

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Édouard Glissant and the Geography of Relation

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Édouard Glissant's notions Relation, Place (*Lieu*), "forced poetics", "le drive", and "detour" are discussed through close readings of Glissant's representations of lived relational, material, physical and discursive geographies in the Caribbean, which are unfolded with references to Caribbean archival research. Using Denmark, a former colonial power in the Caribbean and whose educational policies are influenced by international trends and organisations as a case, the author draws on surveys, interviews, studies of Danish education in geography, and ministerial guidelines and regulations for teaching geography. Bojsen's analysis confirms recent research from other scholars that suggest a growing predominant utilitarian and economy-focused conceptualization of geography in Denmark, where physical geography appears to be increasingly disconnected from social and cultural parameters. However, her reading deploys Glissant's geography of "Relation", which she considers a counter-geography, to tease out the potential room for dissidence in this development and concludes by suggesting how Glissant's notions may lead to constructive critical questions about how geography, mobility and connectedness can be taught in primary and secondary schools in Denmark and elsewhere.

Keywords: Danish geography education; (Glissantian) Relation; place (*Lieu*); forced poetics; mobility marronage

Learning Geography as a Territorial or Relational Discourse

Colonial geopolitics and human geography are not part of the curriculum in geography classes in Danish middle and secondary education. Students often approach such questions via other countries' colonial history in other relevant school subjects (Bojsen et al., 2020). Danish and Caribbean geopolitical histories are overlapping and intertwined in the Saidian sense (Said 1994), as the islands of St Croix, St John and St Thomas, currently known as the USVI, were purchased from other colonial powers by Denmark in the 17th and 18th centuries and remained Danish colonies until they were sold to the United States of America in 1917 (Olwig 1985; Tyson 1995; Jensen 2018). A survey carried out in a representative number of high schools in Denmark in 2016, revealed that most Danish students used a frame of economic and pragmatic geopolitical analyses when talking about colonial practices and ideologies. In qualitative interviews, some students expressed pride in learning that Denmark did not "take a back seat" but was "in the game along with other important nations" in the 18th century or similar statements. When asked about migration and globalization issues in the survey and interviews, the general tendency was that students then would reconsider their initial low ranked interest in the subject and argue in favour of knowing more about colonial history. However, there was no immediate connection to contemporary life even if the mention of a "lost tourist paradise" came up repeatedly (Bojsen et al. 2020).

Various detailed studies of the history of geography in its Eurocentric versions have already established how the emergence of geography in 16th-, 17th- and 18th- century European academia was tied up with the histories of conquest, governance, utility, trade, accumulation of capital, and exploration (Grove 1995; Coursil 2000; Anker 2001; Williams 1944). The geopolitical conceptualizations of European nation-state institutions such as public schools and ministries are driven by the concerns of nation-building, the construction of knowledge as politically neutral scientific truth, and the quest for resources that may support both scientific and commercial developments of the nation. In the case of academia, the nation-state remained the focal point in social and political geography until the 1970s, when different geographers began focusing more on class and identity conflicts (Agnew et al. 2003). However, many Caribbean intellectuals had already begun to contest Eurocentric geography and its ways of conceptualizing the relation between space and humans in sedentary or mobility contexts before the 1970s (Sheller 2018).

Martinican philosopher, novelist, poet, and activist Édouard Glissant was part of a cohort of Caribbean intellectuals comprising Edward Brathwaite, Frantz Fanon, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Cyril L.R. James, José Martí, Fernando Ortiz, and Eric Williams. From the 1930–1950s and onwards, their publications pushed against the various hegemonic

geographical understandings and practices that resulted from European and American colonial development and from geopolitical discourses by representing people, space, economy, and power intersections in new and critical ways. One of Glissant's key notions was Relation (which he styled with a capital initial letter) and which, in his writings is described as the action of linking, relaying, and relating as in narrating: "*relie, (relaie), relate*" (Glissant 1990: 187). The communicative and thus conceptualizing dimension of Glissant's work is where it may be even more radical than other positions in contemporary critical geographies, as well as where it ties into critical educational studies (Bojsen 2014).

