

SPECULATIVE CHRONOTOPES IN CAQUETÁ-COLOMBIA: FROM VERNACULAR LITERATURE TO CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS

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ABSTRACT: This work analyzes the speculative chronotope in the literary production of Caquetá, a Department in the Colombian Amazonian region. Considering time and space as key elements for speculative fiction, we focus on some works written by authors from Caquetá in which speculation is related to the concept of “la manigua”, an identity narrative for the settlement in that region. Works such as *Los cibernéticos* (Carrillo Andrades, 2002) and *La Marcha de las Garzas* (Olmos Alape, 2012) display a specific chronotope through a hyperbolic use of language regarding territory and a vision of static mythical time. Being individual and isolated proposals, these works provide us with a framework that we confront with the outcome of a speculative fiction workshop conducted in 2016 and 2017 with students from Universidad de la Amazonia (Florencia, Caquetá). In those workshops, after having explained basic concepts in speculative fantasy and science fiction, we were able to obtain some short stories such as “El hueco” (Sastoque, 2017), “El infinito de Verónica” (I. Yagué, 2017), “Los Colores de Dolores” (M. Yagüé, 2017) and “Caquetá taumatúrgica” (Florez, 2017) that illustrate speculative fiction potential to think about territory and temporality from a geographical, cultural and literary periphery. The narrative of manigua is not only revisited, but enriched from the consolidation of speculative fiction genres as a writing practice in forthcoming authors.

KEYWORDS: Amazonian region; chronotope; speculative fiction; territory; temporality; Identity.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho analisa-se o cronotopo especulativo na produção literária do Caquetá, Estado da região amazônica da Colômbia. Tendo em consideração o tempo e o espaço como elementos chaves para a ficção especulativa, centramos-nos em algumas obras escritas por autores do Caquetá-Colômbia, nas quais a especulação tem relação com o conceito de “*la manigua*”, uma narrativa de identidade no assentamento nesta região. Obras como *Los cibernéticos* (Carrillo Andrades, 2002) e *La marcha de las Garzas* (Olmos Alape, 2012) apresentam um cronotopo específico através do uso hiperbólico da linguagem sobre o território e uma visão de tempo mítico e estático. Sendo uma proposta individual e isolada, estas obras nos proporcionaram um marco, o qual confrontamos com o resultado de um ateliê literário onde se trabalhou a ficção especulativa, realizado no 2016 e 2017 com estudantes da Universidad de la Amazonia (Florencia, Caquetá). Neste ateliê, depois de ter explicado conceitos básicos de ficção especulativa e ficção científica, surgiram algumas histórias curtas como “El hueco” (Sastoque 2017), “El infinito de Verónica” (I. Yagué, 2017), “Los colores de dolores” (M. Yagüé, 2017) e “Caquetá taumatúrgica” (Flórez, 2017), que ilustraram o potencial especulativo da ficção para pensar o território e a temporalidade de uma periferia geográfica, cultural e literária. A narrativa da *manigua* não somente revisita-se, mas também se enriquece da consolidação dos gêneros especulativos de ficção como prática de escrita nos autores mais novos.

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PALAVRAS CHAVE: Região amazônica; cronotopo; ficção especulativa; território; temporalidade; identidade.

INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGING TIME-SPACE IN FICTION

Fiction implies speculation about one aspect from the construct of reality, putting forth a change according to some degrees of possible worlds (going from the so-called realism to nonsense fantastic lucubration). Fiction also depends on how space and time are represented. In these sense, speculation and representation of space and time, or chronotope, are interwoven concepts that readers and writers accept as a reference to a territory in a particular moment of history. In this article, we analyse speculative chronotopes, a condition for reading, in a first moment, vernacular literary works that depict the Colombian Amazonian region, and then, a condition for writing within this territory. After exposing some theoretical consideration on the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope and speculative literature definition, we focus on some works written by authors from Caquetá in which speculation is related to the concept of “la manigua”, an identity narrative for the settlement in that region. Works such as *Los cibernéticos* (Carrillo Andrades, 2002) and *La Marcha de las Garzas* (Olmos Alape, 2012) display a specific chronotope through a hyperbolic use of language regarding territory and a vision of static mythical time. Being individual and isolated proposals, these works provides us with a framework that we confront with the outcome of a speculative fiction workshop conducted in 2016 and 2017 with students from Universidad de la Amazonia (Florencia, Caquetá). In those workshops, after having explained basic concepts in speculative fantasy and science fiction, we were able to obtain some short stories such as “El hueco” (Sastoque, 2017), “El infinito de Verónica” (I. Yagué, 2017), “Los Colores de Dolores” (M. Yagüé, 2017) and “Caquetá taumatúrgica” (Florez, 2017) that illustrate speculative fiction potential to think about territory and temporality from a geographical, cultural and literary peripheria. The narrative of manigua is not only revisited, but enriched from the consolidation of speculative fiction genres as a writing practice in forthcoming authors.

