms to the first case and brings about the creation of a new earth, in other words, when it connects lines of flight, raises them to the power of an abstract vital line, or draws a plane of consistency (510).

to reveal that the structure of social totality is that of connectivity)—by exposing the gaps and contradictions within the power-takeover of the subject by the state through ideology (which purports the false image of unity or oneness). The individual subject, therefore, is within the obscuring function of the state, but, as such, the absolute is also present in this condition as the ideology must have something to obscure; and thus, the symptomatic reading, by making visible the obscuring function of ideology and revealing the dialogic connectivity of the social totality, makes the absolute accessible, and as such, enables an absolute deterritorialization that effects a movement into the openness of smooth, rhizomatic space. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, this smooth space is “the earth consolidated, connected with the cosmos, brought into the cosmos following lines of *creation* that cut across so many *becomings*” (510, my emphasis). The purpose of my emphasis within the previous quotation is to highlight the correspondence of this space to Althusser’s conception of science, wherein ‘creation’ and ‘becomings’ conceptualize the function of this space in a capacity that I believe is analogous to the ‘deepening of knowledge’ and ‘continual transformation’ that occurs when a problematic functions scientifically. Thus, deterritorialization provides a way to understand what is meant by opening-up when it is related to the closed-off space of the state and its ideology, and it is able to do so in such a way that links ideology and science—and its rhizomatic openness—through the function of both the symptomatic reading and the dialogic nature of the social totality.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, a shift away from Althusser's dialectic approach is essential because, in opening up his model to not just theoretical practice but also the lived function of the subject within the state, the dialogic approach of Bakhtin is better able to accommodate the infinite multiplicity of the rhizome in that it is associative and not synthetic or hierarchized. It, therefore, is better able to facilitate the merger of Althusser's theory of ideology—specifically, its configuration within his theory of literature—with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic and nomadic theory of subjectivity across national spaces and Ashcroft's understanding of transnational subjectivity. Essentially, the dialogic is a problematic itself that enables a symptomatic reading of the imbrication of the social practices within the social totality that work on a subject to produce that subject's problematics and, therefore, it is meant to function as a theory of the theoretical practice of the subject's relation to their social reality—it is a theory to analyze the mechanisms that produce "*the imaginary relationship of individuals [subjects] to their real conditions of existence*" (Bennett 116) so as to make those *real conditions* visible to the subject. Thus, the overdetermination of the subject within the social totality is not reduced to a series of dialectical relationships between two given problematics that are deterministically placed into hierarchies (Callinicos 46); instead, the rhizome opens up an understanding of overdetermination that composes the various components of the social totality—"economic, political, ideological and scientific-theoretical" (Kavanagh 30)—into an interrelated network of shifting configurations and relations, whereby the interaction of the various components produce a malleable subject determined by the various and changing relations between the levels of the social

practices that work together to determine the *real conditions* of an individual subject's existence within the social totality that constitutes the function of the state. That is, "*ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence*" (Bennett 116); thus, the interrelated network of the various components of the social totality constitute the '*real conditions of existence*' for the individual within the state, and it is the rhizome that conceptualizes this multiplicity and, therefore, makes it accessible by the individual, who, as such, can access '*the real conditions of their existence*' and not only '*the imaginary relationship.*'

The transnational subject possesses the condition of potentially being situated within unique and, at times, divergent sets of problematics. The effect of this is twofold: first, the transnational subject is the product of the various internal dialogic relations within a society, which render the subject malleable in that these relations can change depending on the given moment. To make this less oblique, the subject is determined at a given moment as the sum of the internal relations between the social practices within which subjectivity functions. Some of these components may be more relevant or inactive depending on the given situation, and their relations, as such, are not fixed values but dependent on the specific moment which produces a given set of relationships that may or may not persist through time. Over time, certain configurations become overcoded and begin to exist as naturalized, invisible and essential components of the self, which is the ideological function of social practice, and eventually as an ideology, such as bourgeois capitalism, which makes itself appear as both natural to the individual's identity and as a unity by obscuring

the way in which the components of the social fabric collude to insure and secure the dominant power; however, even these overcoded configurations can be destabilized through new relations of problematics or by bringing to bear a new, external problematic on the specific set of configurations. This is why I favour the dialogic approach as opposed to Althusser's dialectic approach because the dialogic does not produce a synthesis product of its relational components, but instead these components refract each other's meaning, in that the meaning of each bleeds into the understanding of the other, which thus seems to better leave each problematic open to change (as the addition or subtraction of a given problematic would change the understanding of all the related problematics). For example, if I, as a subject of Western Secularism and the polity of Canada, were to live in communist Cuba or an Islamic state, such as Pakistan, my understanding of the Communist or Islamic problematics would be refracted through my own bourgeois capitalist and Canadian problematics, and the new problematics would, in turn, refract and provide new understandings of my implicit problematics without (necessarily) producing a synthesized problematic.

This leads to my second point: this type of transnational subjectivity is able to function as a locus for the dialogic refraction of overcoded relational configurations of the components of the social totality, and as such, it makes visible the essentializing, pre-given sinews of the ideologies that hail and produce the subject as a subject of a particular state (and its implicit problematics and ideologies). Its ability to do this resides in the dialogic relation between problematics, which can make strange what is naturalized in each ideology through the symptomatic reading of one

problematic by the other. By making visible what ideology obscures, each problematic is able to deepen or transform its understanding because the problematic is opened up to the posing of new questions—that is, questions that may not have been asked as they were imbricated within an ideology that made them invisible and, as such, unknowable. The text is also a locus for this transformative process because of its overdetermined nature—the overlapping of the ideological level with the economic, political and scientific-theoretical levels (Kavanagh 30)—which invests the text with given and latent dialogues that are brought out by particular readers, who are themselves the products of particular historical moments and the problematics inherent to the implicit social practices. Thus, the ability of a text to produce a knowledge-effect through reading is not inherent to the text itself but a product of the dialogic imbrication of its various components—reader, text, the author function, other texts—and the potential readings that this could produce are limited by the problematic itself—the dialogues that can be read within or in relation to the text. New readings of a text—like Said’s transformative reading of *Mansfield Park*—do not unveil or reveal what was inherent but hitherto hidden within the text, but instead, produce a new knowledge-effect through the dialogic effect of the problematics that the reader brings to bear on the text; thus, a text like Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* does not need to contain a reference to Islamophobia to produce knowledges about either Islamophobia or to help a given reader to understand how power can employ jingoism, and Marx does not have to have anticipated or accounted for multi-national corporations for a given reader to understand how Marxism reveals

the effects of the multi-national on the real conditions of an individual's actual existence.

Furthermore, the postcolonial novel—itsself a product of the educational apparatus in its categorization as a genre—by its very definition reflects the overdetermined nature of the texts and the dialogically related problematics of transnational subjectivity in that the postcolonial implies a set of binaries—pre/post-contact, centre-periphery, dominant-other, etc—and spatiality. It is then the most apt locus to explore the imbrication of ideology and the rhizome because it puts diverse and opposing problematics in dialogue through a process of the subaltern deterritorializing the colonizer's authority or power takeover of history and representation and the push-back effect by the colonizer to reterritorialize their authority, which can be produced by either the overt force of the RSA or the obscuring and internalizing function of the ISA—requiring or inspiring complicity.

Both *The Translator* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are postcolonial novels in the sense that they are engaged with the postcolonial discourse even as they try to find ways to move past it. The two texts produce deterritorializations of hegemonic power—Western supremacy, which makes other and ignores Eastern logics and modes of thinking, in *The Translator*, and the history of colonialism and the New World in *Oscar Wao*—however, to do so, each text corresponds to a different type of deterritorialization. *The Translator* proceeds by negative or relative deterritorialization, which functions by curtailing and closing-off the lines flight that are produced in the social fabric of the hegemonic authority, whereby the novel produces ruptures in the antagonistic binary between East and

West to enable Sammar and Rae to form hybridized subjectivities that are then closed back off into ideology, as Rae's conversion to Islam is a pre-given condition of this hybridity that is never questioned. *Oscar Wao* functions to produce an absolute deterritorialization of the power structures instantiated by the discovery of the New World and enacted by the mechanisms of colonialism by reclaiming the authority to represent the silenced histories of those that colonialism has made other and subsumed or erased from history. The novel functions to produce a "new earth," not by depicting and, thus, assuming authority over how such a space would operate, but by producing an "abstract vital line" through the image of the blank text that calls for the continual production of new and unique histories—i.e., that history is not totalizable but multiple and polyvocal.

As to whether this is still Althusserian or Marxist theory, I fall back to an Althusserian argument: I am less concerned with the details of Althusser's reading of Marx—specifically, his pre-given need to justify class revolution (i.e., Bolshevism)—than with the mechanisms that compose his theory, whereby the ideological state apparatus, the problematic, the symptomatic reading, the 'theory of theoretical practice', the autonomy of theory and, despite my own revisions, his model of science, ideology and the text are useful concepts that I believe can enable me to produce readings of both *The Translator* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* when they are refracted with Bakhtin's theory of dialogics and connected to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model and nomadology. This occurs because they provide not only a theoretical justification for my initial claim that the closed-off nature of ideology and the openness of the rhizome are structurally imbricated, but also

because those terms provide a model for how meaning is produced from that relation within a text—specifically, within the postcolonial text because of its overdetermined, binary form.

Chapter 3- The Process Of Negative Deterritorialization In The Formation Of Subject Positions In Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*

3.1 Introduction

Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator* relates the burgeoning romance between Sammar, a Sudanese woman working as a translator at the University of Aberdeen, and Rae, a Scottish professor at the university whom she works for, and, as

such, the novel negotiates multiple levels of transcultural and transnational interaction. Specifically, Aboulela's text functions to enable Sammar to occupy a subject position that allows her to "choose to be *both* [a] good Muslim [woman] *and* [an] active [citizen] of the British polity, rather than seeing [them] as alternatives" (Wilson, et al. 10). Thus, Sammar must simultaneously occupy two different problematics, or sets of logic for posing and solving questions, in such a way that does not alter the essential components of either problematic—that is, without producing an epistemological break in either problematic. Sammar's national, educational and professional privilege—that is, her passport, ability to translate Arabic to English (and vice versa) and her employment at the university (an ISA)—help facilitate this imbrication. Rae is in a similar, but somewhat more complicated or even convoluted, position, as his conversion to Islam is a necessary movement within the text; however, inasmuch as he adopts Islam, he is able to tenuously retain his function within a Western, secular problematic. Specifically, the way the text presents his conversion imbricates Islam with his role as a professor in a dialogic way that allows Rae to retain his scholarly objectivity on an academic level; thus, Rae will also be able to simultaneously employ two distinct problematics despite the initially disjunctive appearance of his conversion.

This unification of problematics is enacted through the love relationship that forms between Sammar and Rae, wherein each character ostensibly functions as an ideologue (Holquist 429) for their respective problematics—Islam for Sammar and Western Secularism for Rae—and, inasmuch as their marriage is mimetic of a marrying of the problematics, it is also an effect of the imbrication of the two

problematics within each character. That is, the marriage both symbolizes and necessitates the internal, subjective hybridity of Sammar and Rae, and then literally reproduces this imbrication in the marriage unit. So, in bringing the two characters together, the text functions to produce them as hybrid subjects—that is, constituted by the dialogic imbrication of two different (and at times divergent) ideologically produced problematics, or modes of understanding. In order to do so, however, it must reconcile the closed-off, pre-given nature of each of the characters’ problematics. To do this, the text represents deterritorializations of the respective problematics of each character that produce a rhizomatic effect by generating connectivity and multiplicity within the subjectivity of each character. The love relationship provides the impetus for these lines of flight¹⁶; however, the actual fulfillment of it, while establishing a hybridized subjectivity for Sammar and Rae (that allows them each to operate within Islamic and Western problematics), also reconstitutes ideological dominance in the function of their problematic, as Rae’s conversion is a pre-given condition of an Islamic problematic which the text reifies.

The end of the novel, however, does not literally represent their relationship and, instead, favours a metaphorical, dream-state form of representation, which functions to re-open the closed-off nature of a problematic that is operating ideologically. The novel accomplishes this by representing their union not as a subjective end point, but as a point within a process imbedded with potential for further growth and the ability to undo the inherent oppositions of the two

¹⁶ “In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also *lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization* and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines [of flight] produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture [my emphasis]” (Deleuze and Guattari 3-4).

problematics. Thus, the text proceeds predominately by negative deterritorialization, but this is a process of openings and closing-offs and not a conclusive transformation or dichotomization. *The Translator*, as such, represents the hybridization of problematics within a character's subjectivity in a way that pairs the multiplicity and connectivity of the rhizome with the pre-given, closed-off nature of ideology—the nomad and the hailed subject—in a process of mutual relation, of de-/re-territorializations.

There is an additional implication that arises from this argument: inasmuch as the text engages with a representation of a smooth and rhizomatic transnational identity, Sammar and Rae's experience moving between and across states is met with points of rupture and striation. Moreover, although some of Sammar's experiences with immigration mirror Aboulela's own,¹⁷ the relative ease of Sammar's movement and its facilitation by the apparatuses of the state, such as her passport, citizenship and ability to speak the language, point to a problem not so much within the text, as this is one possible representation of an immigrant experience, as much as one that is inherent within the concept of the transnation. The utopian function of the 'literary transnation' to "imagine a radically changeable world" (Ashcroft 81) is a quality of *The Translator* that, at once, enables the openness of the end of the novel to embody potential—i.e., to imagine a plausible world, "cured of divisions put into place by imperialism" (Spencer 42)—and also marginalizes, obscures and makes ex-centric particular dissonances in order to retain the smoothness of transnational subjectivity and realize its ultimate project of unification. A symptomatic reading of the

¹⁷ Leila Aboulela. Interview. "Interview with Leila Aboulela" by Siraj Datto, *The Scribblings of Siraj Datto* (21 Jan. 2011). Web.

mechanisms that produce the unification of Sammar and Rae and their embodiment of transnational identity will, however, challenge the utopian function of the text by exploring an alternative representation of the immigration experience,¹⁸ and the spatial placement of the children and the imperial impulses of Islam.

In order to make this argument I will be situating myself within the preceding body of scholarly work on *The Translator*. Specifically, I will be engaging with similar arguments that have been explored in Anna Ball's "'Here is where I am': rerooting diasporic experience in Leila Aboulela's recent novels," Nadia Butt's "Negotiating Untranslatability and Islam in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*" and Brendan Smyth's "To Love the Orientalist: Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*." Where I will differ, however, is generally in the theoretical model that I employ, which will allow me to engage with rhizomatic identity, travel or globalization and orientalism in a different and unique way through the exploration of the interaction between the function of ideology and the increasingly open rearticulation of state space being produced by globalization. More specifically, I will diverge from Ball's argument at the point of the rhizome, as, while I agree with her identification of the centrality of Islam in the novel, I do not believe that this then negates any rhizomatic conception of Sammar's transnationally produced subjectivity. Butt's essay and my own both identify the multiple cross-cultural communications that occur in the novel; however, where we differ is in our focus, as Butt predominately focuses on Islam and its untranslatability, whereas I am more interested in the points of intersection between the Western and Eastern, Secular and Islamic problematics. Finally, while I agree

¹⁸ Through a brief engagement with Bharati Muckerjee's novel, *Jasmine*.

with Smyth's argument predominately, I will again differ in my focus, in that I am less concerned with the implications of and reasons for Rae's love of Sammar and more interested in the way in which the two are eventually able to come together.

3.2 The Rhizome Function in *The Translator*

The function of the rhizome within *The Translator* is as a means to conceptualize the ability of the lines of flight that deterritorialize Sammar and Rae's individual problematics to enable their mutual imbrication—that is, of both Sammar and Rae, through their marriage, and, consequently, of Sammar's Islamic belief with Rae's Western Secularism. Specifically, I will explore a number of the lines of flight that are depicted in the novel to illustrate the way in which Rae and Sammar are able to form connections to the foreign problematic that they are engaging with. Thus, I will trace the rhizomatic routes that Rae takes to place roots within an Islamic, North African problematic or logic,¹⁹ and those that Sammar traverses in order to acclimatize to the British polity.

Rae can be read as a character whose identity develops rhizomatically. This can be seen through the several attempts that he makes throughout the novel to produce a coherent transnational identity; however, until Sammar, he is unable to move smoothly within and through nations. Movement into Africa, for Rae, “demanded a forfeit, a repayment of debts from the ghosts of the past” (55) and, thus, his movement into it involved striation and resistance. Rae was unable to extricate

¹⁹ First, in Morocco with Amelia and then in Sudan with Sammar.

himself from his implicit Western secularism; and, as such, he was unable to integrate into a society operating within an Islam problematic, or to fully transgress the oppressive structures of imperialism or his orientalism²⁰. He, however, makes three specific engagements with non-Western subjectivities in an attempt to undo this inability and to establish a more transnational relationship with specific African localities and Islam. The first two, his relationship with his uncle David and Amelia, are inadequate to facilitate his engagement with Africa and Islam, whereas the third, his relationship with Sammar, eventually enables him to embrace a non-Western subjectivity and to employ an Islamic problematic. Rae must, however, convert to Islam to do so, as by remaining detached from Islam, he is unable to transcend orientalism (21), and as Sammar states, “would not understand it [Islam] until he lived it” (119).