My presentation of Glissant is structured around three topics: (1) Glissant's use of the word "*Lieu*", which conveys a representation of "place" as a construction by different, incongruent but simultaneously working and valid perceptions, practices and environmental processes (organic as well as non-organic), which are also in relation with other places; (2) geography perceived as a conceptualizing language practice of power, as a poetics; and (3) geography of wandering, in which mobility is not in opposition to a sedentary positioning. My close reading of Glissantian notions such as "*Lieu*", "forced poetics", "detour", and "le drive" presents a geography that focuses on power relations between land, sea and people, and even more on the conceptualizations and enactment of such power relations through social practices. The pertinence of the Glissantian geography beyond a speculative level is underscored through references to historical and anthropological archival research of geographical interest (Hall 1985; 1992; Olwig 1985; Tyson 1995). Thereafter, I relate Glissant's notions to debates on the purpose and didactics of geography in Danish educational policies. Danish educational policies are strongly inspired by UNESCO, the OECD and other international organizations, hence they may be of interest for a non-Danish audience. My analysis of geography as a school subject in Denmark has confirmed two tendencies that also emerged in the above-mentioned survey and qualitative interviews with Danish students. The first tendency was the dominance of utilitarian economic rationalities and tools that aimed to master and manage natural resources for the benefit of a national community. Physical geography was constructed as a non-political and objective discipline and was not connected to issues of political and sociotechnical geography. The second tendency was that teachers and students were not provided with a language and conceptual repertoire that might have helped them to address the multiplicity of ontological and epistemological positions and experiences that exist in the field of research, in the workplaces of geographers throughout the world and in the classrooms, where some students experience mobility as easy while others have gone through life-threatening migrations.

Archipelagic Thinking: The Place (*Lieu*) as a Site of Simultaneously Signifying Practices

Glissant's book titled *Le Discours antillais* (1997a [1981]) is a collection of essays and studies of both sociological and poetic character, some of which had been presented at conferences or published in journals prior to the publication.¹ The book starts with several texts collected under the title of "Introductions". Each introductory section constructs a point of entry into the Martinican space from different positionings. For example, the history of resistance against colonialism and slavery is followed by opinions and quotes from French and local politicians, tourists, and intellectuals that convey representations of Martinique in the decades following World War II. Another introductory section presents descriptions of the land seen through the colonial settlers, the enslaved Indian contract workers, as well as the memories of various forms of *marronage*. Indeed, the enslaved people's practice of running away from plantations, which Glissant often describes as related to the meandering paths of rivers and the mangrove towards the sea, was one among many strategies of resistance and a counter-geography (Hall 1985; Olwig 1985). Other introductory sections refer to local initiatives to recognize Africa as part of Caribbean history. The cluster of introductory sections is presented as "*discours*" (discursive speech acts) and the entire book as a quest for a poetic. Jacques Coursil (2000) argues that Glissant's advocacy for a multiplicity of histories was part of his strategy to oppose the singular colonial history, a reading that Glissant explicitly confirms in *Philosophie de la Relation* (Glissant 2009) extenuating the proposition to include geography as well.

In general, Glissant represented Martinique as a *Lieu*, a relational place in the Caribbean archipelago and in the world, but without glossing over the uneven power relations at play (Glissant 1997a [1981]; 1997b). One example of such representation was the coast. The importance of the coast in the Caribbean has been mainly framed as useful harbours that promote trade or as useful beaches that may attract tourists (Olwig 1985; Sheller 2003; 2018). For the enslaved, the beach signified a much-needed access to food as they would go fishing in order to feed their family or perish while trying. Elsewhere, it signified the contemplation of fleeing to Haiti after its revolution and emancipation from slavery in 1804. Both during colonial times and since then, the sea and the beach expose the people to the hurricanes and winds of devastation, yet the mangrove may provide a place in which to hide and has the biological constitution to live with the hurricanes. Similarly, but tied into a different geopolitical order, the harbour was a place to trade, for information and for greeting people (Glissant 1997a [1981]; 1993).

