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Revista Brasileira
de Estudos de
Cinema
e Audiovisual

**GUEVARA AND KEROUAC HIT THE RHIZOME: DISPLACEMENT
IN WALTER SALLES'S *THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES*
AND *ON THE ROAD***

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ANO 8. VOL. 1 – REBECA 15 | JANEIRO – JUNHO 2019

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**Resumo**

Indo além de uma leitura exclusivamente genérica, analiso os filmes de Walter Salles *Diários de Motocicleta* (2004) e *Na Estrada* (*On The Road*, 2012) em relação à discussão de deslocamento de Clifford (1999) e ao rizoma de Deleuze e Guattari (2005), levantando alguns questionamentos críticos de um ponto de vista decolonial e observando os conflitos das fronteiras internas dos protagonistas. Deslocamento em *Diários* pode ser percebido no descentramento do esperado continente homogêneo, já que os protagonistas encontram uma multitude de biomas, línguas, culturas e povos ao invés de encontrar o coração indígena do continente, a expectativa de uma essência pura e uniforme. Em comparação, deslocamento em *Na estrada* pode ser encontrado na circularidade do movimento criada por uma série de viagens com aparente ausência de começo ou fim e no próprio ato de viajar, uma vez que ele causa erupções de criatividade nos protagonistas enquanto potência de vir a ser.

Palavras-chave: Diários de Motocicleta; Na Estrada; Rizoma; Deslocamento; Decolonialidade

Abstract

Going beyond an exclusively generic reading, I analyze Walter Salles's movies *The Motorcycle* (*Diários de Motocicleta*, 2004) and *On the Road* (2012) in terms of Clifford's (1999) discussion of displacement and of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome (2005), making a few critical points from a decolonial standpoint while also looking for conflicts in the protagonist's internal borders. Displacement in *The Motorcycle Diaries* arises from the de-centering of the expected homogeneous continent since, instead of finding the indigenous heart of the continent where natives live off their lands undisturbed, and where one single cultural and linguistic unspoiled essence can be found, the protagonists encounter a multitude of biomes, languages, cultures and peoples. In comparison, displacement in *On the Road* can be found in the circularity of motion created by a series of travels with apparent no beginning or end, and in the act of travelling itself since it enables eruptions of creativity in the characters as potency of becoming.

Keywords: The Motorcycle Diaries; On the Road; Rhizome; Displacement; Decoloniality



Introduction²

The year is 1947 and Jack Kerouac initiates with his friend Neal Cassady a series of trips across the U.S. and Mexico that would be later fictionalized in the book *On the Road* (KEROUAC, 1976)³. A couple of years after, in 1951, Ernesto Guevara and Alberto Granado initiate a journey across Latin America, recorded in their travelogues *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey* (GUEVARA, 2003)⁴ and *Con El Che Por Sudamérica* (GRANADO, 1987).⁵ In 2004 and 2012, Walter Salles directed the movie adaptations of Guevara's and Kerouac's travel narratives.

A co-production between Walter Salles and Robert Redford, *The Motorcycle Diaries* (*Diários de Motocicleta*, 2004) was well received both by the public and by the critics. Its box office is estimated to be US\$57,663,224⁶ and it received a total of thirty-six awards,⁷ including the 2005 Oscar for Best Music. Shot in Spanish, its cast was composed of Argentinians, Chileans, Peruvians and one Mexican, Gael García Bernal. In comparison, *On the Road* (2012), a co-production between Walter Salles and Francis Ford Coppola, achieved the sum of US\$8,784,318⁸ and received only two awards.⁹ Despite being shot in English and having a plethora of famous actresses and actors in supporting roles, such as Kristen Stewart, Kirsten Dunst, Viggo Mortensen and Steve Buscemi, *On the Road* was less successful than *The Motorcycle Diaries*.

According to Ana Luiza Pereira Romanielo (2014)¹⁰, in her Master Thesis about Walter Salles's road movies, urban spaces in Salles's films are characterized by "rupture, violence, nonconformity, and disintegration while rural locations are redemptive" (ROMANIELO, 2014: 110). In other words, "the road emerges as an alternative, as a way of escaping conformity and passivity" (ROMANIELO, 2014: 112). Romanielo identifies this trait in both *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *On the Road*:

Sal was in a comfortable situation, although he was not rich. He did not have to leave home in search of better living conditions or of work. He decided to leave in search of adventure, as did the protagonists in *The Motorcycle Diaries*, because he felt trapped in a traditional environment. It is the desire to free himself from the constraints of conventions and morality that motivated the journey (ROMANIELO, 2014: 102).

² This research was supported by Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brazil (CAPES) – Code 001

³ First published in 1957.

⁴ First published in 1992.

⁵ First published in 1986.

⁶ According to the website Box Office Mojo: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=motorcyclediaries.htm>

⁷ According to the website IMDB. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0318462/awards?ref_=tt_awd

⁸ According to the website Box Office Mojo. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=ontheroad.htm>

⁹ According to the website IMDB. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0337692/awards?ref_=tt_awd

¹⁰ All non-English sources have been translated by me for this article, unless otherwise indicated.

