

Spiritual Organization and Epistemic Rupture: Questing for Zion in Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*

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Reflection upon the modernist project of the categorization of knowledge and the secularization of culture has caused an existential crisis for contemporary intellectuals. The modern approach to knowledge demonstrates a polemical existence in attempting to critically approach culture while at the same time maintaining a conscientiousness of the shortcomings of epistemic organization, signaling a light nostalgia for an approach to culture that precedes the totalizing epistemology that Modernity implies. As intellectuals reflect upon the violent advent of their respective fields, they show a latent desire to return to a mythological pre-modern idyllic space through the intellectual critique of Modernity. At the same time however, intellectuals tend to recognize the benefits of Modernity and the impossibility of returning to a pre-Modern social organization. The resulting existential crisis causes intellectuals to look for new options outside of the violent epistemic totalization waged by secular projects. Like Benjamin's *Angel of History* being blindly projected through linear time, current intellectuals know that they are moving, they just do not yet know where they are going. Motion is the key however. Motion opens up the altern space necessary to project the

fantasy of hope, a hope that flirts with pre-bourgeois spirituality while remaining a product of secular Capitalist society, a search that becomes somewhat spiritual in itself. We observe this existential search down the alleyways of knowledge, teetering on the brink of the transcendental through the Visceral Realists, an avant-garde group that appears in Roberto Bolaño's groundbreaking novel, *The Savage Detectives*, offering us a cross-section of the contradictory and problematic ontology of contemporary intellectual life, and in doing so, showing hints of cathartic rejoinders.

To approach knowledge, in the Western/Modern sense of the word, is to approach a complex colonial systematization of plural existence. When I say plural existence, I do not mean that the totalizing epistemology of the West is plural in itself but that it singularizes the plural. It is to say that Western/Modern knowledge codifies plurality singularly, or through the singularity of locution and does not necessarily give agency to the cultures/knowledges totalized within its systematic organization. Let us take the Spanish conquest as an example of the subjugation of autochthonous agency in the name of a totalizing episteme. A common trend in the disregard of local knowledge in the name of a grander metanarrative within the New World can be traced from Columbus's arrival through the present day. With the arrival of Columbus, the Spanish justified the subjugation of the autochthonous populations through the metanarrative of the salvation of souls. This narrative was, of course, superficial as Columbus merely used religiosity as a means of marketing the continuation of his exploration of the New World, which in turn paid dividends in resources such as gold and silver that were exotic to Europeans and as a result were valued commodities. This fact, accompanied by the initial impetus of Columbus's voyage, the exploration of new trade routes to the Indies, signals that even the pre-Capitalist voyages funded by Ferdinand and Isabelle showed signs of foundational Atlantic mercantile dominance. Additionally, the subjugation of autochthonous knowledges and religions as a means of justifying the further exploitation of the New World resources shows that in this novel historical moment of the conquest of mind, body, and soul, the inextricable link between economic, epistemic, and spiritual dominance arises.

But the Spanish conquest of the New World precedes the secularization of knowledge that occurs through the rise of a

European middle class, democratic revolutions, and the rationalization of society. In other words, the example of Spanish colonialism does not adequately describe the Modern coloniality of knowledge because, in effect, it precedes Modernity. It is during the 18th century that the metanarrative of reason and the creation of the nation-state displaces the metanarrative of the salvation of souls. Homocentric and democratic European/North American society purports the rationalization of knowledge based on the inheritance of Modern European philosophy as their founding narrative, thus painting the spiritual or the non-*eurorational* as ontologically inferior in all aspects. Nonetheless, enlightened society continues to be economically dependent on trade with the colonies showing the continuation of the pre-modern Spanish colonial project on at least one level. Even in Adam Smith's *Leyenda Negra* ridden account of Spain's imperial failure, Smith describes England's dependency on the colonies as a means of maintaining an economic advantage over other European nations. As Northern Europe, namely France and England, displaces the Spanish religious-based conquest with their own reason-centered culturally-based conquest, they essentially do little more than displace the discourse of the salvation of souls with the discourse of civilization, while at the same time maintaining the same colonial dynamic under the guise of a new name. The Northern European approach then falls victim to its own critique due to the fact that the rationality that Moderns use as a measuring stick to classify and organize society and existence in the process of turning ontology into a commodity of knowledge within the universal academic system repeats the centrality of religion in the Spanish conquest. Christ is simply replaced by Kant and Descartes, and salvation is replaced by the *eurorationality* that pretends to be an objective ahistorical entity that grants itself the right to codify and organize the world.

