



Biopolitics in Roberto Bolaño's 2666, "The Part About the Crimes"

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Starting from Agamben's theories of state of exception and sovereignty and subalternity, this essay looks at Bolaño's novel as a critique of neoliberal capitalism, where the law is predicated on violence and exploitation of surplus humanity, in this case, the poor female maquiladora workers at the U.S./Mexico border. Narcotrafficking and misogyny are symptomatic of a juridical and economic order that revolves on exploitation as central to the working of transnational capitalism. As the boundary between legality and illegality breaks down, an aporetic state of exception forms, in which the transnational corporation acts as sovereign power by introducing a space of exception in the law. This force of law without law obscures the politicization of bare life, while maintaining traditional means of exploitation. The maquiladora workers emerge as docile bodies imprinted by the biopolitical power of sovereign financial capital. Powerless victims of overwork, displacement, destitution, and ultimately rape and slaughter, they objectify the violence of low wage labor in the global exchange of power and capital. In Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004), "The Part About the Crimes," the murders point to an empty specter of evil in the way they become part of the casuistic register of the "normal," catalogues of the banal, part of the everyday life in Santa Teresa. The lines are blurred between criminals – petty ones and drug lords alike, and all suspects – and policemen, who are themselves masks of evil and perpetrators of



violence against women with their misogyny, cynicism and indifferent business-as-usual attitude toward femicide. The novel belies the detective quest, which remains unresolved, as well as the linear plot, which is replaced by a seemingly arbitrary web of plots, that in the end points to a vortex of evil that collapses in on itself, void of redemption or absolution. In *2666* evil becomes a matter of intertextual contexts rather than the action of an individual agent.

2666 is a mesh of genres – academic, detective, drug cartel, apocalyptic, psychological and the journalistic thriller, all taking place on an international scale. Each of the five parts follows a particular plot, sometimes in disjunction with the other parts, because the multiple story lines do not always intersect. The plot departs from, and returns to, the Santa Teresa murders, as the core of the novel that irradiates toward all the other plots, in more or less apparent ways. The first part, “The Part About the Critics,” develops an academic plot of four European scholars of German literature (residing in Paris, Madrid, Turin, and London) in search for an elusive author, Benno von Archimboldi, whose works they read, discuss and publish on obsessively. Their scholarly relationship becomes entangled with erotic games, jealousy and violence, and their search finally leads them to Santa Teresa, where Archimboldi is rumoured to be headed. Santa Teresa is also the place where (in “The Part About Amalfitano”) another intellectual, Óscar Amalfitano, professor at the local university, unravelling in the wake of familial tragedy and the loss of his only daughter, provides a counterpoint image of the Mexican academician to that of his European fellow academics, adrift and doomed in the Mexican city over which death and violence hang like a fog. “The Part About Fate” takes place mostly in Santa Teresa and links two journalists, one American, Oscar Fate, one Mexican, Rosa, the daughter of Amalfitano, to the fate of the jailed femicide suspect, Klaus Haas, a German and U.S. citizen residing in Mexico. The last part, “The Part About Archimboldi,” travels back in time to 1920 in Prussia, where Hand Reiter is born at the court of a baroness. Their fates become entangled during the war, along with that of other characters, one a colorful Romanian general whose erotic adventures in a vampiric setting end in his murder by crucifixion. At the end of this part we find out an unexpected link between Klaus Haas and Archimboldi, via Hans Reiter’s history. The fourth part, on which I focus this essay, engages directly the murders of poor women in Santa Teresa and the half-hearted effort of the authorities at documenting and investigating the murders. The objective, detached catalogue of body parts, identities of the victims, and suspected means of torturing and murdering are chilling in their detachment, and mirror the indifference with which life as usual goes on in Santa Teresa against the repetitive backdrop of murder after unsolved murder. Parallel with the murders we learn of the existence of active drug cartel trading that goes on across the U.S./Mexican border and the tight connection between police, cartels, and forms of government in Mexico. Between the fourth and fifth parts, the murders of Santa Teresa find international resonance in the



war murders of World War II against Jewish victims, where savagery becomes part of a larger mechanism at work across history and space.