Rae’s first interaction with a non-Western subjectivity is through his uncle David, who defected during World War II and converted to Islam. The letter his uncle wrote inspires Rae to write a paper on why “*Islam is Better than Christianity*” (17). The paper gets him expelled from his school and, thus, he is not yet able to integrate Islam into an academic space as he does later in life as a university professor. The Islam that he depicts in his essay is a plagiarized and appropriated version of the religion. He copies and then transforms his uncle’s words to produce a meaning that was not in the letter. His uncle never claimed that Islam was “better,” but rather, that it was a progression from Christianity; ‘better’ was Rae’s addition

²⁰ An argument that is made effectively by Brendan Smyth in “To Love the Orientalist: Masculinity in Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator*,” who argues that “Rae ultimately subvert[s] conventional Orientalist notions of Masculinity [...] which provides a way out of the stagnant binaries of East and West, and repressive constructions of Islam and masculinity” (170).

(18). Furthermore, his uncle's conversion requires a movement from one nation into another that is considered "defection, [and] treason," which sets Islam in opposition to Scotland, conflates Islam with the state, depicts the nation, as in Ashcroft, as a 'striated' and restrictive space and denies the dialogic hybridity that he develops in order to be with Sammar. Rae's uncle, as a Scottish citizen, is then required to recognize the same enemies as the nation of Scotland in order to retain citizenship in the nation space; thus, his conversion is defection because he does not adhere to the state ideology, and furthermore, Rae's digestion and rearticulation of his uncle's views also renders him outside of the proscribed subject position that the state's ideological apparatus require Rae to respond to. Rae is re-interpellated through the repressive function of the school ISA—he is expelled in order to necessitate that he reconform to the demands of the dominant ideologies, nationalism and capitalism, by conflating Islam with transgression and punishment. The text does not represent the effects of Rae's expulsion and, thus, its interpellative effectiveness can only be guessed at; however, as Rae goes on to believe that his academic work should be "objective, detached" (128), it seems credible to argue that the expulsion constituted a re-articulation of the passion and partiality of his grade school essay. Rae's first engagement with Islam, therefore, lacks the smoothness of either his later interactions with Islam or Sammar's interactions with secularity.

Rae's time in Morocco also, in marked contrast to Sammar's eventual position within Scotland, represents an attempt and failure to engage with a non-Western subjectivity and problematic. Rae, in this space, always remains caught between Europe and Africa: he begins learning Arabic, wanders into mosques and lives with

Moroccans, but cannot fully remove himself from the expatriate community and marries a European girl within it (60-2). Rae is unable to develop a coherent transnational identity within Morocco or to instantiate bulbs within and connectivity to the space; and, as such, he is unable to break down the otherness of Morocco. His inability to overcome his foreignness occurs because “the pilots [the men he lived with] were his only connection to the locals,” and they were mostly away from the country; thus, his avenue into Morocco is represented as being mostly absent from the country and his connection to it, consequently, tenuous and shallow. He attempts to engage with Eastern theology and politics by visiting mosque’s and reading the newspaper; but, he is, instead, interpellated back into Western ideology through his marriage to Amelia. Amelia’s parents are English and Spanish, and Rae describes her as being proportioned like Marilyn Monroe (60-1). She grew up in Morocco, but is described as being within “a minority of privileged lives” (60); and moreover, Morocco is her home because it is “in her *Spanish* blood” (61, my emphasis). For Rae, she represents Morocco only as an ulterior and ex-centric presence; and therefore, he cannot see her as a part of the African space²¹ in the way that he is able to see Sammar as such. He only see’s Amelia as European, not Moroccan, whereas he recognizes, in Sammar, her Islamic identity and its implicit non-Western logic—that is, he recognizes Khartoum as her home (104) and, implicitly, the different modes of understanding that this home would have produced in Sammar’s own

²¹ This generalized use of African space is not meant to totalize Africa or African subjectivity, but instead is meant to be in keeping with Aboulela’s treatment of Africa and Rae’s relationship with it: she states that his relationship with Africa functions “as if from him the *continent* demanded a forfeit [my emphasis]” (55). Thus, he engages with African space in the sense that his relationship with Sammar and the imbrication of their two problematics overwrites the striation of Rae’s initial movement into African space with a greater smoothness.

interpellation as a subject. Furthermore, Amelia is not integrated into the community and culture of Morocco in the way that Sammar is within the streets of Scotland. Khartoum and Aberdeen begin to blend for Sammar, whereas Amelia is described as being Moroccan only in terms of being European, which may not be true for Amelia herself, but is true of her for Rae as she is only ever a representation of Rae's memories and impressions of her. Her European origin, however, does seem to contribute to her inability to, or even prohibit her from, completely assuming a Moroccan identity, as Rae is considered a socially acceptable manifestation of what she has always wanted: an Arab—that is, “there was something *Arab* about this young Scottish man. Something Arab that [she] had wanted for years” (62). She then cannot integrate Rae into the African space because she retains an otherness from the place, one which, moreover, seems predicated upon her particularly European subjectivity (and the implicitly discriminatory European attitude that her family embodies).

Furthermore, the child that Rae's marriage to Amelia produces represents Rae's ultimate failure to coherently integrate into the Islamic, non-Westernized space of Morocco. This early attempt to generate a stable identity in an African space is, like the child, stillborn, and produces only “a European buried in African sand” (64). The death of the child, however, not only represents Rae's failure to develop a transnational identity. Sammar cannot understand how Rae can still like Morocco after what happened. Rae replies, “because it was healthy for me. [...] I learnt things that I could not have learnt from books. Like you” (64). He then seems to be gesturing towards the claim that I have been making so far: he is trying to engage

with and adopt an Eastern, Islamic problematic. His time in Morocco, despite its ultimate failure to fully immerse Rae into an Islamic way of thinking and enable his imbrication with the problematics of such a way of thinking, did allow him to engage with and learn from it. Moreover, he assigns a rhizomatic quality to his own identity, as the seemingly traumatic event of the loss of his child is positively incorporated into his identity. His identity then is rhizomatically connected to Morocco despite the failure to fully integrate into the culture because it provided a window into an exterior (Islamic) problematic.

Furthermore, for Sammar's part, her movements through the streets of Aberdeen portray the rhizomatic imbrication of her Islamic problematic with a Western problematic (both as a site for the interaction of East and West and as an image of the multiplicity and connectivity of the routes that comprise the rhizomatic component of Sammar's identity). When she leaves her apartment, she walks past a "grocer shop [selling] halal meat", department store sales, and "a shop selling wedding dresses and lingerie" (66). The Scottish space is able to contain communication between Muslim and capitalistic tradition, Islam and Christianity, and the conservative and the risqué. Sammar, moreover, is eventually able to move through this space with familiarity and comfort. She can buy halal food that has "the ingredients written out in Arabic" and a duffle coat that is on sale at a department store (66-8). The streets are no longer "a maze of culture shocks," and the billboards on the road are no longer alarming (71). She is able to, at once, sustain her traditional Muslim practices and integrate into the Scottish system, as she learns, not to believe

the billboards herself, but rather, “that she was not alone, that not everyone believed what the billboard said” (71).

This is an ability that takes time, in fact “years” (71), for her to acquire; however, I do not think that this undermines the potency of her integration. The time that it takes for Sammar to become comfortable in the Scottish space, instead, seems to further allude to what the end of the novel points to: that the development of a rhizomic identity is an ongoing process. Scotland then gains the capacity to sustain her faith as she gains the ability to properly decode the semiotics of the Scottish space, which is expressed with particular clarity when she states that even “here in Scotland she was learning about her own religion, the world was one cohesive place” (109). This idealized depiction of Aberdeen, however, must be tempered as Sammar does note that Scottish space is not completely without dissonance. She states, for example, that “after having lived in the city for many years she could understand how surprised people would be” if they found her praying in public (76). The streets of Aberdeen, thus, do not eliminate opposition; rather, they support Islam and capitalism, not in equal measure, but without undermining either ideology. They connect opposing ideologies and traditions along a network of thoroughfares and passages that Sammar learns how to navigate as both a Muslim and a Scot.

Furthermore, Sammar’s work as a translator functions as a point of intersection between these two worlds—North Africa and Scotland—that allows her to travel between them, but that also requires her ability to understand each space. This claim may initially seem opaque; however, multiple points in the text work to substantiate this claim. When she describes her job at the beginning of the novel, she

reflects that, in translating a terrorist group's political manifesto, she is "transforming the Arabic rhetoric into English" (5-6), and in doing so, she is connected to smells that she imagines "she had known long ago" (6) while trying not to think about Rae. The act of translating situates her in Arabic and English, and the smells of home and thoughts of Rae; thus, it allows her to blend the "mother tongue" and the "dominant language" into a multiplicity that is "heterogeneous" (Deleuze and Guattari 7). By the end of the novel, when she is working in Egypt, again translating the words of Islamic terrorists, she puts this double movement even more succinctly: "she hoped and worked hard pushing Arabic into English, English into Arabic" (Aboulela 159). Her ability to translate, therefore, requires an ability to move back and forth between the two languages; she must have the ability to change questions in English into Arabic, and Arabic answers into English. Her time in Egypt, furthermore, is related in retrospect, and the story is preceded by Sammar waiting for Rae's reply to her letter of resignation. This leads her to note the difference between mail delivery in Khartoum and Aberdeen, and to recall her hope that Rae would "get in touch with her" (158). Translation then is tied together in her memory with Aberdeen and Rae, and returning to "her aunt's house and [seeing] Tarig's picture on the wall" (159); thus, in as much as Egypt is literally a liminal space between Khartoum and Aberdeen, translation is liminally positioned between Rae and Tarig—the West and East.

This point in the text, however, also marks the continued breakdown of unification between Sammar and Rae, in that Sammar's resignation letter and the absence of any reply from Rae represent the failure of Arabic and English to come

together or even communicate. Moreover, the pairing within the text of the intense level of effort she put into “pushing” Arabic into English (and vice versa) with the resignation letter (158) signifies her failure to maintain communication between her disparate identities, as her resignation from translating is meant also to produce a rupture between her and Scotland and her and Rae. This moment in the text seems to allude to the limits of translation, which was noted early in the novel in relation to the Qur’an. The Qur’an’s “meanings can be translated but not reproduced” (126); thus, Sammar can only translate so much for Rae, and the rest must “[come] direct from Allah” (199). Rae cannot “understand [Islam] until he [lives] it” (119); therefore, the ending of the novel is only able to overcome the limits of translation through Rae’s conversion. His conversion overcomes the initial failure of his relationship with Sammar because it transforms Islam into a shared experience, as “it was *ours* now, not hers alone” (199, my emphasis).

This conversion does not erase the division of “religion, country of origin, [and] race” (Aboulela 34) that Sammar places between herself and Rae earlier in the novel. The conversion that Rae undergoes, rather, presents the mutability and porousness of those divisions: the divisions collapse through the blending or hybridizing, rather than the erasure, of ideologies, such as religion and nationality. Sammar, as his translator, literally inserts meaning into the otherwise meaningless syntax of Arabic for Rae; and, therefore, she translates Islam for Rae. When she reaches the limits of translation, and resigns from her job and ceases to translate, Rae is then required to transform by converting to Islam. His conversion re-inserts her into dialogue with Aberdeen, mends the rupture that her resignation produced,

restores smoothness to her relation to space, and as such, reproduces her ability to contain multiplicity. The love relationship is ultimately portrayed as an exchange, wherein Rae and Sammar “[...] give each other thoughts [...] that] become tangible gifts” (204). The characters, however, must also undergo a transformation to be able to do so: Sammar must learn how to engage with Western Secularism and to perform a more correct Islamic position by praying that Rae will become a Muslim, not for her benefit, but “for his own sake” (179), and Rae has to reconcile his secularity with the Sharia’s prohibition of marrying outside of the religion (91) by converting to Islam (190). Their reciprocal transformations, which allow for their marriage to occur, thus represent both the necessity for each character to hybridize their problematic by incorporating the other’s mode of understanding, and the utopian potential of literature to envision transnational, rhizomatic identities that break down imperial notions of dominance and the dichotomies that these notions employ. Essentially, Sammar and Rae require a deterritorialization of their closed-off, ideologically functioning problematic, which enables the hybridization of the individual problematic that they respectively inhabit, in order to accommodate the reciprocal transformation of their subjectivity. An exploration of this hybridization of problematics in Sammar and Rae in greater detail is now necessary to fully elucidate this argument.

3.3 Exploring the Imbrication of a New Problematic with a Primary Problematic

In a 2008 interview with *I Witness*'s Saleh Eissa,²² Aboulela stated that, “in 1992 [she] started writing more or less as a reaction against the Gulf War and the anti-Arab and anti-Islam sentiment in the media”; however, as her response continues, a further literary intention emerges: “I am interested in writing about Islam not as an identity but going deeper and showing the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith. I want also to write fiction that *follows Islamic logic*” (np, my emphasis). Although Aboulela does not clarify exactly what she means by an “Islamic logic,” she does state that she is trying to represent “ordinary Muslims trying to *practice* their faith [...] in a society which is unsympathetic to religion” (np, my emphasis), and, as such, I believe that her language can be easily rearticulated into a language more in keeping with the one I have hitherto established. Aboulela is textually interested in exploring the operation of an explicitly Islamic problematic within and in relation to the problematic of Western Secularism. *The Translator* is constructed in this way, and her goal, therein, is to explore, not only the interaction of the two problematics—embodied by Sammar and Rae—but also the way in which these two problematics could be joined together without producing an epistemological break within either—i.e., without destabilizing the central tenets of either problematic.

In effect, Sammar and Rae coming together is not a movement into an open space that deconstructs or reconstitutes binaries, but rather, it is a hybridization of two predetermined identities, and their implicit ideologically produced problematics; thus,

²² An interview which is also cited in Nadia Butt's essay “Negotiating Untranslatability and Islam in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*” in *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2009), 169.

like a poly-fibred fabric, the mixture is heterogeneous and the antecedent components are intact. The distinctive shift is not conceptual or structural, but rather a dialogic imbrication of the already existing configurations, wherein Sammar and Rae do not dissolve the boundaries between Islam and Western secularism—despite moments where the Scottish and Sudanese spaces do blend into one another (21, 185)—that produce Islamophobia, but instead they reconfigure the structure of Western secularism and Islam to facilitate Sammar and Rae’s marriage vis-à-vis Rae’s necessary conversion to Islam. Although the text does not explore the real effects of this conversion in any great detail, the overall implication is that Rae’s conversion will not prevent his ability to function as a scholar at the University of Aberdeen (200-1)—that is, “his credibility as a detached Middle-east observer” (201)—as he does not have to forfeit any intrinsic belief inherent to his scholarly work beyond the contention that to be removed from Islam allows one to objectively assess its workings.

The shift that takes place in Rae, although a drastic shift in religious belief, is not a radical ideological shift, in that it leaves his predetermined ideologies more or less intact. To put this in more Althusserian terms, the epistemological break that occurs as a result of Rae’s conversion to Islam is religious and not scholarly and, as such, it need not drastically alter his ability to engage in academic work. Of course, in Althusser’s conception of ideology, religion is an apparatus of the ISA; however, the difference for Rae is that he does not convert to Islam outside of his pre-existing problematics. Thus, he is able to apply the ideological values of the University—i.e., objectivity—to his religious conversion and its consequent modes of understanding,

which undermines any power takeover of his academic problematic by his religious one. Specifically, in response to Sammar's question, "what does everyone in the department think about this," Rae responds, "I've already made a name for myself [...] don't worry. I'm not worried" (200-1). His credibility within the academic community, while not ensuring that his religious conversion will not refract, impact or drastically alter his academic views on the Middle East, implies a track record of strong academic work that suggests that it will not. Time could potentially undo this ability, but as the text does not actually represent the effects of Rae's conversion on his work, this is only suppositional. What it does represent, however, is Rae's belief that it will not impact the perception of his work in any fatal way, let alone impacting the work itself. Moreover, Rae also states that, "in the end it [the conversion] was one step that I took, *of wanting it for myself separate from work*" (200, my emphasis) and, as such, he conceptualizes a separation between those two lives, which supports my argument that his work will be separate from his Islamic conversion and, consequently, still approach theoretical questions through his Western academic problematic. This is not to say that his religious conversion will not in some capacity refract his pre-existing problematics, as their refraction will not produce a transformation of that problematic or a synthesis of the two problematics. Each problematic will and must remain intact; their imbrication will, instead be an effect of their dialogic relation—that is, by being able to operate within both problematics, they will refract one another. The quotation, therefore, succinctly expresses the hybridity of Rae's subject position—the imbrication of the spiritual and intellectual

that produces neither a transformation in either problematic nor a power takeover of one by the other, but instead contiguity or simultaneity.

Sammar, for her own part, must acclimatize herself to the mechanism of Western culture, but Aboulela's intent seems to be to enable to Sammar to "[...] choose to be *both* [a] good Muslim [woman] and [an] active citizen of the British polity, rather than seeing these as alternatives," as the "General Introduction" to *Rerouting the Postcolonial* says of Anna Ball's essay, "Here is where I am" (Wilson, et al. 10). That is, her desire is to construct a narrative that allows Sammar to enter into a space of Western ideology without having to sacrifice any of the essential components of her pre-existing Islamic identity, and the implicit logic or problematic of such an identity. Her text then is meant to be productive—that is, it is designed to produce new, hybridized identity positions for subjects interacting within an increasingly globalized world. Sammar's identity, as such, cannot be reduced to a principal point from which it proliferates, like the roots of a tree do; instead, her identity is better understood as a network of interactions that resist and undo over-determination. This is the essence of the rhizome—bulbs that shoot up individually through the ground, but are connected by a subterranean stem. She, therefore, is not Sudanese then Scottish or vice versa, and neither is she Muslim or secular, or religiously devote or in love with Rae; rather, her diverse roots/routes interact to produce an identity that is a complex of cultural, national and religious identifications. Her identity is rooted in Khartoum and Aberdeen, and in Islam and Rae, which enables her to inhabit disparate identities, cultures, clothes, countries, languages, etc., seemingly without dissonance or dichotomy.