To say that the epistemic organization that accompanied the birth of Modernity exhibits biased and colonial tendencies, at this point, is a redundant recapitulation of postmodern common sense. However, I feel that it is necessary to give specific examples of biased totalizing narratives as a means of slicing open Modernity to show that its inner workings are built more on coloniality than the superficial narrative of the pursuit of knowledge and a homocentric universe. In my appraisal of Modernity, I will give a summary of Santiago Castro-Gomez's critique of totalizing knowledge as byproduct of the spread of capital. Additionally, in my assessment, I

take for granted certain foundational postmodern theories such as Lyotard's understanding of the death of the metanarrative and Foucault's exhibition of the role of authority in the creation of knowledge.

In his article "*The Missing Chapter of Empire: Postmodern reorganization of coloniality and post-Fordist capitalism*," Santiago Castro-Gomez raises the question of epistemological plurality by asking if "it is possible to share a single world where many worlds are possible" (429). To answer his own question, to which the eventual answer is no, Castro-Gomez enters into a dialogue with Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's book *Empire*, which proposes the death of colonialism, and as a result, the possibility of epistemological plurality within the context of post-colonialism. To fully understand Castro-Gomez's dissent, it is useful to delineate Hardt and Negri's hypothesis. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri point out that the nation-state and the evocation of the bourgeois citizen work in tandem with Modernity. The rise of the nation-state further consists of the rationalization of all areas of society, which implies the creation of specialized knowledge. Additionally, Modernity depends on a rigid barrier between an *inside* and an *outside*. This binary is crucial for both the reproduction of capital and for the creation of a local identity through the discursive fabrication of the barbaric other as a means of evoking the civilized self. In keeping with the argument that Colonialism is a structuralist counterpart to Modernity, Hardt and Negri argue that the shift to post-Modernity should also imply a move to post-Coloniality, a train of thought that follows the implications of their assessment of contemporary political economy, or the *inside's* complete absorption of the *outside*, the erosion of the nation-state, the breakdown of the metropolis-periphery binary, the global reach of uneven development, and most importantly, the fact that the global economy is no longer based on the production of tangible goods but on the production and administration of "knowledge and information" (Castro-Gomez). Castro-Gomez argues that despite the dissolving of the nation-state that should seemingly be accompanied by the de-centering of the locution of knowledge, a systematic reproduction of the Modern colonial system within the new space of post-Modernity has occurred. Castro-Gomez goes on to cite the exploration and conquering of biodiversity found predominantly in South America as an example. He describes a situation in which large international corporations explore biodiversity and knowledges of non-Western

communities and extract information that could be useful to them. Subsequently, these companies go on to reorganize this information, turn it into a commodity, and redistribute it throughout the world as a means of reproducing capital. Castro-Gomez describes this process as the episteme codifying the doxa. The episteme continues to represent the subjective point of locution that we have seen repeated throughout the two other colonial models already delineated. In the pre-Modern context, the Spanish conquer the indigenous communities of the New World on an epistemic, corporeal, and spiritual level. In the modern context, the Northern Europeans conquer the international episteme by attempting to rationalize the world through a totalizing and normative concept of knowledge and culture. In the post-Modern context, as Castro-Gomez points out, finance capitalism creates the necessity to continue to codify and categorize knowledge, thus continuing to conquer on an epistemic level despite the end of the national *inside/outside* based project of Modernity.

