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# Spaces of Violence: The Construction of the Cityscape in Lyonel Trouillot's Fiction

JULIA BORST

## 1. Introduction: Violence in Haitian Reality and in the Contemporary Haitian Novel

Political instability, extreme poverty, and proliferating violence following the end of the Duvalier regime have left their mark on Haitian society. In many Latin American countries, a 'new violence' has accompanied the process of democratization and has replaced the state violence exercised by the repressive regimes of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Koonings and Kruijt define it as follows:

'[N]ew violence' is socially or politically organized to wield coercion by evading or undermining the legitimate violence monopoly of formally democratic states. This implies the permanent 'uneasy coexistence' of the legal democratic order and the new violence in a parallel logic that is at the same time antagonistic and complementary in present-day Latin America. ("Armed Actors" 8f)

It is not only characterized by this tense relationship between state power(lessness) and the proliferation and persistence of alternative sources of violence, but also by an increasing number of forms of manifestations, actors, and motives which "instead occup[y] the interstices of the fragile and fragmented formal legal, institutional and political order" (Koonings/Kruijt, "Armed Actors" 8) and which make this 'new violence' stand out by its arbitrary, ubiquitous, and often autotelic features.<sup>1</sup>

This experience has also arisen in Haiti during the process of democratization, initiated after the escape of Baby Doc in 1986, which ultimately made the Duvalier dictatorship collapse. The following decades have been marked by political turmoil,

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'autotelic' refers to Jan Philipp Reemtsma's definition of autotelic violence in *Vertrauen und Gewalt—Versuch über eine besondere Konstellation der Moderne*, a study on violence in modernity. Contrary to 'locating violence' ("lozierende Gewalt"), which considers the human body as an obstacle or wants to move it somewhere or from somewhere, and 'raptive violence' ("raptive Gewalt"), which wants to use or take possession of the body, 'autotelic violence' does not just destroy the body as a side-effect, but aims to destroy its integrity: it destroys the body in order to destroy it (106): "*Autotelische Gewalt zielt auf die Zerstörung der Integrität des Körpers, sei diese Zerstörung letal oder nicht. Sie ist nicht die Verletzung oder Zerstörung eines Körpers, weil es sich im Vollzug einer anderen Form der Gewalt 'so ergibt.'* ... Autotelische Gewalt zerstört den Körper *nicht, weil es dazu kommt, sondern um ihn zu zerstören*" (116-17, original emphasis).

numerous coups d'état, the rise of various armed groups like the *chimè* under the rule of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and tenuous living conditions for the majority of the population (cf. e.g. Dupuy). With the documentary *Ghosts of Cité Soleil* (2006) on the life of gang members in the eponymous Port-au-Prince slum, the alleged U.N. quote<sup>2</sup> that Cité Soleil was the most dangerous place on earth in 2004 became a dictum spreading through a networked world.

The experience of an apparently omnipresent and arbitrary violence has been picked up by numerous contemporary Haitian writers, who try to express the presence of misery and violence in modern-day society in literature, continuing a socio-critical trend in Haitian prose—observed by Trouillot and Dalembert (29)—that dates back to Jacques Roumain.<sup>3</sup> Alba Pessini confirms that the transposition of violence into literature is what characterizes Haitian literary discourse, as every writer—either living on the island or in the diaspora—has contributed in one way or another to the denunciation of violence and to its representation in the literary discourse (117f). I agree with her when she argues that Lyonel Trouillot's work especially stands out for its evident reference to recent events in Haitian reality—as for example his novel *Bicentenaire*, published shortly after the protests in the run-up to the second overthrow of Aristide—, focusing on characters struggling to survive in an inhuman environment (cf. Pessini 120). Not only does violence play a major role in his work, but at the same time the cityscape arises as the prominent setting of acts of violence suffered and exercised by its inhabitants.

Based on two novels by this Haitian author, I will therefore discuss how fictional urban space is constructed as a space soaked with and structured by violence. In order to do that, I will begin with some theoretical considerations about violence and space, on the one hand trying to outline what is to be understood by violence. On the other hand, I will examine how the concepts of the 'spatial turn' and de Certeau's model can be fructified in order to gain insights into the topography of literary texts. I will then analyze the novels *Street of Lost Footsteps* (*Rue des pas perdus*) and *Children of Heroes* (*Les enfants des héros*) in order to study how urban space and violence are interrelated in these particular texts.

## 2. Preliminary Reflections

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<sup>2</sup> The documentary cites an alleged U.N. statement which referred to Cité Soleil as “the most dangerous place on earth.” This is widely cited, but I have not been able to locate the original document.