The novel deals with the issue of Law under neoliberal capitalism, where the Law itself becomes the means of expropriation and violence. Violence is an instrument of containment against surplus humanity, or what Agamben calls the "*homo sacer*" (1998). The victims of femicide and the maquiladora system are not merely exploited, but completely excluded as the waste of contemporary postcolonialism. The following victim profile is common in the novel when it comes to describing the anonymous, inconsequential condition of the targeted migrant woman: "The first dead woman of May was never identified, so it was assumed she was a migrant from some central or southern state who had stopped in Santa Teresa on her way to the United States. No one was traveling with her, no one had reported her missing" (Bolaño 2004: 359). The logic of neoliberal global economy posits that development be accompanied by exclusion and subalternity. Thus, the success of capitalism is premised on the exclusion and marginalization of its waste. The narcoculture and its violence against the undocumented migrant workers is usually blamed for the continuous string of murders in the Ciudad Juárez province (thinly masked as Santa Teresa in the novel), in order to obscure the fact that the hegemonic structures of neoliberalism have packaged Latin America as an exploited land for natural resources and as a means of obscene enjoyment of horror for the titillation of the middle class, who is removed from the direct path of violence. The plight of the undocumented female migrants searching for work at the border raises the issue of the exclusionary practices of the border and the sovereignty inherent in the concepts of "border" and "citizenship." The U.S./Mexican border engenders the violence and the social death of the victims, giving rise to a politics of death, where the migrant workers become abject bodies of subalternity. Most of the victims, young, poor, coming from the fringes of the world of prostitution or maquiladora work, are invariably discovered as tortured bodies that, "according to the forensic examination . . . had been raped and strangled" (412). In the lurid, yet clinically detached, description of each corpse found at the border, Bolaño points to the reification of bare life and the abjection of corpses mixed with the garbage from the garbage heaps, in a poetics of erasure that reinscribes bare life in the logic of neoliberalism. The bodies are paradoxically invisible in their overt and obscene corporeality. Depersonalized and dismembered, they are seen as interchangeable. The victims represent neoliberal reality, but in order to do so successfully, they have to be rendered invisible by the garbage dump.

A world at the border, Santa Teresa becomes a bridge between two worlds, but also an exploratory path back to the origins. The detective plot is strangely mixed with the mythic path of exploration of the past, as Archimboldi makes his way back to Santa Teresa in a movement similar to that of a return to the sea—his symbolic element. The desert is a quasi-primordial sea, a crossing back and return to the original chasm, from which Archimboldi gathers his knowledge of the abyss. Himself an Other (for example



Haas has a prophetic vision of Archimboldi: "The giant was coming. He was covered in blood from head to toe and he was coming now." [Bolaño 2004: 482]), he looks with the Western gaze upon the embodied void and monstrosity of the negativity against which neoliberalism defines itself. As Étienne Balibar (1991) argues, the practice of neo-racism presupposes the existence of a new racialized category of immigrant workers, minorities and dominated human groups (20) that amounts to a persistence of colonial methodology in controlling migrants and a neocolonization of migrant labor, in which bare life persists in the shadow of sovereignty. The American detective Arthur Kessler undergoes a sudden awareness of border politics and the hopelessness inherent in the conditions of Colonia México as he explores the area along the border,

where there was a permanent thunder of trucks and cars on their way to the border crossing [...] a place the police almost never ventured, [marked by] a shameful stain that they zealous young men, bore with sorrow, and why sorrow? Well, because impunity pained them, they said, whose impunity? the impunity of the gangs that controlled the drug trade in these forsaken neighborhoods, something that made Kessler think, since in principle, looking out of the car window at the fragmented landscape, it was hard to imagine any of the residents buying drugs easy to imagine them using, but hard very hard to imagine them buying, digging in their pockets to come up with enough change to make a purchase, something easy enough to imagine in the black and Hispanic ghettos up north, neighborhoods that looked placid in comparison to this dismal chaos, but the two inspectors nodded, their strong, young jaws, that's right there's lots of coke around here and all the filth that comes with it (Bolaño 2004: 602)

As a detective novel of sorts, given it offers no final solution to the murders, 2666 uses the encounter with the absurdity of death as a means to explore the senselessness and bankruptcy of individuality in the context of neoliberal global capitalism at the Mexican border. The crimes have to remain unsolved in the logic of the novel because, as Grant Farred argues, "'Why' cannot be answered without the full commitment of the state to understanding and acting against the violence done to women, the neoliberal disenfranchisement and the exploitation of women who live(d) and work(ed) in the time of the maquiladora" (2010: 699). Death extends from the victims of the maquiladora to encompass the Santa Teresa community at large, turning it into a community without subjects, for whom "death becomes the ubiquitous condition of being" (Farred 2010: 699). Furthermore, the rhizomic nature of death links the "one unknown, overinhabited place (the city that promises 'almost full employment') with every other unknowable space of potential violence against women" (2010: 699). One example comes from an inside view into the police mentality regarding the female victims they are supposed to protect. The jokes they tell underscore the extent of violence against women that has ramifications far beyond the underground of criminal organizations:



And they told jokes. [...] And many of them were about women. [...] And another: how many parts is a woman's brain divided into? *Pues* that depends, *valedores!* Depends on what, González? Depends on how hard you hit her. [...] And: how long does it take a woman to die who's been shot in the head? *Pues* seven or eight hours, depending on how long it takes the bullet to find the brain. [...] And if someone complained to González about all the chauvinist jokes, González responded that God was the chauvinist, because he made men superior. (Bolaño 2004: 552-553) (emphasis in the original)

Violence against women extends beyond Santa Teresa in the novel, across geographical and temporal locations. During the war Archimboldi witnesses soldiers raping women, and Fritz Leube, Archimboldi's and Ingeborg's landlord in the village at the Austrian border is reputed to have killed his wife by pushing her into a ravine. The violent sexual acts between Captain Entrescu and the Baroness Von Zumpe border on staged rape, with the bloodstains spreading on the sheets, while Entrescu recites lines from *Dracula*, and the vampiric and sexual violence fetishes culminate in Entrescu's crucifixion by his inferiors (some of which had previously witnessed the captain's sexual proclivities), crazed with hunger and fear, and still marvelling at their captain's superior sexual endowment in death. The sex between Archimboldi and the Baroness is marked by an orgiastic fantasy that revolves around the market of the flesh (of pimps and women slaves). This is why the secret of the world is hidden in the murders, as Oscar Fate muses in the course of his peregrinations, but it is possible that the "secret" is "the historical inability to think place with any geographical specificity or political efficacy in the global South under the conditional of neoliberalism" (Farred 2010: 700). Death confronts the maquiladora workers with the senselessness of their existence, but also with the fact that individuality itself is bankrupt when faced with the pure nakedness and incommunicability of life. As a provocative act on the scene of death, life becomes the improper and purely exterior – that which is shameful and which represents the ultimate expropriation, that which denies them shelter on earth. "The death scene [...] inscribes – or maybe even writes for the first time – the apparatus of life" (Farred 2010: 700).

The repetitive cataloguing of bodies, objectified and nameless, the non-linear lack of progression toward a resolution, the accumulation of stories moving from one geographical and temporal location to another seemingly arbitrarily, the lack of motive or psychological insight – all against the backdrop of clinical, detached forensic language – belie and rewrite the general expectations of detective fiction. As David Kurnick (2015) argues, at the functional level of detective fiction, Bolaño does away with individuality when he simply "vaporiz[es] the detective himself" (2015: 117) in a genre traditionally known for its romantic attachment to the quixotic individualist lonely detective engaged in conflict with the corrupt ruling officials, in a familiar dilemma of the "individual against the state" (2015: 116). But this sentimentality is



undercut by depersonalization in Bolaño's novel, which "refuses the orienting perspectivalism of character" (Kurnick 2015: 117): "2666 demands that we take an interpretive distance from the category of the individual. The novel is indeed 'character driven,' [...] but only in the sense that character here drives beyond itself: Bolaño's individuals relentlessly direct our attention to the structures in which they are enclosed" (2015: 118). The structures of misogyny and official neglect of the potential and actual victims underscore the systemic violence that pervades the society of Santa Teresa and desiccate and substitute the subjectivity of the typical detective. "Here then, both for the characters and the reader, the confrontation [...] is between the detective's mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart" (Omlor 2014: 667). Because the mystery of the murders remains unsolvable, insight into the psychology of the criminal mind remains a mystery as well, becoming a moment of suspension in the ordering principles of global modernity itself.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE POLITICS OF DEATH

Bolaño's novel thinks through the dialectic of death as irrelevant and political event at once because as Antonio Negri (2007) points out, the state of exception is a state of death that employs structures of power that nullify every definition of democracy:

Death as an absolute, emerging out of the dialectic between irrelevancy (the effect of neoliberal capital) and the event, demands its own thinking. Neoliberalism, nowhere more evident for Bolaño than in the exploitative conditions that obtain for the Third World women who work in the maquiladoras, does more than name the ontological conditions that govern the deployment of death in the postcolonial state. It is ironic that neoliberalism—an economic force so intent on the destruction of postcolonial resources, labor, the environment, and social structures not least among them, and so indifferent to the life or death of the state in which it operates (as long as it continues to be profitable)—is so singularly incapable of speaking to the event of death. In its most reductive formulation, neoliberalism is unable to speak [...] to that which it constitutively is. (Farred 2010: 692)