A central theme in Glissant's geography, as it is laid out in his novels, is the investigation of how the different social groups of the slave plantation and later in post-colonial Martinique were related to each other, to places, and to different mobility strategies in a context of oppression, resistance and unlikely temporary alliances. Some of the most salient examples relate to the fictitious character Longoué, who is sometimes a maroon, other times a *quimboiseur* (a kind of healer who cannot be pinned down on the plantation), and his encounters with a *béké* (a white plantation administrator

¹ An abbreviated version has been translated into English by Michael Dash (Glissant 1989).

and, at times, the owner). The negotiations, confrontations and strategies of cunning that occur between Longoué and his counterpart are all set in situations where the elements of the surrounding landscape, whether the scene is set in the forests or within housing areas, appear as active agents in the negotiation of empowerment (Glissant 1958; 1993). The struggle staged between Longoué and the *béké* entails strategies of naming, categorizing and engaging with the land in a way that will outmanoeuvre the adversary by pinning him to certain social spaces.

In *Tout-monde* (Glissant 1993), the *béké* visits Longoué's house to see whether he may retrieve the mysterious wine barrel that the *béké*'s ancestors had given to Longoué's ancestors. The barrel contains a snake and was intended as a curse against the maroon ancestor, but now it provides Longoué with a strong social power that is never fully explained. The house and the wine barrel merge into a *Lieu*, a place that is constructed by and yet structures the ensuing negotiation, which on the surface appears as both threats of eviction and a real estate proposition. The place of negotiation and struggle emerges as a shared knowledge of the horror of colonialism, hidden in a container that ought to hold a prestigious French product. Consequently, the real reason for the *béké*'s visit goes beyond any rational time-space category and cannot be named. It is the Freudian *Unheimliche* (uncanny) as theorised by Homi Bhabha (1992) and constitutes a reference to other examples in Glissant's work where opposing perspectives are put into painful relation through shared knowledge or history as detected by DeLoughrey (2017). The scene is set early in the daytime and the omniscient narrator finds it important to underline that the skin colours all appear the same at dusk, thus referring to the pervasive racialization of the social imaginary which is temporarily suspended by the elements. The arguments that fly back and forth and the movements of the two men refer to numerous practices and conceptions of time-space relations in the microgeography of the plantations, such as the porch of the "Big House" and other particular areas of the plantation that are defined by the chores and expected behaviour of the enslaved and the *béké* respectively (Glissant 1993: 120–128).

Resistance via Forced Poetics

Glissant readily credited the works of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze as source of inspiration for rhizomatic thinking (Glissant 1997a [1981]; 1990: 23). Nevertheless, he did express some concern that they did not unfold and include the voices and contributions from the "others" that would appear in the rhizomatic network:

Those who speak are also making themselves known, but they may also have to make those who are silent known, that is to conceive their dense existence. Not to speak for them, but to wait for their words. Any other approach would lead to a substitution that could easily be mistaken for freedom. (Glissant 1997a [1981]: 339; my translation)

Glissant's essay on what he calls "free poetics" and forced poetics" was published in English in 1976. In the essay, he explains that free poetics means that one uses language to contest the established order and that one will recognize oneself and one's actions in the language one uses in that contestation. However, this is not the case in forced poetics:

Forced poetics occur whenever a drive for expression confronts something impossible to express. Such a confrontation may occur between the expressible contents and the idiom which is suggested or imposed historically [...]. Forced poetics is the consciousness of the opposition between an idiom which is used and a language which is needed. (Glissant 1976: 95–96)