<sup>3</sup> The reference to a socio-critical tradition of Haitian prose points to the fact that numerous writers throughout the last decades have adapted socio-critical themes in their novels. The solutions they propose (if they do) or the conclusions they draw, however, differ widely (cf. Trouillot and Dalembert 29).

## 2.1. On the Nature of Violence

The complexity of the phenomenon of violence confronts us with the challenge to define what exactly is to be understood by this term in the following analysis. In 2000, Peter Imbusch published an overview on academic discourse in sociology about the phenomenon of violence, also observing that one faces a variety of conceptual differentiations ranging from direct vs. indirect, legal vs. illegal, personal vs. structural violence (cf. "Stochern" 24). Although he also postulates that manifestations such as psychological, structural, or symbolic/cultural violence should by no means be neglected by sociological theory, he stresses the fact that direct and intended physical violation of the body might nevertheless be considered as the core characteristic of every form of violence (cf. "Stochern" 30).

While a narrow concept of violence would exclude various manifestations, an all-encompassing definition would be difficult to operate with analytically. Therefore, this paper privileges the perception of those whom Imbusch calls the "innovators" and who neglect motives or causes of violence. They observe the way physical violations occur (cf. Imbusch, "Stochern" 28), which is why they conceive violence primarily as an act related to the human body. Von Trotha, one of the founding fathers of the so-called 'genuine sociology of violence,' emphasizes that violence is always an act of inflicting and of suffering, actions both of which refer to the body (26). Reemtsma adopts this idea by basing his typology of violence on the relatedness of the act to the body, when he distinguishes between locating, raptive, and autotelic violence (cf. 106 and above). However, he places emphasis on the fact that this perception does not exclude non-physical forms of violence, for their metaphors also derive their force from our imagination of physical violence (104): "*The fact that an act of violence reduces [a suffering individual] to his/her body is the reason why violence always has to be understood as primarily physical*" (125, original emphasis, my translation).<sup>4</sup>

It is exactly this relatedness to the body this paper wants to center on, without trying to define different types of violence, as it wants to bring into focus the effect a particular representation of violence might have on the observer—or on the reader in the case of literature. Imbusch points out elsewhere that the disturbing nature of violence is due to the fact that violence is always an option, whose "power stems from the elemental vulnerability of the human body" ("Concept" 23). This, however, motivates the communicative nature of each act of violence (cf. Reemtsma 107, 467).

## 2.2. On the Construction of Literary Space

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<sup>4</sup> Original quotation: "Die durch die Gewalttat vollzogene Reduktion [des Erleidenden] auf den Körper ist der Grund, warum Gewalt stets als primär körperlich aufgefasst werden muss" (Reemtsma 125, original emphasis).

When one wants to speak about spaces of violence, it is not sufficient to describe only the nature of violence; rather, one needs to elaborate a notion of space that can be fructified for the analysis of literary texts. The so-called ‘spatial’ or ‘topographical turn’ in the 1980s led to a radical revision of the notion of space (cf. e.g. Bachmann-Medick 284-317),<sup>5</sup> as it left behind territorial approaches. Furthermore, space was no longer perceived as a container. Rather—like in the model of de Certeau—, it was understood as a concept produced and constructed by social and cultural practices. Hence, space is no longer looked upon as empty, but as charged with inscriptions, discourses, experiences, or identity and alterity constructions. De Certeau’s notion of space (*espace*) results from movements and activities in space, providing it with temporality. In opposition, he considers place (*lieu*) as a constellation of fixed points representing a position in a geometric system:

A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. ... On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper.” (117, original emphasis)

*Espace* represents a network of directions and velocities; it is considered as a *practiced place*, that is, the space in which we act and with which we interact (cf. 117).<sup>6</sup> Correspondingly, de Certeau draws attention to the role of the *pedestrian* or *walker* whose experience of the city is opposed to the strategic control of space from a position above (cf. 92f.). Rather, this pedestrian roams the city and thus constructs and opens up urban space.

If this model is applied to literature, fictional space can be interpreted as a space constructed by the practices of fiction. By this I do not only refer to the spatial movements of the characters, but also intend to include the discourses about those spaces as well. This idea offers the possibility of examining the *topography of a text* (in terms of representation of fictional space) and makes it possible to reach beyond a traditional analysis of space (that consists of only regarding space as a static and neutral setting and therefore solely bringing up concrete geographical sites) by considering the city as a constructed space, as a text written by movements and discourses. According to the focus on violence in this analysis, one of the crucial questions will be, of course, where to locate violence in this construct.

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<sup>5</sup> While ‘spatial turn’ is considered the more general term, cultural studies give preference to the term ‘topographical turn,’ as they are first and foremost interested in forms and techniques of representation (cf. among others Bachmann-Medick 299; Günzel 13).