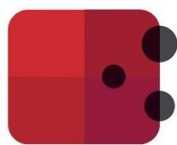


Although I agree both films can be considered road movies, I consider necessary to go beyond defining the road as a site of freedom from conventions. Romanielo's perspective is consistent with Hollywoodian generic conventions of road movies as setting "the liberation of the road against the oppression of hegemonic norms" (COHAN & HARK, 1997: 1), but, by associating the road with freedom from conventions, she also limits the critical possibilities of her own analysis. For example, Devin Orgeron (2008) questions the idea of rebellion associated with road movies, since they "extend a longstanding cinematic tradition that posits a hopeless and lamentable mobility in an effort to eulogize or find stability" (ORGERON, 2008: 2). In other words, Orgeron understands the road movie's obsession with movement as an expression of modernity's anxiety of culture moving away from the stability of community and tradition.

Likewise, the road also elicits a metonymical potential of having the travelling hero representing the identity crisis of national cultures since, according to Marcio Markendorf, "the protagonists of road movies are the modern anti-heroic versions of old *conquistadores* and their expanding territories. By operating in the poetic counterpart of the latter, road movie characters unravel their internal borders" (MARKENDORF, 2012: 224). This is a very relevant point to think about the limitations of an exclusively generic reading of the so-called road movies since protagonists of travel narratives carry with themselves beliefs that often collide internally with the cultures they interact with along the way.

For instance, *The Motorcycle Diaries* opens with an expectation for adventure across a hegemonic continent, which, Ernesto says in voice-over¹¹, he and Alberto only know through books. In addition, Alberto's expectation of "discovering" new lands, new hymns, and new fruits echoes the Spanish colonial rhetoric. As a result, the protagonists's initial expectation of discovering an unspoiled essence at the heart of the continent could be related to the myth of finding *El Dorado*, prevalent among Spanish conquerors. Likewise, *On the Road* opens with Sal's fascination with the West, which not only refers to the Western movies, but also to the expansion of the Western frontier, one of the first enterprises of the United States as colonizers. Hence, although the protagonists seek to escape the constraints of life in Buenos Aires and New Jersey, their journeys are not entirely unconventional since they resemble colonial circuits in Latin America and North America.

¹¹ Sarah Kozloff (1988) defines voice-over as "distinguishable by the fact that one could not display the speaker by adjusting the camera's position in the pictured story space; instead the voice comes from another time and space, the time and space of the discourse" (3).



Therefore, by going beyond a generic reading of the films, it is possible to investigate what Markendorf (2012: 224) calls the characters' internal borders, that is, their internal conflicts regarding cultures, allegiances and different forms of oppression. Another similar perspective is offered by Norma Alarcón through the concept of "multiple-voiced subjectivity" (1998). Alarcón refers to Rosario Morales, who wants to claim herself to be "puertorican, and U.S. American, working class and middle class, housewife and intellectual, feminist, Marxist and anti-imperialist"; she also refers to Gloria Anzaldúa, who questions "What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label" (ALARCÓN, 1998: 152, author's emphasis). Although the concepts of internal borders and multiple-voiced subjectivities are not the same, both deal with the inner subjective fractures, in contrast with a supposedly unified – Eurocentric – subject.

Considering that the protagonists of both *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *On the Road* are white men, one from Argentina and the other from the United States, the issue of internal borders is primarily discussed in this article regarding the positions of comparative privilege they occupy in neocolonial contexts. Neocolonial existence implies a multiple subjectivity since the individual belongs to two or more cultures while not belonging exclusively to neither. Therefore, neocolonial subjectivity calls the Eurocentric notion of the subject as a unified being – the Cartesian producer of knowledge – into question.

If decolonial authors have been questioning eurocentrism in a movement departing from the South towards the North,¹² there have been attempts in the North to decenter Anglo-European as the reference culture to the rest of the world. Indeed, José Jorge de Carvalho (2001) discusses different attempts to reform Anthropology and their limitations:

the ethnographic gaze has resulted from a decentering within the western worldview through which the European culture stopped being considered the reference culture. However, such decentering separated the gaze of the ethnographer, considered to be civilized, from the gaze of the 'native', the one looked upon; the latter gaze being construed as 'natural', non-critical (CARVALHO, 2001: 110).

Hence, even as anthropology tried to reform itself, it reproduced an already existing colonial power relation based on who gazes at whom. In addition, Carvalho

¹² Although postmodernism has turned terms such as North and South dated, I am using them in this article on purpose to cause reflection about how positionalities might still be relevant in a world that, despite its supposedly borderlessness, still is very much geographically heterogeneous. I go back to this issue in the next sections.



(2001: 114) situates James Clifford as part of a North American group of anthropologists who have criticized anthropological authority. Indeed, considering Clifford's ideas, we see that he has "been arguing that ethnography (in the normative practices of twentieth century anthropology) has privileged relations of dwelling over relations of travel" (CLIFFORD, 1999: 22). In other words, Clifford is interested in decentering or displacing ethnography from fieldwork and the problematic notion of "native" to the locus of the village, attempting, instead, to consider the anthropologist not bound to the land but as a traveler. After all,

[T]ravelers move about under strong cultural, political and economic compulsions and certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed. These specific circumstances are crucial determinations of the travel at issue – movements in specific colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours, and returns (CLIFFORD, 1999: 35).