THE CHRONOTOPE IN SPECULATIVE FICTION

For Mikhail Bakhtin, in the chronotope:

spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (1990: 84)

Bakhtin points out the importance of this concept has for genre and generic distinctions, and gives an anthropological view of man as a time-space entity. Bakhtin establishes three chronotopic typologies in ancient and classical genres: 1) the Greek adventure romance or ordeal novel, where heroes move in space and time without changing; 2) the everyday adventure novel, where rogues and *pícaros* are obliged to change because of social reality and the biological effects of time; 3) and biographies and autobiographies, where historical events are articulated through psychological changes in individuals.

Bakhtinian scholars have gone further in the applications of the chronotope proposing new types that can fill the gaps left at some levels by the Russian critic. Bemong and Borghart have summed up these types into five categories or levels of abstraction: 1) “micro-chronotopes” (Ladin, 1999: 215), which are the units of language that have spatio-temporal deictic functions; 2) “local chronotopes”, also identified in Bakhtinian prose as “motifs”, or as Keunen names them, “four-dimensional mental images”, or “congeal events” in Morson and Emerson’s words; 3) major or dominant chronotopes, an overarching impression the reader obtains from the interaction of “the concrete chronotopic units of a narrative”; 4) generic chronotopes, intertextual similarities the reader can find in a corpus; 5) “plotspace-chronotopes” (Keunen) that drive the possible world in two temporal ways: monological or teleological (with a plot moving towards a definite ending); or dialogical (with a non-solved plot within the final structure).

As a literary concept, the chronotope functions as a condition of any fictional work, especially a narrative one, regardless of the genre it belongs to. However, taking this condition per se is not so simple when it comes to distinguishing the role which the chronotope in speculative fiction, a modality encompassing science fiction, fantasy, horror, dystopia, among others sub-genres (and the autonomy of any fictional world, realistic or not), has “in relation to non-fictional versions of the world” (Ronen, 1994: 197), for example, the biographical genres in Bakhtin. Paradoxically, along with this autonomy, space and time are parallel to real times and places. In this sense, Ronan states: “narratives of realistic, fantastic and even science fictional kinds, usually relate their spatio-temporal structure to the times and places of reality drawing on the chronology of world-history and on the geography of world-topography.” (ibid). The chronotopes in fiction can also be varied:

fiction can actualize in fictional time events and situations that never were actualized in history; it can locate imaginary events in a familiar historical moment; it can actualize in a real geographical place fictional events and inhabit this place with imaginary individuals, and it can locate historical events in an imaginary place. (198)

This becomes more complicated when the space-time settlement of a fiction remains closely-related to the real space-time, but this closeness is rarefied with the mechanism of speculative fiction.

Darko Suvin traces the critical pertinence of science fiction and its close connection with classic works of world literature. Not only does his well-known concept of “cognitive estrangement” provides us with a definition of SF, but his attempt to “explore the deep presuppositions for analyzing SF as a specific kind of narrative” (1988: 185) puts this genre at the same level as metaphoric texts using literary and hermeneutic devices such as the “parable” and the “chronotope”. Metaphoric and SF texts share the possibility of creating cognitive estrangement and novum, a possible world very different from the reader’s everyday world and language, that rarefied or estranged connection between non-fictional and fictional chronotopes. Besides this condition of novelty and estrangement, coherence and richness are the other two conditions for metaphoricity that a text, either a realistic or non-realistic, should have if the author envisages an optimal literary work.

For Suvin, following Marc Angenot’s “absent paradigm” theory, in contrast to the one-to-one and unidirectional equivalence that the interpreter can establish between a realistic prose fiction (*Madame Bovary*, for instance) and its tenor or hidden message lying in the paradigmatic axe (the norms of adultery), the SF text “necessarily means a constant shifting back and forth from syntagmatic flow to an implicit semiotic paradigm” (204). This different semiotic reading of a SF text due to the presence of the novum along the syntagmatic axe is similar to the Biblical parable. The New Testament’s cinematic images go beyond a mere narrative or metaphoric use of language where time and space could be condensed or multiplied. In this case, the chronotope works as a “story-telling articulation in which agential and spatial relationships will be unfolded as choices” and as “an articulated thought-experiment” (*idem.*) In other words, the chronotope is inherent in SF and other speculative fiction sub-genres because it involves the reader in a parabolic search of meaning.