Agamben's state of exception continues in the tradition of Benjamin's *Gewalt* in *Critique of Violence* (1996), pure or divine – or, in the human sphere, revolutionary – violence, which cannot be recognized by means of a decision. For Benjamin, the state of exception is catastrophic, marking the baroque's *eskhaton* as an empty end of time that knows neither redemption nor hereafter, but remains immanent to this world. Benjamin resituates the state of exception as no longer the threshold between inside vs. outside or between the anomie vs. juridical context, but rather as a zone of absolute indeterminacy between anomie and law, in which creatures and the juridical



order are caught up in a single catastrophe. Brutal death is the catastrophe of neoliberal postcolonialism, “the only prism through which the postcolonial is thought” (Farred 2010: 693). The zone of indeterminacy between disorder and the law is occupied in 2666 by the fundamental condition of the death of the *homo sacer*. The genocide stands at the intersection between third world independence and the erosion of sovereignty. The women working in the maquiladoras cannot imagine life outside of the realm of trivial, daily, regular sequence of death after anonymous death. As Farred argues, the raped bodies found on the garbage dump

must, out of sheer historical force, belong under the sign of some political event under which it may or may not be properly categorized. The Law, in other words, gives it its official status. For the entire nation-state that is Mexico [...] there is no time outside of the maquiladora: the maquiladora instantiates the neoliberal state that incarnates death. In Santa Teresa it is impossible [...] to learn ‘how to live one’s life outside of politics and death’. (Farred 2010: 695)

Agamben’s understanding of the state of exception relies on a dialectical understanding of law and its suspension in the moment of resistance or insurrection (Agamben 2005a). Within exception, law becomes that which cannot retain its legal form and employs its own exception – the suspension of law itself. At its limit, law reveals its emptiness, its kenomatic state. Ordinarily posited as law, in exception law exceeds its own norms and enters a state of anomie, characterized by the suspension of juridical order, paradoxically still inscribed in the juridical order. Thus, the state of exception is neither internal nor external to the juridical, but caught in a zone of indifference where inside/outside do not exclude each other, but rather become blurred. Such a paradox is justified by the law of necessity, which justifies transgression by means of exception and makes licit that which, under the law, was previously not licit (through special dispensation not subject to the law). The state of exception ensues when a particular case is released from the observance and the literal application of the law and becomes judged by its very particularity. No longer exception, necessity becomes the ultimate ground of the law. From the point of view of the extrajudicial posed by these new norms, juridical order is preserved even at the moment of its violation.

This is the case with the global space that claims to be free from obstacles and able to facilitate the exportation of commodities and markets, democracy and rights, as Carlo Galli (2014) notes. However, in this space the difference between war and politics has been gradually abolished to the point where enemy and criminal have become equivalent under the policing of the Law. Galli also argues that the global space is paradoxical for two reasons: first, because it comes in immediate contact to all other spaces (i.e., glocalism). Thus, “everything can happen everywhere, anytime, and what happens in one spot immediately produces consequences in every other place on earth,” (2014: 14) as is the case with terrorism and its financial operations. Second,



the global space, though discontinuous, is also hierarchical, in a way that is not rigid or fixed, but rather following different configurations in the system of global capitalism. (2014: 14)

These problems can be summarized as follows: the redefinition of the role of post-sovereign State in the context of the Great Spaces according to which global capitalism is articulated; the transformation of the meaning of citizenship; the relationship between settlement and nomadism (a relationship which is much more productive than the one between Empire and multitudes); the role – and the reciprocal difference – between edges and boundaries, between borders and frontiers. Lastly, it is necessary to deconstruct the abstract universalism of global spatiality so to expose the manifold lines of power, both new and old, which constitute it (the line of gender, linked with that of religion, remains crucial). At the same time, it is necessary to avoid the nostalgia for frontiers, identities and close spaces. (2014: 15)

Patrick Dove (2014) argues that “*libertad*” refers “explicitly to neoliberal theory and its powerful identification of unregulated economic opportunity with freedom” (2014: 141). But, he goes on, it is a type of “*unfreedom*” (141) that has to do with the violence of expropriation and the “ideological legitimation of that violence through narratives of moral virtue” (2014: 141). In Mexico it has to do with the decline of the welfare state and the unmediated flow of transnational capital. The Free Trade Zone of northern Mexico is a “space of turbulence provoked by rapid economic growth together with the precariousness and intensified vulnerability under which the unskilled maquiladora labor force finds itself. ‘Freedom’ is a euphemism for the reduction of the workforce to bare life exposed to the cruelties of the sovereign ban” (2014: 141). Consequently, “neoliberal economic growth in northern Mexico leads not to social stability but to new forms of vulnerability—especially among working-poor women—and an intensification of anomie” (Dove 2014: 142). In the novel, *El Chile*, “the biggest illegal dump in Santa Teresa” (Bolaño 2004: 602), is representative of the condition of the surrounding inhabited areas as a whole. Seen through American eyes, Kessler’s, the city appears uninhabitable:

then they turned down a wider street just as desolate, where even the brush was covered with a thick layer of dust, as if an atomic bomb had dropped nearby and no one had noticed, except the victims, . . . but they didn’t count because they’d lost their minds or were dead even though they still walked and stared their eyes and stares straight out of a Western, the stares of Indians or bad guys, of course, in other words lunatics, people living in another dimension. (Bolaño 2004: 603)

As Dove notes, in Mexico the state has been unable to enforce order and security against the backdrop of cartel-related violence and narcotrafficking, and this has broken down the distinctions between law and illegality, order and insecurity,



particularly as the police and the army play a part in the spreading of violence and in human rights abuses, proliferating corruption at the local level (2014: 143). The novel foregrounds the fact that the borders between outside and inside, internal and external become blurred, as far as the old paradigm of Europe as central and the world as the periphery goes:

Juárez, we could say, is the point on the map that without fail directs our attention to both the map as a whole as well as the conceptual basis for modern political cartography, both of which have now become inoperative. As a nodal point for an array of new exchange circuits and trafficking flows, Juárez is the contorted and mutilated image that exposes the fractured nonunity of what used to be the sovereign nation-state (Dove 2014: 144).

STATE OF EXCEPTION AND THE FRACTURE OF THE LAW

Agamben's state of exception does not emerge in response to a normative lacuna but as a fiction of that lacuna, whose purpose is to safeguard the existence of the norm and its applicability to the situation. Juridical law is the expression of a fracture between norm and its applicability, and in extreme situations, the fracture can only be filled by the state of exception – that is, by a zone in which application is suspended, while law as such remains in force. Even if juridical order is suspended in the state of exception, order still exists, rather than its being replaced by juridical anarchy and chaos. What is inscribed within the law, and this order, however, is something essentially exterior to it: the suspension of the juridical itself. The aporia of exception consists in the fact that, by suspending the juridical, it creates a space in which the juridical sense of order can exist, even if not the juridical itself; it separates the norm from its application in order to make the application of the norm possible; and it introduces a state of anomie in the law in order to make the regulation of the real possible.

Thus, the state of exception is the place where the opposition between norm and its realization reaches the greatest intensity, and Bolaño's *Santa Teresa* is such a space, where

everything is increasingly out in the open and interconnected—or torn asunder—under the double rubric of globalization and global war: the predatory power of transnational corporate and financial capital thriving in the retreat of the regulatory state; an army that knows no restraints or oversight and whose tactics resemble those of a terrorist organization; and the cartels that act like mini-states, claiming territory in Mexico and Central America using military-grade weaponry and recruiting soldiers—not through ideology but with paying jobs—from among the growing ranks of unemployed and undertrained. (Dove 2014: 144)



The kenomatic aspect of the state of exception derives from its quality the anomic trait in which at stake is a force of law without law – or what Agamben designates as force-of-law, where potentiality and act are radically separated. In its kenomatic state, exception represents law not as fullness of power but as standstill and emptiness – law in the juridical void, where actions neither execute nor transgress law, but rather *inexecute* it, remaining undecidable, beyond the sphere of law. State of exception is not a dictatorship, but a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which legal determinations are deactivated. Such a state of legal erasure is presented by the vacuous condition of the inhabitants of the border wasteland, whose “gazes [are] no longer able to touch us, we’re aware of them but they don’t touch us they don’t adhere to our skin they shoot straight through us, thought Kessler as he moved to roll down the window. No, don’t open it, said one of the inspectors. Why not? The smell, it smells like death. It stinks” (Bolaño 2004: 603). In this space, the force-of-law is akin to a degree-zero of law, a fiction through which law attempts to encompass its own absence and appropriate the state of exception. Thus, what opens the passage toward justice is not the erasure of law, but its deactivation. Force-of-law keeps law working beyond its formal suspension. The path to justice presupposes freeing the law from canonical use and finding instead not a more proper and original use of the law, but rather a new use that is born only after it. On the path of justice, the political machine that runs at the center of power must be exposed as a machine with an empty center, to finally prepare the way for the messianic figure of Archimboldi, who emerges at the end of the novel as giant “walking in the desert, [who] kept moving farther away, as if he wanted to lose himself forever in that unfathomable and hostile land” (Bolaño 2004: 878).