Although Clifford highlights the relational element in traveling by establishing traveling as common denominator, there is also the risk of assuming that anthropologists and "travelers" are now on equal terms. In fact, Clifford himself points out another limitation of his project since "my own attempt to multiply the hands and discourses involved in 'writing culture' aims not to assert a naive democracy of plural authorship, but to loosen somewhat the monological control of the executive writer/anthropologist" (CLIFFORD, 1999: 23). As we can see in Clifford's words, even though travel as concept raises relevant questions about anthropological practices, he is not willing to relinquish authorship, that is, he still occupies the authoritative position of knowledge producer since,

If we relate to something as knowers, learned people - *le sujet supposé savoir*, the subject of the production of knowledge – it is impossible to have another relationship to learning. No anthropologist has ever, in the history of anthropology, been able to suggest that there is a ratio in the culture studied which is the equivalent of European reason. They have knocked European reason, but nobody has ever been able to substitute for it. On the other hand, it is not true that there is no ratio anywhere. It is not possible to discover it while you remain *le sujet supposé savoir*. Reason is not ceded (DANIUS; JOHNSON, 1993: 49).



Besides Anthropology's own conflicted attempts to reform itself, deconstructionism has critically considered European culture from within in terms of language, arts, politics and philosophy. For instance, "Derrida borrowed and transformed structuralism's idea that we tend to conceptualize our experience in terms of polar opposites, [...] not[ing] that these binary oppositions are also little hierarchies" (TYSON, 2006: 254). Likewise, we can think of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome as a spatial form of thought that attempts to be non-hierarchical:

The rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. [...]

It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows [...]

Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 2005: 21).

And, in turn, the line of flight, or line of becoming:

is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points. A point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination; [...]. A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 2005: 293).

As we can see, the rhizome implies a different relation with space¹³, one that attempts to be non-hierarchical, that is, that continually undermines binaries by moving in unexpected directions. The rhizome does not erase the points that form binarial

¹³ In terms of time, however, there is still a certain linearity. Although the viewer can delay events by pausing and by using slow motion, still, he or she cannot change the order of the events. Film editing software allows viewers to do so but, by rearranging events, the viewer is also creating another film to be watched linearly. The only possibility I can imagine of a non-linear cinema regarding time is that of a serial film made of independent sections that can be easily rearranged by the audience while watching.



relations, or else there would not be a middle, it just escapes in a new direction. In other words, if we are not careful to read decentering and deconstruction efforts in relation to their political and historical contexts, we might misunderstand them as mere proclamations of the redundancy of the very power relations they have sought to critically engage.

Despite its importance and prestige, even deconstructionism has not relinquished what Spivak (DANIUS; JOHNSON, 1993) referred to as the knowledge producer subject. Even though the rhizome is about directions in motion, not fixed positions, deconstructionist authors do occupy a strategic position as the ones that can authoritatively critique Western thought. Even though it might seem contradictory to consider European critical perspectives that have not relinquished the knowledge producer subject and decolonial multiple-voiced subjectivity, I am interested in contrastive analytical perspectives and their political implications. Hence, I analyze Walter Salles' movies *The Motorcycle Diaries* and *On the* in terms of Clifford's (1999) discussion of displacement and of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome (2005), making some critical points from a decolonial standpoint while also looking for conflicts in the protagonist's internal borders.

Discussion

The Motorcycle Diaries initiates with the expectation of adventure through a homogeneous continent. At the café sequence in the beginning of the film, Alberto talks about his expectations about reaching Guajira peninsula in Venezuela: "stomachs full of wine, tropical beauties. If luck is on our side, a few girls" (THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004). Alberto's comment reinforces a vision of Venezuela – and of South America per extension – as a tropical paradise, implying a dangerous parallel between virgin land and female bodies to be explored by modern *conquistadores*. In fact, Rita Lauro Segato establishes the native female body as an intersection between colonialism and patriarchy since the colonial gaze "introduces an alien morality that reduces the indigenous female body to an object while also introducing notions such as sin and capital crimes. We must relate the modern colonial exteriority – be it scientific, commercial or segregational – to the pornographic aspect of the colonial gaze" (SEGATO, 2010: 18).

The expectation of adventure through a homogeneous continent is also cued by the linearity of the route traced on a map. In the same sequence, as Ernesto mentions each place they plan to visit, in voice-over, synchronically, we have an extreme close-up of Alberto's hand tracing it in their itinerary on the map (Picture 1). Since the traced line on the map is continuous, it creates the assumption that the journey will be



straightforward, that is, not foregrounding either the problems the protagonists will face, or the linguistic and cultural fractures they will encounter.



Picture 1 – The linear route.

Source: THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004.



Picture 2 – The circular route.

Source: GUEVARA, 2003: 23.

In comparison, the map reproduced on the book *The Motorcycle Diaries: Notes on a Latin American Journey* (GUEVARA, 2003), while also not indicating linguistic and cultural fractures, is more circular than the map in the opening of the movie. The route in the movie departs from Buenos Aires and reaches Caracas, where Guevara and Granado say goodbye, whereas the route in the book returns, in 1953, to the point of origin. However, the map works as a prop in the movie, being symbolically handed from Alberto to Ernesto in their farewell sequence, a possible metaphor for Guevara's other travels. In fact, Guevara resumed traveling in the very same year he returns to Argentina, immediately after completing his studies, never returning to Argentina again.