<sup>6</sup> De Certeau gives the example of someone walking in a street in order to illustrate this: “Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (117).

However, I want to go one step further by claiming that the text itself shows characteristics of a constructed space, in which it becomes possible to explore a particular phenomenon. Vittoria Borsò alludes to this nature of the literary text when she advocates the notation “topo-graphy” in order to remind us of the fact that space in literature is never predetermined, but always a product of writing (cf. 279).<sup>7</sup> It is therefore necessary to address the question in how far Trouillot's novels can be interpreted as spaces opening up the possibility of (d)enouncing violence.

### 3. Spaces of Violence in Lyonel Trouillot's *Children of Heroes and Street of Lost Footsteps*

With the following analysis I aim to show that the texts pick up a fragmentation of urban space that has spread in cities all over Latin America. In their study on fractured cities, Koonings and Kruijt observe that urban space turns out to be a fragmented, ambivalent, and hybrid cityscape with varying manifestations of poverty, exclusion, violence, and fear—concepts that are strongly interrelated and contribute to a situation of so-called “citizenship insecurity” (“Fractured Cities” 8, 13). Although the two scholars are first and foremost referring to the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, the situation in post-dictatorship Haiti can nevertheless be qualified as similar. They speak of an urban crisis in societies having recently undergone a process of democratization that does not only affect the poor, but the upper and middle classes as well (“Introduction” 1), for a variety of so-called armed actors emerge on the scene, causing the state's monopoly on the use of force to collapse and fueling the new urban violence described above. All these factors have led to a situation of exclusion, insecurity, and violence that, in turn, gave rise to a social and spatial fragmentation of Latin American cities (4). Why is this interesting to us? It is because the novels, as I will demonstrate in the following, clearly reflect the strong interconnectedness of a fragmented urban space, social exclusion, and violence.

Moreover, I will show that, despite an apparent fragmentation of the fictional space, the phenomenon of violence cannot be restrained to certain enclaves. Rather, its de-limitation or unconfinement seems to transform violence into the only structuring element left in a fictional society represented as out of control. Hence, it re-writes the text of the city as a context of insecurity. It does so by the movements of the characters—often marginalized individuals who plunge into a brutal world that absorbs them—who roam through the city on their delirious odysseys. Instead of just strolling through the streets—as would de Certeau's *marcheur*—they stray aimlessly, wander in delirium, try to escape, and go beyond limits. By those movements, they confront us with the

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<sup>7</sup> Borsò stresses that space is carved by the act of writing and hereby establishes an analogy between Deleuze's and Guattari's terminology in *Mille plateaux* (“*strier*”) and the signification of the Greek verb *gráphein* (Borsò 279). When Stockhammer writes “topoGraphy,” he likewise emphasizes the constructedness of spaces as products of graphical operations, mentioning the affinity of *strier* and *gráphein* as well (15).

fragmented space of Port-au-Prince and reveal it as a complex and chaotic urban landscape where violence often seems to be the only point of reference and the individual is left unprotected and exposed.

The novel *Children of Heroes*, first published by Actes Sud in 2002, tells in a non-linear way the story of Mariéla and her brother Colin. After having slain their father Corazón, they are on the run and wander through the conurbation of Port-au-Prince. Their deed is explained by the fact that their image of an almighty father figure is shaken to the core when they witness how this father is being deeply humiliated at work. When he raises his hand again after this crucial moment, they have already acknowledged his vulnerability and defeat him with his own ‘weapon.’ Through analepses and prolepses we learn about their past of violence and misery and how a society condemning their deed tries to get a hold of them.

The novel *Street of Lost Footsteps*, first published in its original French version in Haiti in 1996, is characterized by a polyphony of narrative voices. Alternating and without a strict order, three narrators tell us of an apocalyptic night of atrocities, which represents a reference to Haitian reality after the Duvalier dictatorship and combines various recent historical events. Thus, the two antagonists whose followers seem to fight an eternal battle—the great dictator Deceased Forever-Immortal and the Prophet—are for instance an evident allusion to Duvalier and Aristide. In the novel, murdering mobs wander through the city and fight out this conflict apparently raging forever. While a taxi driver experiences violence directly and immediately on a delirious run through the city, a madam of a brothel re-tells the testimonies of her girls and shows us a society that appears long to have been suffering from a permanent crisis frequently leading to an eruption of proliferating violence. Finally, a post office employee follows the events on the radio and has to experience that violence can enter every space.

