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Encounters with the undead: Reading the Other(s) in Bolaño's 2666

You have to listen to women. You should never ignore a woman's fears.

- Fate's mother (Bolaño, 2009)

Abstract

In Bolaño's 2666, all roads seem to lead to Santa Teresa and its 108 dead women. This, I suspect, follows from the production of the murdered women/the murder of women as seductive spectacle – one that, while discomfoting, is yet familiar. This chapter, conversely, is grounded in the conviction that the murdered 108 women of Santa Teresa offer no new or unique knowledge. They are, instead, the confirmation of a knowledge always already understood and articulated by those still living, with whom they – the dead – share an embodiment. Accordingly, I eschew here the spectacle of the dead in order to follow two figures – yet living – who get more or less lost and forgotten in the pages and narratives that make up 2666. But it is precisely this kind of marginality that makes them significant. For it is their ability to get lost and forgotten in favour of the spectacularised dead that marks their inability to access narrative signification. This circumstance, I suggest, imitates the condition of the (racial and gendered) Other in organisation. Reading Bolaño's text through the undead, then, offers a necessary lesson for comprehending the unfolding of organizational violence.

Murdered women

In Roberto Bolaño's 2666, all roads seem to lead to Santa Teresa. The spectre of Santa Teresa, and its 108 dead women, looms large over this nearly 900-page novel. These 108 female bodies – slayed, splayed, displayed – across approximately 300 pages appear to have captured the thought and imagination of its readers. Although the novel abounds with characters and particularised narratives, it seems irrefutable that 2666 is about Santa Teresa and its murdered women (Eve, 2015, p. 5).

Indeed, the evident fate of Bolaño's text is to make dead women speak louder than those still living.

For Deckard, they speak “the systemic violence of millennial capitalism” (2012, p. 354); for Farred (2010), neoliberal genocide (also Mathew, 2016). Rodríguez reads in their murders how “violence as a condition of the workings of a power exasperated by the market is fundamentally a continuous violence exerted upon a feminine body” (2012, p. 345; see also Mccann, 2010; Reinares, 2010). Scott (2018) views in the telling of their murders ‘narrative necrosis’; Frantzen (2017), forensic fiction. Finally, Driver (2015) reckons with the account(ing) of murdered women/the murder of women as ‘*pornomiseria* or porno-misery’ – i.e. the “voyeuristic treatment of abjection” (Felipe Gómez and Margarita de la Vega-Hurtado in Driver, 2015, p. 174). In Bolaño's representation of feminicide, then, it is not the women that haunt the reader but visions of their tortured bodies (2015, p. 173).

My motivation for this chapter is driven not by the murdered women of 2666 but the profusion of readings that their murders have produced. The image of the object(ed) woman of the south, spectacularised as such in the operation of imperialism and global capital, has

long been the site of feminist, racial and political economic critique. Indeed, undertaking a reading of the world through her body is a well-rehearsed gesture (cf. Spivak, 1999, the chapter on “Culture”). Yet, in this, she is “denied autobiography... [and] *is* a blank, though generative of a text of cultural identity that only the West (or a Western-model discipline) could inscribe” (1999, p. 6, original emphasis).

My impetus for this chapter, then, follows from a suspicion that, for Bolaño’s interlocutors, the murdered women/the murder of women operate/s as seductive spectacle – one that, while discomfiting, is yet familiar; wherein the speech of the other may remain foreclosed, so that meaning may be made through a hegemonic grammar. As such, the lure of the spectacle permits the critical gaze (and analytical energies) to slide over similarly discomfiting but apparently lesser violences in the text. Yet, as Peláez (2014) argues, the killings of Santa Teresa should themselves be read as a minor violence. “The narration of the violence of femicide as minor violence”, she writes,

performs an infrapolitical position since it does not *hypostatize the victim into a transcendental, politico-theological, messianic form*. ... It thus challenges the making of a scale of violences... There is no possibility of hierarchy and thus, there is no [violence]... worse than any other. (2014, p. 35; emphasis added)

Rather than approaching violence only when it becomes recognisable *qua* violence (in this case, as femicide), it is the ecology of violence, then, that must be confronted.