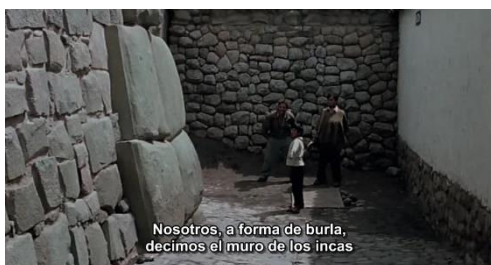
In fact, from 1953 to 1956, Ernesto Guevara traveled around Latin America again; from 1956 to 1959, Guevara was engaged in the Cuban Revolution; from 1959 to 1965, he traveled worldwide as Cuba's ambassador; in 1965, he was engaged in the Congo guerrilla, and in 1966 and 1967, he was engaged in the Bolivian guerrilla. Instead of a journey from point A to point B, this is one trip in a series of travels, or an act of traveling that never truly ends¹⁴. In other words, we have the potency of returning to travel, the line of escaping, of becoming.

However, displacement in *The Motorcycle Diaries* does not come so much from the potency or circularity of the narrative, but from the de-centering of the expected homogeneous continent. Instead of finding the indigenous heart of the continent, where indigenous people live off their lands undisturbed, and where one single cultural and

¹⁴ According to Jon Lee Anderson (2010: 34), Ernesto's family moved a lot in Argentina in his early childhood, partially because of his asthma. In addition, Ernesto covered 4000 kilometers in Argentina's countryside in 1950 alone on a bike with a small Cucciolo engine (ANDERSON, 2010: 91).



linguistic unspoiled essence can be found, the protagonists encounter a multitude of biomes, languages, cultures and peoples. For instance, instead of a homogeneous tropical landscape, the film depicts the Pampas, the Patagonia, the lakes in the border between Argentina and Chile, the Andes, the Atacama Desert, the Amazon river and forest. In addition, the protagonists are exposed to regional variations¹⁵ in Spanish, to different languages such as Mapudungun¹⁶ and Quechua¹⁷, and to rural, oral cultures¹⁸.



Picture 3 – Incas and *Incapazes*

Source: THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004.



Picture 4 – The two Mapuche and their cow

Source: THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004.

In addition, in the sequences in Cuzco and Machu Picchu, Alberto and Ernesto learn the Inca empire was devastated by the Spanish invaders. Instead of a flourishing unspoiled center of the continent, they only find the ruins of a once thriving empire. The only visible trace of the Incas is their skill in masonry and their architecture, pointed out by Don Nestor, who jokingly contrasts the wall of the Incas and the wall built by the *incapazes*, that is, the Spanish (Picture 3). Interestingly, Nestor's joke inverts the colonial logic by representing the colonizers as inferior. That and the interaction with the Quechuas, who moved to the region after the demise of the Incas, had a deep impact on the protagonists, leading Ernesto to wonder about what would have happened if the Incas had won. Nonetheless, at this point, the protagonists realize the unspoiled essence they set out to find had already been spoiled long before by the Spanish invaders, de-centering the landscape in the film.

Unfortunately, I cannot comment on all the examples of cultural and linguistic fragmentation the movie brings¹⁹. However, I would like to point out one specific example

¹⁵ In the sequences at the food market in Temuco and aboard the ship on the Amazon river.

¹⁶ In the sequence where Ernesto and Alberto hitchhike with a young Mapuche and his father.

¹⁷ In the sequence in Cuzco where Alberto and Ernesto interact with a group of Quechua craftswomen.

¹⁸ In the sequence with the two Mapuches, Ernesto and the young Mapuche man have different perspectives towards the blind cow, indicating a contact between different cultures. Moreover, in the sequence in Cuzco, one of the Quechua craftswomen is bilingual and can translate back and forth to Spanish, while another woman could not speak Spanish because she did not have the opportunity to go to school.

¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion of cultural, linguistic and class fragmentations in the movie, see my thesis (MAYA NETO, 2017).



since it is very representative of the psychological conflict the protagonist undergoes during the narrative. Right after they crash with a cow, the protagonists and the mangled motorcycle are picked up by a small truck. The other hitchhikers are a young indigenous man, his father, and their cow (Picture 4). Father and son are speaking in their own language and the audience, as Ernesto and Alberto, are unable to understand the conversation²⁰. As a result, the audience experiences a feeling of estrangement, a linguistic barrier. Ernesto tries to cross the linguistic barrier by starting a conversation with the young man in Spanish. The young man speaks Spanish but seems not to be very interested in talking to Ernesto. And when Ernesto calls attention to the cow, which is going blind, the young man shrugs his shoulders and replies "for all the shit she sees". For the young medicine student from Buenos Aires, the cow's failing vision is a problem that must be treated. But for the poor Mapuche peasants, the cow going blind is nothing extraordinary, it is just one more unfortunate thing bestowed on them.

The linguistic and cultural contact between Ernesto and the young Mapuche has deep political implications. Since "being part of modernity implies accepting the cultural values of the center and following its rules, while being neocolonial means being incapable to do the aforementioned and, at the same time, being unable to leave the system and make a new way" (PRATT, 2009: 22-23), the spectator sees that both Ernesto and the young Mapuche are neocolonial but the former aspires to emulate the rules of [post]modernity while the latter is conscious of the futility of such aspiration. In other words, Ernesto occupies a conflicted position as a neocolonial subject on one hand, and as a white Buenos Aires medicine student, on the other.