### 3.1 *Children of Heroes*—Urban Spaces of Violence and Fear

*Children of Heroes*<sup>8</sup> portrays a clearly fragmented urban space characterized by social exclusion. In fact, the text falls back on a traditional binary spatial structure and creates strong dichotomies in the conurbation of Port-au-Prince: the *bidonville* vs. the richer neighborhoods. Rotker also emphasizes this fragmentation of urban space in her study on cities of fear when she states that: “Modernity divided the large cities into clearly marked areas: high and low, clean and dirty” (18).

The *bidonville* represents a space apart that does not belong to the official cityscape: “The State is far away” (CH 104), states Colin. It does not affect the inhabitants of the slum, which is shown as a hermetically sealed world. Only a few are able to break out, and if they do, they try to burn all bridges behind them and never come back (cf. CH 50).

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<sup>8</sup> In the following quoted as CH, all page references will be to this edition. The original version, *Les enfants des héros*, will be quoted as EH.

The idea of the outside world remains vague and imprecise. It represents a distant space which surpasses imagination. Colin observes: "To survive, we preferred to believe that the whole world was like ours. With lots of Joséphines. With Corazóns. With a single season, always bad" (CH 141).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the slum is described as a space of "informality" which has no outlines.<sup>10</sup> Only when the protagonists are leaving the slum does the city gain structure: "She [Mariéla] was still laughing when we reached a real street. With a name. And cars. A different territory under different rules" (CH 20).<sup>11</sup> This quote clearly shows how far the exclusion of the *bidonvilles* and their inhabitants goes, as the lack of denomination surely questions the official existence of these neighborhoods that are not part of "the real city. The one on the map" (CH 20). Although Mariéla and Colin are able to take advantage of the big city's anonymity in order to hide out, they nevertheless remain alien elements. This is particularly obvious in the scene at Champ-de-Mars where they sit on a bench next to a man in a suit: "The man did not see us, refusing the accidental company of such offspring from another world" (CH 25).<sup>12</sup> Even though both their worlds are geographically contiguous, which theoretically makes it easy to cross their borders, a real co-existence seems inconceivable. They speak a different language (cf. CH 25), a statement which might not only be understood literally considering the diglossic society in Haiti (*Kreyòl Ayisyen* vs. French), but metaphorically as well. The man in the suit is unable to perceive the two children, as society is unwilling to list the slum on a map or to give names to its streets.

Simultaneously, the *bidonville* is the space where violence is endemic. Colin states that they have always lived with violence (cf. CH 32), and the murder of Corazón has been a trap laid for them by life (cf. CH 12). The question of guilt for the committed crime and its social determination by the milieu is central to the novel, for the text makes us question the responsibility of the two kids. Not only do they look back on a traumatizing childhood filled with beatings and suffering, but the novel stresses that violence is just a course of action in a world not offering many other options. This does not mean that their deed is excused. However, in such an environment, violence is simply reduced to banality and usualness.

Yet, the story of the novel is not at all limited to the slums of Port-au-Prince. Being on the run and wandering through Port-au-Prince, Colin and Mariéla leave their familiar space and enter other parts of the city. Trouillot names quite concrete places like the Champ-de-Mars in the city center or Kenscoff and Boutilliers up in the hills. They cross over into a world they cannot understand, which is why they try to explain it in familiar

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<sup>9</sup> "Pour survivre, nous préférons croire le monde entier pareil au nôtre. Avec des tas de Joséphine. Des Corazón. Une seule saison, toujours mauvaise" (EH 120).

<sup>10</sup> Koonings and Kruijt already note that informality is one of the features of a fragmented urban space ("Fractured Cities" 7ff).

<sup>11</sup> "Elle [Mariéla] riait encore quand nous sommes arrivés dans une vraie rue. Avec un nom. Et des voitures. Un autre territoire soumis à d'autres règles" (EH 29).

<sup>12</sup> "L'homme ne nous voyait pas, refusant le hasard lui imposant le voisinage de ces rejets d'un autre monde" (EH 31).



categories, for instance, a hotel room as “our own little slum” (CH 137). Nevertheless, they seek refuge in flight, although they are conscious that there is nowhere to go to. Thus, violence converts the quiet pace of de Certeau’s strolling pedestrian into the aimless run of two straying children, persecuted by a prejudiced society and by their own feeling of guilt.

The more Colin and Mariéla move up the hills, the more privileged the places seem. Those upper parts of the city, which are called “land of tourists” (CH 142), are described as a heavenly and safe enclave full of dogs with happy tails (cf. CH 143). It is represented as a celestial paradise, near the clouds, whose existence one cannot be sure about (cf. CH 142). This confrontation of the mountains and the plain draws on the real-life fragmentation of Port-au-Prince. Although nowadays various *bidonvilles* are growing up the hills, there are numerous poor districts near the ocean, such as Cité Soleil or Martissant, while rich neighborhoods, such as Pétion-Ville or Kenscoff, are traditionally located up in the mountains. By emphasizing the celestial and paradisiacal attributes of this space, the text further charges this real-life opposition symbolically and gives it a religious connotation.