This multiplicity, however, should not be taken as a displacement of the centrality of Islam to her identity; instead, it is meant to represent the complex interaction of the oppositional ideologies that take root in her identity in a non-sequential structure. Thus, Rae is not as central as Islam to Sammar's identity, but her love for him is not figured as a departure from Islam either, since the end of the text is able to imagine a way in which Sammar can maintain her Islamic faith and love Rae. The point is that the interaction between Islam and Rae does not "fix an order" (Deleuze and Guattari 7) to the development of Sammar's identity, wherein she does not move from Islam to secularism or her faith to Rae; rather, the text seeks for a way to allow her to exist within both spaces simultaneously.

The purpose of the rhizomatic model then is not to occlude either internal or external opposition, or to suggest that Sammar does not experience opposition. It, rather, is a model that necessitates multiplicity; and, in doing so, it allows for a single character to embody many seemingly oppositional spaces without problematizing or dichotomizing those oppositions. She can, therefore, be seen as occupying a 'smooth' "space of potentiality" that is distinguished from the "'striated' space of the state [that] it surrounds and interpenetrates" (Wilson, et al. 5) and, as such, is a citizen of the transnation. Although complicated by culture shock, and economic and national privilege, her transnationality breaks down essentialized constructions of nations, both as territories and identities. The smoothness of the transnation implies a relative fluidity to the movement of the transnational subject, and the city space acts as a literal embodiment of this transnational smoothness, as the streets of Aberdeen allow Sammar to move between halal meat shops and Boxing Day sales, and the

university allows her to pray in a Mosque and to engage with the secular world of office politics and scholarship. This fluidity becomes even more apparent when Khartoum and Aberdeen blend. The two spaces start to blend as they become inseparably connected within Sammar. First, Khartoum comes to Scotland in a hallucination. Sammar states: “Home had come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feel of home had come here and balanced just for her” (21). The sensations of Khartoum—its sights, smells and sounds—encroach on the Scottish space for the first time. Sammar’s language here is important, as, although she is hallucinating Khartoum, she is also seeing Aberdeen as home for the first time. The second instance takes place in Khartoum when Sammar opens the fridge. Aberdeen arises out of “the sudden chill [...], the blue cold, [and] frost,” which she immediately conflates with Rae (185). Home then is a multiplicity—it is Khartoum, Aberdeen, Rae—and, as such, it has a transnational, smooth quality to it.

3.4 Complications with the Transnation, Rhizome and the Utopian Function of the Literary Transnation

The temporary failure of the love relationship between Sammar and Rae, however, marks a failure to bring together Islam and Western secularism, and her return to Khartoum is, consequently, an act of rupture, in that she breaks herself off from Scotland and Rae, but cannot smoothly reintegrate into Sudanese space either. Her movement then functions as an attempt to deny the multiplicity of her identity and to return to a rootedness that is like a tree, which attempts to ignore the rhizomatic formation of her emerging identity that had hitherto allowed for her to

move into and cohabit the smoothness of the transnational space. This rupture circumvents her ability to inhabit the transnational space, and her movement ceases to be smooth—she is too slow to manage the children (171-2)—and she can no longer tolerate the light—she has to wear sunglasses to filter it (137-8). She attempts to cut herself off from Scotland by returning to a place that she existed in before Scotland, but is unable to fully do so—i.e., “she still dreamt of him” (168), pressing her toe into the mud reminds her of Rae, and after, Aberdeen actually breaks into Khartoum (184-5). Sammar then is truncated in Khartoum because her identity has become inextricable from Aberdeen and, implicitly, from Rae. Moreover, when she re-engages with Scotland by sending her response to Rae, she is able to better engage with and function in the African space. After she mails her response, she is then able to “live day after day, get involved in the preparations for Nahla’s wedding, and wait” (193).

This necessity for Scotland, however, should not be taken as a privileging of Western space; instead, it is meant to underscore the necessity for the imbrication of the two spaces for Sammar, in that she has experienced a rupture from Khartoum—i.e., “[...] she had not been able to substitute her country for him, anything for him” (199)—that renders it inadequate on its own to properly hail her as a subject of its ideologically instantiated state space. This occurs because faith, for Sammar, is no longer explicitly or exclusively tied to the space of the state, and it is no longer fully effective to hail her or produce her as a subject. Her faith has a smoothness to it that is undone by her separation from Rae; however, his conversion restores this smoothness by restoring their connection. Specifically, this passage illustrates this

point: “‘Ours isn’t a religion of suffering,’ he said, ‘*nor is it tied to a particular place.*’ His words made her feel close to him, pulled in, closer than any time before because it was ‘*ours*’ now, not hers alone” (199, my emphasis). Thus, her faith has a transnational smoothness to it, as it is tied to no particular place and is able to make her feel close to Rae despite their continental separation; however, this smoothness is evidently dependent on Rae and his conversion, and as such, its smoothness is an effect of the interpersonal contact that is instantiated in faith. Faith itself has an ideological function, in that its pre-given categories and definitions require Rae’s conversion to Islam, despite possessing a transnational smoothness. It is then the combination of the smooth quality of her faith and her connection to Rae that enable her to move through space with an orientation towards the transnation, but the smoothness of this movement is revealed to be tenuous and easily prone to striation and rupture.

Furthermore, Sammar’s identity can be read as a conglomeration of components of both Eastern and Western problematics—Islamic faith and scholarly objectivity, and African and Scottish culture. This occurs because Sammar moves between Khartoum and Aberdeen, and in doing so, has rhizomatic bulbs in each space, and Sammar, in this capacity, can be read as a rendering of transnational subjectivity, as she travels through and into disparate states with a fluidity or smoothness. She is able to directly and legitimately fly between Khartoum and the United Kingdom. She is, therefore, able to travel in airplanes owned by national airlines, and is protected by both the safety precautions of the airport and the laws of the respective countries.

The point is that her experience with immigration is drastically different from Jasmine's in Bharati Mukherjee's novel of the same name. Jasmine was outside of these systems of protection because she did not have a passport, and as such, was forced to travel along illegal routes to gain access to the United States. Jasmine lacks Sammar's economic and national privilege; therefore, Jasmine was unable to smoothly enter the national space of America. Although I imagine that Deleuze and Guattari would enjoy the image of migration that Mukherjee represents—"the zizag route is the straightest. I phantom my way through three continents" (101)—she also makes the dangers, striations and violence inherent to this mode of transnational movement apparent. Specifically, she must attain "illegal documents" (98), travel by plane, boat and cars, occupying "soundproofed and windowless back room[s]" (102) and sleeping under tarps, "roll[ing] with the waves and hold[ing] the vomit in" (104). At the end of Jasmine's first day in America, she is in a room with only herself "and the man who raped [her], the man [she] had murdered" (119). Furthermore, Jasmine's identity is constructed through destruction (176), as, with each destruction of her identity, she assumes a new name, and each name she assumes signifies a new person/identity created through the death of the previous identity. This allows her "transformation [to be] genetic" (222), as each identity is figuratively born where it is formed. Moreover, when Sammar returns to Aberdeen after Tarig's death, she is able to find a job with relative ease, as "the demand for people to translate Arabic into English was bigger than the supply" (Aboulela 74), whereas Jasmine must struggle to attain proper documentation in order to attain a quality job—as Jasmine recalls,

“without a green card, even a forged one [...], I didn’t feel safe going outdoors. If I had a green card, a job, a goal, *happiness* would appear [...]” (Mukherjee 148-9).

Sammar’s fluidity, thus, is predicated upon her position of relative privilege, as it is her good education (13) and her British passport (73) that enable her to move over national borders and to then gain employment within those national spaces with relative ease. Her fluidity then can be read as an idealized image of immigration, as Sammar’s experience cannot be applied to all immigrants; however, this is not meant to undercut the potency of Aboulela’s rendering of Sammar. Sammar is, instead, meant to embody, not a working model of the immigration experience, but an imaginatively constructed utopian vision of what that experience could be. The ideal that Sammar represents then is the potential for a unification of Eastern and Western ideologies through the rhizomatic model of identity, which undoes both their inherent opposition and the striations of the two national spaces that disrupt and reterritorialize the lines of flight that would seek to connect them. There is, however, an inherent problem with this idealized rendering: to effectively do so, Aboulela must obscure dissonance and leave it in the peripheries; thus, the type of striated, violent movement through space that Jasmine represents is, like the spatially ex-centric positioning of both Amir and Mhairi, marginalized and absent from the text.

The children of Sammar and Rae, Amir and Mhairi, respectively, are liminal figures in the text, as they contribute to and complicate the idealized, rhizomatic components of their parents’ identities in a number of ways. The children perform a double role: they affirm the imaginative potential of the text to overcome dissonance, and they challenge the utopian vision of marriage that the end of the text seems to put

forward. Thus, Sammar is able to imagine a cohesive family unit that incorporates the children (118-20); however, that is all she can effectively do. Rae's daughter is literally in a peripheral space, living in Geneva and spending holidays in Edinburgh (38-9), and is only present in the text as a subject of conversation or someone for Sammar to think of only as a means to think of Rae. Moreover, when Sammar returns to Khartoum, she is still able to be close to Amir after all the time they have spent apart; however, she is only able to do so through a "game of baby and mother" (162). She, therefore, can only feel a close connection to her child when they pretend that time has not passed (which also further underscores the rupture that Sammar experiences in relation to Khartoum). They can then imaginatively connect with each other, but cannot actually do so on any level deeper than this. The children, thus, are only ever ex-centric presences in the text, and are spatially marginalized in as much as their importance within their parents' lives is marginal. Moreover, neither child is ever successfully integrated into their parents' life together; thus, it becomes ambiguous how their family unit would actually function outside of the abstraction of the imagination put forward by Sammar (118-20).

Furthermore, Darfur is mentioned in passing in the novel; however, it is not presented as a contentious, war-torn space or as a signifier of Islam's own oppressive authority, but as a space of nostalgia. The significance of Darfur within *The Translator* is its dialogic function as an utterance in relation to Sudan, and specifically Khartoum (as it is both Northern and predominately Muslim). As Mark C. Hackett notes in "Modern History of Conflict in Sudan," a blog for the *Pulitzer Centre on Crisis Reporting* web page,

June 30, 1989 is a date that will always be engrained in Sudanese history. For six years leading up to this day, a civil war between the predominantly Muslim north and Christian/traditional south had put the southern provinces of Sudan in a state of emergency.

So, when Darfur is named in the text, this history necessarily refracts its representation, and when it does appear in the text, it is only as a name on a map in a magazine that appears in a litany of other cities, and it evokes Africa only obliquely. It is, moreover, in an almost entirely apolitical fashion, as the closest she comes to acknowledging the genocide is when she states that “inside her [... were] the voices of those who endured because they asked so little of life” (17). This is obviously inadequate, and when she turns the page of the magazine, Darfur is forgotten and replaced by nostalgia for her years as a schoolgirl. By ignoring Darfur, Aboulela is obscuring the imperial practices of the Islamic world, although condemns the West for at multiple points in the text (20, 109). This move seems to be a product of the text’s attempts to combat Islamophobia—e.g., Rae’s book, *The Illusion of an Islamic Threat* (5), someone shouting “Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein” at her (99) and the radio program, “Is This War a Holy War” (100)—by “writ[ing] back to Western imperial discourses which depict Islam as a backward, barbaric religion of extremists and terrorists” (Smyth 180); however, in doing so, she conflates imperialism with the West, and situates Islam as an anti-colonial force, which re-instates East-West binaries that the text otherwise works against.²³ Also, this is an important and

²³ A point that Joshua Walker makes clear, “In particular, it has been difficult for students of non-Western empires to enter the debate on the role of imperial legacies despite the fact that many of the most pressing international problems involve the question of contested historical memories of empires in Asia and the Middle East” (4).

necessary project for a writer to undertake, but it should not function to obscure or tolerate practices that deserve direct, cogent criticism and renunciation.

The problems that the children and Darfur present within the text do not undermine a rhizomatic reading of the identities of Sammar and Rae; instead, they represent the inherent limitation of the utopian elements of the ‘literary transnation.’ The utopian potential of literature is effective in that it enables the text to transcend and reconstruct the negative divisions—racial, national, ideological, etc.—produced by imperialism; however, in doing so, this utopian vision implicitly obscures any internal dissonance. The children, thus, are not actually integrated back into their parents’ lives, which would presumably occur with less smoothness than Rae’s conversion, for example. They are, instead, only imagined within the family unit because imagination enables the text to depict a utopian family structure without having to engage with any of the actual problems that would arise if it were to exist. Moreover, the conflict in Darfur is omitted from the text because, in doing so, it allows an African space to be nostalgically remembered in a positive way that does not reduce the representation of the continent to violence and conflict. As such, the marriage between Sammar and Rae cannot be seen as a complete embrace of rhizomatic identity or the production of a smooth space within Khartoum or Aberdeen because the multiplicity that Sammar and Rae produce does not consist of “only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari 8)—despite the representation of which being totalized the utopian function of the text—but also of reterritorialization, rupture, striation and ideology.

The marriage of Sammar and Rae can, therefore, be read more appropriately as a representation of the relative ease with which the state is able to envelop divergent components into itself through apparatuses such as a passport or the institution of the university—that is, the passport legitimates movement into a discrete and predetermined state space, and the university functions to produce cross-cultural meetings within a space of intellectual engagement but a space that is nonetheless state-funded and producing active members of the state (even if they function as dissident voices). Sammar’s identity is, thus, best understood also in terms of the way that the ideological state apparatuses of the university and nationality are able to adapt to and enclose the multiplicity of the rhizome within the superstructure of the state. Consequently, there seems to be a double move that the text is engaging in: first, Aboulela’s text asserts multiplicity and connectivity to combat anti-Islamic sentiment in Western ideology, and to, conversely, undermine the notion of an Islamic threat that such sentiments espouse or are inclined towards; and second, she explores the capacity for the ISAs to unify Western ideology and Islam by negating and combating the use of the repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) to do so, such as anti-Immigration policies, discriminatory law making—like the Scarf Law²⁴ in France—or jingoist discourses within the media. Thus, the text functions within the superstructures of the Western ideology, but does so to fight against the repressive mechanisms of the state by exploring the ways in which ideology is able to interpellate “*concrete individuals as concrete subjects*”

²⁴ Scarf Law: a law passed in France on 15 March 2004 that “bans wearing conspicuous religious symbols in French public (i.e. government-operated) primary and secondary schools.” For more information, see “French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools” at wikipedia.org.

(Callincinos 65) into itself, which enables Sammar and Rae to come together within the confines of their respective ideologies. As such, Aboulela's text explores interpellation within the context of globalization: she explores how a subject can be interpellated into an ideology when the "Unique and Absolute Subject" (66) of their initial ideology—i.e., Allah/Islam—is different from that of the new ideology that they are engaging in—i.e., Western Secularism. Her solution is that, through the mechanism of the ISA, cross-cultural engagements are enabled, and that these engagements lead to real human connection, but that these connections must be made in a hybridized fashion, such as with Sammar and Rae, that allows the intrinsic components of each requisite ideology to be retained.

3.5 Conclusion

The image of a rhizome functions to break down the monolithic construction of the nation and national identity, and to shift postcolonial analysis away from binary oppositions of East-West and towards interconnection, process, movement, and exchange. The image that rhizome evokes is expressed with particular clarity in the city spaces of *The Translator*, specifically in Sammar's description of her neighbourhood in Aberdeen, and in her work as a translator. Sammar, thus, develops a rhizomatic identity through her increased engagement with Western secularism—that is, her increased interaction with Rae and the city of Aberdeen. Nevertheless, her identity, as such, is not fully developed. The rhizomatic function in the formation of the hybrid subjectivity or identity that Sammar eventually inhabits, rather, is formed

through a process of interpellating oppositions that coalesce in the final moments of the novel, when Rae and Sammar are reunited and presumably married. Rae can be seen to be operating equally within this notion of interpellation, as he too must integrate true Islamic belief into his secular scholarship to allow for the marriage to occur. The end of the novel, however, can only represent the hybrid identity as a fantasy (204), and in doing so, leaves its literal representation as an extra-textual discourse that the reader must imagine.

This image of the rhizome, specifically its openness, therefore, is inadequate to properly capture the relation of the two problematics within the text, wherein the ideological apparatuses of the state—the institution of the university, Sammar’s education in English and her possession of a Scottish passport—effectively enable her integration into Scottish society and facilitate the hybridized interpolation of Western and Eastern problematics that the end of novel establishes. As such, her romance with Rae is indicative of the state’s ability to weave together divergent elements of its internal threads to form a textured fabric—that is, to pull together seemingly divergent elements into a coherent, cohesive but also complex unit/unity. Sammar then is able to embody elements of a rhizomatic identity, but, in being interpellated into the state—marrying Rae, moving back to Scotland, embracing elements of Western Secularism (while maintaining her Islamic faith)—she is equally representative of the way in which the state can interpellate opposition through its institutions and, as such, close off the openness of the rhizome within itself through the function of its ideological apparatuses.