In *Le Discours antillais*, Glissant explains certain practices and styles of speech in Creole as strategies of resistance against the plantation owners, later against the consequences of the attachment to France as an "Overseas Department": digressions, detours, loudness, and staccato produced a Creole speech practice that would be difficult for others to understand and could turn into a "routine delirium" (Glissant 1997a [1981]). The enslaved were not masters of their time in body, actions or words, let alone of the land and geographical constituents around them. Glissant further argues that language was not meaningfully connected to any practice or emotion throughout most of their day (Glissant 1997a [1981]). This alienation continued after emancipation, inasmuch as the production of local products in Martinique was initiated by the *béké* or by interested parties located on the mainland. As pointed out by Celia Britton, Glissant's analysis picked up from Fanon's work by insisting on this and other connections between alienation from the land and from language as a consequence of slavery and post-emancipation colonialism (Britton 1999). Mimi Sheller, among other scholars, has demonstrated the ongoing alienation from land and economic practices for Caribbean populations caused by a tourist industry and oil economy that are run by a few locals and tied into networks of continental, often transnational, assemblages of political and financial institutions and discourses (Sheller 2018).

However, "forced poetics" complicates the notion of alienation by mapping it out as a terrain of struggle. Glissant notes that in Creole folktales there are no descriptions of landscapes: "The countryside is a diagram, a map of various places one walks across; the forest and its darkness, the grassland and its sunshine, the hill and its weariness, are precisely places of transit" (Glissant 1976: 99). Landscape is not a homeland but a place that one strives through, as the land is owned by the King (the European plantation owner) and controlled by brother Tiger (the *béké*). Glissant's text offers his readers a political geography, conceived from the bottom of the social pyramid and produces a contrapuntal

perspective (Said 1994) of Sheller's reading of the romantic representations of Caribbean landscapes (Sheller 2003), as well as of Kenneth Olwig and Don Mitchell's emphasis on the relation between power, justice systems and landscaping practices (Olwig and Mitchell 2009).

In the same way as maps and GIS are geographical tools, Creole is a tool: Creole "is not a language of Being but of Relatedness" (Glissant 1976: 98),² by which he meant it was a language of a performed geography of relationality. Glissant's texts convey the message that for the enslaved and their descendants neither land nor language are owned or mastered; they are spaces with which one must relink, relay, and relate and narrate, both painfully and in a struggle, in order to survive, and possibly, intermittently, to reach a safe space before moving on.

Mobility and the Geography of Wandering

Glissant's notion of Relation encompasses different types of mobility and immobility. The forced journey of the enslaved across the Atlantic Ocean is mobility as fundamental oppression (DeLoughrey 2017). In *Tout-monde* the place of the slave ship produces and contains relationality between the enslaved in the forms of animosity or friendships, structured by an oscillation between sequestration (resulting in immobility) and anonymity below deck and access to air and exposure above deck, in addition to the movements of the sea. *Marronage* conveys resistance in terms of mobility by contributing to a counter-geography. It deploys the physical and social geographical constituency of the Caribbean island to create alliances with the few survivors of the indigenous peoples, other African-Caribbeans, enslaved or free, or soldiers deserting from the French army who participated in the wars against the English on the North American continent (Nicolas 1996; Butel 2002). After emancipation, *marronage* mobility turned into what Glissant called "le drive", which conveys an erratic, unproductive (in the eyes of the pervasive capitalist system) moving about and an existential void (Glissant 1997a [1981]). To Glissant (1997a [1981]), "the drive" was an attempt to escape the meaninglessness of post-slavery modernity and, after 1947, the politics of assimilation. The notion must be understood in the context of the particular geography of communal solidarity, in which mobility between homes and islands was woven into an economy and cultural geography of mutual services and where "keeping scores" was frowned upon (Olwig 1985; Zargazadeh 2017). As such, the notion is not an opposition to sedentarism, but describes the inability to connect with the networks of solidarity and mutual aid within a given community, including its accepted patterns of mobility. In this context, Glissant introduced another important concept, "detour", which is a particular kind of mobility, a wandering. The detour is a strategy of resistance against an imposed or anticipated chronological linearity of a particular place. The place may be a nation, a community or specific language practices. Furthermore, a Glissantian detour may be a displacement in order to connect with the other in solidarity and to find a part of oneself in such a gesture (Glissant 1997a [1981]).