Agamben holds that we cannot return to a state of law from the state of exception, but we can halt the machine and show its central fiction – the *Arcanum imperii* – and the fact that the state of exception both institutes and deactivates the law. The tension between anomie and nomos takes us to the heart of the fiction. As Dove argues, neoliberalization and global war undermine both state sovereignty and friend/enemy distinctions, which brings global capitalism to the verge of its breaking point. The modern state institutions of law and ideology can no longer regulate the flow of capital, migrant populations, and contraband trafficking. “Global war suspends the old distinctions between wartime and peacetime, war and politics, while also putting an end to the principal status formerly held by state sovereignty. [...] No doubt globalization today announces the dismantling of an old referential frame and the imminent emergence of new modes of arranging bodies, goods, and collectives in relation to one another” (Dove 2014: 145).

FEMICIDE AND BARE LIFE



In *Homo Sacer* (1998) Agamben focuses on a different variation of the state of exception. 2666 presents the female of the machista culture of Mexico as the *homo sacer*, neither in, not out, or both in and out of the patriarchal social structure. Females are supposed to reflect male power, while being excluded from it. According to Agamben, bare life is that which is excluded in the process of founding the polis. *Homo sacer* is the bare life that may be killed but not sacrificed, that which is excluded by being captured in the political system. Because it marks the foundation of the political system, bare life is both the object and the subject of the political system. *Homo sacer*, or the sacred man, is the human representation of the state of exception. A taboo figure, both august and damned, s/he is a limit figure, between human and divine law. As sacred, or bare, unpoliticized life, s/he is excluded from both the divine and the political realm. In modern politics, *homo sacer* is neither divine nor political, but akin to "lice." It is the one who has survived its own death as effigy and has become incompatible with the human world. Its residue of bare life must be excluded and exposed to a death not redeemable as sacrifice or rite. The killing of *homo sacer* is neither capital punishment nor sacrifice, but merely the killing of bare life; its death is configured neither within law, nor religion, but biopolitics. Thus, it is not natural life that is political, but bare/sacred life, because it is life exposed to death. Totalitarian states politicize life so that bare life is found within the biological body of every human being. However, the problem is not the way the state politicizes life, but the fact that in the process the limit between inclusion/exclusion becomes indistinguishable.

In the totalitarian state, or modern state, *homo sacer* is essential to political life because it marks the foundation of law: it is the object and subject of the political system. Just like the sovereign (who is neither outside, nor inside the law, and thus crucial to the foundation of law), *homo sacer* is the state of exception. As such, it is that which cannot be codified, norm-alized, legal-ized, and yet has juridical form. While it seeks to punch a hole in the law, it also creates and guarantees its validity. As that which is excluded, the female enacts a state of exception used to justify the enactment of emergency measures that strengthen the rule of the law of exclusion. Sergio González Rodríguez (2012), who appears as a journalist in the novel, talks about the femicide-machine designed to propagate the structure of neo-Fordist economy as defined by mass economic regulation on an international macroeconomic scale, automated methods, and categorized labor. This has the advantage of exploiting material and human resources while maintaining the traditional means of exploitation. (2012: 9-10). The machine leaves its mutilatory traces on the bodies of its victims and their communities.

The dispossessed of the global South, with maquiladora workers as its leftovers, are also the disposable. They are vulnerable to poverty, exploitation and murder, denied their right to subjectivity and personhood. Outside of the legal and social system, they are denied human rights and economic justice. The void they inhabit extends as a blanket of silence and sadness over Santa Teresa. Because the women are



viewed as cheap, unskilled labor that is easily disposable, they are also killed with impunity by the powerful men at the core of political, judicial and economic corruption, to the degree that “drugs, femicide, and economic success seem synonymous with each other” (Reeds 2011: 143). Because they are dislocated and denationalized, they are exploited sexually and economically. In *2666* they are reduced to the utmost degree of abjection and human waste: a corpse bearing the marks of rape, torture and murder. The subaltern woman is the powerless victim of rape and slaughtering. However, rather than “destabilizing the system, these women’s deaths actually seem to be invigorating it” (Reinares 2010: 66). They are stripped by the rights of citizenship (and in fact their abjection makes possible the emancipation of their first-world counterparts) and passed over by the eyes of the law. Their state of exception is integral to the operation of neoliberal economy. They are unworlded beings, reduced to the bare life of their biological material nakedness, where their embodiment is reducible to a marker of their poverty and void in terms of class and juridical status. Their objectification in the repetitive catalogues in the body marks the connection between crime and poverty in the novel.