Thus, the smooth space of the transnation that forms within the striated space of the state can be seen as a tenuous space that is marked by both the ability of its subjects to “rise up at any point and move to any other” (Massumi xiii) and also the ability to be closed back off into the state space. The transnational subject is then invested with the capacity to deterritorialize the power-takeovers that the ideology of the state is able to produce in forming its subjects, but is also susceptible to re-interpellation into either (or more) of the states that they are moving between. Sammar traverses the nomad space of the transnation, but her ultimate formation of identity coheres within the state space, and she emerges as a subject who does not produce the dissolution of binary into multiplicity, but one that reaffirms binary (but not opposition) by effecting the unification or hybridization of the two poles of the binary—that is, each problematic remains distinct but simultaneously occupied, opposed to being viewed as only alternative oppositions that cannot be cohabited. Sammar and Rae’s union does not explore West and East binaries to erase their constructed differences, but rather to represent the potential for these two different ideologies to come together through the connection between subjects who embody those opposing ideologies who find a way to effectively love each other. They are able to accomplish this through the adoption of the opposing problematic, which can be produced ideologically and can work to reaffirm that ideology but can also produce knowledge-effects and work to open up the limits of the questions and understandings that an individual subject can produce. Thus, the ideological function of Sammar and Rae’s respective problematics—Islam and Western Secularism (specifically, scholarly objectivity but, implicitly, the dominant capitalist and

democratic system that it supports)—must be deterritorialized in order to open them up so as to enable their imbrication. The consummate image of Aboulela’s text then is not the anti-fabric image of felt that Ashcroft evokes (79), but a woven fabric that coheres Western Secularism and “good” Islamic belief into a marriage unit that, moreover, functions within the university itself. Thus, what the movement and exchange that Sammar’s engagement with Aberdeen and Western Secularism signifies is indicative less of a cosmopolitanism or a dissolution of national space and more of the state’s ability to interpellate such exchanges into its very function. This interpellative function then represents the malleability of the state space, which, despite its striated and closed-off configurations, is not absolutely or ubiquitously so, and as such, it is susceptible to and proceeds by openings as well as closings.

Anna Ball, in her essay ““Here is where I am”” presents an argument against the rhizome that is able to illustrate this point, wherein she contends that, while Sammar’s identity is polycentric, it is rooted in her Islamic belief (124-5). I contend that Ball is correct in seeing Sammar’s Islam as central to her identity; however, the rootedness that she assigns to Sammar’s Islam need not discount all rhizomatic functions because Sammar’s faith, in isolation, is insufficient to bring her out of her depression and, as such, the problematic must be opened up to new ways of understanding in order to facilitate her healing. Sammar reconfigures the space of isolated Islam within Aberdeen, her “hospital room” (78), not through prayer or Allah alone (16), but through an engagement with the city and Western capitalism. Her room in Aberdeen is initially presented as a hospital room in which “the only thing she could rouse herself to do was pray the five prayers” each day (16), whereas, she

describes how “her room was no longer a hospital room” through the “new curtains [and] bedspread” that she purchased (78). Her ability to end her four year mourning period for Tarig, which is substantially longer than the “four months and ten days” required by sharia law (69), does not proceed from her Islamic belief alone, but is instead produced through her engagement with and incorporation of components of Western secularism—that is, through her movement into Aberdeen, engaging with capitalism and her relationship with Rae. Moreover, this engagement with secularism is not represented as undermining or replacing the centrality of Islam in her life.

Thus, her mourning period is concluded through the interconnection of her Islamic belief and her love of Rae, a secular intellectual, and this connectivity gestures away from a dichotomized reading that renders the rhizomatic as opposed to a polycentric root. The rhizome twists around Sammar’s Islamic roots; it produces divergences, openings and alternate routes that wrap around and shoot through other roots or centers. Moreover, it is not a power takeover of one by the other—it is not her Islamic faith allowing her to navigate the dangers of Western capitalism or, conversely, Western Secularism articulating or performing what Islam could not—but the dialogue that forms between them, their mutual refraction, that enables Sammar to move out of the closed-off, dead space of the “hospital room.”

Thus, the rhizome is necessary to Ball’s conception of a polycentric model because these roots that she speaks of are not isolated—they do not operate monologically—but rather through their imbrication or dialogic relation, which forms through the rhizomatic formation of subjective multiplicity—i.e., through the incorporation of disparity without incoherence, such as Sammar’s simultaneous

engagement with Allah and the purchase of the duffle coat (66-8). Neither problematic, therefore, discounts the other, and, while Islam may be more central, these are articulations only of degree—of speed, as opposed to movement²⁵ (Deleuze and Guattari 381).

Sammar is nowhere near a perfect, fictional iteration of this; however, the concept of speed is a better way to think of the development of her engagement with a Western problematic. The end of the novel may be characterized by movement, in that it is an extensive shift, but this is only through the intensive relations of the two problematics that enable them to be fixed to Sammar. Thus, the movement from one point, an individual subject operating within an isolated Islamic problematic, to a second point, a subject operating within a hybridized set of problematics, is a product of the vortical, intensive relation of Sammar's Islamic belief and her incorporation of Western Secularism, which persists even in the second point—that is, the two problematics are still related intensively, despite the movement of Sammar from one subjective point to another. Sammar then can be seen as indicative of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as negative or relative deterritorialization which, despite the vortical relation of its components “operates [...] by secondary reterritorializations that segment and work to curtail [the lines of flight]” or the openings of the closed-off striated space that they cut across (510). The rhizomatic multiplicity that forms through the dialogic relation of the multiple problematics that Sammar is within, which works to deterritorialize (in part) the pre-given, ideological function of her

²⁵ “Movement is extensive; speed is intensive. Movement designates the relative character of a body considered as “one,” which goes from point to point; *speed, on the contrary, constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex, with the possibility of springing up at any point*” (381).

initial problematic, is then re-interpellated or reterritorialized back into a closed-off subjectivity that operates through a pre-given, ideologically determined problematic. In less Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, Sammar's Islamic faith, and its implicit problematic (or logic), is opened-up to accommodate a divergent mode of understanding through both her engagement with Rae and Western Secularism—both on the streets and in the university—however, the necessity that Rae convert to Islam closes these openings back off into an ideological problematic. Thus, the rhizomatic function within the formation of Sammar's subjectivity is paired with the ideological function of her Islamic problematic, in that their imbrication is able to produce a polycentric, hybridized subjectivity that is ultimately determined by ideology—i.e., the predetermined nature of Sammar's Islamic problematic, which can only approach marriage as a union between two Muslims. Thus, the development of the hybrid subjectivity is a process of lines of flight breaking through the striated space of ideology to connect to external points and those lines of flight being reterritorialized by “mak[ing] the absolute something ‘encompassing,’ something totalizing that overcodes the earth and then conjugates [the] lines of flight in order to stop them, destroy them—rather than connecting them in order to create [...]” (510). Put simply, the imbrications of the two problematics that are paired within the text necessitate an imbrication between the function of the rhizome and ideology in order to capture the complementary movement between opening and closing within the subjective development of Sammar and Rae.

The fact that Sammar's, and similarly, Rae's, subjectivity and the problematics that they employ to understand their society are ideologically

determined does not mean their subjectivities or identities are fixed or that they will then progress on to any other specific point. Thus, inasmuch as Rae's conversion to Islam is a product of the ideological function of the Islamic problematic, which necessitates marrying within the faith, the implication of the very end of the novel suggests that the imbrication of problematics could be productive despite its ideological refraction. Specifically, Rae states, “‘We'll give each other thoughts,’ [...] ‘They would come out of us and then take shape and colour, become tangible gifts’” (204), which suggests that Sammar and Rae's connection and exchange (which enables their hybridization) is latent within the potential to produce something tangible and, as such, it re-opens their hybridized subjectivity. Furthermore, it points to the ability of imaginatively produced, abstract thoughts to become tangible, which underscores the potency and purpose of the ‘literary transnation’—i.e., its capacity to transform the abstract into the tangible through representation, by conceiving of it.

The end of the novel then performs a very specific function in relation to identity: the hybrid identity that Sammar and Rae assume is, first, part of a process, and moreover, it must be imagined as an ongoing process that continues outside of the text, the text is thus opened back up and left in a state of latency and fecundity. The text situates their hybrid identities within the productive power of imagination, and as such, alludes to both the productive power of the text to imagine other possible worlds and the pointlessness of representing a conclusively formed rhizomatic or fully predetermined ideological identity. This occurs because the rhizomatic function of deterritorialization (negative or absolute) in the formation of individual subjectivity is a process that is never finished but that is, rather, constantly forming through the

production of new connections and exchanges, and, inasmuch as these connections may be closed back off into the ideologically predetermined structures of a problematic, the openings they produce can effectively alter the practice of the problematic (without violating any of the terms of the problematic). Thus, the text proceeds by negative deterritorialization in its imbrication of Islamic and Secular Western problematics, but this does not render *The Translator* ineffectual in representing the potential for hybridized subject positions, even ideologically produced ones, to undo oppositions between binaries, smooth over striation and open up the closed-off space of the state. Negative deterritorialization proceeds by circumventing the lines of flight of absolute deterritorialization, and thereby the characters of the novel are granted a small degree of power, but this power ultimately works to reaffirm the authority of the state in *The Translator* because Sammar and Rae retain the implicit ideologies of each problematic in their hybrid subject positions, which closes-off the lines of flight they produced back into the pre-given, vertical authority of the state. Sammar and Rae open up the problematics of their individual subject positions to produce hybrid subjectivities that cohere to a pre-determined, hegemonic conception of a “good” Muslim and “good” British citizen, instead of forming a new definition of “good” that denies the totalizing authority of hegemonic power and negates the pre-given nature of ideology by leaving it open and expanding in its connections and multiplicity. Thus, *The Translator* proceeds towards negative deterritorialization because it produces openings in the dominant power of the state to augment what constitutes subjectivity within the authority of the

state, or to close those openings back off into the state to expand what states authority is able to encompass or “hail” as a subject.

Chapter 4- The Absolute Deterritorialization Of The Repressive Function Of The State Apparatus

“She was about to say something and I was waiting for whatever she was going to tell me. I was waiting to begin.” (Diaz 75)

“He wrote that he couldn’t believe he’d had to wait for this goddamn long. (Ybón was the one who suggested calling the wait something else. Yeah, like what? Maybe, she said, you could call it life.) He wrote: So this is what

everybody's always talking about! Diablo! If only I'd known. The beauty! The beauty!" (334-5)

4.1 Introduction

Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar* tells the story of Oscar de Leon, a Dominican-American nerd. Oscar, as such, exists between a Latin American, Dominican problematic—one specifically inflected by the 20th century, totalitarianism and Trujillo²⁶—and an American problematic—one marked by neo-imperialism and functioning as a locus of diaspora. However, it is Oscar's third problematic, his nerdism, that refracts his Dominican-American status in such a way that exposes the repressive mechanisms of the state apparatus—both the repressive state apparatus (RSA) and the ideological state apparatus (ISA)—of each problematic by representing the pushback that his sub-alterity elicits. Oscar's nerd status, and his constant uses of its language and culture, effectively excludes him from properly operating within, and consequently being interpellated into, either an American or Dominican problematic.

His nerd status can also be seen as a metonym for otherness in general and the state's response to it, and as such he is able to expose the state's response to non-conformity.²⁷ This occurs because his nerd status coheres as an overcoding of otherness or alterity, as an effect of his refusal to perform the normative roles of

²⁶ As Yunior describes him in a footnote: "Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, and Fuckface) came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was master" (2-3).

²⁷ Richard Perez makes a similar point in *Transamerican Ghosts*: "the consequence of Oscar's grotesque identity is a complete social rejection, depicted comically in the novel as his failure to find a woman to love him, but indicative of larger historical exclusions" (92).

either problematic. This refusal by Oscar exposes the mechanisms of repression that each ideologically-produced problematic employs to, first, attempt to reterritorialize him through the ISA—through systematic punishment, like teasing at school, to provoke a desire for conformity—and then through the RSA, which employs violence to eliminate divergence and multiplicity. There, however, is no need for such a linear progression—the ISA does not need to move on to the RSA if it is ineffectual and, inversely, can be circumvented all together or follow after the RSA. Moreover, Oscar’s alterity exposes the naturalization of ideology within each problematic, whereby the exclusion and violence that Oscar experiences is performed unconsciously and uniformly—that is, the mechanisms that support the dominant power of the state, which are sustained through ideology and repression, have been internalized by the subjects of the state and performed within the limits of the problematic produced by that ideology without the need for external, state interference.

It is this repressive push-back against Oscar’s alterity, embodied in his nerd status (which is indicative also of otherness in a broader, postcolonial sense), that the text operates against and attempts to destabilize by structurally refusing the totalizing effect of the structures of colonialism that silence and erase representation of and by sub-alternated subjects. The novel is able to achieve this through its heteroglot and heterogeneous construction, which asserts multiplicity, polyvocality and a representation of textuality as a rhizomatic, smooth space. In telling Oscar’s story, Diaz also tells the story of Yuniór, the main narrator of the novel, Oscar’s family—his mother, Belicia, sister, Lola and grandfather, Abelard—the history of the Trujillo

regime and ostensibly the history of the New World. Consequently, Diaz shifts the narrative between speakers (Yunior, Lola and La Inca), voices (first, second and third-person), nation-states, and time periods (moving variably from 1492 to 1995, but focusing predominately on the twentieth century). The novel is structured into three sections and eight chapters (named and dated) that trace a rhizomatic route from Columbus to Oscar's death, wherein the multiple, divergent stories that compose the material history that led up to and coincide with Oscar's life twist around one another, produce ruptures in the narrative that shoot off into history, anachronism, intertext and fantasy, and open up the implicitly closed-off nature of a text (as a material object), in general, and, more specifically, of the pre-given implications produced by the title of the text—the title of Diaz's novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, succinctly encapsulates the inevitable trajectory that Oscar's life will follow.

However, inasmuch as the title circumscribes the limits of the narrative by enclosing Oscar within a prescribed temporality, the structure of the text—its sections, chapters and footnotes—and the narration and voice employed by Diaz function to disrupt and circumvent the finality and authority of the title by fluidly shifting narrator, voice and chronology. The text operates within a dialogic continuum through the vortical relations of intertextual assemblages forming semi-coherent formations that define the subject by rupturing at the point of overcoding. That is, the novel produces the life of Oscar, not out of an imagining of his interiority or as a *Bildungsroman*, but relationally through the voices, perspectives and stories that produced him—the stories that preceded him, that were about him and that he avidly consumed. Their coherence, however, is not as fixed or absolute as the title

suggests. Diaz constantly undercuts the authority of Yunion through the presence of other voices, historical facts and anachronisms, and by making the textuality apparent.

The title also is a reference to “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” a short story by Hemingway, which underscores the prevailing intertextuality of the novel. In fact, there is no way into the novel except through intertext, refraction and dialogue. Specifically, before the novel even begins, the title references Hemingway, the epigram quotes Galactus from *Fantastic Four* (Stan Lee and Jack Kirby), a Derek Walcott poem follows this and the cover itself is marked by a palimpsestic image of (presumably) Oscar spray painted over its title (which is visible underneath the image, spray and running lines of paint dripping away from it). Thus, the limiting effect of the title, which renders the narrative trajectory of the text a foregone conclusion, is automatically shot through with rhizomatic routes that dialogically refract its univocality with multiple and divergent discourses—that is, the novel produces meaning by “ceaselessly establishes connections [...] to anything other” (Deleuze and Guattari 7).

The effect of this structure, narrative style and intertextuality is that the text takes on a rhizomatic quality that allows it to subvert the authority of the god-author and the singularity of biography in order to produce an anti-totalitarian Zafa subjectivity that disrupts the closed-off death lines of the Fukú, the curse of the Plátano Curtain, Trujillo, the “*página en blanco*” (Diaz 90). The zafa is an utterance that functions as a counter-curse, and it points to the essence of the novel: the text represents the repressive function of both the RSA (i.e., Trujillo regime) and the ISA

(Oscar at school and in the family) in order to circumvent them textually—both structurally and conceptually—or, as Diaz puts it, “even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell” (7). The fukú is the otherness that is produced by the binary categories of colonialism that carve space and divide people between centre/periphery and subject/object, for example. Specifically, as Yuniors puts it: “they say [the fukú] came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began” (1). The Zafa, conversely, is the literal human connection instantiated with the loss of Oscar’s virginity (334), which marks Oscar recognition that his alterity is actually a valid subject position, and is sustained through the continued textual representation of the silenced (hi)stories of those made other and silenced by the categories of colonialism that is embodied in the multiplicity, polyvocality and openness of the image of the blank text (325).

As Richard Perez states, “for Deleuze, art and writing are the most effective ways to dismantle the horror of the face - built by social machines and institutions to meet the requirements of power - since the creative process activates ‘lines of flight’” (60), and it is within this ethos that Diaz employs textuality to undo the repressive function of the apparatus of the state. *Oscar Wao* is able to function predominately by, or more accurately for, absolute deterritorialization, as its structure and the image of the blank text (325) function to rupture the enclosing death lines of the state by producing the text as a rhizomatic, smooth space of opening, proliferation and creative potential. Thus, the story is not a prescribed chain of events that proceeds to

or from any principal unity; instead, it is malleable and open to proliferation and alternative possibilities.

Moreover, the text is an imaginative reconstruction of a lost text that Oscar wrote before his death, which Yunior learns of through a letter from Oscar that arrives after he has been beaten to death in the Dominican Republic by the police. The narrative effect of this letter is that it circumvents Oscar's textual absence following his death, and allows him to speak the final words of the novel. In doing so, Oscar is left within a smooth, rhizomatic space that ceases to be subject to the repressive apparatus of the state that would have otherwise left him dead in a cane field and silent. The final moment of the text then is a rhizomatic "mode of connection [...that] neutralizes the lines of death and destruction that divert the line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari 508)—that is, it enables Oscar to move outside of the vice-like grids of the repressive authority of the fascist state, and to be left in a moment of human connection and to possess the authority to speak the final lines of the text.