Glissant's novel *La Lézarde* (Glissant 1958) and several of his later texts convey two strategies adopted by the enslaved in the face of the plantation system: the maroon who runs off and lives in the wild, as represented by Longoué, and the plantation slave who remains, yet struggles against enslavement by trying to be as passive and slow as possible, as embodied by Béluse. In the majority of cases, the Longoué family and the Béluse family are in a constant state of hate and rivalry, interrupted by rare but significant moments of strategic temporary alliances. Their names are playful creolisms that refer to their social positionings: Longoué is the name for a "long way", whereas Béluse refers to a state of being "beautifully used" by the plantation owner. In practice, Béluse resists by being opaque and unknowable to the *béké*, either by being silent or by "detour" in his speech as a "de-speaker" (*déparleur*).

Glissant uses the narrative of intertwined histories of Longoué and Béluse to suggest that they are constituted by and actively constituting the same geopolitical and cultural geography. Detouring is not about deviating from the sedentary norm. Rather, detouring is about ties to a *Lieu*; it is part of being as Relation. Detouring and staying are at work simultaneously within the same body and mind regardless of where the body is located. This point is unfolded further in Glissant's last theoretical essays, *Une nouvelle Région du monde* (2006) and *Philosophie de la Relation* (2009).

Geography Policies in Denmark

How can the three Glissantian dimensions – the composite, incongruent and dynamic understanding of place (*Lieu*), the conceptualizing power of language, and the deconstruction of mobility as a deviation – inform the discipline of geography as it is taught in Danish schools? I have consulted the directives and guidelines on geography published by Denmark's Ministry of Education in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019.³ In addition, I have also drawn on surveys and interventions conducted by Danish geographers and scholars in didactics of natural and social sciences, as they discuss how geography is conceived and taught in Denmark (Krogh and Andersen 2017; Schmidt 2015; 2019).

In 1814, King Frederik VI passed a decree for what was perceived as middle-class schools in which geography would be emphasized as a particular subject. The decree specified that "Natural history and science" were to promote "knowledge about trading commodities, as well as about artisan and industrial products" while geography 'should be connected to

² "Relatedness" is the English translation of the French word "Relation" in this particular translation. The essay is available in French in *Le Discours antillais* (Glissant 1997a [1981]). Translators of later versions of Glissant's work into English preferred the English word "Relation" (e.g. Glissant 1989, 1997a, 1997b).

³ Danish ministries often change names and locations when a new government is installed. Since the Frederiksen government was installed in June 2019, the institution responsible for primary, middle and secondary education has officially been named Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet (officially translated into English as the Ministry for Children and Education). For the sake of simplicity I refer to the Ministry of Education.

trade geography" (Krogh and Andersen 2017: 17; my translation). A noteworthy point of the decree is that the teaching of natural sciences is explicitly connected to a capitalist economic vision. However, in the early 19th century, learning natural sciences was considered to be of limited relevance for the Danish upper classes and only in 1871, were such school subjects taught in secondary schools that prepared students for university.

Since the mid-20th century, the Ministry of Education has had one set of learning objectives for students in primary schools and middle schools (called *Folkeskolen* in Danish) for pupils in the age range of c.6–15 years and another set for secondary education schools, with students in the age range of c.16–20 years.

In this section, I refer to two types of documents produced by the Ministry of Education: regulations on learning objectives for students and the ministerial guidelines designed to help teachers to understand and comply with the regulations. In the ministerial guidelines for teaching geography in primary and middle schools, the areas to be covered are "demography and professional activities", "the Earth and its climate", "globalization", and "natural resources and conditions of living" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2018c: 1). Geopolitical concerns are framed as a globalized economy in which technologies and the quest for inventing solutions for extreme weather consequences and increasing populations are among the prioritized arenas. While it is underlined that social and cultural geography must be included to fulfil the goals, they are only mentioned a few times. According to the guidelines, "foreign cultures" are structures that must be described and analysed, and national and global conflicts are explained as a question of "cultural difference, border constituency and resources" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2018c: 2). Notably, students should acquire "intercultural competence", which is defined as an "individual's insight and ability to understand the cultural complexity of everyday life and to communicate without prejudice with people from other cultures" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2018c: 2; my translation). The intentions may be laudable, but the framing is still the assumption of a homogeneous national "we" in the face of alternative understandings, which are per se "foreign". This is explicitly stated in the regulations that stipulate common goals for 2019: "students must obtain understanding of foreign cultures and knowledge of how physical and cultural geography contribute to our perception of the world" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019a: 3; my translation). Because the learning is constructed as a constituent in building a territorial "us" and not a relational *Lieu*, the guidelines fail to acknowledge the diversity of national, racial, and religious understandings that are present in classrooms, thus resulting in a general pedagogical lacuna in Danish classrooms (Horst and Gitz-Johansen 2010; Horst 2016). Staying and detouring simultaneously is not an option.