Building from this critique, I ground my argument in the conviction that the murdered 108 women of Santa Teresa offer no new or unique knowledge. They are, instead, the confirmation of a knowledge always already understood and articulated by those still living, with whom they – the dead – share an embodiment. This, I suggest, is the “secret of the world hidden in [the killings]” (Bolaño, 2009, p. 248) – or at least one possible secret.

Accordingly, in this chapter, I eschew the spectacle of the dead in order to follow two figures – living – who get more or less lost and forgotten in the pages and narratives that make up 2666. But it is precisely this kind of marginality that makes them significant. For it is their ability to get lost and forgotten in favour of the spectacularised dead that marks their inability to access narrative signification.

Reading 2666 through these figures offers a necessary lesson for comprehending violence in organization(s). It is to this latter issue that I now shift my attention, before returning to Bolaño’s text.

The spectacle

Organizations, according to Flyverbom and Reinecke, are concerned with “[c]reating dramatized representations of a reality, creating spectacles” (2017, p. 1626). This imperative to produce, and produce themselves, as spectacle emerges from the need to generate impressions (in both senses). That is, spectacularization enables an organisation to not only make itself visible – i.e. noticeable – but also to cast the correct impact or influence, for herein lies (its) value (2017, p. 1630).

Flyverbom and Reinecke's account of organisation follows from Debord's (2005) notion that modern capitalist society is organised and operates through spectacle. Spectacle, here, denotes the valorization of appearances – of representation over materiality. The imperative of spectacle is to facilitate “a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system” (2005, p. 11) such that the ‘real’, material conditions of production underlying the system are – in all their banality and brutality – rendered obscure. For organisations, then, spectacles are the means through which they ‘hide, replace or perform reality’ (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017, p. 1628) in order to create and manage impressions.

Moreover, according to Debord, the spectacle is “the opposite of dialogue” (2005, p. 13). It presents, instead, as an autonomous entity that serves as “the ruling order's nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life” (2005, p. 14). Indeed, for organisations, spectacle is the dominating power through which meaning is made by, of and for itself (Flyverbom & Reinecke, 2017, p. 1630).

The constitution of society, and of organisations, as spectacle follows from the operation of spectacle not merely as a collection of images but rather as “a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 2005, p. 10). This description has particular pertinence to forms of existence instituted as Other. Whereas the spectacle, as outlined by Debord, and by Flyverbom and Reinecke, is a socio-economic effect (2005, p. 12), it operates, too, as an ethical effect in the construction of otherness.

I read in Debord's, and in Flyverbom and Reinecke's, accounts a parallel to W.E.B. du Bois' (1903) account of the veil. The veil, of course, is his seminal designation of the condition of the Black person in the United States. To be Black in the US is to be born into “a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the *revelation of the other world*” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 8; emphasis added). To be behind the veil, then, is to experience negation – to be rendered an object, indeed an appearance, about and through which meaning is made. This image, no doubt, serves and confirms the authority of white ruling order for it matters little what the Black *person* “thinks or dreams or wills... [they are] unthought of, half forgotten” (2007, p. 39).

To be behind the veil is, thus, to exist as spectacle; to be stripped of (the possibility of) self-determined life or meaning; to be denied (expression of) the conditions of own production, no matter how banal or brute; to be legible, finally yet only, as a *representation* of the ruling order's discourse. The routine violence/routineness of violence inflicted thereby lies in a “double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 8).

This latter condition is emphatically not a kind of false consciousness. On the contrary, the veil is the location of what might be called the third eye – the sense through which one experiences observing oneself as object: “the feeling that a third eye has floated out of one's body and is observing [oneself] with the dispassionate air of a zoologist examining a specimen” (Rony, 1996, p. 4). To be behind the veil is, in fact, to *know* the grammar through which one is known. And to, yet, see oneself being neither seen nor heard.

This, I suggest, is the condition of being Other in organisation. The spectacle, recall, is the opposite of dialogue. To be rendered spectacle is to be hyper-/visible yet unable to cast one's own impression. The normalization of this circumstance, through socio-historical reification,

entails that this violence – of existing as a simulation of oneself – is never recognised as violence. And, thus, the speech of the Other in organisation – indeed, all attempts at speaking this violence – remain unfamiliar. It is only when the spectacle unleashes itself as absolute negation, when all that is hidden, replaced and performed gets exposed, that violence becomes recognised.