The foundations of Castro-Gomez's description of the episteme codifying the doxa roots itself in the advent of modern political economy that takes place through both a theological and a rational approach to autochthonous knowledges and ontologies. Both theologically, as is the case in the Spanish appellation of indigenous populations as spiritually void, and *rationality*, as can be seen in modern philosophy ranging from Kant's racial tetragon through Hegel's *absolute spirit* and into the epistemic organization associated with current academic fields, political economy has always been organized by a Western zero-point that arrogantly grants itself the omnipotence of interpreter of ahistorical locution. As Walter Mignolo argues, this process is carried out through the *othering* and the *exoticizing* of exogenous ontologies. These two mechanisms are the tools of the codifying process, with the locus of elocution *exoticizing* similar cultures and *othering* cultures of difference. Mignolo contends that the populations and ontologies that are *othered* and *exoticized*, tend to react in two ways. The *exoticized* tend to react with counternarratives of similarity or "sameness," while the *othered* react with the argument of difference. The problems with these two counternarratives, when viewed in their broadest sense, is that both fall into the trap of playing within the discourse and episteme dictated by the zero-point. This attempt can be viewed as futile, or as lost before it is even carried out, as it gives up as soon as it begins.

The resulting situation shows a clear need for an alternative option in order to challenge the zero-point of global design. Or articulated in a different way, there is a need for an epistemic shift or a challenging of the geopolitics of knowledge. But in order to begin to break down the aforementioned mechanisms of knowledge, we need to fully understand how they operate. The idea that any group or society can be *othered* or *exotcized* reflects the hegemonic system of global design that divides the world, essentially, into subjects and objects. The subjects, as I mentioned earlier, enjoy and grant themselves the privileged space of locution, and as a result, hegemony radiates from these metropolitan spaces. The objective or peripheral nations act more as sources of knowledge than consumers and designers within the global hegemonic system. In turn, they are objects of gaze and not speaking subjects. The question then necessarily arises: How is it that knowledge can be so slanted? To begin, we must stop focusing on knowledge as a hermetic entity that is not affected by other global relations. To do this would be to ignore the partial foundations of knowledge that are tied up in other colonial interests. That is to say, we need to examine knowledge, as only one element in what constitutes what Aníbal Quijano refers to as the larger colonial matrix of power. Quijano describes the colonial matrix of power as being made up of four principal domains: economy, religion/knowledge, gender/sexuality, and authority/politics. In other words, to fully understand the anatomy and archaeology of anyone of these institutions, we must understand them as they exist in relation to one another, and furthermore, within the context of the hegemonic power structure that purports them. To understand the object of knowledge, it is necessary to understand the subject, and to understand the subject, we must examine the root of its ability. For the subject, based in the zero-point, or the locus of elocution, to be in the position to design knowledge, authority, politics, and economy, there is the need for a great amount of capital. When I refer to capital, I mean it in the broadest sense of the word. I refer to here both financial capital and symbolic capital. Financial capital being that which constantly attempts to reproduce itself, as Karl Polanyi points out, with disregard for society, and symbolic capital that while working in tandem with financial capital, is just as important and dynamic of an agent within the colonial matrix of power. In a sense, financial capital buys symbolic capital and symbolic capital lays the groundwork, paves the way, and justifies the actions of financial capital. Financial capital manipulates and takes advantage of the

market while symbolic capital creates the market. Financial capital reorganizes society while symbolic capital discursively mends the open wounds created by reorganization, attempting to make the violent appear natural. Symbolic capital works in myriad ways, but one of its most dangerous faces is as an apologist for finance capital's disregard for society. In this sense, symbolic capital acts, within the colonial matrix of power, as the zero-point of knowledge while financial capital buys the throne for symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital then can be viewed in a Foucauldian sense as institutionalized knowledge/gender/economy/authority that continuously justifies its own position, therefore creating a cyclical power structure within its relation to the *docile bodies* that make up the actual biological subjects of these discourses. But we must go beyond Foucauldian philosophy to find a remedy. If we were to simply consider ourselves as *docile bodies* within the colonial matrix of power, there would never be a chance to exploit the holes in the subjective forces of capital. In other words, we need to look beyond Foucault and actually realize that it is in effect because symbolic and financial capital have worked their way through institutionalized being that the colonial matrix of power is actually a frail object. The fact that knowledge is created within its relation to the three other domains mentioned, opens up a space for subjective encounter and reworking of the international episteme. Let us examine different approaches to undoing hegemonic knowledge. One approach consists in the complete ignoring of Western global designs. However as Hardt, Negri, and Castro-Gomez point out, the attempt to begin to speak of the *outside* in the post-Modern setting is anachronistic due to the fact that the *inside* has already totally absorbed the *outside*. But if we approach the existence of an *outside* as a product of the locution of the *inside*, then we see that the *outside* only exists because, as we have already seen, the symbolic forces of the *inside* create a space for it through its tools of *othering* and *exoticizing*. The resulting alternative is a need to cause epistemic rupture not from the *outside* but within a space of exteriority that dwells in the borders and exploits the grey areas, thus accentuating the weakness and triviality of the rigid totalized episteme.