The internal conflict the protagonist experiences – between his comparative privileged position as a traveler by choice, unlike many people he meets who are forced to travel to survive, and his empathy towards their suffering – lends a special neocolonial meaning to the otherwise very European tradition of traveling as a form of *bildungsroman*. Hence, this conflict in the movie constitutes what Markendorf (2012: 224) calls internal borders, which I previously discussed. Interestingly, we can see Ernesto's internal borders in his diary of the first Latin American trip, in the sometimes-conflicting voices about issues of race and of coloniality²¹, an indication of the dialectical questioning of himself. And only in his diary of the second trip across Latin America (GUEVARA, 2011), the conflicted inner voices give way as Ernesto gradually forms his own worldview based on his activism and on meeting many left-wing exiles. In contrast, Ernesto's internal

²⁰ In his diary, the location is indicated by Ernesto as near Malleco (GUEVARA, 2003: 61), which is located between Temuco and Los Ángeles, in Chile, in the Mapuche region. So, it is possible the two men are Mapuche speaking in their language, Mapudungun.

²¹ Because of space limitations, I refrained from including and discussing excerpts from Guevara's diaries. I will probably write an article in the future only about his first two diaries.



borders are less conflicted on the film, as the character undergoes a more straightforward transformation. Because of the specificities of film adaptation and film language – the challenge of adapting a transformative journey that took place in two different travels into a single narrative; and the more psychological insight literature can give as opposed to the more dramatic or visual elements of cinema – Ernesto deals with his internal borders through encounters that impel his transformation.

A turning point in the film's narrative takes place in a cold Atacama Desert night when a peasant couple (Picture 5) looking for work in the mines shares the comfort of a fire with Alberto and Ernesto. The sequence starts with an extreme long shot of the desert landscape with the Andes Mountains in the back. As a truck driver refuses a lift to Ernesto and Alberto, they approach two human figures. As they approach, we hear in voice-over Ernesto greeting the couple and introducing himself. Then, the camera cuts to a sequence of medium close-ups of fire crackling and a kettle, Alberto, the couple, and Ernesto. The pauses between the lines of the characters, the absence of music – besides the voices, the only other sounds are the fire crackling and crickets chirping – and the darkness enveloping the characters create tension.

The tension increases as the audience gradually learns the couple have been expelled from their ancestral lands for being communists, and that they are now forced to look for work in the dangerous mines in order to survive. Shot and reverse shot indicate the emotional reaction of Ernesto and Alberto as they hear the dire history of the couple. Then, as the woman asks if Ernesto and Alberto are also looking for work, Ernesto replies they are not, so the woman asks: "why do you travel?". Alberto, unsure about what to say, looks at Ernesto, who reluctantly answers "we travel for traveling" (THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004). Here we have the contact between those that are compelled to travel, because of land conflicts and political repression, and those that choose to travel because they like it. Even though Alberto and Ernesto do not have their motorcycle anymore and rely on other people's solidarity to get by, their harsh journey becomes a privilege compared to the couple's, who have been deprived of everything besides the comfort of each other's company. The tension reaches its climax as we wait for the couple's reaction to Ernesto's honest answer.

Fortunately, the tension is resolved as the couple interprets Alberto and Ernesto's way of traveling as a blessing. Clearly touched, Ernesto removes the blanket which was wrapped around his body and hands it to the couple, and Alberto offers them a hot drink, *un mate*. The initial tension is dissolved, and the symbolism of the sequence is resignified. The glow of the firelight on each one's faces, the contrast between the cold darkness beyond and the orange warmth of the fire, the medium close-ups, followed by an establishing shot of the huddled figures around the fire set against the cold and



darkness of the desert night, all help create a sense of companionship, which is reinforced by Ernesto's voice-over narration:

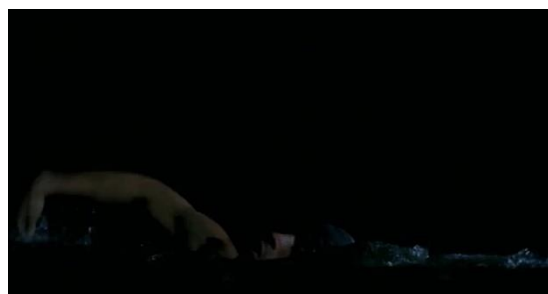
Those eyes had a dark and tragic color. They told us about militants that disappeared in mysterious circumstances and probably ended at the bottom of the sea. That was one of the coldest nights of my life, but to meet them made me feel closer to the human kind, so strange to me (THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004).

If the indigenous communist peasant couple comes to have a metonymical meaning for Ernesto, the juxtapositions in the film of light and darkness, of cold and warmth, of the desert night and the characters huddled around the fire, help create the feeling of tacit cooperation. Furthermore, another very symbolic sequence at the end of the film plays with the contrast between light and darkness. Ernesto's internal border is finally crossed as he decides to swim across the Amazon river from the privileged North margin – where there is a hospital, a lab, housing quarters for staff and nuns, and electrical power – to the South – where patients live in huts, in metonymically similar conditions to much of the poor peasantry in Latin America – immediately after his birthday speech calling for a united Latin America.