[T]he depiction of the violence perpetrated against them is interleaved always with the violence of low wage labor itself, the forces that trap these bodies in the filth of Santa Teresa’s underworld. The overpowering sense of embodied being that emerges from this section, the sense of these women as subjects bound to the material body, is shaped by the global exchange of power and capital that the novel traces. (Boxall 2013: 196)

This illustrates Agamben’s claim that the homo sacer strengthens the connection between democracy and totalitarianism as systems that base their sovereignty on the exclusion of bare life from their politics. Andrew McCann (2010) discusses commodification as the fashioning of the inhuman,

where the commodification, technology, totalitarian domination ... are related to animals, ghosts, death and the subhuman, all of which have to be transcended in order to realize the freedom assumed as an ideal by cosmopolitanism. [However], the human/inhuman dyad is part of a fantasy of cosmopolitan becoming that obscures the ways in which global capitalism can produce the human and inhuman simultaneously, precisely because the forms of production and accumulation it assumes are “based on inequality and the hierarchical division of means and ends” (2010: 135).

I will consider Agamben’s notion of “the antinomy of the messianic,” according to which the “time that remains” is spent in a tension without release in which nothing can be achieved. Yet, that time is not spent in deferment of the messianic *parousia*, but as a means of grasping it. This presence comes with its own “time within time,” its own



remnant, the equivalent of Badiou's void – a zone of undecidability that affects definitions of completion and incompleteness: "Hence the past (the complete) rediscovers actuality and becomes unfulfilled, and the present (the incomplete) acquires a kind of fulfillment" (Agamben 2005b: 75). Therefore, that which is past and appears complete is challenged to open up and render visible the illusory core of its "completion" in order to reveal the fulfillment waiting in the wings of the incomplete "now-moment." The now-moment contains all the past in the move of summary or recapitulation, which "produces a *pleroma*, a saturation and fulfillment of *kairoi*" (2005b: 76). Through "*katargeo*" (a rendering inoperative of the law, similar to the sabbatical suspension of works), the messianic enacts an inversion: "potentiality passes over into actuality and meets up with its *telos*, not in the form of force or *ergon*, but in the form of *astheneia*, weakness" (Agamben 2005b: 97). Thus, "power [or potentiality] realizes itself in weakness" (2005: 97). The *telos* of power realized in weakness suggests that privation and im-potentiality maintain a kind of potentiality. Messianic power remains powerful in the form of weakness. Messianic *dynamis* is, in this sense, constitutively 'weak,' but it is precisely through its weakness that it may enact its effects. Agamben calls this weakness the "messianic inversion of the potential-act relation" (2005b: 97).

The weakness of messianism consists in "a remnant of potentiality not consumed in the act" and which "cannot be accumulated in any form of knowledge or dogma, and if it cannot impose itself as a law, it does not follow that it is passive or inert. On the contrary, it acts in its own weakness, rendering the word of law inoperative," in an act of potentiality that fulfils itself in weakness (Agamben 2005b: 137). The opportunity is that of the "as not," that of rendering the power of the old law inoperative – the old struggle of life against death – and activating a new form of power that relies on its weakness. Dying as not dying is another way of confronting death with life. It has to do with an erasure of biography, identity, the old self, singularity, face, and entering into a new community without these presuppositions. This is the community of the messianic, formed of singularities without identities. Sergei Prozorov (2007) discusses Agamben's "coming community" in terms of language and its power on a humanity that has entered it without realizing. "The experience of a language that speaks without saying anything," that "communicates its own incommunicability" (Prozorov 2007: 116) is analogous to bare life, in which humans liberate themselves from their sacredness. He goes on to say that Agamben's community is devoid of identitarian predicates and the historical traditions that have sacralized and sacrificed life.

In *The Coming Community* (1990) Agamben argues that the State can recognize any claim for identity within the State, but what it cannot tolerate is that

singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging. ... For the State, therefore, what is important is never the singularity as such, but only its inclusion



in some identity, whatever identity. A being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the State. ... Whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State. (1990: 86-87)

There is a messianic dimension to this, which Agamben, through Benjamin, presents as a reality very similar to our current world, only a little bit different, since in the messianic everything repeats itself as the same, minus its identity as such. The citizens in Agamben's community have no origins, no properties, no need for a state, and they dispense with the properties of objects and subjects. The messianic dimension in *2666* is obscured by the inversion of the Savior archetype embodied in the figure of Archimboldi. Klaus Haas's prophecy casts Archimboldi as a bloody giant who comes to save him, and while the giant is not openly associated with positive savior-like qualities, he is clearly marked as a war survivor, one who is beyond good and evil, life and death, and who alone is able to master the wasteland of death and devastation in the Mexican desert with his irrepensible movement forward, undeterred by the specter of violence and by Lotte's warning to stop:

She saw Archimboldi walking in the desert, dressed in shorts and a little straw hat, and everything around him was sand, one dune after another all the way to the horizon. She shouted something to him, she said stop, there's nowhere to go. . . "It's unfathomable *and* hostile," she told him . . . "No," said Archimboldi, and he seemed to whisper in her ear, "it's just boring, boring, boring." (Bolaño 2004: 879)

THE DETECTIVE NOVEL AS A UTOPIAN FORM

The detective form in Bolaño suffers distortions. The hard-boiled detective's masculinity, celebrated in the traditional form, undergoes a negative transformation. Machismo is the direct cause of the murders, and it is perpetuated by criminals and policemen alike, while Archimboldi, and even Hans, subvert traditional forms of machismo through their nihilist passivity and lack of direct action in the name of masculinity itself. Another way the novel subverts the detective genre is its utopian orientation toward the future. Detective novels are oriented toward the past, to the moment of the crime, whereas *2666* is open-ended and oriented toward a future of the justice-to-come (as well as, implicitly, many more femicides to happen to bring that along). Utopia is about the fulfillment of impossible desires, and the novel is messianic in the impossibility it creates for the resolution of the crimes, but also in its desperate yearning for justice for the victims and the oppressed. But, of course, the impossibility of the fulfillment of desire, just like the impossibility of messianism or utopia in the historical present, is a common tenet of psychoanalysis. In psychoanalytic terms, Santa Teresa is akin to Lacan's Real, both in its gruesome, unchecked reality of



the murders that have become trivial and everyday life, but also in its utopian impulse for an age of justice that will transform and purify the corrupted structures of society. Utopia comes about through an act of radical interruption, a heterogeneous, apocalyptic act that is incomprehensible. The murders have already done that. As it is, Santa Teresa is already a radical space of impossibility, a heterotopia.

In 2666, as McCann points out, the mutilated bodies are testimony and witness to violence that does nothing to further the narrative plot, the stock-character types of hard-boiled detective novels, while they do some of the work of sensationalist crime fiction, they are not recognizable as much as characters, as they are as cyphers “before an almost agentless sense of criminality” (2010: 138), and generally there is “a clear departure from the works of genre fiction that have hitherto attempted to fictionalize the violence of the border zone. The repetitiveness and lack of variation with which the text sets out schematic, forensic accounts of its crime scenes – including details of sexual violence and mutilation – suggest a neutral, instrumental perspective that has no power to contain or deflect the threat of violence” (McCann 2010: 138). In “The Part About the Crimes” “individual characters have been rendered largely secondary to events that are bigger than anything the rubric of the individual can accommodate” (2010: 138) and in fact McCann points out that the novel is written more in the tradition of apocalyptic fiction than adventure fiction. Archimboldi himself is eclipsed by the enormity of the crimes and landscape of Santa Teresa, as much as by his anonymity, itinerancy, and denationalized dislocation. “Archimboldi is, as it happens, a giant: a giant with the eyes of a blind man. He belongs as much to the inhuman as he does to the human, and one senses that this is the quality needed to see into the darkness of Santa Teresa” (McCann 2010: 138). His ability to see is therefore a deactivated potential that has no effect on the evolution or resolution of the murder investigation.

In “A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel” (1980) Ernst Bloch argues that the detective novel is one of the least utopian forms in its orientation to the past and its fixation on solving the crime so that the status quo can be restored. There is no production of the new as such in the detective novel. In 2666 these expectations are deconstructed. The only probing of the past is done in conjunction with the future. Archimboldi’s impulse is always future-oriented, he is always on the move, and one step ahead of the academic detectives seeking to establish his whereabouts. Archimboldi’s relation to the past is transformative, seeking to correct historical wrongs or at least extricate himself from the web of history. And, of course, the murders are never solved in the present of the narrative, but create an opening toward a messianic or apocalyptic moment of the future: the year 2666. In this regard, the novel, with its deconstructed detective conventions and its aspiration toward a utopian or dystopian future, approximates the science-fiction novel—a genre with a distinctive utopian focus. For Bloch another characteristic of the detective novel is a hermeneutic of suspicion in the Marxian tradition of uncovering the ideologies of



capitalism. The murders, like primordial sin in human history, suggest that the backward-looking glance aimed at solving the mystery of our primordial failure, require by the same token a fulfillment in an open future-to-come, which 2666 leaves open to the imagination.

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