The writer will create a fictional world situating it in a chronotope that he or she will hide with other fictional elements such as extrapolation of present science in the simon-pure science-fiction (Heinlein, 1991: 10), magic in fantasy, hesitation between natural and supernatural for the fantastic (Todorov 1981: 15), the excess and transgression in gothic (Bottin, 1996: 1), coexistence of belief systems between “two very different groups of people” in magic realism (Hart and Oyang, 2005: 3), the unexplained presence of evil and its violent signatures in bodies, as for horror. An in turn, the reader will decodify this speculative chronotope in order to

find, not a soteriological message as the analogy with the parable that Suvin mentions, but a political resignification of reality.

The interpretation of speculative fiction written in a specific territory, in this case, Caquetá and the Colombian Amazon, should follow this hermeneutical line. But this also applies to the teaching of this kind of writing: how to codify a fiction according to textual (micro-chronotopes, that units of deictic language; and local chronotopes, motifs), intratextual (major chronotopes, or units of narrative), intertextual (generic chronotopes) and critical (monological or teleological chronotopes) layers. Mostly, these layers are techniques that can be taught in the creative writing workshop through writing exercises or discussing a corpus of speculative fiction. But inducing young adults to speculate about their territory and temporality in critical terms, through a genre they are not used to, reveals a pedagogical and cultural project. In the next section, we will see the first isolated steps of this project as a vernacular response to the chronotopes imposed by outside narratives.

LITERATURE FROM CAQUETA: LA MANIGUA AS A CHRONOTOPIC DRIVE

In Colombian literature, the region of Amazonia is associated with the rubber boom depicted in *La Vorágine* (Translated as *The Vortex*, José Eustasio Rivera, 1924) and *Toá, narraciones de caucherías* (Julio César Uribe Piedrahita, 1933). Both novels rise against the western colonial exploitation of nature and humans, but using western codes of representations: modal realism as a transparent mimicry, a realist and naturalist legacy which will prevail in Colombian literature, and the supremacy of writing over native oral narratives. In fact, these novels depict the jungle as a chronotope in the immensity of labyrinthine rivers and man-eater trees fuse in a temporality where salvation and progress are not possible. The idealist poet Arturo Cova in *La Vorágine* and physician Antonio De Orrantia in *Toá*, both from the civilised and bourgeois early-20th Bogotá, degrade themselves as they penetrate into a chronotopic hell, which render these narratives a modern mixture of ordeal and everyday adventure novel, recalling here the typology of chronotopes according to Bakhtin. Another novel from the same period, *El corazón de la América virgen* (In the heart of virgin America, 1924) by Julio Quiñones, recently discovered and not yet included in the official literary canon, is the tragic history of the Murui and Muina people of the Caraparaná River. Again, it is the jungle is a battlefield in which western civilization absorbs its otherness and entails this disparition. Willy, a mestizo, who ran away from the bad treatment, fustigation and unhealthy conditions of Arana House, infamous for the annihilation of uitoto people in rubber plantations, comes to Noyuba tribe begging for help and shelter. However, his presence as foreigner will trigger the

dénouement of the drama this community is living: the haunting of a killed jaguar taking revenge in acts of *barbarie* committed by the tribes, the impossible union of the indigenous woman and the civilized man, and a suicide than not only symbolizes the despair of the heroine, but a cultural death. Thus, in this previous literary works, an external canonical representation will remain until the first attempts to create an autonomous and vernacular representation of and by the people of this territory.

A territory of 34,350 square miles, the Department of Caqueta, according to national policy (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2014-2018), belongs to the Amazonian region. This department is an example of an active colonization, and an endeavor to forge an identity that oscillates between marginality and the lack of cultural heritage. This fact is well known and has been explained by its own people, who speak of their uprooting and ignorance of the territory, a cultural, academic and musical tradition without regulations, which turn every element into a political tool and lead to selfish and conflicting favors, a marked spiritual search, rather more for euphoria than for reason. Some authors praise the territory as “a cosmopolitan region” (Almarío Rojas, 2007, p.18) with a rich heritage of oral narratives, and others draw on the concept of “*la manigua*”, which we will explain later. The violent process of colonization is not over yet, and has been adapting to the needs of those in power. In the varied topography of the Colombian territory, migrations of “colonos” (settlers) continue to transform the territories and inherit part of the culture of their sites of origin; this migratory flux is traditionally north-south bound. Florencia is born as a port on the banks of La Perdiz river. Most of the urban settlements in the department of Caquetá are small port cities, bordering historic rivers: Fragua, Bodoquero, Caguán, Caquetá, and to some extent the lifestyle in several municipalities resembles the lifestyle of the greater ports, where the visitors stay for a while, supply themselves with provisions and return to their boats on their way home, several hours inland.