Yet, the inability/unwillingness to pierce the veil, in the first instance, is to insist on the implosion of spectacle in order to finally face violence; it is to (know how to) approach the Other only at the point of crisis, where the *brutality* underlying the conditions of production of (social relations within) the organisation threatens to reveal itself. There is little comfort or no justice, then, in approaching the Other at this point of crisis. Far from being a critical gesture, I would venture to argue that it represents a colonial ineptitude¹ in standing with the Other.

To reiterate, then, my aim for this chapter is to demonstrate who and what gets missed – gets lost and forgotten – amidst the lure of the 108 dead, brown women. In so doing, I draw a parallel between the “morally alert criticism(s)” (Peláez, 2014, p. 33) of the murdered women/the murder of women, and the critical responsibilities of those, within organisation, morally concerned with the situation of the Other.

Accordingly, below, I follow two figures – Rebeca and Fate – who get more or less lost and forgotten in the pages and narratives that make up 2666. Rebeca is a minor character – a young, poor, indigenous woman we meet in encounters with a European academic visiting Mexico. Fate, unlike Rebeca, is not a minor character. He is an African American journalist we travel with to Mexico for over a hundred pages. Yet, what appears at risk of being lost and forgotten is the centrality of his Blackness.

In my readings below, I hope to show how Rebeca and Fate watch “the human drama from a veiled corner, where all the outer tragedy and comedy have reproduced themselves in a microcosm within” (Du Bois, 1920, p. ix). Their third eye enables a prescience that warns, albeit quietly, of the “unleashing of an ethical crisis” (Silva, 2009, p. 213). To account, then, the many murdered of Santa Teresa, is to miss, or refuse, these others who “returned gazes and who spoke, people who in many ways also were seeing [the making of spectacle]” (Rony, 1996, p. 24). Indeed, these speaking radical Others, I will argue, in representing the conditions of their own existence, prophesize the disappearance and death unfolding in Santa Teresa.

Rebeca

Rebeca is a poor, young Indian girl² who sells rugs in the crafts market in Santa Teresa. We meet her in Part I of the novel through her encounters with Manuel Espinoza, a Spanish academic who, along with his colleagues – the French Jean-Claude Pelletier and the English Elizabeth Norton, also academics – finds himself in this city, on their obsessive search for the German author Benno von Archimboldi.

¹ By colonial I mean the system whereby the Other is rendered known, or knowable, not as “the result of [the dominant subject’s] own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations” by which the Other has always already been instituted *qua* Other (Said, 1995, p. 40).

² “She said she was in high school and that if things went well, she planned to study to become a nurse” (p. 125).

Rebeca's relationship with Espinoza begins with a transaction – he buys a rug from her even though “he didn't actually like [it] very much, but the girl was nice and he spent a long time talking to her” (p. 125) – and there is an uneasy sense of/in Rebeca's knowing this transactional quality as it permeates their relationship. To be sure, this transactional character is not merely economic but, as becomes apparent in due course, sexual and, indeed, moral.

During their first encounter, Espinoza takes the time to speak with Rebeca even as he muses over her prettiness, “though [she is] possibly too thin and delicate for this taste” (p. 125). Here is Rebeca's inauguration as (Espinoza's) ethnographic object – indeed, as spectacle. Ethnography, although generally understood as the objective study of a people, describes, in fact, the relation between a (Euro-centric) spectator and their Other (Rony, 1996, p. 8). Furthermore, it describes the distance between the *I* and Other, insisting therein that “there is nothing to be learned from “them” unless it is already “ours” or comes from us” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 28). Ethnography is, thus, the practice of distancing and possession – or, of possession through distancing.³ As such, the spectacle is the proper object of the ethnographer.

For some pages and days thereafter, there is no sign or thought of Rebeca. During this time, Espinoza drifts through Santa Teresa – this city that looks like “an enormous camp of gypsies or refugees” (p. 111) – still on a quest, albeit a perfunctory one, for Archimboldi. Then, after a quick succession of confrontations with ‘reality’ – first, the departure of Norton, his lover (also Pelletier's) and, then, hearing about the murdered women of Santa Teresa – Espinoza returns, now, to the crafts market, looking for Rebeca.

During this first return, he “stroke[s] one of the rugs” as he addresses her, asking whether she remembered him. Rebeca is not surprised to see him. “She raised her eyes, looked at him, and said yes with a naturalness that made him smile” (p. 139). Rebeca, it would seem, anticipated his return.