At first glance this heaven-part of the city seems to be far away from the hell on earth in the *bidonvilles*: “From high up, it [the city] didn’t look threatening. On the contrary, you could imagine the sand mines that tunneled into the mountain’s slopes sending it crashing down there one day. Crushing the city with the weight of its flowers” (CH 143).<sup>13</sup> Apart from being categorized as a menace, the city below, looked at from above, represents a blank space. There is no further specification. In his study, de Certeau remarks that a view from above should make the complexity of the city readable and generate a transparent text (92). However, a city in which violence and exclusion seem to be the only reference point offers no insight from above. Rather, it remains an opaque, nebulous whole that is subliminally menacing.

But violence breaks into this hoard of peace and security in the rich neighborhoods due to the presence of the two adolescent parricides: As children from the *bidonville*, they bear the stigma of violence. By revealing their identity to the tourist guide who wants them to share the money they got for having their photo taken by some tourists, they turn their stigma into a weapon and remind the guide that he is living in a city of fear:

Mariéla asked him if ... he might have heard about the two crazy kids who’d killed their father and were wandering around the city, each armed with a dagger. ... The guide knew our story. He backed off. My hand was still in my pocket, holding tight to the ten-dollar bill. But when you’re frightened, you see things that exist and things that don’t exist. He saw the dagger. And began to scream bloody murder, backing away. (CH 147)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> “Vue de haut la ville ne représentait pas une menace. Au contraire, on pouvait croire que la montagne aux flancs percés de mines de sable pourrait un jour lui tomber dessus. L’écraser du poids de ses fleurs” (EH122).

<sup>14</sup> “Mariéla lui a demandé s’il ... n’était pas au courant de l’histoire des deux jeunes fous qui avaient tué leur père et qui se baladaient dans la ville avec un poignard chacun ... Le

However, the fear evoked by the presence of those children is quite ridiculous, as the novel shows us the background of their deed, namely that they have grown up with and witnessed violence all around them. In reality, they are just two more children who dream of being happy, “[of becoming], for a moment, the children of heroes” (CH 147); but they are in no way dangerous and lunatic killers anyone would seriously have to be afraid of. Yet, what the scene does show is the fact that the existence of violence and those who experience or practice it cannot be locked up in a particular space. Rather, those who suffer and inflict violence might be wandering around in the city, making those who were feeling safe realize that they are all living in a city of fear.

### 3.2 *Rue des pas perdus*: The De-Limitation of Violence in an Apocalyptic Cityscape

The novel *Street of Lost Footsteps*<sup>15</sup> pursues a similar representation of space and even goes one step further. The political conflict initially described quickly leaves the context of purposeful violence. Rather, it escalates and turns into autotelic acts the purpose of which is not primarily political but aimed at the destruction of the human body (cf. Reemtsma 116f).

The fragmentation of space in the novel becomes evident in the second narrative sequence. The post office employee spends the night of horror with his loved one Laurence in a friend's house located in the world up in the hills, which is represented as a supposedly safe place. The fictional space of the novel seems to be divided: on the one hand the setting of violent actions in the narrative sequence of the madam and the driver; on the other hand the post office employee's shelter.

But being out of the reach of violence is just an illusion. Although they are not physically in danger, it enters their world and they can no longer ignore it. While the protagonist states that there was something unreal in Gérard's account of the horrible radio news, as “[n]othing in the house confirmed the actual fact of the murders and executions” (LF 53), he has to acknowledge that he is part of it “without being part of it” (LF 54). They have tried to push violence aside, as has Laurence when she says that she convinced herself until that night that the conflict did not even exist. But Gérard's sanguinary records of the atrocious events in the city bring violence back into their midst. Henceforward, the apocalypse of that night determines their future: “The sole reality was that terror we had experienced only by hearsay, but which from now on

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guide connaissait notre histoire. Il a reculé. J'avais toujours la main dans ma poche serrant très fort le billet de dix dollars. Mais lorsqu'on a peur, on voit les choses qui existent et les choses qui n'existent pas. Il a vu le poignard. Et il s'est mis à crier à l'assassin, en reculant” (EH 126).