The shots of the two margins are alternated with shots of Ernesto swimming (Picture 6). There is no music and what sets the rhythm for the sequence is Ernesto's asthmatic wheezing, desperately trying to get air in his lungs as he swims southward. We can also hear muffled sounds coming from the two margins, as the Northerners try to dissuade Ernesto and the Southerners urge him on. And like the sequence in the desert night, the darkness of the sky above and of the murky waters below threaten to swallow the protagonist. Besides a fitting last feat of bravery in Ernesto's rite of passage, the river crossing also carries an allegorical symbolism of border crossing: crossing this geographical obstacle that helped segregate those considered healthy from the leper patients also stands for a political commitment that would be a major driving force in Ernesto Guevara's later years. The North margin with all its infrastructure and specialized staff comes to represent at the same time the point of departure in the narrative – Buenos Aires – and, more importantly, Europe and the United States. The South Margin with its precarious infrastructure, inhabited by lepers rejected by their families, stands for the former colonies that are now dependent on capitalist countries.



Picture 5 – The couple at the desert.
Source: THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004.



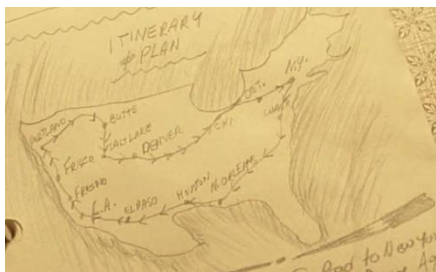
Picture 6 – Crossing the river.
Source: THE MOTORCYCLE, 2004.

In comparison, *On the Road* (ON THE ROAD, 2012) depicts a series of travels to the West, back to East, to South and North, and all over again. This circularity of motion, despite being a challenge for the audience to keep track, is justifiable since the focus of the narrative is not on the sites, but in the act of traveling itself. Nowhere is it clearer than in the sequence where Sal goes over his travel notes, finding a map, which represents the circularity of their trips across the USA (Picture 7). Instead of a linear trajectory between point A and point B, Sal's map depicts a circularity with apparently no beginning or ending. That is, according to Marco Abel (2002), a characteristic of the book *On the Road* (KEROUAC, 1976):

It is precisely the physical following and aesthetic mapping of the various roads and routes – or Deleuzian lines of flight – that characterize the entire narrative. From the beginning, *On The Road* produces the road narrative as rhizomatic. As a horizontal, rhizomatic mapping of the literary, cultural, and political "American" landscape, the novel does more than just reject an arborescent – that is, a more vertical, hierarchical, goal-oriented, or, if you will, tourist – model of traveling (Abel, 2002: 230).

Likewise, in the film, the reasons that motivate each trip become secondary in comparison to the act of traveling. In that sense, the protagonists do not hit the road only to escape conventions – which they attempt to do to a certain extent – but also to seek the "in-betweenness" of the way, Deleuze's line of flight or becoming, opening the possibility for new signification. In Sal's case, since he is the homodiegetic narrator²², the whole film can be interpreted as his attempt to write *On the Road*.

²² A character narrator is a resource commonly employed in biopics to create a sense of subjectivity and is frequently used in association with voice-over narration.



Picture 7 – Circular route.

Source: ON THE ROAD, 2012.



Picture 8 – Writer's block.

Source: ON THE ROAD, 2012.

Interspersed in the film's narrative, there are sequences depicting Sal's struggle with writer's block, staring at the blank page on his typewriter, in the confines of his room (Picture 8). In contrast, traveling, and Dean by association, has the effect of precipitating eruptions of creativity in Sal, who then avidly takes notes on his small notepad (Picture 9) or on any piece of paper he can find. Indeed, in the beginning of the movie, when Sal leaves New Jersey to meet Dean in Denver, Sal says in voice-over that "with the coming of Dean Moriarty, began the part of my life you could call 'my life on the road'" (ON THE ROAD, 2012). And, by the end of the movie, after meeting a drained-looking Dean on the streets of New York, Sal experiences the eruption of creativity again and can finally write the book, all in one sitting.



A truck with a flat board at the back with about six or seven boys sprawled out on it.

Picture 9 – Taking notes

Source: ON THE ROAD, 2012.



) Hola, welcome to paradise!

Picture 10 – *El Paraíso*

Source: ON THE ROAD, 2012.

Sal is not the only character to experience the possibilities of becoming, precipitated by the act of traveling. Indeed, the act of traveling becomes a metaphor for a new mindset and lifestyle, one that is associated with jazz beat, energy, life, risk taking and movement. For example, when Carlo, Sal, Dean, Ed Dunkel and Marylou are reunited in a New Year's Eve party in New York, after describing to Chad King his suicide attempt in his previous trip to Africa, Carlo proposes a toast to life (Picture 11):

I was twenty days at sea in the doldrums, when I decided to kill myself. And I realized that ... shit! I haven't written a fucking suicide note! I'm going over, searching my mind for the right words and then I saw all of the crew coming out onto the deck, and I couldn't jump anymore. But, in



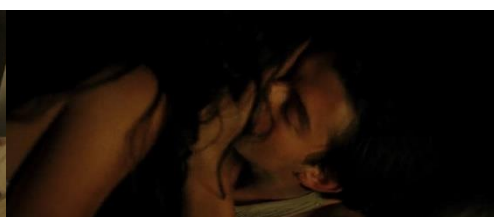
that moment, I resolved to follow my heart. To live. To experience the wisdom of life, mad with ecstasy and vengeance, a truth. [...] On that note, everybody moves their feet like you feel something, like you are alive! And on that, I want us to raise our glasses, being alive. To living and to life! (ON THE ROAD, 2012).

