

Paper prepared for the Euroacademia International Conference
Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities

Zagreb, 18 – 20 April 2013

This paper is a draft

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Fragmented Worlds – Fragmented Identities

Destruction as a Tool for Politicized Use of Marginal Identities in Goytisolo's novel *El sitio de los sitios*

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Abstract

The object of this paper is to outline to what extent in Goytisolo's novel *El sitio de los sitios* the description of the destruction of Sarajevo during Bosnian War as a 'fragmented world' goes along with a politicized use of marginal identities in form of a performance of a fragmented European memory and identity.

Theoretical background is Marc Augé's conception of 'anthropological places' and 'non-places' (Augé 1992) and the actual debate on the existence or inexistence of 'European sites of memory'. Pierre Nora's work on '(French) sites of memory' (Nora 1997 [1984-1992]) marked the beginning of this debate and the recently published work on 'European sites of memory' by Pim den Boer, Heinz Duchhardt, Georg Kreis and Wolfgang Schmale (2012) tried to bring it to a termination. These theoretical reflections and the fact that in Goytisolo's novel 'Sarajevo' appears as well as a real, historical place as a common place that manifests not only various crimes against humanity but also multiple marginal ideas, lead to two central questions of this paper: Can Goytisolo's description of 'Sarajevo' be understood as a literary performance of a European site of memory? and: To what extent the destruction serves as a tool for politicized use of marginal ideas and identities?

Principal method is Reiner Keller's Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) (Keller 2011). Based on this method this paper aims to investigate the discourse on 'Sarajevo' in Goytisolo's novel and its entanglement with the discourse on 'Europe' and the 'European Union' on the one hand and the discourse on marginal ideas and identities on the other hand. By combining the discourse-analysis with methods of literary studies this paper will give an answer to the two central questions.

Key words: Goytisolo, Europe, Memory, Identity, Marginality

Introduction

Due to the end of European dictatorships and the collapse of communism, there is a particular need for new orientations at the end of 20th century in Europe. This situation, called "world in pieces" by Clifford Geertz (Geertz 2000), implicates a lack of identity. Particularly in Spain, the new postcolonial situation and the exclusion from the process of European integration after the Second World War (due to the politics of isolation of the regime), go along with a need for new identification. In his novel *El sitio de los sitios* (1995), the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo describes the destruction in Sarajevo during the war in Bosnia. This particular place with its particular history seems to become more and more a common place or topos that illustrates other European conflicts and different kinds of loss. This leads to the first question of this paper: To what extent, in Goytisolo's *El sitio de los sitios*, the description of Sarajevo and the reference to other conflicts serve the purpose to perform a new European memory? Furthermore, the description of war damage seems to illustrate as well the resolution of fixed ideas and identifications. As a sort of creative chaos, the destruction offers the possibility to build new orders, to fix new ideas, including marginal opinions and identities – the fragmented world seems to go along with fragmented memories and identities. The entanglement of the discourse on the historical incidents during Bosnian War and marginal (non-European) discourses leads to the second question of this paper: To what extent, in Goytisolo's novel, the destruction serves as a tool for politicized use of marginal identities?

Methodological and Theoretical Approach

In accordance with social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann²²2009), this paper is based on the hypothesis that every kind of knowledge and meaning is a social artifact; collective memory and identity are no predetermined entities but have to be performed. This paper focuses on literature as medium of identity performance. Combining literary and sociological methods, this paper aims to analyse the discourse on the destruction of Sarajevo and its relation to the discourse on collective memory and identity. Principle method is the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) (Keller 2011).¹