Epistemic rupture is realized through the questioning and challenging of the totalizing narratives and epistemic organization of knowledge. If epistemology is carried out temporally through the

reproduction of bodies and minds, challenges and epistemic shifts in modern intellectual community cause a resistance of biopower that creates a space of exteriority to the framework of totalized knowledge, highlighting the fallbacks and reductionisms of totality. In other words, epistemic shifts that are realized through the reproduction of biopower that constitute counternarratives should constantly question the validity of the counternarrative itself, or while remaining conscious of the inherent flaws of knowledge. Borrowing from Castro-Gomez's vocabulary, the doxa would not flee from the episteme but would travel to its borders. Plural locution can work its way into the totalized episteme by becoming active subjects instead of docile objects. Viewed then within the four-domain framework of the colonial matrix of power, alternative knowledges and ontologies can be created by agents consciously breaking with the codified norm within the border of all of the delineated fields. Alternative knowledges and epistemes can be taught within the Western academic framework. Cross-dressing and the exercise of sexuality and gender that escapes from the institutionalized status-quo has occurred and will continue to occur despite what traditional epistemology will argue. Authority is challenged through constant critique and by realizing the imperfection of all governmental systems. In terms of the economy, the black market does wonders to manipulate the official economy on a global scale. Ontologies and knowledges that escape from the colonial matrix of power exist. The challenge is to make these practices visible, or to create alternative epistemologies without committing the same reductionisms and violent codifications of the colonial matrix of power. This is where avant-garde movements and *splinter groups of knowledge* are good examples of challenges that can result in positive ends. Avant-garde movements wage constant attack on the status-quo from the position of the periphery. *Splinter groups of knowledge* work from the border of the totalized episteme to highlight its flaws, thus causing the questioning of all facets of the colonial matrix of power. Both signal possible ways of existing and learning *otherwise*. They do not passively accept institutionalized ontology but recognize its frailty and actively, through the reproduction of alternative ontologies and knowledges, begin to pick at the glue that holds coloniality together.

The Visceral Realists from *The Savage Detectives* do a good job of highlighting the fractures in the colonial matrix of power while avoiding the violence of reductionism. Roberto Bolaño introduces the

Visceral Realists and its constantly shifting body politic through a fragmented montage narrative form. The majority of the novel outlines the two main characters and revivers of Visceral Realism, Arturo Belano, loosely based on Bolaño himself, and Ulises Lima, a character whose name is by no means a matter of chance. The narrative that describes the avant-garde group and their members is constructed by gaining retrospective insight from anyone that has come into contact with either of the two foundational figures. A multitude of narrators describe, in the first person, their experience with Belano and Lima, a trajectory that begins in Mexico City while the two are teenagers and ends up traveling through Europe, Africa and Israel ending with the main characters approaching their forties. The formation of the narrative in itself points to the shortcomings of categorized knowledge by seeking out a plurality of voices in describing the history of the Visceral Realists, many times with these stories contradicting one another.

As Belano and Lima travel geographically they also continuously shed their ideological skin, showing signs of constant motion both physically and intellectually. One trait that unites all of the Visceral Realists and something that its founding members never abandon is the constant critique and disillusion with epistemic structuring. Through their constant challenge of knowledge, they seek out new demigods, challenge State knowledge and iconic literary figures, manipulate the market, and more importantly never pause long enough for any of their actions or ideologies to become ossified and categorized. The group's members initially organize themselves when they meet in a state-university sponsored poetry class. The narrator of the first third of the book, Juan García Madero, who is not a member of the Visceral Realists at the start of the novel, relates his acceptance and introduction into the group starting with their foundational disagreement with the professor of the poetry seminar. After a couple nights of attending the seminar, García Madero describes how he used to ask questions that the professor could not answer, eventually getting him thrown out of the seminar but while gaining his peers respect and approval at the same time. It is worth noting that Belano, Lima, and the rest of the Visceral Realists are in their late teens at this point, so their challenge of authority seems somewhat natural. But these are well versed, motivated, and emotionally mature young adults. Belano, a native Chilean, lives in Mexico in exile, and the other Visceral Realists argue about poetic