<sup>15</sup> In the following quoted as LF, all page references will be to this edition. The original version, *Rue des pas perdus*, will be quoted as PP.

would form the great reference point in our lives” (LF 53).<sup>16</sup> The post office employee cannot even remember if he made love to Laurence that night or if he did not. In the end, it just does not seem to matter anymore given the omnipresence of violence:

Did we make love that night? ... We made love that night. ... Our first act had been to make love. ... For the first time we had conquered our hollowness, our inner hells, and that city outside that was burning like hell. From now on, we would be able to confront that city. ... Passersby spoke of rapes, murders, revenge ... And yet, mingling with all that, stronger than all that, there was a garden fragrance ... To remember is always to lie to myself. We did not make love that night. ... The streets reeked of blood and smoke. ... Thousands of dead, voices shouted. Whole families. Entire neighborhoods. ... Next to me, at a respectable distance, Laurence was losing her garden perfume. ... But things are getting mixed up in my memory, and I don't know which ending is real. ... André would say that this isn't important, that history hasn't time to stop and sort out these details. But no human story is beneath notice. (LF 100-102)<sup>17</sup>

Hence, the urban space offers no place where the individual is safe. Rather, violence seems to be without limits, penetrating any space, and acting as the only structuring element left in a society represented as being out of control. The post office employee can no longer deny that violence is part of his reality and the smell of death covers the garden fragrance of a lost world in which they could feel safe.<sup>18</sup>

As violence infiltrates the whole urban space, it blurs the fragmentation of the cityscape discussed above. Although it is still related to certain areas, violence is shown as untamable and unleashed, as spilling over the edges and re-structuring—or de-structuring—the city. Rotker explains this as follows: “Violence rewrites the text of the city and the rules of the game. It should be understood as a form of resistance that ... crosses borders and space, erasing the boundaries that separate the outside from the inside” (18). It does not stay constrained to isolated areas, but it “destabiliz[es] all ... margins” and “penetrat[es] neighborhoods” (18). It “obliterates spaces of difference and

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<sup>16</sup> “N’était réelle que cette horreur à laquelle nous n’avions participé que par ouï-dire, mais qui constituerait désormais la grande référence de nos vies” (PP 77).

<sup>17</sup> “Avons-nous fait l’amour cette nuit-là? ... Nous avons fait l’amour cette nuit-là ... Notre premier acte avait été de faire l’amour ... Pour la première fois nous avons triomphé de nos vides, de nos enfers intérieurs, de cette ville qui, au-dehors, brûlait comme un enfer. Nous pouvions désormais l’affronter, cette ville ... Les passants parlaient de viols, d’assassinats, de vengeance ... Il y avait pourtant, mêlée à tout cela, plus forte que tout cela, l’odeur de jardin ... Mes souvenirs, c’est toujours me mentir. Nous n’avons pas fait l’amour cette nuit-là ... Les rues puait le sang, la fumée ... Des milliers de morts, clamaient des voix. Des familles entières. Des quartiers ... A côté de moi, à distance respectable, Laurence perdait son odeur de jardin ... Mais les souvenirs se brouillent dans ma mémoire, et j’ignore des deux fins laquelle correspond à la réalité. ... André dirait que cela n’a point d’importance, que l’histoire n’a pas le temps de s’arrêter à ces détails. Mais nulle histoire humaine n’est une petite histoire” (PP 132-34).

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to observe that although the act of love-making is dismissed as a detail unimportant to history, it is nevertheless mentioned as an act of possible uprising against a hellish city.

differentiation, making all of us experience injustice, insecurity, and inequality" (18).<sup>19</sup> As a phenomenon that is not characterized by containment but by de-limitation and 'unconfinedness,' violence rewrites the topography of the city as a context of insecurity for everyone.

Ducarmel's delirious run from the erupting apocalypse exemplifies this. His quiet drive through the city is interrupted by the proliferation of atrocities. It turns into a confused and lunatic run through a labyrinthine space. Like a disconcerting version of de Certeau's *marcheur*, he opens up a cityscape without any reference point other than violence (cf. Pessini 125f.):

And the soft thump of the bodies beneath the wheel, Rue des ... But what the fuck did I care about the street names, I was in the corridors of a huge barracks, a labyrinth of machine guns, my fear was driving any which way, peeing, crapping, weeping, clinging to the walls of my stomach, talking, singing, yelling—I haven't changed, communiqué, you're going to die—cackling with glee. (LF 31, omission marks and italics original)<sup>20</sup>