In order to fully clarify this argument I will situate myself within a similar critical space to Richard Perez in "Transamerican Ghosts" and Monica Hanna's "Reassembling the Fragments." Perez's essay engages with rhizomatic and transnational components of the text, and Hanna's explicitly explores the narrative structure of *Oscar Wao*, which assembles Oscar's history out of the fragments of battling historiographies. Each essay effectively and accurately argues its points, and I do not wish to contest their validity; however, neither essay exhausts the critical possibilities of either argument. Perez only loosely evokes the rhizome and the

transnation functions as a theoretical structure for the image of the mongoose in the text, which represents the female counterforce to Trujillo's "positive and ruthless embodiment of universal law, a machismo held together by a perverse violence" (66). His chief focus is on *Oscar Wao*'s depiction of "an aesthetic and ethics of rage," which is the counterbalance that the mongoose is indicative of, and how it enters into a "conflictual process" (65). I am also interested in the "conflictual process" that Perez identifies—the Fukú/zafa, spell and counterspell; however, my analysis will differ from Perez's in that I am interested in the deterritorializing effect that the structure of the novel has on the repressive function of the state apparatus as opposed to an ethical rage. Hanna's essay also engages with the structure of *Oscar Wao*; she views the polyvocal structure of text as a means through which to construct a more honest history that engages the reader and requires that they too "examine the power structures behind story telling" (501). I will differ from Hanna in that I am interested in the relationship between textual authority and power that the structure of the text attempts to undo. Specifically, the multiple narratives of *Oscar Wao* not only represent the multiple and irretrievable nature of history, but also help to deconstruct the political and textual power takeovers of history by absolute authority—the dictator and the author-god (97)—that obscure history's multiplicity and fragmentariness.

Furthermore, I will outline the text's representation of the repressive function of the state's apparatuses by focusing on both Trujillo and the Dominican Republic, and Oscar's experience in school and at home in America. I will then explore two motifs that Diaz repeatedly employs to engage with state violence: facelessness and

the mongoose. Diaz's image of the "No Face Man" represents the dehumanizing effect of the repressive function of the state apparatus, but also has further subjective implications in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality—black hole/white wall—and the mongoose, which is an anti-phallic symbol that precedes moments where characters are able to circumvent or escape the constrictive and venomous effects of patriarchal authority (as manifested in Trujillo's sexuality and machismo). I will then explore how Diaz employs the structure of the text itself to also attempt to perform a deterritorializing, anti-totalitarian function, and conclude with a reading of the recurring image of blank text (325) in order to explore the latent creative potential invested within the smooth space of the unmarked text.

4.2 Moronic Infernos and the Plátano Curtain: The Repressive Function of the ISA and RSA

Junot Diaz, in a 1996 interview with Diogenes Cespedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant, stated that, "There's no state in the world that can facilitate all the ambitions of its underclass. So it throws up obstacles—plenty of intoxications, bad schools, aggressive cops, no jobs—and depends on us to do the rest" (893). *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* expresses this repressive function of the state apparatus predominately through two particular modes: the school and the government, which both function by requiring proper conduct for membership or subjectivity, but punish divergence differently within the text.

The governmental violence that the text represents is predominately totalitarian—it focuses mostly on the violence perpetrated by the Trujillo regime, but also refers to

the totalitarian function of American foreign national policy and its apparatus, the CIA (2-3)—and it is overtly employed by the government to induce coherence to the conditions of state sanctioned subjectivity through fear, which is an effect of the function of the repressive apparatus within the totalitarian state—it excises what the state deems to be too divergent or subversive. The RSA of the totalitarian government is, therefore, made effective essentially by the visibility of its power and, thereby, through the acute awareness that the state is composed only of subjects—i.e., it is known that those who did not conform to conditions of the hegemonic power were violently removed from the state. The ubiquitousness of this power is, of course, a false image—as Diaz notes, “Trujillo was certainly formidable, and the regime was like a Caribbean Mordor [...], but there were plenty of people who despised El Jefe, who communicated in less-than-veiled ways their contempt, who *resisted*” (226)—but its effectiveness does point to the obscuring function of ideology employed by the RSA.²⁸ The RSA produces conformity through fear not just by its actual repressive function, but also by its ability to make this violence seem inescapable and irresistible. The violence expressed by the apparatus of the government is overt and totalizing, whereas the school’s use of violence, while less physical and absolute, is also more covert and psychological.

The school space produces subjects who punish those who are unable to conform to the requirements of the subjective ‘hail’ in order to produce conformity or re-interpellation. The function of repression within the school space is no less overt

²⁸ The RSA employs repression and ideology but “functions massively and predominately by repression [...], while functioning secondarily by ideology” (Althusser 138).

(although substantially less violent) in its expression²⁹; however, it operates predominately by ideology, in that it functions to interpellate subjects who have internalized³⁰ and normalized the (often arbitrary) conditions of membership, and, consequently, to obscure, rather than to call attention to, the purpose of the performance of repression. The repressive function is not condoned or sanctioned by the school, but is also attributed with a transformative quality—that is, either that the person conforms to normative standards of behaviour and appearance, or that they emerge from the experience a better person, so as to render the situation a positive experience in a roundabout way.³¹ So, the student feels that they are acting autonomously when teasing those who do not fit in (264-5), and those, like Oscar, who are coded with an otherness, aspire to conform (in the sense of not standing out as an object of derision) because ideology functions to obscure the necessity and purpose of their alterity.

This transformative quality, however, is the myth by which ideology functions to obscure the real conditions of the subordinated, othered individual to the state: the hegemonic system of power requires alterity as a point from which to distinguish itself—that is, the subject, interpellated by the dominant ideology, is that which is not other. Thus, the subject's complicity is induced through the privilege of *not*

²⁹ “He walked into school every day like the fat lonely nerdy kid he was, and all he could think about was the day of his manumission, when he would at last be set from its unending horror. Hey, Oscar, are there faggots on Mars?—Hey Kazoo, catch *this*” (19).

³⁰ Diaz also notes this element of the RSA in the Cespedes interview: “You don’t know how many times I saw a person escape institutional discrimination only to knock themselves down with self-hate and self-doubt. Together these pressures are a lethal combination” (893).

³¹ This is obviously a broad rendering of the effects of what would be referred to as “Bullying”; however, the point is less about encompassing the entirety of such an experience, and more about conceptualizing a general supposition of the purpose of repression and the function of ideology in relation to it.

experiencing the repression that they inflict, and the subaltern is coerced through the belief that the divisions between subject and other are permeable, but this, ultimately, sustains the state's power to establish the division between subject and other and to control the permeability of this border. Oscar's suicide attempts (47, 189-91) are an enactment of his perception of the immutability of his position within the hegemonic power system; Ybón is another—that is, an absolute death line that succumbs to the restrictive structures of state power or an absolute line of flight that breaks out of hegemonic power systems.

Specifically, the divisions between subject and other are not so rigid that they cannot be crossed, ruptured and negated by an individual, but generally or categorically the distinction holds—i.e., someone is made to occupy a space of alterity. Oscar is the embodiment of this space in both a specific and general sense, in that his size, inclinations towards genre and ethnicity (both externally, from racism, and from his inability to cohere to a Dominican self-conception of Dominican-ness) specifically code him as other, and also that he is meant to be indicative of the experience of otherness in a way that is, not essentializing, but encompassing. Oscar encompasses the subjective alterity produced by the *Fukú* that afflicts both the de Leon family and all of the Americas—the family curse and “*fukú americanus*” (1); therefore, Oscar can be read as an embodiment of the structures put in place by colonialism that, through the narrative of the New World, subsume the history of the Americas into Eurocentric, hegemonic discourse. The novel deterritorializes Oscar's otherness similarly: specifically, Ybón has sex with him, which undoes the otherness that is coded into his inability to perform a Latino masculinity (Perez 92-3), and

generally, the structure of the novel ruptures the authority and singularity of the author-god through its multiplicity of narrators, voices and stories. Oscar, however, predominately represents the repressive function of the ISA through his experiences in school. The form of punishment within the school space operates to coercively produce desire for, while obscuring the unattainability of, a sanctioned, hegemonic subjectivity that is simultaneously denied any realization.

To illustrate this less abstractly: Oscar's otherness at school is represented explicitly in the section entitled, "The Moronic Inferno," a saying that, for him, encapsulates his high school experience. Specifically, as Diaz puts it:

High school was Don Bosco Tech, and since [it] was an urban all-boys Catholic school packed to the strakes with a couple hundred insecure hyperactive adolescents, it was, for a fat sci-fi-reading nerd like Oscar, a source of endless anguish. For Oscar, high school was the equivalent of a medieval spectacle, like being put in the stocks and forced to endure the peltings and outrages of a mob of deranged half-wits, an experience from which he was supposed to have emerged a better person, but that's not really what happened. (19)

This passage succinctly encompasses the repressive function of an ideological apparatus, such as the school, whereby it functions punitively in response to social transgression or non-conformity, which, for Oscar, is even coded into his body's immense size, and this punishment is construed as a set of experiences that are meant to improve the individual. These improvements, however, are only as a subject, in

that Oscar's torture is a response to his inability to conform to the (often arbitrary) social mores constructed around power-centers that privilege replication, and as Oscar is unable to replicate them, he is unable to improve himself by those standards, despite implementing personal changes that could improve him as a human being. The arbitrariness of these conditions of subjectivity often renders them shifting and relative to specific relations between individuals—i.e., Miggs, Oscar's (somewhat) friend, is a "loser" but he is still able to get a girlfriend (28-9), which Oscar is not able to do. This relational component of subjective status—i.e., who is able to attain subject status—is expressed with particular clarity by Oscar: "he realized his fucked-up comic-book-reading, role-playing-game-loving, no-sports-playing friends were embarrassed by *him*" (29). Oscar is here, and continually throughout the text, an emblem of a totalized other, a subject only of alterity—both in Paterson at school and later in the Dominican Republic in relation to the government. He attempts to produce certain changes in his conduct and appearance: he cuts his hair, shaves, diets/starves himself and tries to imitate the "Latin hypermaleness" of "his cursing swaggering [Dominican] cousins" after returning from a summer visit to the DR (30); however, these changes are unable to circumvent his alterity and leave him as lonely as before.

What such an improvement could appear-like manifests itself during his high school time through two particular relationships: first, he attempts to transform the nature of his friendship with Al and Miggs, and second, he attempts to adopt a masculinity that he cannot actually perform to impress Ana Obregón, a girl that he had been spending time with from a SAT prep class. Oscar's tenuous friendship with

Al and Miggs never really recovers from Oscar's realization that they were embarrassed of him after they get girlfriends (29). Oscar does exhibit a change here: he shows backbone, as "in the old days when his so-called friends would hurt him or drag his trust through the mud he always crawled voluntarily back into the abuse, out of fear and loneliness, something he always hated himself for, not this time" (33); however, despite the pride that this independence produces in Oscar, those were also "some fucking lonely weeks when all he had were his games, his books, and his words" (32). Oscar, therefore, is able to choose to reject his complicity in his alterity, but he is not able to overcome it in any productive way. As he cannot simply negate the repressive function of the system, he must create a positive, productive space outside of it. Oscar attempts to produce this space himself by textually constructing the family history, but his death causes this text to be lost. Diaz, however, frames the novel as a text that is constructed by Yuniór and that reconstructs Oscar's lost text, which produces a single representation of this positive, productive space. Finally, Yuniór's dream of Oscar holding the blank text (325) produces an encompassing image of this space, in that it functions as a smooth, open space of textual representation that requires filling-in with stories such as Oscar's—i.e., the representation of the (hi)stories of those who have been othered and silenced by the hegemonic power systems of colonialism.

Furthermore, Oscar meets a girl, Ana, at SAT prep, and of course, falls in love with her (33). They spend time together, go to movies and on drives, and talk to each other with an intimacy that Oscar had never experienced with a woman outside of his family (36); however, the friendship never transforms into anything more, and Ana

goes back to her ex-boyfriend, Manny—an abusive (40), ex-military (41), “recovering coke addict,” whom she started to date when she was thirteen and he was twenty-four (35). Manny represents the hypermasculinity that Oscar is only able to dream about embodying: Ana tells Oscar about Manny’s “big cock,” whereas Oscar can only fantasize about “nuclear annihilation” enabling him to rescue Ana and to take her “to the sweaty love den where Ana would quickly succumb to his take-charge genius and his by-then ectomorphic physique” (42-3). Oscar is only able to embody a hypemasculinity in his dreams, and when he does try to perform it—when he begins to tell Ana that he loves her by telling her that she has “beautiful breasts” (48)—it fails in comparison to Manny’s actual ability to perform such a masculinity: Ana rejects Oscar by reminding him that she has a boyfriend, Manny (49). Thus, his self-respect is unable to overcome his isolation because he is still unable to conform to an idealized image of subjectivity by either embodying hypermasculinity or submitting to the abuse of Al and Miggs for the sake of having friends.

Oscar’s university experience, specifically when Yuniior (the narrator and Oscar’s then roommate) decides he is “going to fix Oscar’s life” by getting him into shape (175) and hanging out with him (176), puts the simultaneous functions of ideology into acute focus. Oscar is, at once, looked down upon for not trying to change, asked to do so and then reviled for trying to. As Yuniior puts it:

I knew shit wasn’t easy for him. [...] I saw how it was. You think people hate a fat person? *Try a fat person who’s trying to get thin.* [...] Sweetest girls you’d ever see would say the vilest shit to him in the street, old ladies would jabber, You’re disgusting [...], and even Melvin [...] started calling

him Jabba the Butt, just because. OK, people suck, but what were his options?
O[scar] had to do something. (177, my emphasis)

So, Oscar is caught between the simultaneousness requirement to change and the punishment for trying to do so. The repressive component in the response to Oscar's desire to change is evident; however, despite this overtness, there is an ideological function that results from the mechanisms of the school apparatus. Yuniior's decision to help Oscar is predicated by, and almost exclusively because of, the housing system at Rutgers: "That year I'd pulled what was probably the lowest number in history of the housing lottery. Was officially the last name on the waiting list, which meant my chances for university housing were zilch, which meant [...] Oscar, for all his unhappiness, didn't seem like so bad an option" (170). Yuniior means well in helping Oscar; however, he is equally complicit in the system because he acts as Oscar's friend and tries to change Oscar, at this point in the novel, almost exclusively out of self-interest—he lives with Oscar because he does not want to live at home and wants to impress Oscar's sister, Lola (170), and only tries to fix Oscar as a way of not dealing with a difficult break-up (175). The point is that is Oscar is compelled to try and change because of a so-called friend, who is only present because of the function of the school's housing system, and is then punished for it through the derision of complete strangers. Oscar is (briefly) convinced to try to change, Yuniior believes that he is helping Oscar and typically nice people behave violently towards Oscar as if their conduct is appropriate and natural, and the school is the locus in which this situation is produced. The apparatus can work without intent, and the subjects perform its function without being aware that they are doing so; this is the ideological

element, as it obscures the real conditions of an individual's relationship to the conditions of their existence.

The Plátano Curtain is a name that Yuniór uses to describe the “forced isolation” that Trujillo imposed on the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961—between assuming power and getting assassinated (224-7). Yuniór describes this period variably by employing a number of references to pop culture—for example, “Santo Domingo was the Caribbean’s very own Peaksville,” from the “famous *Twilight Zone* episode [...] where the monstrous white kid with the godlike powers rules over a town that is completely isolated from the rest of the world” and Trujillo “dominated [it] like it was his very own private Mordor” (224). The ancillary footnote that he provides after these humorous and equally sinister images, however, puts the intent and effect of the Plátano Curtain on the Dominican space into an even clearer, more insidious focus. Yuniór puts it as such:

He [Trujillo] aspired to become an architect of history, and through a horrifying ritual of silence and blood, machete and perejil,³² darkness and denial, inflicted a true border on the countries [that is, the once fluid Dominican and Haitian border], *a border that exists beyond maps, that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries of a people.* (225, my emphasis)

³² “The dictator Rafael Trujillo did not want the Haitians removed from his borderlands, he wanted them killed. When his soldados approached a hapless campesino they would hold out a sprig of parsley and ask, “How do you call this?” If the peasant answered ‘perejil’ without trilling the ‘r’ sound he was assumed to be Haitian and was immediately shot, bayoneted or hacked to death with machete” from “The Annotated Oscar Wao” website.

Yunior describes this closing-off of the national space as being so absolute and effective that when World War II ends, “the majority of the pueblo didn’t even have the remotest idea that it had happened [and] those who did believed the propaganda that Trujillo had played an important role [...]” (225).

Of course it is an anachronism to attribute the repressive state violence that Oscar experiences in the Dominican Republic in 1995 to Trujillo and the Plátano Curtain; however, this anachronism is both in keeping with Diaz’s fluid construction of history and, more importantly, signifies the pervasive and insidious effect of Trujillo’s violence. Thus, it is a part of the continuum of violence carved into the borders of the country and the bodies of the people that persisted through the power vacuum that Trujillo’s death produced, which was filled by “the Demon Balaguer” (90), a politician in the Trujillo regime. Balaguer ruled for a period time referred to as the “Twelve Years,” in which “he³³ unleashed a wave of violence against the Dominican left, death-squading hundreds and driving thousands more out of the country” (90). Furthermore, Ybón’s boyfriend, the police capitán, who orders Oscar’s first beating and then eventual shooting in the cane fields, “was very busy under the Demon Balaguer. Shooting at sindicatos from the backseats of cars. Burning down organizers’ homes. Smashing in people’s faces with crowbars. The Twelve Years were good times for men like him” (294-5). The line then between Trujillo and the Plátano Curtain and Oscar’s death (ordered and executed by

³³ In Yunior words: “Although not essential to our tale, per se, Balaguer is essential to the Dominican one, so therefore we must mention him, even though I’d rather piss in his face. [...] (Know also as the Election Thief [...] and the Homunculus.) In the days of the Trujillato, Balaguer was one of El Jefe’s more efficient ringwraiths. Much is made of his intelligence (he certainly impressed the Failed Cattle Thief) and of his asceticism (when *he* raped his little girls he kept it real quiet). After Trujillo’s death he would take over Project Domo and rule the country from 1960 to 1962, from 1966 to 1978, and again from 1986 to 1996 [...]” (90).