technique and the world literary canon with convincing fluency. Youth is not used to show a sort of naïveté or ignorance but instead underlines the cult of novelty so important to any avant-garde group along with their collective hope that is projected onto the future. Apart from bonding due to a mutual distaste for the institutionalized knowledge of the Mexican university system, the Visceral Realists also find common ground in their collective repugnance toward Octavio Paz. Paz for them represents the converse of the path that Mexican poetry, and by synecdochical extension, Latin American letters, should take. Through their challenging of official national knowledge, represented in icons such as Paz, and through the means of disillusionment with the centralized university system, the Visceral Realists form an identity through the negation of national epistemology.

But negation alone does not constitute a counternarrative, and the Visceral Realists are aware of this. In addition to vilifying Mexico's only Nobel laureate of literature, Belano, Lima, and their followers exalt and sanctify the original Visceral Realist poet: the long lost and forgotten Cesárea Tinajero who disappeared in the Sonora dessert at the height of her literary career while publishing in her own magazine *Octavo*. A large portion of the novel tracks the young Visceral Realists in the seventies as they attempt to uncover more information about the scarcely remembered literary hero. In the process, it becomes evident that they have sanctified her, and that she is an icon that is as important to their collective identity as the negation of Octavio Paz. Here we see the villain-savior dialectic repeating and underlying the spiritual search that the Visceral Realists wage as they attempt to break with official pseudo-secular epistemology.

Spirituality is a topic that only scarcely comes up in an explicit way despite the multitude of characters in the novel. However, the journey that the Visceral Realist, and more importantly the movement's three key figures, Tinajero, Lima, and Belano, take, beginning with a simple disenchantment with official state knowledge and literary epistemology, turns into a metaphysical search, with these characters constantly trying to find truth beyond superficial structuralism. As I have already mentioned, Tinajero disappears in the middle of her literary career. In researching her life, the young Visceral Realists, Lima, Belano, and García Madero eventually track

her down in the North of Mexico while fleeing from an angry pimp that is unrelentingly chasing them and a whore that they helped escape from Mexico City. The angry pimp, Alberto, will, undoubtedly kill them as soon as he finds them, and all parties involved are conscious of this inevitable bloody encounter. Lima, Belano, and García Madero find Tinajero by deducting her location from the information that they receive from multiple local oral histories, and upon finding her, they discover that she is living like a peasant. After speaking with locals, they come to understand that Tinajero is known as a mysterious figure that once wrote voraciously and appeared in the North in an attempt to rediscover Aztlán: “Ortiz Pacheco didn’t even know what Aztlán meant, never having heard the word before in his life. So Avellaneda explained it to him from the beginning, telling him about the sacred city of the first Mexicans, the city of legend, the undiscovered city, Plato’s true Atlantis, and when they got back to the hotel, half drunk, Ortiz Pacheco thought that only Cesárea could be responsible for such wild ideas” (549). When the disciples of Visceral Realism find out that their founding figure abandoned her literary post in the 20’s in order to pursue a higher spiritual plain, or to attempt to find the mythological idyllic space of Aztlán, they are deeply impacted, and shortly after Ortiz Pacheco explains her spiritual fixation, they finally meet Tinajero face to face. Upon meeting her, Tinajero announces that she will accompany the Visceral Realists in their journey, although she does not give any rational explanation of why. This is followed shortly thereafter by the inevitable confrontation with Alberto the pimp, in which Tinajero sacrifices her life and at the same time kills Alberto in order to save the young Visceral Realists. The encounter is replete with religious undertones. Tinajero, the foundational mythical figure of the movement that the young poets use as a means to organize, mobilize, and transcend the violent epistemic organization by which they feel displaced, sacrifices her life to save her followers. Tinajero, a spiritual figure herself, that writes poetry about Zion, left society fifty years prior to the bloody encounter in pursuit of the Mexican equivalent of the Garden of Eden and only becomes active within the storyline in order to sacrifice her life so that the younger generation of Visceral Realists can continue their attempt to transcend their current milieu. After Tinajero’s death, Belano and Lima follow her example and enter into a twenty-five year diaspora that eventually entails the death of Visceral Realism itself.