The largest portion of the population lives in the piedmont, a strip sloped on the limits of the Andean mountain chain. A city such as Florencia (165,000 inhabitants) allows for a certain urban culture and commodities within a peripheral and rural space. The University of the Amazonia is a center for the gathering of ideas, a port where hundreds of stories of the rural inhabitants of Caquetá converge. In spite of this cosmopolitanism and oral richness, however, the department and the region lag behind other regions of Colombia concerning writing as an academic and creative practice. In that regard, Jiménez Mahecha (2010) points out that: “the practices of reading and writing literary texts in the Department of Caquetá are incipient, precarious and, for the most part, associated to schools” (p.5). Without acknowledged authors in the national literary canon, literature in Caquetá is a compendium of a few workshop anthologies

and a set of books from a few authors, most of them not following a process of editing and peer-reviewing before self-publishing. The result is a clumsy-styled corpus, with some compositional deficiencies, but with an interesting narrative drive, which must be taken into account as a specific speculative chronotope.

Among all the names and titles, we can find a work that is a specific speculative fiction and another that uses a speculative chronotope: *Los Cibernéticos* (Julio César Carrillo Andrades, 2002) and *La Marcha de las Garzas* (Dairo Hernán Olmos Alape, 2012). The former is a collection of short stories framed in an extradiegetic apocalyptic scenario. The narrator and his family live in a parcel of land in the middle of a conurbation whose inhabitants are cyborgs. Close to the end of the world due to an environmental crisis, the farmer decides to spend time with his family telling stories:

Esta historia la terminé de escribir cuando tenía ochenta años de edad. No me acuerdo cuando la comencé, de lo único que si (sic) estoy seguro es que la empecé a escribir en el año 2.050, cuando todas las cosas del mundo habían cambiado influenciadas por los desarrollos de la ciencia y la tecnología, la deshumanización y desculturización del hombre

I finished this story when I was eighty years old. I don't remember when I began, but the only thing I'm certain of is that I started to write it around 2050, when everything in the world had changed because of the development of science and technology, dehumanization and cultural impoverishment (p.7)

Rather than showing a novum, the text induces the reader into a cognitive estrangement with a hesitation about time –“I don't remember when I started to write it around 2050”, which is not less unclear than “when everything in the world had changed because of the developments of science and technology”. The gap between the factual world –our known world since the scientific and industrial revolution– and the possible world depicted in *Los Cibernéticos* can have a different unfolding which depends on the acceptance of the covenant.

Time provides a hint of space in the framework story: “*Después de la primavera, el otoño, con sus ramas desnudas y alfombras de hojas secas daba mágicas pinceladas a la tierra. El invierno nos producía fortaleza y alegría. Finalmente, el verano, acompañado de fuertes vientos, mecía el follaje*” (“After spring, fall, with its naked branches and dead leaves rugs giving magical brush-strokes to the ground. Winter gave us strength and joy. Finally, summer, accompanied by strong winds, swayed the foliage”, p. 9). A sentence like this one holds a curious micro-chronotope: is it a chronological mistake in Carrillo Andrades' writing when he puts seasons in this order: “spring, fall, winter, summer”? Perhaps it is an order based on the emotional or other preferences, but the presence of seasons also indicates a major chronotope that situates the reader within a hypothesis: if the possible world keeps a close reference with the

factual world, this framework story is not taking place in Caquetá, an equatorial zone where there is usually an alternation of rainy and dry seasons, unless global warming and climate changes have become responsible for this novum and cognitive estrangement in this fictional story. Another alternative is to think that this farm situated in a big city with north/south hemisphere seasons is a “chronotope zero”: a non-place and a non-time, all times and places, and none of them” (Padilla, qtd in Fornet 2005: 10). The chronotope zero would be a tantamount of hyper-mediatized Latin American cities in which McOndo and Crack cosmopolitan authors have grown up –an apocalyptic sensibility also inspiring someone writing in an outlying zone like Caquetá.

A closer chronotope to the spatio-temporal framework in which Carillo Andrade is writing is one of intradiegetic stories: “Paraíso gigante” (A Giant Paradise). In 1968, a man from Florencia travels around inland Caquetá in order to collect venomous snakes for a German laboratory. Over the journey, he sees a vigorous superman on top of a cliff. Twenty years later, the explorer receives an invitation from this man to meet him at the same place. But the luxurious landscape has become yellowish and polluted; and the guest, whose name is Amax Onas, is now “*mitad fantasma mitad humana*” (“half ghost and half human” p. 80). In this personification, time “takes flesh”, as Bakhtin puts it in the definition of chronotope, showing the territory in a process of deterioration. Amax Onas praises the love of nature and artistic talent of the explorer and requests him to call all the artists from all over the world and to immortalize together “*un Paraíso Gigante y bello, donde estaba reflejada la condición de toda la humanidad y que el hombre por un capricho lo llamó Amazonas*” (“A beautiful Giant Paradise that mirrored the human condition and that man arbitrarily named Amazonas” p.85). After that, Amax Onas explodes and causes a drastic planetary change, connecting with the end of the framework story: an acid rain falls over *los cibernéticos* (the cyborgs) and the family of farmers (p. 91), and they all end up ejected in chunks of earth to “*otro lugar del espacio infinito*” (“another place in the infinite space” Ibid). The virtues of a work like *Los Cibernéticos* can be found in a binding of a chronotope zero of dehumanized cyborgs and the ecological chronotope personified in the dying superman of Amax Onas.