Dominican police officers) does not even require six degrees to connect the separation in time between the two manifestations of state violence. Trujillo, Balaguer and the Capitán occupy the same plane of consistency and trace similar death lines upon it; and, thus, the Plátano Curtain may be a temporal anachronism, but what it signifies is a totalizing, restrictive repressive state power and violence that pervades all of its apparatuses and persists, in essence, up to and after Oscar. Diaz, in the Danticat interview, captures the pervasiveness and persistence of Trujillo's violence in his discussion concerning the opposition and similarity that Diaz establishes in the novel between dictators and authors. Diaz states:

Trujillo wrote the *Foro Publico* [...] but I think that this “scribbling” was just sideline to [his] real writing, which was done *on the flesh and psyches of the Dominican people*. That tends to be the kind of writing that the Trujillos of the world are truly invested in, and it's the kind of writing that *lasts longer and resonates far deeper* [...]. His “work” *deformed, captured, organized* us Dominicans in ways we can barely understand, and this “work” has certainly *outlasted his physical existence*. (93, my emphasis)

The Plátano Curtain that Trujillo carved over the once (relatively) smooth borders of the Dominican republic, thus, persists and is indicative of the type of repressive state violence that Oscar experiences; however, despite revealing the capacity for ideology to sustain hegemonic power and those who possess it without being reducible to any one of those people, it is not necessary to employ such an anachronism in order to analyze the representation of this type of violence in *Oscar Wao*.

Belicia (or Beli), Oscar's mother, is also a literal embodiment of this repressive state violence, as she has a scar that striates her back that is a result of the cumulative effect of Trujillo's dismantling of the family, or the Fall (235-58); however, she is not reducible to this striation, as its signification is countered by Beli's unquenchable, amorphous desire to escape. Yunió describes this desire to escape as the search for "Houdini holes in the Plátano Curtain" that were not yet there in "a country, a society, that had been designed to be virtually escape proof" (80-1). She then exists within the same vortical relation of the closing off effect of the state and the rhizomatic impulse towards flight into openness and multiplicity.

Furthermore, Belicia is "the literal Child of the Apocalypse" (251), whose disappearance, enslavement and burning completes "the Fall" of the Cabral family. The Fall is caused by Trujillo's violent patriarchy and machismo—i.e., "the rap about The Girl Trujillo Wanted was a pretty common one on the Island. [...] Trujillo took your house, your properties, put your pops and mom in jail? Well, it was because he wanted to fuck the beautiful daughter of the house! And your family wouldn't let him!" (244). The effect of the Fall was that Beli, an infant when it happened, ended up being passed off between family members until she was sold into domestic slavery (253). When La Inca, her aunt (and, thereby, Oscar's great-aunt) finds Beli, "not only had the savages burned the girl, they proceeded to punish her further by locking her in a chicken coop at night" (257) as a punishment for wanting to go to school (255). The scar and the chicken coop are encompassing images of the effects of the repressive state violence of the Trujillo regime: the scar is the body writing that Diaz spoke of in the Danticat interview—it is "a monsterglove ruination extending from

the back of her neck to the base of her spine. A bomb crater, world-scar like those of hibakusha³⁴ (257)—tracing the striations and death lines of the repressive apparatus; the chicken coop is the perfect iteration of the restrictive, closed-off space of the totalitarian state that is supported by its repressive apparatus and reproduced in the daily lives of the people through ideology, which makes violence seem normal and, thus, replicable.

The territorializing function of the repressive apparatus—that is, its ability and necessity to close-off and restrict the state’s space—is made explicit through Beli’s affair with the man known only as ‘the gangster’, which is the relationship that leads to Beli’s second direct experience with the full force of the repressive apparatus. The love affair and the violence of how it ends is set against the backdrop of subversive—i.e., Communist—rebellions that are threatening the authority of the state. Diaz makes the contiguity apparent: the revelation that Beli is in love with ‘the gangster’ is immediately followed by the disclosure that “the world was coming apart at the seams—Santo Domingo was in the middle of a total meltdown, the Trujillato was tottering, police blockades on every corner—and even kids she’d gone to school with, the brightest and the best, were being swept up in the Terror” (129). The quotation then, inasmuch as it reveals the political landscape of the Dominican Republic at the time, also conveys the violence employed by the totalitarian state to maintain its totalized control—to prevent ruptures at its seams that would produce gaps in control and enable lines of flight. This is expressed with particular clarity by the “police

³⁴ “Hibakusha is the term widely used in Japan referring to victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese word translates literally to ‘explosion-affected people’” from “The Annotated Oscar Wao.”

blockades on every corner,” which literally enable the apparatus of the state to constrict and control movement through its space. Furthermore, ‘the gangster’ is a part of the repressive apparatus of the state that attempts to hold the seams of Trujillo’s authority from coming apart—to prevent the rupture of Trujillo’s totalized façade of power—which caused him to disappear for weeks. When he would return “from ‘his business’ he would smell of cigarettes and old fear and want only to fuck, and afterward he would drink whiskey and mutter to himself” (130). Moreover, ‘the gangster’s’ wife is actually Trujillo’s sister, and it is she who orders that Beli be brought to the cane fields and beaten.

So, when Belicia is beaten nearly to death and the baby inside her is lost, this violent act is part of the continuum of violence of the totalitarian state, which is attempting to close off its borders to prevent subversion of its absolute authority. Yuniór’s summative description of the beating captures the extent and the intent of the violence:

Let me pass over the actual violence and report instead on the damage inflicted: her clavicle, chicken-boned; her right humerus, a triple fracture (she would never again have much strength in that arm); five ribs, broken; left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung collapsed; front teeth, blown out. About 167 points of damage in total and it was only sheer accident that these motherfuckers didn’t eggshell her cranium, though her head did swell to elephant-man proportions. Was there time for a rape or two? I suspect there was, but we shall never know because it’s not something she talked about. *All*

that can be said is that it was the end of language, the end of hope. (147, my emphasis)

Thus, the violence that is written on her body functions to delimit language—it is a type of writing that totalizes the potential for representation or expression—and to circumvent its potential to counteract or subvert the authority of Trujillo’s violent regime (that Diaz discusses with Danticat). Belicia can again be seen as an embodiment of the violence of the state apparatus, which codes her with its language of violence and silence, leaves her broken and lost in the rigid, striated space of the cane field and erases the productive potential of the child held in her womb. The cane field itself is a perfect expression of the effect of the striated territorializing function of the repressive apparatus on the state space: the stalks of can violently clack together, opening and closing and producing routes only to close them off; the subject, therein, is “mazed in their endlessness, only to reappear months later as a cameo of bones” (149). Beli, in this space, is “a broken girl, atop broken stalks of cane” (148). A golden mongoose, however, appears to Beli—a recurring motif in the novel that I will explore in depth in the next section—and leads her out, thereby rupturing the striated territorializations of the state that function to maze-in and consume the subject. Belicia breaks free of the cane field and, subsequently, of the Plátano Curtain, which enables her to flee to America and have Oscar and Lola.

The home that Belicia establishes in America, however, itself becomes a microcosm for the despotic state, in that Beli employs the family apparatus to reconstitute a restrictive space that Lola, Oscar’s sister, wants to break free from. She is abusive (54-9), which Lola succinctly captures: “her rage filled the house, flat stale

smoke. It got into everything, into our hair and food, like the [nuclear] fallout they talked about in school” (60). Beli’s restrictive rage initially produces Lola’s complicity in her own oppression, which is expressed through Lola’s desire to behave properly (56). This complicity illustrates the function of the family apparatus—as she is Lola’s mother, Lola believes her criticisms, which induce her to behave properly by running the household and raising her brother as her mother works. Lola eventually rebels against this authority and runs away (59-61) and, while this line of flight is not productive and she is eventually brought back home (70), it does mark the first attempt in the novel to move out of the restrictive authority of the repressive function of the state apparatus and to, instead, move into a more rhizomatic space of human connection that is persistently sought after throughout the novel.

Beli, therefore, is too circumscribed and overwritten with Trujillo’s lines of violence to not reproduce them when she becomes the head of her household; however, her rupture of the Plátano Curtain, which was incited by her desire to have the other two children that the Mongoose informed her of in the cane fields (149), produces Oscar and Lola, and enables their lines of flight and the rhizomatic networks of human interaction and connection that they produce. The text that Yunior constructs out of these stories—employing multiple narrators and voices to do so—is the utterance—of *zafa* or “the beauty” (335)—that fully ruptures the silence and blank pages of Trujillo’s power takeover of history. Story becomes the abstract vital of subjectivity that is traced onto the blank text that Oscar holds in Yunior’s dreams—“Oscar’s hands are seamless and the book’s pages are blank” (325). This blank book is different than another image in the text of a blank page, Balaguer’s “*pagina en*

blanco”: it requires that the blank pages be filled in and shot through with the assembled fragments of history, but, in doing so, it refuses any single or specific representation, and thus requires constant creation, connection and multiplicity.

4.3 The No Face Man and the Mongoose: the Conflictual Process of Rupturing the Death Line

There is, however, an additional set of implications that arise from Beli’s beating in relation to the repressive function of state violence. Diaz employs two running motifs throughout the novel to express the repressive function of violence and the pushback against it: the No Face Man and the mongoose. The No Face Man is employed as a symbolic precursor to moments of intense violence in the text and, inasmuch, the motif reflects the totalizing effect of the repressive apparatus of the totalitarian state, whereby the perpetrator of the violence of the RSA becomes a dehumanized automaton performing the authority of the state without autonomy or individuality. Furthermore, a direct comparison with Deleuze and Guattari’s depiction of the face as a black hole of subjectivity is able to expand my reading of the relationship between facelessness, subjectivity and the RSA. The golden-eyed mongoose is presented as a countervailing motif to facelessness: it is a nomadic, transnational figure that functions as a line of flight that breaks through and leads out of the death lines that are produced by the repressive violence that the figure of the No Face Man precedes.

Facelessness, in *Oscar Wao*, is associated with Abelard’s betrayal, Beli’s beating and Oscar’s beating and death. Specifically, the face of Abelard’s friend,

who is implicated in Abelard's downfall, is described as "an absence, a pool of shadow" after Abelard complains about Trujillo's predatory sexuality (220). Furthermore, immediately following the last time that Beli is with 'the gangster' she sees a man who "has no face" (135), and when she is later dragged to the car by two men, referred to only as Elvis One and Two, who are employed by 'the gangster's' wife (who is, incidentally, also Trujillo's sister) to kill her, she sees that the man sitting in the car "*didn't have a face*" (141). Lastly, prior to Oscar's first beating, Oscar sees "a lone man" who he "could have sworn had no face" (298), during the beating "Oscar was sure that he was being beaten by three men, not two, that the faceless man from [earlier] was joining them" (299), and right before he is shot, his killers "faces slowly disappear[ed] in the gloom" (322). It is also implied that Lola's daughter, Isis, will eventually "hear the word *fukú*" and "dream of the No Face Man" (330), but Yunion hopes that his own and Oscar's stories, which function as modes through which to communicate "all we've [the de Leóns and Yunion] done and all we've learned" (330-1), will enable her to "put an end to it" (331)—that is, the *fukú* and the erasure of subjectivity that is produced by the violence of the No Face Man.

Facelessness can be read as an expression of the type of subjectivity that is produced by the performance of the violence of the RSA. The perpetrators of the violence of the RSA, therefore, are faceless because they have been reduced from individuals to mechanisms of the state apparatus and function only to enact the erasure of subjectivity that Beli's and Oscar's refusal to conform to the dictates of the state elicits. Moreover, they are interchangeable and unnecessary as individuals, as their facelessness is indicative of the fact that any other person could replace them;

thus, they are, at once, no one and anyone. Facelessness then totalizes subjectivity and its alterity: the faceless subject as the machine of the state apparatus is indicative of the uniformity that the state requires from its subjects, and this sets the victim in counter-distinction and, thereby, renders them other and excised. The black hole face of the No Face Man, therefore, functions as a totalized or overcoded assemblage that reflects out to the othered individual their alterity and consequent exclusion from subject status.

Facelessness, for Deleuze and Guattari, represents something different. The face exists at the intersection of significance and subjectification—i.e., white walls and black holes—in that it is a machinic assemblage of expressions that operate to signify meaning to other people (170). The face is the black hole of subjectivity (167) that must be dismantled—that is, one must become faceless (188). Specifically, for Deleuze and Guattari,

If the face is politics, dismantling the face is also a politics involving *real becomings*, an entire *becoming-clandestine*. Dismantling the face is the same as breaking through the wall of the signifier and getting out of the black hole of subjectivity. Here the program, the slogan, of schizoanalysis is: Find your black holes and white walls, know them, know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and *draw your lines of flight*. (188, my emphasis)

Thus, becoming-faceless is the means by which to subvert political authority and to produce lines of flight that deterritorialize the binarizations of faciality (176).

Facelessness in *Oscar Wao*, therefore, would appear to contradict Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality; however, for Diaz this facelessness is actually more indicative of the black hole of subjectivity, as it is an expression of the totalized state subjectivity that the victim of the No Face Man is excluded and excised from. For Deleuze and Guattari, the black hole of subjectivity operates by "biunivocalization, or binarization" (176)—that is, "the empty eye or black hole absorbs or rejects, *like a half-doddering despot who can still give a signal of acquiescence or refusal*" (177, my emphasis)—and, consequently, functions "at every moment" to reject "faces that do not conform, or seem suspicious" (177). Facelessness, in *Oscar Wao*, then depicts the literal enactment of this rejection in an actual despotic state that still has the ability to excise from itself those who will not conform to its dictates of subjectivity. Furthermore, if the RSA functions to remove from the state those who refuse to conform to the requirements of membership, and thereby subjectivity, and the face communicates to a listener "to guide his or her choices" (167), then the black hole face of the perpetrator of the violence of the RSA communicates to the victim (or the listener) their absence of choice. Thus, because the victim of the state's repressive apparatus has chosen not to cohere to the conditions of the state's hail,³⁵ they are denied any subjectivity, which the facelessness of the perpetrator of the violence reflects back to them. Facelessness is then the despotic overcoding of the face that totalizes its ability to express by allowing it only to reflect the victim's alterity and, thus, lack of subjectivity. The blackness of the face of the perpetrator of the repressive function of the state apparatus communicates as a mirror: the absence of

³⁵ "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (Althusser, qtd. in Callinicos 65)

the perpetrator's face, which embodies the image of the black hole of subjectivity, communicates to the victim of the state violence the absence of their own subjectivity—i.e., they will also be made absent.

Moreover, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari: “There is a face-landscape aggregate proper to the novel, in which black holes sometimes distribute themselves on a white wall, and the white line of the horizon sometimes spins toward a black hole, or both simultaneously” (174). The violence of this rejection, which is determined by the black hole of the face, traces out signification on the white wall, in that every act of violence perpetrated by a subject for the state in *Oscar Wao* acts as a filling in of Balaguer's “página en blanco.” The “página en blanco” is a blank page that Balaguer left in his memoir that responded to the accusation that he ordered “the death of [the] journalist Orlando Martinez,” which he denied responsibility for, but still “claimed he knew who had been responsible [...] and left a blank page [...] in the text to be filled in with the truth upon his death. [...] Balaguer died in 2002. The página is still Blanca” (90). Thus, every act of state-sponsored violence functions as a confirmation of the violence that Balaguer's memoir only implies and, therefore, makes the blank page signify violence even through its silence.

Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari contend that “the abstract machine of faciality” has triggers that determine when it is in operation, in that

Very specific assemblages of power impose significance and subjectification as their determinate form of expression, in reciprocal presupposition with new contents: there is no significance without a despotic assemblage, no

subjectification without an authoritarian assemblage, and no mixture between the two without assemblages of power that act through signifiers and act upon souls and subjects. It is these assemblages, these despotic or authoritarian formations, that give the new semiotic system the means of its imperialism, [...] the means to both crush other semiotics and protect itself against any threat from outside. (180-1)

This image of competing semiotics perfectly illustrates the relationship between the No Face Man and the golden-eyed mongoose. Specifically, the No Face Man, as an expression of both an authoritarian assemblage of subjectification and an expression of the violent function of the RSA, is the new semiotic of the Trujillo regime and, as such, it is indicative of the isolation of the Plátano Curtain and the violence of Trujillo's hypersexual machismo.³⁶ The mongoose, conversely, is the competing semiotic that, like Hatüey³⁷ and Anacaona³⁸, is indicative of a female and transnational semiotic. Specifically, Perez describes the mongoose as a female, "Latina phallus" (89); however, I contend that, while certainly representing a counterpoint of female power to Trujillo's machismo, its power is not phallic. The mongoose is, instead, the anti-phallus: it is the seeming easy kill (like a mink) that has the latent potential to bite the head off of the king cobra. It is not for crossing swords,

³⁶ i.e., "The rap about The Girl Trujillo Wanted was a common one on the island. [...] Trujillo took [everything] because he wanted to fuck the beautiful daughter of the house! And your family wouldn't let him!" (244).

³⁷ Hatüey rebelled against the Spaniards and was burned at the stake for it, and "(What Hatüey said on that pyre is a legend in itself: Are there white people in Heaven? Then I'd rather go to Hell.)" (212).