Espinoza returns now each morning and spends most of the day with Rebeca. He asks her about herself and her family, shares meals with her, becomes familiar with her brother; he visits her home, in the neighbourhood where most of the murders happen, and meets her family – and each day he buys more rugs.

Through all this Rebeca seems to move with a sense of knowing – her third eye silently returning his ethnographic gaze.

In *The Third Eye*, Fatimah Tobing Rony describes her encounters with particular films as an experience of being shrouded by the veil:

Sometimes, there are moments in watching a film when the illusion of entering another space, another time, another experience is shattered. A tropical island. A prehistoric land. Fay Wray. Island Savages. King Kong. The Savages are speaking my language. ... I am watching myself being pictured as a Savage. I am the Bride of Kong. (1996, p. 3)

³ See also Said (1978) on orientalism and Williams (1991) on ‘propertizing’.

Encountering *King Kong* from behind the veil, Rony observes another shrouded figure – the Bride of Kong who “remains observantly silent” as she stares at “the white filmmakers trying to talk to her people” (1996, p. 17). Rendered silent herself, Rony imagines the Bride, akin to her, “read[ing] how they had made her into a spectacle. If only she had looked straight into the camera, and thus at me, a far-flung Sumatran. I wanted to cover the Bride of Kong, to unravel the weaving of this narrative, this screen – to pierce through the veil of the imagination of whiteness” (1996, p. 17).

Rebeca’s fate, like that of Rony and the Bride of Kong, is to be trapped behind the Veil – to be “pictured as a landscape, a museum display... an exotic” (Rony, 1996, p. 17). Upon encountering loss (Norton’s) and violence (femicide) Espinoza’s “reality...seemed to tear like paper scenery, and when it was stripped away it revealed what was behind it: a smoking landscape, as if someone, an angel, maybe, was tending hundreds of barbeque pits for a crowd of invisible beings” (p. 135). Within this smoking landscape, strewn with murdered women, Rebeca is a familiar and enticing feature – figurable still through “the imagination of whiteness” and, thus, representative of a more familiar, more certain, reality.

To be sure, Rebeca “turns on a recognition: [she] perceives the veil, the process of being visualized as an object, but returns the glance” (Rony, 1996, p. 213). Yet, like the Bride of Kong, she remains unheard within the seductions of brasher spectacles – “the din of roaring monsters, screaming females” (1996, p. 17) and the haunting howls of dead women.

One night, after spending his day at the market, Espinoza takes Rebeca out dancing.

As they drank Cuba libres, Rebeca told him that two of the girls that later showed up dead had been kidnapped on their way out of the club. Their bodies were dumped in the desert.

Espinoza thought that it was a bad omen that she’d told him the killer made a habit of frequenting the club. (p. 151)

When he brings her home, he kisses her and asks if she would like to sleep with him. “She nodded, several times, without saying anything” and so they make love.

While it is possible to read this as a consensual, romantic encounter – it is also, unarguably, the restaging of the originary colonial encounter, and – as both Rebeca and Espinoza seem to sense – a mirroring of the dead bodies of poor, young, women dumped in the desert.

Writing of the imagery that surrounds colonial conquest, Anne McClintock makes note of Columbus’ gynomorphic description of the earth: “it was shaped like a woman’s breast, [he said], with a protuberance upon its summit in the unmistakable shape of a nipple – toward which he was slowly sailing” (1995, p. 21). Indeed, the colonial project was materialised through the eroticization of native bodies, especially the bodies of native women, which, imagined as features of native landscapes, became objects of mystery and desire – a “fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears” (1995, p. 22; see also Said 1995).

On the one hand, this eroticization makes native lands and bodies available to exploration,

'penetration' and domination. On the other, as McClintocks notes, this eroticism is also an effect of a fear of engulfment. The *conquistadors* and explorers, finding themselves in an uncertain land amongst an unknown people, experiences a crisis of dislocation and a paranoia of emasculation. The feminization of land then becomes "a compensatory gesture... as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy" (1995, p. 24). Native lands and bodies thus further become open to command and control, to their reconstitution into a familiar worldview.