The irrational euphoric craving for identity in an uprooted context manifests itself as a constant praise and exaltation of the grandeur of the Amazonian nature. The locals usually explain outsiders (from another countries or other Colombian regions) what “la manigua” is. One of the entries in the RAE dictionary of this term is the Colombian use of: “*Bosque tropical pantanoso e impenetrable*” (“marshy and impenetrable tropical forest”). But, for *colonos* and their offspring, la *manigua* is a narrative that justifies the settlement in this region since the first

wave of newcomers in the beginning of 20th century (with the rubber rush), the second wave in the 1950's and 1960's during *La Violencia*, and the late waves provoked by other factors such as labor hiring in illegal crops and drug trade in the 1980's and 1990's, as well as the forced displacement caused by armed groups in the late 1990's and 2000's. Duque Villegas states that: "in the popular speech of Caquetá, 'cogerlo a uno la manigua' ("to be seized by the manigua") means to undergo a magic ecstasy ("*arrobamiento*") in front of the Virgin Forest, to alienate the will in the face of that South American natural wonder" (1992, p. 11). Novels such as *La Vorágine*, *Toá* and *El corazón de la América Virgen* use la manigua as a sense of wonder in their speculative chronotopes, the same as *Los Cibernéticos*, a *stricto sensu* speculative prose. La manigua is rooted in the history of an uprooted community, almost as a romantic impulse for the sublime or an idealistic overvaluation of the territory.

La Marcha de las Garzas (The Heron's March) opts for the chronotopical use of the Manigua and speculation as a way of transcending events. It is 1997, and the farmers of the region of Caquetá, coerced by the guerrillas, are on strike, protesting against the fumigation of illegal crops. Olmos Alape manages to integrate historical facts with stylistic devices: interior monologues, counterpoint, and polyphony. The *incipit* illuminates a constant use of chronotopes:

Son las diez y media de un día como todos y como el agua de un río, corre el año de mil novecientos noventa y seis; allí bajo la luz de un picante sol, se enfrentan los adversarios. Eran solo las dos multitudes porque sus gestores como siempre no estaban (ni estarán), ya que prefieren ver la lucha, desde el estrado que les otorga la fortuna, aquella fortuna que a otros les fue adversa. Los primeros formados en disposición cerrada, estratégica, los otros dispuestos a la carga, como tropas de visigodos. (1)

It is ten and a half from a common day, and like the water in the stream, the year 1996 is running. Over there, under a hot sun light, two adversaries fight. There were only two crowds because their instigators, as usual, were not there (nor will not), since they prefer seeing the battle from the dais that the fortune provides them, that fortune denied to others. The first group in a close and strategic formation; the others, ready to charge, like a troop of Visigoths.

Starting from a comparison between a river and time, the narrator situates the two confronting groups under the intense sunlight, meanwhile the two real opponents are absent in space. A metaphorical dais ("*estrado*") is the symbolic chronotope of power, or in a more allegorical term, fortune, reminding by this way the foucaultian concepts of panopticon and biopolitics. More interesting here is the chronotopical disjunction enabled by the literary language, even if it is not a narrative speculation: like a troop of Visigoths ("*como tropas de visigodos*"). With this rhetoric escapade to medievalism, the novella mixes historical and mythical time into a magical territory, where hyperbole abounds:

[...] *personas de todas partes invadían la carretera, algunos venían de lugares recónditos, [...] gente de todos los colores, contaban historias de fantásticas regiones, en donde se encontraban boas de más de un metro de diámetro, que devoraban enteros a los caballos, tigres que se disputaban a manotazos, [...] árboles tan altos como catedrales, que partían las moto sierras (sic) al intentar derribarlos, peces que para sacarlos del río se necesitaban hasta ocho hombres, pueblos que detenían los ladrones a balazos y ladrones quienes respondían de igual forma, como en las películas del viejo oeste, cuentos de sicarios que mataban a otro por necesidad ya que les era imposible conciliar el sueño, si no asesinaban a alguien como mínimo tres días [...]* (pp.54-55)

People from everywhere invaded the road, some of them came from remote places, people of all races, who told stories about amazing regions, where there were boas more than one meter thick, able to eat up horses, the hunting of jaguars using their bare hands, trees as tall as cathedrals, breaking chainsaws in the felling, fish that eight men struggle to take out of the river, gunfights between people and thieves in the villages, as in old Westerns, tales of hitmen who needed to kill someone so they could sleep tight, at least one murder every three days. (54-55)