Besides the thrill of life, we can also perceive a juxtaposition of life and death that is related to a lifestyle of living on edge, that is, without commitment to anyone's cause and focused on living the moment. The theme of living on edge is also present in other sequences, such as when Sal hitchhikes in a truck loaded with dynamite and in the sequences when Dean drives recklessly across the country. Interestingly, in one of the many quotes from Marcel Proust's book *Swam's Way*, Dean reads aloud: "Not caring for their lives, is it? Why, what in the world is there that we should care for if it is not our lives, the only gift the Lord never offers us a second time" (ON THE ROAD, 2012).



Picture 11 – Toast to life

Source: ON THE ROAD, 2012.



Picture 12 – Terry and Sal.

Source: ON THE ROAD, 2012.

Hence, in the film, the energy and the intense lifestyle are associated with the potentials of returning to traveling and of becoming, implying movement as a result. In fact, when setting out to Louisiana with Marylou, Dean, and Ed, Sal says in voice-over: "we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one noble function of the time: move". Furthermore, the movement and the circularity of the route are also reinforced by Kerouac's bluesy poem, recited twice: the first time, in voice-over by Sal, in a beautiful media opening sequence juxtaposing the poem and the movement of Sal's feet; the second time at the end of the film, with Kerouac's original recording. Hence, Kerouac's poem (Appendix), which talks about movement, displacement, and has a circularity of its own, also works as a circular frame for the movie, bringing it full circle.

However, the displacement implied by the circularity of traveling and the act of traveling itself as a potency of becoming should not hide the internal borders of Sal and Dean. Even as they attempt to escape social conventions through a wild and libertine behavior, they carry learned beliefs and practices that end up reproducing power relations they wanted to escape from. For example, in the movie, while Sal, Bull Lee, and Dean have an intellectual discussion about the problems in literary translation, Dodie



Lee, Galatea Dunkel²³, and Marylou scrub the kitchen's floor and talk about sexually pleasing their men. Furthermore, although Dean has a lifestyle and a discourse that challenge conventions, the ways in which he treats women is extremely sexist. For example, after divorcing Marylou, he convinces her to join him in his trip to the East coast and back to the West coast, only to abandon her when they arrive in San Francisco, where Camille lives. While trying to be a fatherly figure in San Francisco, Dean leaves a pregnant Camille to take care of their other baby while he and Sal spend the night out, and to hit the road together after she kicks him out.

Besides gender, there are also racial and neocolonial issues that should be considered both in the novel and the movie. Although Marco Abel seems open to discuss gender, race, and class aspects regarding Kerouac's novel, he [over]emphasizes how "Kerouac's writing-style and its mapping of the American landscape shifts the ground altogether upon which the vast majority of Kerouac scholarship stands" (ABEL, 2002: 246), failing to see how his own stress on "invention [...], doing, activity, movement" of the culture pioneer figure whose "destiny" is of "crossing limits and frontiers" (246-7) actually erases neocolonial relations altogether from his own discussion of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

In contrast, Margaret Collopy discusses the appropriation of black culture by white counter-culture writers such as Kerouac, whose "tendency to appropriate bop culture presents itself a cruel irony as his writings – particularly *On the Road* – establish his stark romanticism of racial minorities" (COLLOPY, 2016: n.p.). Similarly, Jon Panish criticizes Kerouac for his "romanticized depictions of and references to African Americans (as well as other racial minorities – American Indians and Mexican-Americans)" since they "betray his essential lack of understanding of African American culture and the African American social experience", comparing "Kerouac's novelistic attitude toward racial minorities [...] to the stance of those 'romantic racialists' of the 1840s and 1850s" (PANISH, 1994: 107).

Overall, the issue of race in Salles' movie adaptation is more subtly present than in Kerouac's novel. Sal works side by side with Mexicans, Chinese and African-Americans in menial tasks, but he does not romanticize their social condition. Furthermore, Sal and Terry's short relationship seems to happen more as a result of attraction and loneliness than of sexualizing the color of her skin. There is indeed an interracial sex sequence, but the lighting makes their colors seem almost the same

²³ Galatea is a specially interesting character for a gender discussion since Dean convinced Ed to marry her for her money, and the two of them leave her stranded on the road. She is angry and demands they come back for her, but, eventually, she seems to conform to the position of wife, scrubbing the kitchen floor and talking about how to sexually please Ed.



(Picture 12). Racial conflict is subtly indicated by Terry's father frowning at her during dinner, the white foreman's scornful look at Sal in the cotton field, a sign "No beer sold to Indians" at a market where Sal casually steals some food, and the hostile reaction of a black woman to Sal's stare at her in a black neighborhood in California.