Over the course of Espinoza's visits with Rebeca, he notices that his features appear to have changed. "I look like a gentleman, he said to himself sometimes. I look younger. I look like someone else" (p. 149). Espinoza, here, standing amidst a terrible landscape "[a] fully armored Vespucci stand[ing] erect and masterful before a naked and erotically inviting woman" (McClintock, 1995, p. 25).

His last night with Rebeca – a last which is not yet spoken as such – Espinoza takes her to a hotel, and "after they had showered together he dressed her in a thong and garters and black tights and a black teddy and black spike-heeled shoes and fucked her until she was no more than a tremor in his arms" (p. 154).

The next morning, as they're saying goodbye, Rebeca asks whether she would see him again.

Espinoza, without knowing why, maybe just because he was tired, shrugged his shoulders and said you never know.

"You do know," said Rebeca, in a sad voice he didn't recognise. "Are you leaving Mexico?" she asked him.

"Someday I have to go," he answered. (p. 154)

Rebeca was not surprised when Espinoza first returned to the craft market. She was not surprised that a much older European man would show interest in her, a poor Indian schoolgirl, and desire to sleep with her. And she was not surprised when he returned, a day later, to finally say goodbye. Rebeca says nothing, only smiles a pleasant smile.

Here, again, is Rebeca's "third bemused eye" (Rony, 1996, p. 209), acknowledging her creation in Espinoza's gaze; her knowing following from centuries of Vespuccis who have rendered "America⁴'s identity a dependent extension of [theirs] and stake[d] male Europe's territorial rights to her body and, by extension, the fruits of her land" (McClintock, 1995, p. 26).

Espinoza's last night with Rebeca, as was his first and every other, is a night of romanticised rape – a rape that can be romanticised only because the colonial relationship always already negates its possibility as such. Under colonial logic, rape isn't.

"I'll come back to you," said Espinoza... "And maybe we'll get married and you'll come to Madrid with me."

It sounded as if the girl said: that would be nice, but Espinoza couldn't hear her.

"What? What?" he asked.

Rebeca was silent. (p.157)

⁴ metonym for native women as/and native lands.

The silence, “transparent, not dense” (p. 157), that greets the announcement of his departure is Rebeca’s returning Espinoza’s (colonial) gaze. Rebeca knows the conditions of her disappearance; she has already anticipated them – her subjective annihilation foretelling the possibility of a corporeal one.

250 pages later, the body of Rebeca Fernandez de Hoyos is found in Colonia Lomas del Toro. This Rebeca is 33 and a waitress.

The medical examiner wrote in his report that the cause of death had been strangulation. The dead woman had had sexual relations in the hours before her murder, although the examiner couldn’t certify whether she’d been raped or not. Probably not, he said when a final opinion was demanded. (p. 413)

For Bolaño’s readers, the younger Rebeca is by now, perhaps, already lost and forgotten.

Before Espinoza leaves Santa Teresa, he disposes of Rebeca’s rugs amongst the clerks, guards, and waiters at his hotel.

Fate

Quincy Williams, nicknamed Oscar Fate by his colleagues, is an American journalist. We meet Fate in Part 3 and follow him as he travels from the US to Mexico to cover a boxing match in Santa Teresa. Fate works for a local New York newspaper called *Black Dawn*. For the first thirty or pages of the section, Fate moves through identifiably Black US American space – meeting with an ex-Panther, visiting a black church, interviewing a black communist. In all this, Fate is unmarked, his presence is unremarkable. Yet, given that Black space in the metropole is always interruptible, always encroachable, the question about Fate’s Blackness lingers.

This question is finally answered when he arrives at the US-Mexico border. Stopped at a café, waiting for his order, Fate looks around and realizes “that no one in the whole restaurant was black except for him” (p. 264).

It is not incidental, in my opinion, that it is in a threshold moment – as Fate is no longer circulating in explicitly Black space – that Bolaño has Fate declare his Blackness. I read this as Fanon’s (1967) interpellative moment – “Look, a Black man!” – played out in Fate’s world.

Fate’s blackness, I therefore suggest, is key to his perception and experience of violence in Santa Teresa – and, arguably, his ability to *act* within it. To disregard this, is to, once again, leave this still speaking subject unheard.