A Rabelaisian world, through a Macondian bridge, is depicted in this story. The main character, Chindicue, a *raspachín* (a coca grower), decides to break out of the lines of peasant marchers trying to reach Mocoa and head to Florencia, despite of the death sentence that guerrilla commander have given to the deserters, and the military posts that the Colombian government has set up in order to block at any price passages of people. The territory is vast and plenty of descriptions of herons and other kind of birds crossing the sky and the rivers, where corpses are also thrown out. For *raspachines*, this territory came to be once a land of endless richness, “*una sucursal de los Emiratos Árabes*” (“a branch of the Arab Emirates”, p. 13). And, at the same time, the territorial grandeur is reduced to the actual and current circumstances, poverty and political subjugation. At the end, the aircrafts will overfly the jungle, sprinkling with chemicals all kind of plants, animals and humans.

Even if the narrative can be included in a realistic genre, the literary devices employed make *La Marcha de las Garzas* into a speculative writing through the topoi of *La Manigua*. The same as *Los Cibernéticos*, this novella uses *La Manigua* as an anchor for the uprooted identity of the *Colonos* and the problems of reading and writing present in Caquetá. Both conjure up speculative chronotopes, not only in their denotative and connotative references to territory, but also in “plotspace-chronotopes” where temporality is thought in terms of finding a way of reading the future. With the apocalyptic end in *Los Cibernéticos*, Carrillo Andrade offers a teleological vision of history and ecology. Meanwhile, Dairo Olmos sets out a non-solved plot of Colombian political reality. Both works show how writing, as possibility, more than an accomplished literary act and objet, keep a collective potential. In the next section, we show

how we tried to use this potential to create an outlet through speculative fiction with a group of college students.

WORKSHOPPING SLIPS OF FUTURE: ANALYSING STUDENTS OUTCOMES

The creative writing workshop arises in the middle of one of the most important events that have transformed the territory of the Amazonian piedmont in social terms during the last 53 years. The stories written by the students of the University of the Amazonia, and compiled in two publications, were originated in a moment of transition of political order, as the FARC guerrillas were signing a peace agreement after several years of dialogue. These workshops were developed in order to write a new story that transcends stories about violence, dispossession, abandonment and misery (recurring events during the last five decades), and that could become a tool to re-imagine the territory, to glimpse a future that could be narrated in a different way. Over the second term of 2016, we started a workshop on creative writing with a group of undergraduate students, mostly from English and Spanish undergraduate programs. For the purpose of offering outlets to an increasing demand, we met with 10-30 students every week and discussed the foundations of creation, composition and editing. But the number of participants throughout the process surpassed our expectations and some texts produced by them displayed a speculative hint. The result was the handcrafted self-published *El hueco y otras instantáneas* (The Hole and Other Snapshots, 2017). In this collection of poetry and short narratives, some works stand out for their potential as coherent and rich texts, according to Suvin's criteria, and novelty, a requirement for considering them as speculative fictions.

"El Hueco", by Omaira Sastoque, is a story about a brothel in the middle of the jungle which is controlled by a group of armed men. In the courtyard of the house, one woman is sacrificed every night around a strange hole. In a détente of some days, women are no longer on edge because the commander is travelling and the men in the house only want to satisfy their sexual urges and sleep. But this is over when the command arrives after having "hunted" five recruits for the brothel: four women and a ten year old girl. The commander chooses the latter to be sacrificed in the hole, shocking everyone, in particular Mechas, the patroness who has been witness to many years of atrocities. However, the commander is found dead and the girl's body is empty. A big ugly bird starts to kill all men and prostitutes; meanwhile the four recruits are around the hole, from where more birds come out. This story ends with radio newscasts announcing that the army managed to break in "The Hole House" and came upon a hoatzin nest and a weeping little girl. In the village, people laugh at all this and when they are asked about it, they answer: "*no era más que una simple historia de mujeres*" ("it was only a woman's tale" p. 84). A feminist reading of Caqueta reality, "El Hueco" shows that a new generation of writers is

able to speculate using social issues and historic reference. In the story, the year of 1999 is mentioned twice with no more clues, but the place chosen (the jungle), the offenders (an armed group) and the victims (women) are elements that parallel the events of that time –in that year, Caquetá was a political focus, being the chosen region where the FARC and the government were negotiating in a demilitarized zone; it was also the outbreak of massacres carried out by paramilitary groups. The story also connects history with the supernatural –in oral accounts from Caquetá and other rural regions in Colombia, a witch is a woman who changes into a big bird during nighttime by the agency of a diabolic pact; the appearance of this bird is similar to turkeys or hoatzins.