Whereas the 2019 guidelines are short and lack exemplary material (2019b), the 2018 guidelines provide case examples for teachers in order to illustrate the most salient points of the document (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2018c). Without exception, all examples are set within physical geography, even when suggesting themes such as boats with refugees arriving in Lampedusa or mine disasters in Turkey (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2018c). Furthermore, the document states that "nature, humans and production are the cornerstones, broadly speaking, of a geographical understanding of the spatial world, and the subject [of geography] provides concepts and explanatory models to facilitate understanding and perspective" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2018c: 1; my translation).

In the 2019 learning goals, which are more extensive than those for 2018, geography is now unambiguously put forward as a subject of natural science and modelling is framed as a central element, which, in addition, provides students with a "universal language" and an "intercultural archive" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019a: 11). The same document states that "natural sciences are a culture" and "natural sciences contribute to" and "are a part of our culture" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019a: 12). The tendency is clear: the natural science approach is expanding.

Instead of merely lamenting the exclusion of social and cultural geography, the situation can be analysed as a struggle between positions of free and forced poetics. Posing natural sciences as both "our culture" and a "universal language" can be seen as a contradiction in terms or an imperialist position, easily dismissed with reference to studies on the *global* history of science. But it could also be seen as a *départeur* symptom from marginalised cultural geographers. While apparently confirming a hegemonic, economic, utilitarian, quantifiable and apolitical knowledge production, the emergence of these excerpts also points towards "a wine barrel with a hidden snake" in the guidelines. The dominant discursive constructions serve to represent the school subject of geography as politically neutral, scientific and "beautifully useful" (as in Beluse) to the national economy and to the quest for global solutions. However, the structures of power, transnational dynamics and political choices that are part of the examples mentioned, the proposed definition and the very subject matter of geography and geoscience when "put into use", remain hidden. The 2019 guidelines have taken the examples of Lampedusa and mines away, but mention issues of "inequality in the world", "cultural differences and minorities" and "globalisation and living conditions in the world" (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2019c). Depending on the eyes of the beholder, this can be seen as a discursive pushback against an implementation of a utilitarian geographic vocabulary or as a cementation of an economic utilitarianism constructed as universally neutral via the censoring of politically charged concrete examples.

In the regulative and guideline documents for secondary schools, geography is an elective subject and is now explicitly called "*naturgeografi*" (physical geography). Interestingly, the subject is called "geoscience" when taught at the advanced A-level. Cultural, political and social geography have been taken out of the curriculum, and there is no mentioning of socio-scientific issues (Ratcliffe and Grace 2003). Instead, the examples that suggest interdisciplinary work use mathematics as an example. For secondary school education, the word "culture" appears twice in the regulative and guideline documents for 2017 but not for 2018 and 2019 (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2017a; 2017b; 2018a;

2018b; 2019b). This development is inscribed into a longstanding competition among subjects in the quest to be taught in the public education system since the 19th century (Krogh and Andersen 2017). Danish scholars of science education argue that Danish education policies have been influenced by the cold war effects documented by Glen Aikenhead (2006), the crisis rhetoric on education in the USA in the 1980s, and by the Obama administration's advocacy for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics – STEM education (Krogh and Andersen 2017; Schmidt 2015; 2019). Other important vectors of influence are the OECD's conceptions of viable learning goals and how their fulfilment may be measured (Schmidt 2019).