Fate travels to Mexico, having been sent there unexpectedly to cover a boxing match, dogged by a feeling of unwellness and intermittent thoughts of his recently dead mother. As he heads towards the border, he is disoriented – physically and psychically – by the darkness of the

night-time desert. He considers stopping until it is light again but, despite his general unsettledness, “[h]e knew without being told that for a black man to sleep in a rental car parked on the shoulder wasn’t the best idea in Arizona” (p. 271).

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon outlines the condition of the Black man⁵ existing in a white world. The Black man exists within a social environment that has proclaimed his inferiority – an inferiority writ large upon his skin by “the white man, who had woven [him] out of details, anecdotes, stories” (1967, p. 111). Whereas for the white man, the body is a spatial schema – i.e. the unconscious means for perception and action in the world⁶ – for the Black man his body is always already the object of self- and third-party consciousness. Fanon thus asserts that the Black body exceeds existence as corporeal schema being also a historio-racial (i.e. racial-epidermal) one. Accordingly, under the white gaze, the Black man experiences, through his body, “the whole weight of his blackness”(1967, p. 150).

For the Black man, his body is an obstacle to movement, to engagement with/in the world – “[c]onsciousness of the body is a solely negating activity” (1967, p. 110). “[B]attered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’” (1967, p. 112), objectification marks his existential condition. The Black man is made to exist, then, as a highly sensitised being – hyperaware of the animosity he/his body evokes.

Indeed, this sensitization is made plain by Bolaño, who makes repeated references to Fate’s consciousness of his blackness as he moves through Santa Teresa. For instance, when a cashier at a gas station speaks to him in Spanish, Fate tells her he doesn’t understand because he is American. Later he wonders, consciousness no doubt of perceptions of his black body in Mexico:

Why didn’t I say I was African American?... Does this mean in some places I’m American and in some places I’m African American and in other places, by logical extension, I’m nobody?” (p. 283).

Soon time later, Fate finds himself amongst a group of American reporters discussing the upcoming fight. Then one of them begins to tell a story mocking Mexican fighters, laced with comments about “improving the race”, the rapes of Indian women, and “mongrel children”. The story is met by the reporters with laughter and then mock penitence.

The faces, suddenly solemn, made Fate think of a masked ball. For a brief instant he couldn’t breathe, he saw his mother’s empty apartment, he had a premonition of two people making love in a miserable room, all at the same time, a moment defined by the word *climacteric*. What are you, flacking for the Klan? Fate asked the reporter who had told the story. Watch out, looks like we got ourselves another touchy j*g, said the reporter. Fate tried to lunge at him and get a punch in..., but he was blocked by the reporters surrounding the man. (p. 289)

This encounter comes directly on the heels of Fate first hearing about the murders. “[The women] vanish into thin air”, he is told by the Mexican journalist, Chucho Flores, “here one

⁵ Fanon’s discussion here focuses explicitly on the condition of the Black man and I will continue to refer to his subject as such. Fate’s explicit positioning as a Black man further renders this appropriate.

⁶ Here Fanon draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception.

minute, gone the next. And after a while their bodies turn up in the desert” (p. 287). The condition of the (dead) women of Santa Teresa is, arguably, akin to that of the Black man as described by Fanon.

To be Black in the world is to be confronted with an unreasoned hate: “I was hated, despised, detested [because of my color], not by the neighbor across the street or my cousin on my mother’s side, but by an entire race. I was up against something unreasoned” (1967, p. 118)

Sergio González Rodríguez, the journalist who Bolaño relied upon for forensic reports of the murders, makes a similar point about the murdered women:

Women are killed for being women, and they are victims of masculine violence because they are women. It is a crime of hate against the female gender. We cannot ignore this. These are crimes of power. Yes, men are killed like flies, but they are not killed for being men. Women are. (quoted in Driver, 2015, p. 164)

Black men hated for being black. Women hated for being women. Both carrying the weight of this hate upon their bodies. And for this, their bodies are objects of disdain and destruction.

It may be argued, on the one hand, that Fate’s consciousness of his own blackness – and of its destructibility – sensitized him to the condition of the (murdered) woman of Santa Teresa. That having recently heard of their fate, he hears in the reporter’s story a repetition of their murders and also all those murders borne by his own skin. Blackness, in this account, provokes something akin to seeing with the third eye – i.e. it allows for a clarity of vision that enables the perception of ethical crises.