Apart from Tinajero's search for Aztlán, references to an idyllic mythological space surface during the travels of Lima and Belano. After Tinajero's death, Lima and Belano both begin to travel constantly. They turn up in countries all over Europe, arriving and departing without explanation. They meet people, usually members of the local intelligentsia, exchange ideas, bum food and shelter, and continue the journey with an almost somnambulist air. The one thing that remains constant in their journeys is perpetual motion, motion that is working toward an idyllic focal point, a motion that keeps them from being narrowed and codified. As soon as other characters get to know Belano or Lima well enough to categorize them and place them within their own structuralist frame, Belano and Lima depart. These are two characters that are terrified of the violence of official knowledge. In one instance, when a well-renowned critic in Barcelona decides to write a review of one of Belano's books, Belano challenges him to a fencing duel to first blood, a scene that highlights Belano's fear of entering into the commodified cultural epistemology of the book market. Instead of simply accepting the book review, he challenges the critique to a pre-Modern battle of honor, showing his desire to find hope within the idyllic past. But Belano and Lima are not simple pre-Modern fetishists, but instead, like any good spiritual searcher, two characters trying to find the idyllic garden through constant motion, always working toward the future.

Belano and Lima work on similar levels, despite their respective lines of flight. Both travel from Mexico to Spain and then throughout Europe, although they do not arrive in Europe together, and their paths only cross once. But once they depart from Europe, their exclusive trajectories take decidedly different paths. Following his duel with the Catalonian literary critic, Belano, travels to Africa, with plans, at least originally, to die. Lima on the other hand travels to Israel with no specific agenda in mind. Both travel from the New World to Europe and then to Africa and Israel, tracing the linear telos of history of Western cosmology in reverse, burlesquing Hegelian historical organization. Upon finding discontent with the Modern organization of the New World, both Lima and Belano work backwards and find nothing but contradictions along the way, ending up in Israel, the Judeo-Christian Zion, and Africa, the crucible of humanity and also Zion to religions such as Rastafari. But neither finds a peaceful Garden of Eden in their travels. In continuing the critique of Modern global design and historical organization, Belano

arrives in a Liberia in the midst of catastrophic guerilla warfare whereas Lima arrives in a violent Israel suffering from the symptoms of post-World War II Western global dominance. Both Africa and Israel, despite their spiritual significance, are spaces of violence due to Western-Modern economic and political designs, which emphasize the reason for Lima and Belano's spiritual search in the first place, an attempt to go beyond modern hegemony and epistemology in order to find a space of exteriority that exploits the shortcomings of Modernity itself.

Epistemology and the unifying properties of religious style social organization are not hermetically isolated from the market in the novel. To leave the market out of the storyline would be an injustice considering that the Atlantic hegemonic system established as early as the Spaniards first arrival in Mexico plays a crucial role in the ontological problems that inspire the Visceral Realists' metaphysical search. Also, as autonomous as any avant-garde group tries to be, capital always plays a key role in their foundation and the dissemination of their work. Belano and Lima exploit the economy in a way that allows them to fund their magazine, *Lee Harvey Oswald*, while they are still in Mexico, and also, as is seen in an episode in a French port city, to simply survive until moving on to the next destination. While in Mexico, Belano and Lima sell Acapulco Gold, credited as the best marijuana in Mexico. Here we see that Belano and Lima exploit the market by selling an illegal product outside of the official economy in order to fund a magazine that will create an alternative epistemology. In funding their magazine with marijuana, the Visceral Realists exploit the holes in both Western economic hegemony and state/status-quo epistemology on various levels. The name of the magazine, *Lee Harvey Oswald*, shows their iconoclast approach to history and Western global design. The Visceral Realists publish the magazine in the mid-seventies, just one decade after Kennedy's assassination, and in taking the name of Kennedy's assassin, they show their desire to challenge the global dominance that at that time would have divided the world into two juxtaposing polls. Beyond this critique of exogenous ideology, myths and conspiracy theories of Kennedy's assassination are rampant, marking one of the most controversial moments in North American official history and, additionally, drawing attention to the polemics and reductionism of official knowledge.