In her doctoral dissertation, Jette Schmidt documents how major Danish companies are exerting decisive influence on the prevalence of a utilitarian and design-focused approach to learning in natural sciences through board memberships in educational councils and funding councils pertaining to education and research from middle school to university level (Schmidt 2015). She addresses two major problems in this development, one of which is the lack of transparency due to the absence of democratic debates and of structural accountability in the funding of research and teaching facilities. The second problem is that private companies do not appear to have an immediate interest in supporting critical debates on ontological and epistemological discussions on particular elements within the natural sciences and sub-disciplines such as geography (Schmidt 2019). This may explain why the Danish ministerial regulations and guidelines are lagging so far behind international cutting-edge research in critical geography and educational studies. Research that challenges instead of complying with nation-state idiosyncrasies cannot be “beautifully used” and does not fit into the assemblages of the OECD, financial crisis (capitalism's eternal crisis) rhetoric and sponsor companies.

Conclusions

Glissant's texts describe the ties between social and physical space in a way that covers and exceeds the referents of the Excel spreadsheets and GIS tools used in geography classes. In a similar move, his geography complies with the learning objective in ministerial regulations that names the ability to communicate what one has learned to others and to become a responsible citizen, yet it also goes beyond the regulations as it takes us beyond the implicit nation-state ontology without denying its existence. His geography insists on the dynamic diversity of populations by pointing to the conditions that include or exclude certain groups from certain political, social and physical spaces, as well as to the strategies deployed to challenge those conditions. The utilitarian purpose is not necessarily excluded in Glissant's theory, but it is analysed as a relation that has ramifications other than economic profit, as in the relation between Longoué and Béluse. Reading Glissant along with the Danish ministerial regulations and guidelines reveals that the current system only values a small part of the simultaneously-working human, cultural, physical, and economic geographical and geological processes that are at stake in the cases and areas suggested by the ministry, but also in students' lives.

The tendency to explain transnational processes that pertain to either physical or social geography along nationally-framed utilitarian economic logics is pervasive in the Danish context. This tendency is also detectable in other natural science subjects, according to material available on the webpages of the Ministry for Children and Education. That some Danish students end up feeling proud that their ancestors have taken part in the trade and enslavement of millions of people is a wake-up call (Bojsen et al. 2020). Students are not learning *how* Denmark is a place (*Lieu*) in connection and in relation with not only Europe and what is pointed out them as “the West”, but also with Africa and the Caribbean. They are not provided with a language that permits them to conceive themselves through the relation they and Danish politicians and institutions perform with these and other places, nor to see how the boats overloaded with people in the Mediterranean are related to Danish politics and how some “boat people” have become Danish subjects, possibly their classmates. They do not learn how to name and analyse the marooning, “drive” and detouring that take place within the national “we” as a simultaneously working multiplicity not only of productions, but of practices, human and nonhuman.

What would happen if we, who teach, were to formulate the proposition that those who try to cross in fragile boats or muster the money to find safer passage are not marooning from a slave plantation, but are struck by “the drive” as they maroon from the consequence of climate change and transnational assemblages of political, financial and industrial economic interests whose language and algorithms are not available to most citizens? What would happen if the Danish education system were to encourage students to reflect critically on how they conceptualize their own multiplicity of simultaneously signifying practices and marooning or detouring strategies? What if we were to study different ways to live the “drive”, seen in the perspective of increasing disparity between rich and poor, between those who do and those who do not have access to health care, education and jobs? What if textbook cases on climate change and recycling were to mention how Danish students are in relation to and *along with* West African migrants such as those in Lampedusa, who might have worked in the mines digging titanium in the Sahel for use in Danish students' smartphones, and who now collect bottles after the Roskilde Festival (Juul 2017)? All of these questions concern relational geographies of humans, borders and resources. Somewhere, there is “a barrel with a snake in it” and a negotiation to be started.

Competing Interests

The author has no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report.

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