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# Nothing is true, everything is living<sup>1</sup>

Yapci Ramos' proposal is an ongoing trilogy consisting of geopolitical, biological, cultural and sexual dimensions.

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Yapci Ramos is often associated with the African continent and, when asked where she is from, this is an association she does not refute, but cherishes. Born in Tenerife, her relationship with Earth Africa is a dominant motif. In her work, Yapci Ramos attempts to depict the inner complexity of human relationships without being either illustrative or redundant. She explores different mediums, allowing her to choose the one that will most appropriately express the emotions which bind local understanding of her land to the notion of culture at large, without losing the link with real time and real experience.

As far as African cultural tradition is concerned, the land is the mother and the source of livelihood and identity. The issue of the land, be it on the Island or the African continent, is one of the main political driving forces and a very strong motive in human relationships, and also a dynamic found specifically in the artist's last presentation. In her work, Yapci Ramos conducts a dialogue with the land, minorities and the life experiences of displaced people. As an introduction to the artist's existential identity and survival quest, I will refer here to the extent that the African continent relates to the artist; as T. A. Mofokeng puts it, "The land is also the house of our ancestors. We always go back to them to converse with them, to retain and promote our sense of community."<sup>2</sup>

As we all know, the Island is surrounded by the sea. Water is all around, in constant flux, breaking in waves on the shore. In the artist's work, the only limit for the mind is the horizon, an infinite line one wishes would overcome the state of uncertainty in order to depart to a better world. Seen from the shore, the sea is an element that contains all the possibilities of life and displacement. This constant dynamic characterizes the Canary Islands, whose roots are partly of "Amazigh" heritage, which may have left traces under a guanchista-africano revival experienced in the mainstream population.

These influences might have given birth to a democracy often lacking critical discourse versus an enriching intercultural aspect of the Island. The land is made intercultural from Spanish and Portuguese colonies, and from Jewish influences to slaves from the trade between the Americas and the Caribbean. The proximity with Africa has always been there. Consequently, the artist's work has evolved from a colonial past and from the near-and-far relationships with Africa in her quest for human re-encounters. Her images arise from the potential meeting of people, their needs and surroundings. Like in an incomplete puzzle, the missing parts tend to ask how we imagine what is not there, what could be there, and from where do we look at the artist's work? The erased parts might introduce us to the specific notion of displacement to unknown lands and seas.

As the artist says, "The idea of fragmented images, with some non-representation, calls upon the idea of going back to primary colours," as a way to look for the absence of representation, rather than an invasion of images and information. The desire here is to make us confront the unknown, the absence of data, which can activate the mind rather than saturate it. The artist also calls upon the limit of what one can see, because it relates to the living experience of people, rather than an illustration of displacement, be it in Bamako, Luanda or Barcelona.

Modern (European) civilization thinks of itself as the most developed. This sense of superiority obliges it, in the form of a categorical imperative, as it were, to "develop" (civilize, uplift, educate) the more primitive, barbarous, underdeveloped civilizations. The path of such development should be like that followed by Europe in its own development out of the Middle Ages. Where the barbarians or the primitives oppose the civilizing process, the praxis of modernity, in the last instance, has recourse to violence. It produces victims in many

<sup>1</sup> Glissant, É. (April 2010) Rien n'est Vrai, tout est vivant. Les Transformations du vivant dans un monde en relation. Seminar conducted by the Institut de Tout-Monde. <http://www.tout-monde.com>

<sup>2</sup> Mofokeng, T.A. (1987) "A Black Christology: A New Beginning." Journal of Black Theology in South Africa p. 1-17.

different ways and takes on an almost ritualistic character: the civilizing hero invests his victims (the colonized, the slave, the woman, the ecological destruction of the earth, etc...) with the character of being participants in a process of redemptive sacrifice. From the point of view of modernity, the barbarian or the primitive is in a state of guilt (for, among other things, opposing the civilizing process). This allows modernity to present itself not only as innocent, but also as a force that will emancipate or redeem its victim from guilt. Therefore, with the Canary Islands caught in-between these dynamics, the artist establishes the distance which allows the creation of images that refer to these “civilizing” and redemptive symptoms of modernity; the suffering and sacrifices (the costs) of modernization imposed on “immature” peoples, slaves, races, the “weaker”, sex, are inevitable.<sup>3</sup> This corpus of images also brings together the notion of fear; fear of surviving, fear of not being able to make it, fear of losing, fear of living.

One of the multiple narratives of Yapci Ramos’ work has been shaped by the ongoing flux of a constantly changing history, with a diachronic and synchronic use of time and social reality, combining what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian describes as the notion of coevalness.<sup>4</sup> It refers to another way of relating oneself to time and identity and the complexity lies in these different uses of time, be it in the Western world or the African continent. The artist presents us with the possibility of experimenting differently with time and space. Supporting this is the artist’s recording of whistling communication, which originated in ancient times, but is still in use in so many places in the world today. This simple and efficient ancestral way of communicating is still used by shepherds in the Canary Islands. This use of the whistle suggests another system of time operating in the hilly landscapes of the Island. Using this way of addressing each other is still a collective practice among people on the Island of Gomera and is probably a more intuitive way of connecting and sending messages than the way we do using our present technology. This delicious birdsong is an analogy which sets us off on a relationship of familiarity between different times and places, denying any distinction between Nature and Culture. In relation to this, Deleuze refers to the elements of art in an animal’s territorializing behaviour and the deployment of the notion of becoming-animal;<sup>5</sup> the artist uses a similar approach in her work.

The artist has captured moving images of the transformation of the land and people’s capacity to adapt and pick up any

atmospheric signs as the island wakes up. The artist holds our attention by making an analogy between the operating forces of Nature and the varieties and identities of different movements. She embraces the possibility of non-form, bringing into play another constantly changing land. Here, slow movements alternate in density, from diaphanous to opaque, and define themselves from one identity to another, constantly mutating, implying that these variations contribute to the fabric of the living and its relation to its surroundings. It is therefore the landscape that delineates the common place, or rather, the path that defines the landscapes that in turn draw the map. Glissant makes us think about the “Common Place” in a succession of landscapes which, through their contrasts and harmonies, constitute the land. While more closely observing these contrasts, which are nearest to the world of rock, of plant, and of the human being, borders vanish. Yapci Ramos’ proposal is an ongoing trilogy consisting of geopolitical, biological, cultural and sexual dimensions, which might relate to each other in what the philosopher Édouard Glissant defines as a common place.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dussel, E. (1993) *Eurocentrism and Modernity* (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures), Duke University Press, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Fabian, F. (1983) *Time and The Other, How Anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.34.

<sup>5</sup> Dittmar P., Golsenne, T. (2008) “Note sur le devenir- animal”. In éditions papiers. Retrieved from <http://www.editionspapers.org/laboratoire/note-sur-le-devenir-animal>.

<sup>6</sup> Glissant, É. (1996) “Treatise on the Whole World”.