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The other marked moment in which Belano and Lima manipulate the market occurs in Port-Vendre, France, several years after they depart from Mexico and takes on a much more spiritual air alluding to the religious undertones of the Visceral Realists. In this passage, Belano and Lima stumble upon one another inexplicably after having been apart for several years. While together, they lie Lima's way into a job as a seaman, claiming that he has had a lot of experience at sea, despite the fact that, as one witness puts it, "...it was obvious it wasn't true..." (245). The experience at sea takes on a biblical air when the sea company puts out their nets in a place in which they had never fished before, and in doing so, reaping the biggest catch that the captain and his crew have ever caught. The reference to the biblical account is enhanced by the fact that Lima uses the money from the catch to travel to Israel. Lima manipulates the market in a similar way as in Mexico. However, while the money that he acquires in Mexico implies a challenge to Western hegemony and epistemology, the episode in France emphasizes the Visceral Realist's spiritual search and religious organization, both funded through a manipulation of the market.

But why does Bolaño open his ambulant characters to a spiritual reading? Isn't religion and especially institutionalized spirituality a main player in the epistemic violence from which the Visceral Realists try to escape? The answer lies in how religion is approached. In his book *Orientalism and Religion*, Richard King shows the importance of two different etymological readings in the shaping of the modern understanding of religion and, by extension, secularism. King points out that in the pre-Christian era the Roman orator Cicero defined religion in the sense of *relegare* or "to re-trace or re-read," and "retracing the 'lore of the ritual' of one's ancestors" (35). This understanding of religion places a heavy emphasis on a common culture and background that is exalted through ritual. To explore these rituals, the members of a group "retrace" their common links in the past and socially organize themselves culturally. In this way cultural practice, social organization, and religion look to their own autochthonous past as a means of uniting. The idea of a unifying singular religious entity or culture is not compatible with religion understood as *relegare*, and power struggles over God and the pretense of interpreting sovereignty are foreign to this means of organization. A totalizing narrative of theism, according to King, arises with Lactantius's etymological reading of religion as *religare*.

In contrast to *relegare*, *religare* implies a binding together through, “a worship of the truth,” and “a superstition of the false” (36). The idea of a singular truth and a disregard for all other approaches to cultural and spirituality erupt evidently through Lactantius’s reading. Here we see the philosophical foundation of the *hubris of the zero-point* and the violence of epistemic totality mediated by singular dogma. An emphasis on interpretation and application of doctrine replaces cultural practice as a means of social organization based on a cultural collectivity, and in doing so, opens the door to the violent globalism from which the Visceral Realists attempt to break.

The Visceral Realists are socially organized through a unifying spiritual focal point carried out through their mutual love for literature. But they are not content with the indoctrinated knowledge of the institutions that surround them in Mexico City, namely state-controlled knowledge and the Catholic Church, both institutions ascribing to a *religare* style evocation of subjectivity, a violent authority-centered interpretation of both religion and culture. The Visceral Realists, on the other hand, through a *relegare* style organization create their own space by retracing and exalting a literary figure that has been forgotten by market and official academic epistemology. Their constant search goes beyond the exaltation of a 20th literary figure and extends to an idyllic space that inspires Lima and Belano to engage in a metaphysical exploration, always seeking a *pre-religare* codification of knowledge and spirituality. If the protagonists were to stop long enough to enjoy their findings, they would run the risk of falling into the trap of the stagnant complacency of structured codification. Motion plays a key role in the trajectory of both protagonists, while, in total, they voyage to land held sacred by three different cosmologies but leave shortly after, seeing that even the mythical space of Zion has been distorted by modern global design. But the existence and organization that exploits holes in the colonial matrix of power by highlighting its borders acts as a tool in itself: a creation of biopower and ontology *otherwise* that proves to be far more effectual than actually finding anything.

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