The metaphors used on the one hand take up the concept of de-limitation by expanding violence to the urban space in its totality. On the other hand, in particular the labyrinth is a closed universe with no way out. Ducarmel puts this into words by saying that there are armed actors coming out of every street corner and that, when danger is everywhere and you are surrounded by a topography of misery emphasized by streetnames like *Empty Belly Street* (LF 30), *Dead Street* (LF 21) and the famous *rue des Pas-Perdus* (LF 31), you can never be on the right path (cf. LF 31).<sup>21</sup> In the end, they all return to the "wretched, blood-stained ... Street of Lost Footsteps" (LF 108). But what could that mean? Keeping in mind the fact that in French a "salle des pas perdus" is a waiting area or a waiting hall in a public building (cf. *Le Nouveau Petit Robert*), the Street of Lost Footsteps represents the limbo or abeyance of Haitian history. Ducarmel Désiré is finally able to unmask the madman as what he really is: this spiral of Haitian history, the persistence of violence mentioned by Hurbon (116, cf. below), the waiting state they all return to once more, but still hoping for a better future to arrive one day.

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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that even traditional sanctuaries like religion or family collapse in Trouillot's fictional universe. They can no longer provide shelter in a society where parents name their daughter "One-Too-Many" (LF 56) and where God might be dead or has at least forgotten his children (cf. LF 90).

<sup>20</sup> "Et le plouc des corps sous les roues, rue des ... mais qu'est-ce que j'en avais à foutre des noms des rues, j'étais dans les couloirs d'une immense caserne, un labyrinthe de mitrailleuses, ma peur roulait sans destination, faisait pipi, caca, pleurait, se cramponnait aux parois de mon estomac, parlait, chantait, hurlait, *je n'ai pas changé*, tu vas mourir, communiqué, éclatait de rire" (PP 50, omission marks and italics original).

<sup>21</sup> Due to spatial constraints in this article, I just want to point to an interesting analogy: In his study on *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau mentions the "chorus of idle footsteps" (97); in the original French version, however, he speaks of "le parler des *pas perdus*," (180, my emphasis) as the mouvement that weaves spaces together and makes up the city.

### 3.3. A Legacy of Violence?

In her study on violence in Trouillot's fiction, Alba Pessini argues that his novels can be classified under two categories: the ones dealing with a violence of milieu ("*violence du milieu*"), such as *Children of Heroes*, and those bringing up state violence ("*violence du pouvoir*"), such as *Street of Lost Footsteps*. She points out milieu violence as a different manifestation of the phenomenon that takes place in the privacy of one's home serving as the backdrop of the story (cf. 131). With regard to *Children of Heroes*, she observes that the family is the crucible where violence settles, smoulders, and explodes (137).

She is right when she argues that we have to deal with different forms of violence if we focus on the superficial sources or motifs. Yet, such a simplistic differentiation does not bear in mind that both texts show the same society stuck in a crisis since its independence; a society that is characterized in the novels by social exclusion, moral decline, abject misery, and the banality of violence. Marginalized individuals like prostitutes, abused children, and angry mobs populate these fictional universes. If we shift our emphasis to this fact, the texts reveal a crucial analogy: Although the political and social conflict illustrated in *Streets of Lost Footsteps* appears to be absent in *Children of Heroes*, it is nevertheless subliminally present on a different level. In the microcosm of a family of the *bidonville* the same conflict is reflected, as a crucial pattern is reproduced: violence breeds further violence. Therefore it is hardly surprising that Colin and Mariéla kill their father. On a more abstract level, both novels assimilate the helplessness of a society that has found no peace until this day. The pattern can also be observed in *Street of Lost Footsteps* when the madam's prostitutes for instance stream out of the brothel in order to savor their share of blood by participating in the massacre in the streets (cf. 58).

Pessini already recognizes the importance of Hurbon's statement on the persistence of violence in Haitian society, but she does not complete this train of thought with regard to its meaning for Trouillot's texts:

For in every crisis, at every crossroad of its history, the phantasm of violence comes back to life through the slogan of the independence act: "*koupé tèt, boulé kay*" ("*cut off heads, burn down houses*"). It is not the case that Haitians feel a particular inclination to violence or have a habit of glorifying it. In their perspective, it is still something evil, but an evil that cannot be suppressed but by violence. (Hurbon 116, original emphasis my translation)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "En effet à chaque crise, à chaque carrefour de son histoire, revient en force le fantasma de la violence à travers le slogan de l'acte d'indépendance: '*koupé tèt, boulé kay*' ("*coupez les têtes, brûlez les cases*"). Ce n'est point là chez les Haïtiens un attachement particulier à la violence ou une habitude d'en faire l'éloge. Celle-ci demeure à leurs yeux un mal, mais aussi un mal qui ne peut être jugulé en retour que par la violence" (Hurbon 116, original emphasis).