The workshops conducted during 2017 changed their orientation by proposing the creation of speculative fictions. At first, a brief introduction to the topic of Speculative Fiction was presented. Subsequently, the question "what if...?" was discussed with the group. Each assistant to the workshop replied and discussed in class, writing down in her notebook the main points for the creation of a story. After this warming up activity, the agreement involved that, at the beginning of each session, students had to show a story to be read aloud, in front of their classmates. After the reading, the classmates asked questions and gave recommendations to develop the plot in a better way, a peer-review that facilitated the generation of new ideas, and gave unexpected scenarios and topics to the stories. After each week, the story was better arranged, the students felt that they had mastery over their narrative, and reaffirmed their identity with the territory. The challenge of transforming the local perspective on the territory, in order to narrate speculative fictions that transcend stories of violence, was a very rewarding experience that will be discussed in the next lines.

In three of the short stories produced in the workshop, there is an intimate space in which different temporalities converge. "El infinito de Verónica" (Veronica's Infinity), by Iliana Saray Yagüé, is about a trip and a hallucination: "*Se preguntarán qué es lo mejor de tener un cupón de viajes ilimitado, bueno, que todos los días puedes estar en un lugar diferente*" ("You will wonder what is the best thing about having an unlimited travel coupon, well, being in a different place every day"). Verónica runs between the statues of Bamiyan and after being persecuted by a shadow "*abrió los ojos y su alucinación desapareció, volvió la realidad, Verónica ya no era más aquella joven de 1542 a la que le prometieron viajar por todo el mundo, solo era un cuerpo más con el paso de los años*" ("She opened her eyes and her hallucination disappeared, reality returned, Veronica was no longer that young girl from 1542 who was promised traveling around the world, now she was just one more body over the years". From this exotic place and time or chronotope zero, Veronica tele-transports/time-travels to another

chronotope: “*En una de las regiones más inexploradas de Colombia se encontraba Verónica, hace muchísimos años había llegado al Chiribiquete con su padre, un militar español con ansias de colonizar y en busca de escurridizos habitantes, los indígenas*” (“Veronica was in one of the most unexplored regions of Colombia; many years ago she had arrived in Chiribiquete with his father, a Spanish soldier eager to colonize and in search of evasive inhabitants, the natives”). However, at the end, Veronica loses the power of shifting from chronotopes and gets stuck in stasis:

Verónica quedó condenada a permanecer en una celda abandonada con el único consuelo de sus alucinaciones, llevaba tantos años allí que su cuerpo estaba amarrado por raíces a la pared de roca, una gruesa capa de moho se extendía por los barrotes, la naturaleza había reclamado la celda y está poco a poco estaba consumiendo el cuerpo y alma de Verónica. Era el susurrante embrujo de la manigua, una selva inhóspita que atrapa a los colonos caqueteños y no los deja escapar jamás.

Veronica was condemned to remain in an abandoned cell with the sole consolation of her hallucinations. She had been there for so many years that her body was tied by roots to the rock wall, a thick layer of mold spread through the bars; nature had taken possession of the cell which was slowly consuming Veronica’s body and soul. It was the whispering spell of the Manigua, an inhospitable jungle that traps the settlers of Caquetá and never lets them escape.

In “Los colores de Dolores” (Dolores’ colors), by Marian Yagüé, a 17-years-old girl is sitting in the back of a moving car, completely alone (we do not assume there is a driver or if it is a automatized car), in the middle of the night. Like “Verónica’s Infinity”, besides the syntagmatic parallel in the titles of the stories written by the Yagüé sisters, in “Dolores’ colors”, the protagonist confronts her intimate, oppressive and drowning state. The narrator only describes what Dolores can see with a flashlight, meanwhile she tries to draw in a small board and to escape. Colors have a liquid texture but not are specified because the dark scene and the convulsed prose. When she realizes that nobody can decide for her happiness, and what she really wants is to study drawing, she manages to break the car window glass:

Respiraba desde el alma, el miedo había desaparecido. El aire le acarició el rostro y el pelo húmedo, la rodeaban varios lápices, su tablilla manchada al igual que la cartuchera y la linterna. Los rayos del sol comenzaban a salir y frente a ella se levantaba imponente un hermoso Cananguchal. Su tierra, su vida, volvían a pintarse sin importar los fracasos, no abandonaría todo por lo que había luchado. Abrió los ojos. Varias personas vestidas de blanco y con tapa bocas se encontraban aplaudiendo a su alrededor.

She breathed from inside her soul, the fear was gone. The air caressed her face and wet hair; she was surrounded by several pencils, a stained tablet, a case and a flashlight. The sun rays began to rise and in front of her rose a beautiful Cananguchal palm. Her land, her life get paint again with disregard of failure, she would not give up everything she had struggled for. She opened the eyes. Several people wearing white clothes and surgical masks were clapping around her.