On the other hand, this form of argument is not necessary to take serious account of Fate’s blackness. In other words, the above events need not be associated with the sensitisation of the Black man, with third-eye sight. It is sufficient, instead, to acknowledge how these events underscore Fate’s consciousness of his blackness, and how this consciousness affects his self-perception as well as his experience of violence in Santa Teresa. Fate’s blackness, thus, is not incidental to Bolaño’s writing of him – but rather is central to the weaving of various violences in *2666*.

In order to grasp the possibility of existence within situations of crushing objectification and irrational hate, notes Fanon, the Black man may choose to act against the social causes of his neurosis. That is, the Black man must impose himself upon other men for “[m]an is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him” (1967, p. 210). To be sure, this imposition entails a demand for recognition not only of his humanness but, more crucially and within in, of his blackness, of his difference (cf. 1967, p. 221): “Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, *or else I want them to be aware of it*” (1967, p. 197; emphasis added).

I suggest, then, that to recognise Fate, we must bear the full weight of the blackness he imposes upon us. To miss this, is to dismiss him behind the veil.

As Fate moves through Santa Teresa – trying to get a sense of the city and the game he knows little about – he is overcome with a sense of strangeness; he sees things that aren't quite there, knows things that he can't quite explain – things seem to be without “the consistency of reality” (p. 313). This sense is heightened the evening of the boxing match.

In the boxing arena, Fate meets Chucho Flores and his friends Charly Cruz and Rosa Méndez – both of whom he has met before – and, for the first time, Rosa Amalfitano. This entire evening – through the match and after – carries heavy sexual overtones. Here, too, Fate's blackness seems to be front and centre.

“You're the first black man I've ever met,” said Rosa Méndez.
Charly Cruz translated. Fate smiled. Rosa Méndez smiled too.
“I liked Denzel Washington,” she said.
Charly Cruz translated and Fate smiled again.
“I've never been friends with a black man,” said Rosa Méndez, “I've seen them on TV and walking around sometimes, but there aren't many black people in the city.”
That's Rosita for you, said Charly Cruz, a good person, a little bit naïve. (p. 309-310).

Even as he is kept engaged by Rosa Méndez, Fate finds himself growing increasingly interested in Rosa Amalfitano – who, as it turns out, had recently been dating Chucho Flores. As for Flores, although he had on various prior occasions been hospitable towards Fate, this evening he looked at him “as if he'd never seen him before” (p. 310).

The Black man, writes Fanon, “is a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety” (1967, p. 154). This anxiety is at a biological, indeed genital level. “For the majority of white men⁷ the [Black man] represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state). The [Black man] is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions” (1967, p. 177).

As the evening wears on, Fate senses that he has become an unwelcome presence. Even though he suspects that they are trying to lose him, he follows the group to a restaurant, to clubs and, finally, to Charly Cruz's home. Fate thinks the men with Rosa Amalfitano are “peculiar” (p. 316) and yet he stays, realising that she, and he too, might well be in danger (cf. Levinson, 2009).

The sexualisation of Fate's presence in the group culminates in his being made to sit through a pornographic film (or, perhaps more precisely, a “porno-misery” film). As part one of the film winds down, he attempts an escape.

“Where's Rosa?” asked Fate when the film ended.
“There's a second tape,” said Charly Cruz.
“Where's Rosa?”
“In some room,” said Charly Cruz, “sucking Chucho's dick.”
...
Fate said he needed to use the bathroom.
“End of the hall, fourth door,” said Charly Cruz. “But you don't want to use the bathroom, you want to look for Rosa, you lying gringo.”
Fate laughed.

⁷ including those that have appropriated whiteness

“Well, maybe Chucho needs some help,” he said as if he were asleep and drunk at the same time. (p. 322)

Fate playing his role as the incarnation of genital potency.

Approaching the room where Rosa Amalfitano is, he hears an angry argument between Chucho Flores and another man. As he confronts the men, he realises that in order to get Rosa and himself out to safety, he must finally unleash himself: “Now I have to try to be what I am... a black guy from Harlem. A terrifying Harlem motherfucker” (p. 323).