To analyse the function of Sarajevo in Goytisolo's novel, this paper refers to Marc Augé's concepts of *lieux anthropologiques* (anthropological places) and *non-lieux* (non-places). His concept of *lieux anthropologiques* is based on Louis Marin's definition of *lieu* as the place where a particular corpus (*corps*) is situated (Marin 1991, 89) and Michel de Certeau's definition of *lieu* as a particular collocation or constellation (*ordre*) of elements in space (*espace*) (Certeau 1990, 172-73).² Referring to Marin and Certeau, Augé defines *lieu anthropologique* as a partially materialized idea, which the inhabitants (of a particular space) have of the relation to their territory, to their relatives and to the others (cf. Augé 1992, 73).³ An anthropological space is characterized as semi-phantasm (*demi-fantasme*) (Augé 1992: 61), as concrete and symbolic construction of space (*construction concrète et symbolique de l'espace*) which have at least three characteristics in common: they are (understood as) identical, relational and historical (cf. Augé 1992, 69).⁴ This definition reveals the proximity to Edward Soja's characterization of *third spaces* as "real-and-imagined-place" (Soja 1996). Following Augé, supermodernity produces a particular type of spaces, so called non-spaces (*non-lieux*) (Augé 1992, 100). In contrast to anthropological places, *non-lieux* are defined as places which are neither identical, nor relational, nor historical (Augé 1992, 100). Anthropological places and non-places are

described as opposite poles (*polarités fuyantes*); both of them never exist in a pure form (Augé 1992, 101). Some non-places even exist only in the word, e.g. imagined places or clichés. This particular form of non-place will be crucial for this analysis. According to Augé, the term *non-lieux* refers to two different realities, but two realities that complement one another: to the places which serve a particular purpose (e.g. transit, holidays, trade) and to the correlations between the place and an individual. While anthropological places create 'organic-social realities', non-places create 'solitary contracts' (Augé 1990, 96).

Within the scope of collective memory and identity Pierre Nora's conception of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) is fundamentally. Following Nora, the lack of *milieux de mémoire* (milieus of memory) in actual societies goes along with a need for *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1997, 23). *Lieux de mémoire* are characterized as rests (*restes*) that offer a minimal form of commemorative consciousness which is based on history (or on a story?) (*histoire*) they call forth.⁵ Due to the fact that there is no spontaneous memory, the emergence and persistence of a site of memory depend on sentiment (*sentiment*) (Nora 1997, 29). Within the scope of European Studies Nora's work provoked a large debate on a possible transfer of the concept to a European level (cf. Assmann 2007: "Europa als Erinnerungsgemeinschaft?," 250-71, Assmann 2005). At a conference in Munich in 2007, Nora presented a paper focused on the question whether European sites of memory exist or not (published in: Nora 2011: "Y a-t-il des lieux de mémoire européens?"). In this paper Nora points to the fact that there is no historical experience of unity in Europe, on the contrary, there is an experience of division (Nora 2011, 386). He draws the conclusion that the most natural European site of memory is the frontier (*frontière*) and, consequently, the best way to create a sentiment of commonality is to emphasize difference (Nora 2011, 391). On the basis of Nora's work on French *lieux de mémoire* (and obviously in consideration of Nora's reflections on *lieux de mémoire européens*), Pim den Boer, Heinz Duchhardt, Georg Kreis and Wolfgang Schmale published recently a work focused on European sites of memory (*Europäische Erinnerungsorte*) (Boer et al. 2012a). In accordance with Nora, they describe in three volumes European sites of memory, including historical facts and achievements, works of art, but also symbols, concepts and common places. One of the concepts referred to is "Europe" itself as site of memory (*Erinnerungsort*) (cf. Boer 2012).⁶ In their introduction, the editors define European sites of memory as constructs (*Konstrukte*) which combine a broad reception history approach with one particular historical moment where a positive or negative remembrance of a broader (not only an elitist) part of society becomes manifest and which create an idea of commonality.⁷

Performances of European Memory in *El sitio de los sitios* (1995)

Goytisolo's Sarajevo: from *non-lieu* to *lieu de mémoire européen*?