The Cananguchal palm, a symbol of Caquetá, functions as the only geographical reference point in the inside-outside speculative game of hallucination, insanity and postmodern chronotope zero. But what we could infer from this allegorical and intimate tale is an invitation to the young people from this region to leave this imposed and alienating chronotope zero, and look the colours around them.

The third story, “Caquetá Taumatúrgica” (“A Miracle Worker in Caquetá”), by Sebastián Flórez Cano, starts off by reaffirming the characteristics of a specific territory. A young narrator is visiting a village from Caquetá in a period of time that begins one October night and finishes during Holy Week (Easter). Villagers’ life seems joyful until the arrival of the religious feast. People stop all activity and go to pray with a lit candle in the “majestic” and “surrounded by jungle” Caquetá riverbank, waiting for a ghostly apparition. On the way, the narrator hears the story of Joseph Cano, a priest who had been found burnt in his house with a five-year-old boy. An enigmatic message was left by the priest, it is the prayer that people recite, and this will stimulate speculation in the narrator:

Me recosté sobre una roca a observar las estrellas pero las nubes estaban adueñadas del cielo [...] Sentí cierto alivio al poder ver una, ya que me recordaban a mi madre, ella solía ver las estrellas conmigo, y cuando no lo hacíamos estábamos resolviendo crucigramas en los periódicos.

I lay on a rock to observe the stars but the clouds had taken over the sky [...] I felt some relief when I saw one, since they reminded me of my mother, she used to see the stars with me, and when we did not, we solved crosswords in the newspapers.

The narrator finds out that the boy’s name is in the prayer and that this boy is Joseph Cano’s son. The narrator breaks the spell but the evil priest takes away the souls of all the villagers. This character “*fue uno de los fundadores del Caquetá. Sí, fue uno de los que desterraron y esclavizaron a los indios que vivían aquí hace mucho tiempo atrás*” (“was one of the founders of Caqueta. Yes, he was one of those who banished and enslaved the Indians who lived here a long time ago”). The foundation act determines the chronotope and breaking its spell is one possibility of speculative fiction. Per se, a foundation act is the chronotope that makes any identity possible. *La Manigua* is an attempt to anchor this identity in a fixed point in history and geography. But, in fact, naming it means to uncover the history of violence that has accompanied these attempts of foundation: “*En ese momento supe la verdad. El Sacerdote nunca fue bueno, nunca cambio, había perdido una apuesta con el diablo y su deuda había sido pagada con todas las almas del pueblo incluyendo la de mi tía. "Vaya jugada Joseph, Vaya jugada"* (In that moment, I knew the truth. The priest had never been good, never changed, had bet the Devil and had lost, paying with all the souls from the town, including my aunt’s. Well played, Joseph, well

played). Instead of the radiant grandeur of the tropical exuberance, Flórez choses a gothic atmosphere deconstructing myths, in this case, religion.

CONCLUSION

We have moved from theoretical considerations about chronotope and speculative fiction to literature itself, seen as a canonical outcome that symbolically founds a territory –in this case, the Colombian Amazonian region, and a work-in-progress experience –literature *in vitro* – made by forthcoming writers. Thus, following Bakhtinian scholars and Darko Suvin’s contributions, we have reviewed some literary production from Caquetá. *Los Cibenéticos* and *La Marcha de las Garzas* are examples of an existing literature in Caquetá, although without the supporting institutional mechanisms. Beyond the established representations by canonical novels such *La Vorágine* and *Toá*, local authors find a way to speculate about their history and territory through the narrative of *La Manigua* and hyperbolic rhetoric, trying to balance the identity uprooting endured by the settlers. Different in levels of “realism” or referentiality to the current Caquetá, both novels uses a chronotopical speculation through their literary devices to reinforce identity and envisage a future for this population. One can be monological and apocalyptic; the other, dialogical and open, despite the uncertainties of the present.

Exploring speculative subgenres such horror, science fiction, surrealism and gothic, the young writers who took part in our workshops fluctuate between the elision of the real temporal and spatial references and the slight finger pointing of precise references or postcolonial recriminations. In “El Hueco”, “El infinito de Verónica”, “Los colores de Dolores” and “Caquetá Taumatúrgica”, there seems to be a fine anchored center working like a critical chronotope. What the four narrative from the workshops have in common is the way temporalities and territorialities are woven together and how they help to construct alternatives images: oppressing or liberating ones, challenging traditional representations of territory. Some of these aficionado writers promise a future for the Colombian Amazonian literature, but there is still a lot of work in teaching and workshops to do in order to undo marginality. A more widespread awareness of the potential of speculative fiction is one way to increase the quality and quantity of literary production that can attract the interest of national and international publishers, scholars and readers.

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