³⁸ In Yunió's words: "A common story you hear about Anacaona in the DR is that on the eve of her execution [for trying to resist the European occupation] she was offered a chance to save herself: all she had to do was marry a Spaniard [...]. Offer that choice to a contemporary Island girl and see how fast she fills out that passport application. Anacaona, however, tragically old-school, was reported to have said, Whitemen, kiss my hurricane ass! And that was the end of Anacaona" (244).

but for crossing borders: “The Mongoose, one of the great unstable particles in the Universe and also one of its greatest travelers. Accompanied humanity out of Africa and after a long furlough in India jumped ship to [...] the Caribbean” (151). The mongoose, therefore, is constructed by Yunió as a transnational figure that is able to trace diverse routes and permeate borders, which is an integral aspect of its literal function in the novel.

The Mongoose is not only a conceptual counterpoint to the No Face Man; it also functions in the novel as a precursor to and impetus for the lines of flight that Beli and Oscar follow in order to circumvent the death lines that the faceless subjects of the RSA produce to enclose them in the vertical authority of the state. Specifically, the golden-eyed mongoose first appears to Beli after she has been beaten and left for dead in the cane fields. It is the voice of the mongoose³⁹ that compels Beli to survive by telling her that she will “never have the son or the daughter” that await her if she does not rise, and then it “rivered into the cane” to lead her out of its maze. The golden-eyed mongoose traces lines of flight through the stalks of cane (which perfectly embodies the capacity of the striated, closed-off space of the state to reterritorialize those lines of flight), and ruptures the Plátano Curtain, as Beli’s belief that she will have two children compels her to survive and to leave the Dominican Republic for New York.

The Mongoose also appears to Oscar in a dream after his beating and asks him, “What will it be, [...] More or less?” (301). Oscar “almost said less” but the

³⁹ The mongoose speaks to her, but this may be magic realism or imagination—i.e., “whether what follows was a figment of Beli’s wracked imagination or something else altogether I cannot say. Even you Watcher has his silences, his páginas en blanco. [...] But no matter the truth, remember: Dominicans [...] have an extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomena” (149).

memory of his family and the optimism of childhood incite him to respond, “more” (301). Essentially, this conversation is a dramatization of whether Oscar will choose to fight to stay alive following the trauma of the beating, which caused a “broken nose, shattered zygomatic arch, crushed seventh cranial nerve, three of his teeth snapped off at the gum, [and a] concussion” (301). By choosing to stay alive, Oscar is enabled to return to the Dominican Republic, which allows him to consummate his relationship with Ybón. This consummation, moreover, is set in contradistinction to the Dominican hypermasculinity of the capitán that Oscar had previously (although less violently) also tried to embody. Specifically, Oscar tells Ybón that he loves her but lets her choose if she loves him back, whereas the capitán “put his .44 Magnum in her vagina and asked her who she *really* loved” (304) in a concise and violent image of hypermasculinity—i.e., the repressive, violent phallus demanding complicity or death. This distinction marks a change in Oscar’s conduct that is markedly different than when he had previously tried to assume a hypermasculinity akin to his cousins and Manny, or when he had gone jogging at Rutgers, in that Oscar is no longer trying to conform. He is not trying to transform those components of himself that render him other, rather his pursuit of and consummation with Ybón following his conversation with the mongoose in his dreams marks a moment of recognition—Oscar is able to accept that these components of himself that constitute his otherness within the strictures of the states subjective actually constitute a genuine and valid subjectivity. Thus, the transformation that the mongoose precedes is not personal, but categorical: Oscar rearticulates the categories by which he constitutes valid subjectivity to move beyond the delimited conditions that he was coerced to accept

within the school space. Specifically, the end of the text marks the full instantiation of this rearticulated category of subjectivity: “Ybón was the one who suggested calling the wait something else. Yeah, like what? Maybe, she said, you could call it life” (335). Thus, what had previously been conceptualized as “the wait” is rearticulated as “life”—that is, Oscar validates his own existence as actually constituting subjectivity opposed to reducing it to a period of waiting to be validated by the interpellating ‘hail’ of the state.

What is further significant about this passage is that the response that the Mongoose gives to Oscar is omitted and, instead, represented only by three solid lines. Yuniór chooses to leave the Mongoose’s response absent, but this silence is different than the silence of the “página en blanco,” in that it is not an erasure of history; instead, it is a refusal to subsume the representation of meaning into the univocal authority of any single author. The mongoose’s words are not represented because Yuniór does not want to only communicate Oscar’s reason to live, rather the blankness demands the subjective response of the reader to fill in the text with their own meaning.

4.4 The Rhizomatic Narrative Structure and the Blank Text

Thus, by leaving blank the mongoose’s response to Oscar’s desire for more life, those lines can be variably filled in by any answer provided by any given reader. The lines of the mongoose’s response form an abstract vital line that is capable of connecting the endlessly multiple lines of meaning that could be formed along it into

a polyvocal and irreducible formulation of meaning. Textual meaning is then removed from the authority of the god-author and left open and proliferating. This denial of authority is indicative of Diaz's textual deterritorialization of totalitarianism, in that he not only challenges the totalizing authority of dictators but also codes this challenge into the structure of the text by rupturing the authority of authors to circumscribe the text with univocal meaning. Yuniors, in a footnote, explicitly explores the relationship between authorship and the dictator,

What is it with Dictators and Writers, anyway? Since before the infamous Ceasar-Ovid war they've had beef. Like the Fantastic Four and Galactus, like the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, like the Teen Titans and Deathstroke, Foreman and Ali, Morrison and Crouch, Sammy and Sergio, they seemed destined to be eternally linked in the Halls of Battle. Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that's too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like.* (97)

And, while Diaz discusses this tension further in the Danticat interview—within which he construes Trujillo's violence as a type of writing on the body of the Dominican people that functions as a challenge to writers to compose something as powerful in words to counteract the Dictators' repressive desire to silence (93)—this interpretation does not occlude or delimit other potential readings.

Therefore, inasmuch as "like [...] recognizes like," the antagonism between writers and dictators arises from the fact that they each assume a totalizing authority

over representation, in that the dictator attempts to assert total authority over the subjects of the state and the author-god endows the text with meaning and constitutes the contents and limits of its representations. Diaz employs a polyvocal and continuously opening narrative structure to attempt to circumvent this type of authority, as a way to fully deny the totalizing authority of the dictator.⁴⁰ To accomplish this Diaz employs multiple narrators, moving between Yuniur and Lola predominately, but also allowing La Inca and Oscar to speak; he shifts narrative voices, as in Yuniur's framing of Lola's narrative, wherein Yuniur uses a 2nd person "you" to speak directly to Lola (as opposed to his regular, 1st person "I"); and, in telling Oscar's story, he also tells Beli's, Abelard's, Lola's and his own, as well as a loose history of the Dominican Republic. He also employs footnotes as subtextual roots that connect the family's story to the broader history of the Dominican story. These footnotes are lines of flight that break out of the confines of a linear narrative by deconstructing the image of the text as a totalized account of the family story, which the footnotes accomplish through both their allusion to external historical figures, stories and events, and to other stories about the family that could have been told or have yet to happen (like Isis eventually visiting Yuniur). Specifically, Yuniur begins Abelard's story by noting that, while the family views this as the start of their story, "there are other beginnings certainly, better ones, to be sure" (211).

Furthermore, the end of the novel reflects what Cesare Casarino calls a "love [of] potentiality" (qtd. in Ashcroft 82), which as Ashcroft construes it, "means, among other things, to write, to experiment with forms and narratives that allow

⁴⁰ Of course, after Barthes's "The Death of the Author," this is not a new way to approach authorship, but that does not render it an ineffectual or unnecessary one.

subjects to surpass their limits” (82). Specifically, Oscar is able to speak the final words of the text despite being dead at this moment because of the narrative structure of the text, which sets up a number of endings—“The Final Voyage” (Diaz 316), “The End of the Story” (323), and “On a Super Final Note” (324)—only to again refuse to end and to re-open in an unnamed final section that presents Oscar’s “Final Letter” (333), within which Oscar reveals his consummation with Ybón and its “beauty!” (335). The structure of the novel refuses its finite form (i.e., its material form as a book), in that its refusal to end suggests that there is no actual ending to be found as there will always be more details to fill in or that cannot be represented and more stories to tell. Ultimately, *Oscar Wao*’s open, unresolved structure renders the text a plane of consistency, which functions by “[retaining...] only *that which increases the number of connections* at each level of division or composition [...] in descending as well as ascending order” (Deleuze and Guattari 508). The narrative structure of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, therefore, enables Oscar to inhabit the smooth space of the literary transnation because it embodies “the utopian potentiality of literature [to conceive of] a future without dimension” and that moves past its limits, such as death and the finite, delimited nature of a physical text (Ashcroft 82).

The novel attains this smoothness through an alternative conception of textuality that circumvents the closed-off authority inherent to the material finitude of a text—an alternative conception of a blank text to that of Balaguer’s “pagina en blanco.” Yuniór has a dream about Oscar holding a book in which “Oscar’s hands are seamless and the book’s pages are blank” (325). Thus, like his refusal to

represent the mongoose's words to Oscar, the blank pages of the book here are not the same as the blank page in Balaguer's memoirs. The blank pages of this text demand to be filled in: Diaz constructs the novel as if Yuniór has reconstructed the lost text that Oscar wrote about the family's history and the fukú (334), and he does so through a cacophony of voices and stories. Furthermore, the pages of the blank text differ from Balaguer's "página en blanco" because they call for a filling in, not of the blank pages of history, which would leave the new history within the structures and strictures of the colonial representation of history and, thereby, sustain the othered individuals alterity, but of Oscar's lost manuscript (334) and, therefore, the (hi)story being created and represented on the blank page is within a distinct text of its own and not on a page within the closed-off, circumscribed annals of monologic, eurocentric colonial history. Yuniór then is not adding a page to Balaguer's memoirs; rather he is composing his own unique and distinct text that cannot be reduced to or subsumed by the authority of the hegemonic history that has hitherto othered and excluded stories such as Oscar's. Oscar's blank text then signifies the many historical erasures that, as Emily Shifflette notes, "the European's flawed, linear vision of history" (11) has produced in the representation of the historical and imperially othered individual.

Diaz constructs the novel as if Yuniór has reconstructed the lost text that Oscar wrote about the family's history and the fukú (334). Emily Shifflette, in "The Novel Mezclada," contends, however, that the difficulty and inadequacy of "Yuniór's attempt to fill the 'páginas en blanco' of Abelard's pre-lapsarian life" is a result of "the impossibility of completing these blank pages," which reflects "the irreversible

effects of the narrow colonial categories” (11). And, while I do agree that Yuniór’s difficulties do point towards a level of incompleteness, Shiflette concludes that this incompleteness renders colonialism’s categories irreversible, whereas I contend that the blank text that Yuniór dreams of functions as a space outside of “the narrow colonial categories” (11) and reflects incompleteness, not in the sense that it is impossible to fill in, but that it is impossible to *finish* filling in. Yuniór’s representational failure then reflects the impossibility of a single author filling in those blank pages within the structures of the colonial categories, whereby the blank text does not function to fill in Beleguer’s “pagina en blanco,” but forms its own, external space upon which the (hi)stories of the othered individual can be represented. This does not so much reverse the colonial categories—specifically, those of subject and other—as much as it negates the narrowness of those categories that Shiflette identifies by negating the silencing effect of colonialism that produced “a silence within the [Cabral/de Leon] family that [stood] monument to the generations, that sphinxed all attempts at narrative reconstruction” (243). The space of textual representation that the image of the blank text of Yuniór’s dreams is indicative of undoes this silence and, thereby, denies the othered individual’s categorization by constructing a space within which the othered individual is able to assert their subjectivity without reducing it to or necessitating even the rigid categories of colonialism.

The polyvocal and re-opening structure of the text functions to construct these representations of the subjectivity of the other into a unique category. This occurs because the polyvocal narrative structure refuses monologue and, thereby, de-

essentializes the authority of an author to represent the totality of a subject's experience or (hi)story. This, consequently, extends the call or demand of the blank pages, in that no single author or representation is adequate to accomplish the (partial) construction of Oscar and the de Leon family's history. Therefore, the pages in the text that Oscar holds in Yunior's dream are eternally blank because they necessitate a process of representation that constantly records the diverse and constantly forming histories of othered individuals through multiple voices; however, this representation continually, but never absolutely, counteracts alterity's exclusion and erasure from history. This occurs because there is no single textual zafa: Yunior's text—the internal narrative structure of *Oscar Wao* that constructs Diaz's novel as a text produced by its narrator—which he writes as a response to his dream of Oscar and that functions to fill in the pages of Oscar's lost text (334), is only a single utterance. The only way this single utterance can effectively act as a counterspell, which Perez argues that it is, is through the continual repetition and multiplicity that the eternal blankness of Oscar's text demands through its call to be filled in. The blank text seamlessly attached to Oscar's hands, therefore, requires the continual representation of the pre-existing and newly forming histories of those denied one by the categories of colonialism and (neo-) imperialism because it forms a new subjective category that represents their (hi)stories without requiring these subject positions to cohere to the strictures of the colonial categories of subject and other. Specifically, Yunior represents Oscar as a subject by representing Oscar's story without ever requiring Oscar to deny or excise the aspects of his personality and behaviour that produce him as other within the conventional colonial categories of Dominican masculinity.

Oscar's alterity is undone, instead, by constructing those components that constitute his alterity as a valid subject position, whereby Oscar is produced as a subject by refusing to cohere to the standards of subjectivity produced by "narrow categories of colonialism." Oscar then does not reverse the colonial categories but makes valid his own subjective category, which forms out of the continuous and polyvocal representation of the (hi)stories of the silenced other.

Furthermore, Perez states that, "ultimately, the reading/writing process explicates this curse," which is, in part, the erasure from history that I have discussed, "giving it form and bringing it in from inside the shadows, thus, enacting, through fiction, a Latino counterspell" (78). Perez succinctly captures the ability of textuality in *Oscar Wao* to undo the silencing effect of alterity's erasure from history by naming this silence and, thus, bringing it out of that space of absence; however, in doing so, he also invests an authority in Yuniór's particular counterspell that the text itself seems to constantly act against. Perez, in making his argument, points to the following passage: "'even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My *very own* counterspell'" (Diaz 7, my emphasis), and it is here—in Yuniór's words, "my very own"—where I diverge from Perez's analysis, in that what seems acutely apparent is that the nature of the zafa is personal. Each zafa is the localized, specific utterance of an individual and, consequently, its ability to function as a counterspell is equally individual and not totalizable. No single utterance could function to undo the fukú; the zafa as an effective counterspell is, instead, an aggregate of utterances, or an assemblage of the innumerable, divergent particles of

the words of the creatively produced texts that cohere along the plane of the blank text.

The blankness, therefore, is essential because it underscores the infinite potentiality of representation and maintains its deterritorializing openness, as the blank text must always be filled in and always requires more stories and more connections. Thus, like the plane of consistency, the blank text is a “mode of connection” that only retains “*that which increases the number of connections at each level of [...] composition*” (Deleuze and Guattari 508). Specifically, the lines of the story trace multiple routes along the smooth surface of the blank text like lines of flight that rupture and open up historical representations. The various lines of flight twist, refract and shoot through each other to form rhizomatic assemblages that cohere as an abstract line. This abstract line embodies the multitude of rhizomatic assemblages—that is, the relation among all of the individual performances of filling in the blank text—whereby the polyglot nature of the abstract line produces an absolute deterritorialization of the closed-off, monologic representation of history that the fukú of colonialism produces. The blank text, therefore, forms a “new earth” of polyvocal and multitudinous historical representations that, through the perpetual blankness of the image of the blank text (which always needs to be filled in by new (hi)stories), attempts to avoid totalization and, thereby, reterritorialization. The blank text then functions to produce an infinite textual openness and representational multiplicity—that is, it develops through a rhizomatic mode of connection that attempts to form a smooth space outside of the striated, closed-off space of

hegemonic representations of history by rupturing the territorializing effects of colonialism, totalitarianism and authorship.

4.5 Conclusion

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, therefore, depicts the repressive function of each mode of the state apparatus (the ISA and RSA) in relation to and against the othered individual. The repressive function of the ISA arises because subjectivity requires otherness, which Oscar literally is meant to embody, to establish and sustain the status of the individuals it interpellates. However, the ISA also makes Oscar desire to change—to be interpellated into the protective power of hegemonic privilege—to maintain his complicity in sustaining the mechanisms that constitute subjectivity by obscuring the necessity for his otherness through a belief that it can be transformed into its inverse—subjectivity. The government—predominantly the Dominican government (specifically, the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes), but also the American government, through references to Kennedy (3-5) and Reagan (263)—instead, employs punishment predominantly as a (repressive) state apparatus, in that its goal is erasure and excision, not re-interpellation, and its ideological function is to make this erasure appear as an inevitable consequence of any transgression of the conditions that constitute subjectivity (the arbitrariness of which only makes them more effective for inducing fear, as the line between propriety and transgression is always threatening to shift and become a death line).

Each mode operates by compelling the subject to be complicit in the system of exploitation: Trujillo's secret police "was widely believed [to have] between forty-two and eighty-seven percent of the Dominican population" on its payroll (225-6), and, as a teacher at his former high school,

Every day [Oscar] watched the 'cool' kids torture the crap out of the fat, the ugly, the smart, the poor, the dark, the black, the unpopular, the African, the Indian, the Arab, the immigrant, the strange, the feminine, the gay [...]. In the old days it had been the whitekids who had been the chief tormentors, but now it was the kids of color who performed the necessities. Sometimes he tried to reach out [...] but the last thing a freak wants is a helping hand from another freak. (264-5)

The importance of noting this internalization of the repressive function of the state apparatus is that it expresses the totalizing desire of power to close off and delimit, and to reterritorialize the subject by constructing them into or against a counter-subjectivity—an otherness or alterity against which it defines itself against. The text engages with these two forms of state power as an attempt to disrupt their death lines, to rupture the function of ideology by creating "a new earth" that divests subjectivity of its obscured internalized, self-reflexive fascism through the creative process. That is, writing a text "connects lines of flight," which through the image of the perpetually blank text "raises them to the power of an abstract vital line" (Deleuze and Guattari 510).