However, race, gender, and neocolonial issues become more apparent as the two white gringos cross the border into Mexico. Everything seems exotic to the two travelers – the people, the food, the intensity of sex in the whorehouse, even the size of marijuana joints. The currency exchange ratio between dollars and pesos favors them and the two working class white men feel as if they were rich, as if they could do anything in Mexico, including communicate in a mixture of English and broken Spanish. Once again, Rita Laura Segato's concept of Eurocentric men's pornographic gaze towards invaded lands and indigenous female bodies comes to mind, especially in the whorehouse sequence.

Named *El Paraíso*, which reminds me of Sal's last name, Paradise, the whorehouse makes me wonder whose paradise is it. Certainly not the Mexican sex workers', despite their lustfulness and frenziness. Although Sal's little neocolonial expedition is cut short by Dean's betrayal, the film does not present any possibility of questioning or of elaborating the shallow and exotic Mexican portrayal. Indeed, Mexico as a place of lawfulness and chaos, in comparison to its Northern neighbor, corresponds to the distinction Sergio Bellei makes between "border cultures – they have the capacity of making maps that establish the superiority of those within in relation to those outside – and borderline cultures – dispossessed of cartographical skills, they can only desire what is outside" (BELLEI, 2000: 150). This is especially problematic if we consider the contemporary backlash against immigrants in the United States and the project of walling off the whole of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Conclusion

Although *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) and *On the Road* (2012) can be considered road movies, the analysis should go beyond identifying generic conventions, important as they may be. An exclusivist generic reading runs the risk of not considering the contacts protagonists make and the conflicts that arise in terms of internal and external borders. Furthermore, displacement and traveling as potency of becoming must be carefully considered in order not to erase power relations, especially when white men occupy the position of homodiegetic narrators/privileged travelers.

In *The Motorcycle Diaries*, displacement does not come so much from the potency or circularity of the narrative, but from the de-centering of the expected homogeneous continent. Such displacement is achieved by frustrating the protagonists' initial expectation of finding a center of unspoiled essence, encountering in turn a multitude of



peoples and places fragmented culturally, linguistically and politically. Gradually, Ernesto faces his internal border, as a white medicine student from Argentina who comes into contact with his privilege of choosing to travel instead of being forced, to the point of crossing it figuratively at the end of the film as he literally crosses the Amazon river from North to South, the latter metonymically functioning as a symbol for neocolonial countries. In *On the Road*, displacement arises from the circularity of traveling, which is related to the potential of returning to traveling, of becoming, of creating new meanings. It is not surprising, then, that the act of traveling becomes associated in the film with the themes of creativity, energy, life and living on the edge, which, in turn, are associated with Sal's very peculiar writing process. And although the film adaptation is much more subtle in dealing with race issues than the novel, gender issues and the stereotypical portrayal of Mexico are present and should not be ignored. Unlike *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *On the Road* does not create enough spectatorial distance regarding neocolonial issues and that might explain why, as well as the reverential tone towards the Beat movement, it failed in emotionally affecting the public as the former film did.

Finally, in using the terms "North" and "South" in this article, even though they are usually associated with Anticolonialism and Twentieth-Century Marxism, I am interested in causing reflection about how positionalities are still relevant in a world that, in discourse at least, is described as borderless but that is still very much geographically heterogeneous. If, on one hand, global capitalism has intensified fluxes around the world as Appadurai (2006) pointed out, to the point of neoliberalism insisting on the redundancy of national states, on the other, the greater influx has increased geopolitical differences, political instability and economic dependency. Can capitalism, a system that historically relies on social and spatial segregation, create a world where capital, information and other forms of fluxes are homogeneously distributed? And how can I, a non-white decolonial Marxist, challenge hierarchies while also being true to my multiple-voiced subjectivity, observing the position I occupy in the world while not essentializing it or becoming fixated in words? Those were some of the questions I came across in my own internal borders when writing this article. I still cannot answer them definitively since they are ongoing as part of my research, and I shall return to them in a future article.

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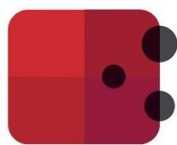
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**Appendix**

On The Road

I left New York in 1949
To go across the country without a bad blame dime
Montana in the cold cold fall
Found my father in the gambling hall

Father, Father where you been?
I've been out in the world and I'm only ten
Father, Father where you been?
I've been out in the world and I'm only ten

Don't worry about me if I should die of pleurisy

Across to Mississippi, across to Tennessee
Across the Niagara, home I'll never be
Home in ol' Medora, home in Ol' Truckee
Apalachicola, home I'll never be

Better or for worse, thick and thin
Like being married to the Little poor man
God he loves me (God he loves me)
Just like I love him (just like I love him)
I want you to do (I want you to do)
Just the same for him (just the same for him, yeah)

Well the worms eat away but don't worry watch the wind
So I left Montana on an old freight train (on an old freight train)
The night my father died in the cold cold rain (in the cold cold rain)

Road to Opelousas, road to Wounded Knee
Road to Ogallala home I'll never be
Road to Oklahoma, road to El Cahon
Road to Tahachapi, road to San Antone

Hey, hey
Home I'll never be, home I'll never be
Home I'll never be, home I'll never be
Home I'll never be, home I'll never be

(Jack Kerouac, qtd. in Romanielo 98).