The Black man, writes Fanon, “symbolizes the biological danger... To suffer from a phobia of [Black men] is to be afraid of the biological. For the [Black man] is only biological” (Fanon, 1967, p. 165). Further, quoting from Sartre’s *Anti-Semitism and the Jew*, Fanon analogizes the phobic condition of the Black man with that of the Jew:

Such then is this haunted man, condemned to make his choice of himself on the basis of false problems and in a false situation, deprived of the metaphysical sense by the hostility of the society that surrounds him, driven to a rationalism of despair. His life is nothing but a long flight from others and from himself. He has been alienated even from his own body; his emotional life has been cut in two; he has been reduced to pursuing the impossible dream of universal brotherhood in a world that rejects him. (Sartre quoted in Fanon, 1967, p. 181)

Reckoning with this circumstance – of genitalization, phobia and unreasoned hate – makes the Black man “akin to an obsessive neurotic type” (Fanon, 1967, p. 60). This neurosis follows from “the conflictual clusters arising in part out of the environment and in part out of the purely personal way in which that individual reacts to these influences” (1967, p. 81).

[The Black man] is afraid, he is terribly afraid. He is afraid, but of what is he afraid? Of himself. No one knows yet who he is, but he knows that fear will fill the world when the world finds out. And when the world knows, the world always expects something of the [Black man]. He is afraid lest the world know, he is afraid of the fear that the world would feel if the world knew.

...

To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world’s anticipation.

...

The [Black man] is a toy in the white man’s hands; so, in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes. (1967, pp. 139–140)

Now I have to try to be what I am... a black guy from Harlem. A terrifying Harlem motherfucker.

Yet, back at his hotel, having escaped Charly Cruz’s home with Rosa Amalfitano, Fate

began to think about everything that had happened that night and his stomach hurt. He felt a wave of heat rise to his face. He sat on the bed, covered his face with his hand, and thought of what an idiot he’d been. (p. 326)

You have to listen to women

To approach the killings of Santa Teresa as minor violence is to pierce the spectacle; to listen to women (and other Others), as Fate's mother cautions, *while they are still speaking*.

Of the 108 women dead women, one – Perla Beatriz Ochoterena – was found hanged in her room. She was a teacher, by all accounts ambitious and accomplished. She was “neat and hardworking and she never complained about anything. ... [S]he never gave anyone a hard time about anything. Her life seemed devoid of scolding and blame” (p. 517).

The detective investigating Perla Beatriz's death had no doubt it was death by suicide. They found a note on her desk:

All those dead girls.
I can't take it anymore.
I try to make a life for myself, like everyone, but how? (p. 517)

It was a heart-felt note, thought the detective, even if a bit sappy.

Later, contemplating Perla Beatriz's death, Elvira Campos, the director of a psychiatric facility in Santa Teresa, wondered:

What was it the teacher couldn't stand anymore? Life in Santa Teresa? The deaths in Santa Teresa? The underage girls who died without anyone doing anything to stop it? Would that be enough to drive a young woman to suicide? Would a college student have killed herself for that? Would a peasant girl who'd had to work hard to become a teacher have killed herself for that? (p. 519)

To live life behind the veil is to live within an “inner torment of souls [from which] the human scene without has interpreted itself... in unusual and even illuminating ways” (Du Bois, 1920, p. ix). Is it not this torment and its interpretation that Perla Beatriz could not stand anymore?

Perla Beatriz saw the making of the spectacle, the making of her as spectacle: “[p]erhaps we Savages, plunged in darkness, do understand each other. What we share is the ability to see with the “third eye”” (Rony, 1996, p. 4). In death, she returned the gaze, placing blame upon those outside the veil.⁸ Her death, the returned gaze, an indictment of those outside the veil.

Concluding his meditation on ‘The Fact of Blackness’, Fanon writes:

The crippled veteran of the Pacific war says to my brother, “Resign yourself to your color the way I got used to my stump; we're both victims.” Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation. (1967, p. 140)

⁸ See, for another example, Spivak's discussion of Bhavenshwari Bhaduri's suicide in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988)

This refusal of amputation is the refusal of negation, of being approached only as spectacle; it is to tear at the veil (du Bois), to return the gaze (Rony), to speak and insist on being heard. In each of the moments described above, Rebeca and Fate – amongst other minor(itized) characters – persist in making gestures towards rightly heard. Beyond that, there is only us, the readers, “who have the power to hear or fail to hear” (Stauffer, 2015, p. 74)

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