The 'abstract vital line' is the demystified counter subject position that the text produces through its representation of the other and, thereby, asserts the other's subjectivity that is denied by the silencing effect of colonial authority; it is the subject position assumed by composing lines of flight along the smooth surface of the blank text that nullifies both the closed-off nature of the text and its univocality. What is essential to the contrariness of this subject position to the one produced by the 'hail' of the state is its anti-totality, which Diaz invests in his own narrative—that is, his refusal to totalize narrative authority by representing and necessitating multiple speakers and voices, which are, moreover, insufficient even still to fully represent the story or undo the Fukú. It is the eternal blankness of the text that makes it effective as a counter subject position, as it denies the closed-off, absolute authority of the dictator and the author; instead, it requires the constant production of "a new earth," a constant movement out of territory, state and totality. *Oscar Wao* then represents the ability of the repressive function of the apparatuses of the state to close off and restrict or erase the othered individual in order to rupture these death lines and their totalized authority so as to produce new subject positions that cannot be subsumed by and do not require the authorization of the 'hail' of the state. Specifically, Diaz's text functions to assert the subjectivity of the othered individual—embodied by Oscar—by representing the history that hegemonic colonial authority has hitherto denied or erased; thus, it functions to produce an absolute deterritorialization of representation and subjectivity in the totalitarian state.

Chapter 5- Conclusion

Both *The Translator* and *Oscar Wao* employ interpersonal connection as a means through which to open ideology. Ashcroft puts forward the term “transnation” to conceptualize the condition of the subject when they are within and between multiple nation-states. The effectiveness of the transnation for conceptualizing the subject positions of Sammar and Oscar is that it provides “a way of talking about subjects in their ordinary lives, subjects who live between the categories by which subjectivity is normally constituted” (73), and who, consequently, form hybridized subject positions.

In *The Translator*, both Sammar and Rae are able to attain hybridized subjectivities—the combination of genuinely Eastern and Western problematics—through their union at the end of the novel. In *Oscar Wao*, the final, unnamed section of the novel circumvents the totalized alterity of Oscar’s subject position and the repressive functions of the (totalitarian) state that produced it (which had, previously in the text, beaten Oscar to death by employing the repressive function of each of its apparatuses—the school and the police force). It is able to do so by allowing Oscar to end the text asserting “the beauty” of existence, which is, itself, a consequence of consummating his love for Ybón (Diaz 335). The love relationship is the common mode in each novel by which Sammar, Rae and Oscar are able to constitute their transnational identities. There are of course other modes that are able to constitute a transnational identity—in *Oscar Wao*, his family’s diasporic heritage moves him between Paterson, NJ and Santo Domingo, DR, and in *The Translator*, Sammar’s faith produces a smoothening of space by functioning as a plane of consistency, in that her Islamic faith is consistent across and within multiple states (even if its expression, therein, is different). The predominance and effectiveness of the love relationship to connect multiple and divergent problematics, ideologies and discourses, however, makes it noteworthy.

The interpersonal love connection that Oscar makes with Ybón is, textually, able to open up the closed-off space of the state, or more specifically its ideological function, as it enables Oscar not to die because of it (the literal consequence of his relationship), but to negate the effects of the repressive apparatus by moving outside its control into a textual space that allows him to speak after his death and, moreover,

to speak about the positive power of interpersonal connection and to connect with the broader human condition—i.e., “so this is what everybody’s always talking about” (335). Oscar’s final utterance—“The beauty! The beauty!” (335)—which concludes Oscar’s revelation that he slept with Ybón, is particularly important for understanding the transnational effect of the consummation of his love relationship with Ybón. Oscar’s utterance is an inversion of the final words of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and, inasmuch, it can be construed as an inversion of the true nature of colonialism that Kurtz is witnessing and of the Fukú, which “came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved” to become “the Curse and the Doom of the New World” (1). Oscar’s utterance, therefore, is a zafa or counterspell that circumvents Kurtz’s horror at witnessing the true, violent nature of colonialism by asserting a counter-narrative that notes the beauty of love, despite the horrific effects of colonialism. The zafa, however, is not a single or conclusive utterance; instead, it requires repetition and polyvocality to undo the historical erasures that colonialism’s power takeover of historical representation produced for subjects constructed as other within the colonial power systems (which acknowledge only what they legitimate and, thereby, exclude the counter-narratives of sub-alternated subjects). *Oscar Wao* accomplishes this through the recurrent blankness of the image of the “blank text” (325), which functions as a smooth and infinitely open space of representation that the alternative histories of the previously silenced other are always able and required to be written onto. *Oscar Wao* can then be said to perform the utopian potential of the literary transnation to imagine other worlds that overcome the inherent striations of the real world.

Furthermore, the text is constructed by two narrators, Yuniór and Lola, who posthumously tell Oscar's story. As such, the structure of the text enables the narrative to form a rhizomatic structure. Oscar is able to speak after his death, the end of the novel keeps opening back up to tell more story, and the narrative itself is able to move through history and to shift between different characters and to change speakers. Thus, the text is not a linear or univocal construct. It incorporates an open-ended multiplicity of stories that allude to different possibilities—different constructions and even different stories altogether—even as they tell their own. This is evident when Yuniór tells the story of the beginning of the Cabral family history: “when the family talks about it[self...] they always begin in the same place: with Abelard and the Bad Thing he said about Trujillo,” and then in a footnote states, “there are *other* beginnings certainly, better ones, to be sure—if you ask me I would have started when the Spaniards ‘discovered’ the New World—[...] but if this was the opening that the de Leons chose for themselves, then who am I to question their historiography?” (Diaz 211, my emphasis).

In *The Translator*, the effect is slightly different. Rather than opening up ideology to infinite connectivity and proliferation (as the end of *Oscar Wao* does), the interpersonal love relationship between Sammar and Rae enables them to open up their respective ideological problematics—Islam and Western Secularism—in such a way that facilitates the merger of the two problematics into hybrid subjectivities that retain the essence of each problematic. Thus, the love relationship enables a liberal recasting of each problematic that functions to produce a greater connectivity between them by negating the unity of each problematic, which has hitherto led to

jingoism, Islamophobia and an antagonism between Eastern and Western (individual) subjects, but that does not produce an epistemological break within either problematic.

The Translator explores this potential in relation to an “Islamic logic” (Aboulela np). The text attempts to circumvent the xenophobic function of the repressive state apparatus by imagining the potential for the ideological apparatus of the state—specifically, the university and a passport/nationality—to produce a hybridized subject. What is necessary within the text, and consequently what makes the ISA more appropriate than the rhizome within *The Translator*, is that the two problematics that are paired within the text—Islam and Western Secularism (vis-à-vis the ideological apparatus of the university)—must be brought together without compromising any of the essential components of either ideology. Sammar and Rae’s marriage at the end of the novel is then not a movement into an open space that deconstructs or reconfigures binaries, but rather it is a synthesis of two predetermined identities; therefore, like a woven, poly-fibred fabric, the mixture is heterogeneous and the antecedent components remain intact. The distinctive shift then is not conceptual or structural, but merely an imbrication of the already existing configurations, wherein Sammar and Rae do not dissolve the boundaries between Islam and Western secularism that contribute to the production of Islamophobia—despite moments where the Scottish and Sudanese spaces do blend into one another—but instead the text functions to unite these ideologies in a way that retains the essential components of two seemingly incommensurate subject positions. Thus, they

reconfigure the structure of Western secularism to accommodate Sammar's Islamic faith through Rae's necessary conversion to Islam.

Although the text glosses the real effects of this conversion, the overall implication is that Rae's conversion will not preclude his ability to function as a scholar at the University of Aberdeen; thus, although Rae is no longer secular in his belief system at the end of the novel, he is still able to work within and engage with the discourses of Western secularism. This occurs because his conversion need not necessarily inhibit or change his academic work. As such, he does not have to forfeit any intrinsic belief inherent to his scholarly work beyond the contention that to be removed from Islam allows him to objectively assess its workings. Although Rae undergoes a drastic shift in terms of his religious beliefs, this is not a radical ideological shift in that it leaves his predetermined ideologies more or less intact. This is even more true for Sammar, who, for her own part, must acclimatize herself to the mechanism of Western culture, but Aboulela's intent seems to be to enable Sammar to "[...] choose to be *both* [a] good Muslim [woman] and [an] active citizen of the British polity, rather than seeing these as alternatives" (Wilson, et al. 10). That is, her desire is to construct a narrative that allows Sammar to enter into a space of Western ideology without having to sacrifice any of the essential components of her pre-existing Islamic identity. Moreover, this is intended to de-essentialize Islamophobic thinking, which sets Muslim faith and Western ideology in antagonistic opposition. Aboulela represents this opposition through the hybrid subjectivities of Sammar and Rae, which convey that the two ideologies can be productively unified without denying any of the intrinsic components of either.

Her text then is designed to produce new, hybridized identity positions for subjects interacting within an increasingly globalized world; however, her means of doing so employs the mechanism of the Western state to allow for this unification of East and West, which is in marked contrast to the rhizomatic formulation of identity that Deleuze and Guattari put forward, as it maintains a structural difference between the two spaces. As such, the marriage between Sammar and Rae cannot be seen as a complete embrace of rhizomatic identity or the production of a smooth space within Khartoum or Aberdeen because the multiplicity that Sammar and Rae produce does not consist of “only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). In doing so, the multiplicity retains a subject—Islamic faith and Western Secularism—and an object—the identity positions of Sammar and Rae. Instead, it can be read more appropriately as a representation of the relative ease with which the state is able to adapt to and enclose the multiplicity of the rhizome within its superstructures through its ideological apparatus, such as a passport or the institution of the university. The passport legitimates movement into a discrete and predetermined state space and the university functions to produce cross-cultural meetings within a space of intellectual engagement that is still state-funded and produces active members of the state (even if they function as dissident voices). Thus, the text functions within the superstructures of Western ideology, but it does so in order to fight against the repressive mechanisms of the state by exploring the ways in which ideology is able to interpellate “*concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (Callincinos 65) into itself, in that the deterritorializations of the pre-given nature of

ideology that the text represents function so that Sammar and Rae are able to come together within the confines of their respective ideologies.

Consequently, in as much as the rhizome breaks into the state space to open up subjective positions for transnational subjects that are not invested with the alienation of the diaspora or subject to the restrictive function of the repressive state apparatus, the state also has the ability to embody elements of these rhizomatic subject positions. The fundamental difference is that the state fixes these positions into distinct categories, while the rhizome establishes them only as possibilities and, as such, allows them to form only “fuzzy, not exact aggregates” (Deleuze and Guattari 505-6). Moreover, Sammar’s ability to benefit from the ideological state apparatus is a product of her relative privilege—her ability to read English and her Scottish nationality; however, she also reveals that the state is not an obliquely static or repressive force. Thus, each text is able to resist the fascist operations of the repressive state apparatus—both the overt violence of the police in *Oscar Wao* and the covert xenophobic discourses that are presented in *The Translator*—through a pairing of the rhizome and the ISA, but they achieve this through different relations between these two components. For Oscar, the rhizome opens up a smooth space beyond the state that circumvents its repressive function, while in *The Translator* the ideological apparatus of the state maintains a striated structure, as it weaves the rhizomatic multiplicity that enables the hybridizing of Sammar and Rae’s subjectivities back into the fabric of the state. That is, *The Translator* construes space as “a woven textile,” whereas *Oscar Wao* constructs space like “felt”—i.e., as “an anti-fabric” that is “‘smooth’ without being ‘homogeneous’” (Ashcroft 79).

Ultimately, these two texts, *Oscar Wao* and *The Translator*, can be read as inverse expressions of deterritorialization. Aboulela's novel explores a rhizomatic formation of identity that, while predominately representing openings, consummately works to close those ruptures in hegemonic power back off into an interpellated subject position. The ruptures it produces in Islam and Western Secularism allow for lines of flight to form rhizomatic routes between the two problematics, but does not form a new space that is divested from the ideological, pre-given nature of the function of either problematics; instead, it forms a hybrid subject position that reterritorializes those lines of flight back into a contained space—one that is expanded but not altered and is no less ideological. *Oscar Wao*, conversely, functions to effect an absolute deterritorialization but, in doing so, proceeds predominately by representing the closing-off effect of the repressive function of the state apparatus—both of the ISA and RSA. The polyvocality of the narrative structure and image of the blank text function to rupture the restrictive death lines produced by the totalitarian state around subjectivity and alterity to form a new, exterior space of latent potential. The creative production or filling-in of silenced histories then becomes a defiant act that forms an abstract, endlessly-proliferating smooth space upon which to trace multiple, diverse and deepening subjective lines.

Junot Diaz, in an interview with Edwidge Danticat, spoke in greater detail about the importance of filling in silenced histories of alterity. Danticat asked Diaz about the Fukú, stating, “there are so many examples all around us still. In our part of the world, we have not totally recovered from colonialism [...]. We see Fukú americanus just rip through the lives of the characters in this book. Is there any hope

of recovery from it?” (90). Diaz’s response addresses the nature of the Fukú—it is the historical erasure of Caribbean people produced by colonialism—but it also reveals the rupturing power of acknowledgement through representation:

For me, though, the real issue in the book is not whether or not one can vanquish the fukú—but whether or not one can even see it. Acknowledge its existence at a collective level. To be a true witness to who we are as a people to what has happened to us. That is the essential challenge for the Caribbean nations—who, as you pointed out, have been annihilated by history and yet who’ve managed to put themselves together in an amazing way. That’s why I thought the book was somewhat hopeful at the end. The family still won’t openly admit that there’s a fukú, but they’re protecting the final daughter, Isis, from it collectively, and that’s close, very close to my dream of us bearing witness to (in Glissant’s words) “the past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us (but that) is however, obsessively present.” (91)

Danticat is, in part, asking Diaz about the possibility of transcending the effects of colonialism, which postcolonial studies is so explicitly tied to, and Diaz’s response suggests that an utterance or acknowledgement could have the potential to rupture the closed-off death lines of historical annihilation. His statement then points towards the implications of this rupture for postcolonial literature. Diaz’s novel ruptures the power takeover of history by the hegemonic power and authority of the state by articulating the disassembled histories of othered individuals and, through the image of the blank text, requiring continual, diverse and polyvocal re-articulations of

additional individual (hi)stories. The effect of the blank text is that its potentiality is latent with the capacity to move past the confines of postcolonial discourses into a space of representation that can assert the unique history of Latin American people, as opposed to only refuting the absence of a history that is falsely constructed by the erasure that colonialism has imposed upon Latin Americans through the silencing effect of the *fukú* (Danticat and Diaz 90-1).

These implications are acutely reflected in Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru and Sarah Welsh's "General Introduction" to *Rerouting the Postcolonial*, and in a 2007 interview that Aboulela gave at the University of Aberdeen. Wilson et al. contend that postcolonial studies should be rerouted "by including ex-centric perspectives on its relationship with theories of globalization [...]" (2) and the "'transnation'" (5). Moreover, in response to a question by Randal McDonald—who asked if the faith of the female characters in Aboulela's novels is apolitical, as it seemed to allow them "to occupy a space that is beyond the political, postcolonial discourse" (np)—Aboulela responded that

In a secular climate, Muslims need, for practical purposes, to talk in this (postcolonial, adherence to tradition/culture) language. [...]

But this language to me has been and is very limited and I do not feel that it could show readers the kind of faith I knew and grew up in. *I wanted to write about this space you mentioned, that is beyond the political* because I feel that this space is important and it is neglected. Fiction made it possible for me to write about this space. And by acknowledging the postcolonial discourse through the characters of Anwar and Rae, I acknowledge that it exists and I

am not completely opposed to it, I do admire it, but *it does not paint the whole picture or tell the whole story*. To me faith is more than that and if modern day, secular discourse does not have the language to explain what I want to explain, then I have to make up this language or chart this *new space*. (np, my emphasis)

Faith, in Aboulela's conception of it, then has a rhizomatic, transnational quality. It has the ability to transcend the binaries of postcolonialism and to effect the production of a new external space because it smooths and connects spaces in the sense that belief, for Aboulela, is not reducible to any one place. The experience of practicing faith may differ from place to place, but the belief itself is a consistent experience. For example, when Sammar is praying in Aberdeen she may be alone and may realize the strangeness of public prayer to the Scottish, yet she is still praying to Allah, facing the same place and performing the same movements as every other practicing Muslim. Thus, her faith is rhizomatic and smooth, in that it connects her to a community that (idealistically) is not divided by the rigid borders of the state. This, of course, may not connect to the material reality of Islamic faith and its lived experience in and between various states; however, the utopian potential of literature enables Aboulela to represent Islam in such a way that renders faith transnational and rhizomatic.

Thus, both novels point towards a new, smooth space that is able to move outside of the structures and histories put in place by imperialism and colonialism. Implicit in this project is the transformative effect of the text to imagine other possible worlds and, as such, to produce their possibility through representation or

textual creation. Neither the texts nor Ashcroft's theory of the transnation are able to realize fully the creation of this space; however, this is not a failure, as the space that they are trying to represent is not univocal or totalizable. Instead, this space is always in flight from monologue and totality, as each representation marks a rhizomatic bulb, shot through with and connecting to an endlessly opening matrix of representations. And, while each novel and theory have their problems, they function within an Althusserian-type scientificity, in that they operate by deepening the problematics that they employ (Callinicos 38), thereby expanding the limits of the questions that a text can raise (35) and contributing to the formation of a space that reroutes or transforms the postcolonial.

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