Traces of this persistence are to be found in the actions of the protagonists in *Streets of Lost Footsteps* as well as in the plot of *Children of Heroes*. The madam corroborates Hurbon's words by describing Haiti as a closed universe of hatred and desolation: "You see, monsieur, twenty-seven thousand square kilometers of hatred and desolation—a touch more if you count all the outlying islands ... hatred grows faster than trees. Almost as soon as the children start talking it sprouts in their voices" (LF 10).<sup>23</sup> And this legacy has transformed urban space in the novels into a space of violence and vulnerability.

The question whether somewhere in the novels there is a counter-discourse offering hope for a more optimistic future in which society might break through this spiral of violence is a difficult one and requires further investigation elsewhere. As in view of the excesses of violence described in the books—and particularly in *Street of Lost Footsteps*—it is hard to see hope in Trouillot's fiction. Yet, I want to draw attention to the fact that some protagonists like Colin or the post office employee awaken to the fact that there is a vicious cycle of violence and that they are trapped in it.

#### 4. Conclusion: Literature as a Space to (D)Enounce Violence

My analysis permits us on the one hand to draw the conclusion that the relation between space, movement, and violence is threefold. First, urban space is not to be understood as a geographical coordinate, but as a space of experience and practices opened up by fictional discourse and the characters' movements. Second, the de-limitation of violence re-writes the text of the city and transforms violence into the only reference point in urban space. Third and last, violence does not only invade space as a social construct, but creates a new pedestrian who walks the city of violence on a delirious odyssey.

On the other hand, the analysis has shown that the historical topos of violence generating further violence is central to both novels, even though they deal primarily with domestic violence and a rather modern-day conflict on the content level. Although obvious allusions to history in the texts are missing, it is still consistently present in the text.

At this point, this paper would like to bring the concept of 'fictions that hurt' into focus in order to reach a conclusion. It is a concept elaborated by a German research group on the representations of violence in Latin American and African literature and media.<sup>24</sup> By it, we refer to fictions that do not only deal with violence on a content level,

<sup>23</sup> "Voyez-vous, monsieur, vingt-sept mille kilomètres carrés de haine et de désolation, un peu plus en comptant toutes les îles adjacentes, ... la haine croît plus vite que les arbres. A peine les enfants commencent-ils à parler que ça leur pousse dans la voix" (PP 21).

<sup>24</sup> This concept has been elaborated by a German research group on "Cultures of Violence in Africa and Latin America" including scholars from the University of Hamburg and the University of Bayreuth. It has, for instance, been discussed in the context of a section on "Ficciones que duelen: la violencia que combate la violencia" at the 17th Conference of the German Association of Hispanists (March 18-21, 2009) in Tübingen, Germany (cf. Schäffauer/Michael).

but in which the aesthetics of violence are joined by a violence of aesthetics. The reading of these texts does not only encourage reflection on the topic, but constitutes a shocking experience. ‘Fictions that hurt’ do not recoil from the atrocity of violence, but try to unearth its horror without getting carried away by explanatory attempts, moralizing tendencies, or voyeuristic glorification. According to the hypothesis of the research group, ‘fictions that hurt’ renounce the taming of what by its nature is untamable. Fictional violence untamed by moral judgment, or lust for sensation is a scandal, as it violates our faith in the containment of violence. But at the same time this aesthetic of violence emphasizes the communicative character of every violent act (cf. Reemtsma 467ff). For literature opens up a space where the presence of violence in any society and culture and its possible de-limitation can be put up for discussion and can be transformed into something speakable.<sup>25</sup>

For this is exactly what Trouillot does in his novels, by not only confronting us with a particular individual conflict, but conjuring a whole legacy that he is fiercely criticizing. The persisting violence transforms the Haitian capital into a chaotic and complex cityscape making the individual lose its orientation. Trouillot’s work, therefore, creates a space to address violence as one of Haiti’s insistent problems. In this awakening lies his optimism. We can see the importance of creating such a space in Trouillot’s most recent novel *Yanvalou pour Charlie*, where the adolescent Charlie takes the upper-class lawyer Mathurin D. Saint Fort on a trip to the spaces of violence of the city. Afterwards, everything has changed and Mathurin has learned that he will never just go back to normal.

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<sup>25</sup> This spatial interpretation of ‘fictions that hurt’ is close to Markus Schäffauer’s concept of ‘violence work’ (*trabajo de violencia*) presented at the symposium “La transformación de la violencia en América Latina—dinámicas del cambio de la violencia en la sociedad y en la literatura” (March 11-12, 2010) in Potsdam, Germany. The proceedings, including Schäffauer’s paper on “Violentografía como trabajo de violencia: Desde *Pixote* a *Cidade dos Homens*,” will be published in the near future, detailed information has not yet been available.

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