Already the title of Goytisolo's novel characterizes Sarajevo as both an anthropological place and a non-place. Due to the fact that *sitios* signifies not only "place", but also "state" and "siege", the title can be translated as "state of siege" (so the English translation of the novel by Helen Lane), "place of siege" and even "place of the places". While the first possibility points to Sarajevo as particular, anthropological place, the last possibility focuses on Sarajevo as a non-place, a place that represents all the other places where crimes against humanity are committed. Despite of the 'high fictionality', the novel refers obviously to Sarajevo and its particular history during Bosnian War. Juan Goytisolo, who was in Sarajevo during the war in Bosnia, integrates historical details and personal impressions. He describes not only the destruction of the national library in Sarajevo (Goytisolo 1995a, 114ff), the daily 'bombardment of artilleries' ("bombardeo de la artillería") (Goytisolo 1995a, 114), but also the effects of the siege on everyday life of the inhabitants, focusing on particular characters:

"El señor mayor que, dos veranos antes, permanecía el día entero sentado en un banco, frente al café en el que, con conmovedora fe en el futuro, los parados y pobres del barrio apuestan sus cuartos en las carreras del hipódromo de Longchamp retransmitidas en directo, había perdido poco a poco su aspecto atildado y pulcro." [The older man who, two summers before, remained sitting on a bench the whole day, in front of the café, where the unemployed and poor people of the quarters spend, with an impressive faith in the future, their loose money for the races of the hippodrome of Longchamp, shown in live transmission, had lost step by step his neat and tidy appearance.](Goytisolo 1995a, 33)

In this way, the reader gets a detailed impression of the "lenta consunción de objetos, cuerpos y almas" (slow decomposition of objects, bodies and souls) (Goytisolo 1995a, 15). On one hand, *El sitio de los sitios* seems to complement Goytisolo's travel report *Cuadernos de Sarajevo. Anotaciones de un viaje a la barbarie*, published two years before (Goytisolo 1993), on the other hand Goytisolo seems to avoid names. Sarajevo is mostly referred to as "S.", an abbreviation which could mean as well "Sarajevo" as "sitio" or even "Sentier" (a district in Paris), as we will see in the next chapter. And also the descriptions could refer to any other place of war:

"Desamparo, soledad, desnudez de un sobrecogedor panorama de ruinas, esqueleto de inmuebles, vehículos desdesguazados, calcinados tranvías, quioscos callejeros fundidos, oquedades, chatarra, residuos patéticos de arrasadora ignición." [Abandonment, lonesomeness, bareness of a frightening panorama of ruins, stonelike skeletons, scrapped cars, burnt trams, molten kiosks, cavities, discarded metal, declamatory remains of glowing ignition.](Goytisolo 1995a, 15)

Sarajevo appears as a setting or common place for any kind of crime and cruelty. Using Sarajevo as a setting, Goytisolo points to other unknown or ignored crimes against humanity. Furthermore, the critique that the western intervention hoped for did not take place ("No hubo la intervención occidental esperada," Goytisolo 1995a, 137) alludes also to other crimes ignored by western societies. Also the European Union is accused for ignoring the

situation in Sarajevo (“[L]a Comunidad Europea nos largas usaldos y reservas invendibles de ropa y comida, sin preocuparse con la prolongación del asedio [The European Union sends us its remnants and unsellable tinned food to get rid of it, but does not give a damn about the prolongation of the siege]”, Goytisolo 1995a, 103). According to Augé’s characterization of *non-lieux* as places which serve a particular purpose and create a particular correlation between the individual(s), the function of Goytisolo’s Sarajevo is to illustrate the effects of crime and cruelty and to create compassion and a sense of responsibility.

To answer the question, whether this *non-lieu* can be understood as a *lieu de mémoire européenne*, it is necessary to analyse the connection between the discourse on ‘Sarajevo’ and the discourse on ‘Europe’ and on the ‘European Union’ in Goytisolo’s novel. Europe is already referred to in the dedication of the book. The dedication draws not only a parallel between Sarajevo and Europe, but appeals also to Europe’s consciousness of the crimes committed in Sarajevo. The dedication to the inhabitants of Sarajevo (and also the personal dedication to Susan Sonntag) creates closeness and gets the reader involved with the occurrences in Sarajevo. In the novel, Goytisolo draws the parallel between other crimes. The discourse on the burning library of Sarajevo is entangled with the *autos de fe* during the Spanish Inquisition and the cremations in the concentration camps during National Socialism in Germany (Goytisolo, 1995a, 110). Moreover, the abatement of the Jewish community in Sarajevo is compared to the pogrom in Toledo at the end of 14th century (Goytisolo 1995a, 104). On a meta-level, Goytisolo describes these historical burnings as “historia esfumada” (smoked history) (Goytisolo, 1995a, 110-11). The destruction of the library as well as the extinctions during the Spanish Inquisition and the German National Socialism are characterized as extinctions of cultural memory. Referring to the crimes committed and pointing to the parallels, Goytisolo wants to remind of the historical crimes and to clarify the ‘smoked history’. Seeing that Goytisolo refers mostly to European conflicts, Sarajevo can be understood as *non-lieu* of European crimes. The exchangeability of the name “Sarajevo” becomes evident in the chapter, entitled “Sieged District” (*Distrito sitiado*).⁸ In this chapter the situation in Sarajevo is projected to a district in Paris (*Le Sentier*),⁹ this means from the margin to the center of Europe. The descriptions of the setting and the feeling of threat correspond to the situation in Sarajevo. The reactions of the inhabitants of this district illustrate that war out of Europe or at the margins of Europe is tolerated:

“A nadie parece importar le un rábano el asedio y bombardeo de nuestro distrito! Si eso ocurriera en los Balcanes o en el mundo árabe, yo lo comprendería perfectamente [Nobody seems to give a damn about the siege and bombardment of our district! If this happened in the Balkan region or in the Arabic world, I would understand it perfectly]” (Goytisolo, 1995a, 63).

In another chapter, Goytisolo refers the “state of siege” in Sarajevo during Bosnian war to Madrid during the time of Spanish Civil War (Goytisolo 1995a, 167-75). In this chapter, the reader gets to know about the cruelty and the feeling of threat at that time from a personal first-person-narrator. Despite of being a non-confidential narrative – considering that the narrator is writing from a mental hospital – the reader gets very close to the occurrences during Spanish Civil War. The exchangeability of the name ‘Sarajevo’ emphasizes also the phrase “Las visiones son móviles. Lo que ocurrió allí se ve acá [The visions are mobile. You can see here what happened there]” (Goytisolo, 1995a, 29). Besides war and conflict, Goytisolo relates the discourse on Sarajevo to various European figures and (literary) works – e.g. Erasmus of Rotterdam, known as proponent of religious toleration (Goytisolo 1995a, 125), Luis Cernuda (145), *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett (137), *Candide* and *optimisme* by Voltaire, a sonata by Johannes Brahms (29) and the chapter entitled “Prolegómenos a un asedio [Prolegomena to a siege]” refers to Kant’s famous work *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Furthermore, considering the narrative techniques and the fact that one of the narrators is described as a madman, the novel *El sitio de los sitios* can be seen as homage to Cervantes and his famous novel *Don Quixote*.

Following den Boer, Duchhardt, Kreis and Schmale, to be a European site of memory this *lieu* must relate an reception history approach to one particular historical moment, where a positive or negative remembrance becomes manifest, and create an idea of commonality. Goytisolo’s Sarajevo is based on the reception history of European crimes against humanity and the particular historical moment is the Bosnian War, where a common negative remembrance becomes manifest. Consequently, Goytisolo’s Sarajevo can be understood as a literary European site of memory. In contrast to Nora’s hypothesis that, in view of the diversity of Europe, commonality should be created by focusing on frontier, Goytisolo’s Sarajevo emphasizes unity. Crime is characterized as common European experience and the prevention of other crimes is presented as common aim and also the reference to European figures focuses on unity and not on difference. According to Nora’s theory that every *lieu de mémoire* must be based on sentiment, Goytisolo uses various literary techniques to provoke the reader’s compassion. As a sort of pastiche, the novel *El sitio de los sitios* consists of various chapters, offering different narrative perspectives and styles. In this way, the reader gets informed about the occurrences in Sarajevo from different points of view. Due to the fact that Goytisolo uses mostly personal narrators, the reader identifies strongly with the characters presented in the novel. In the first chapter, Goytisolo describes the last moments of a future victim, using a personal third-person narrator. Since narrator and character merge and narrated time and narration time are equated, the reader sees the war through the eyes of a victim and feels the threat. Other chapters describe in form of a first-person narrator the effects of the war on Sarajevo and its inhabitants from the point of view of a scientist who came to Sarajevo to study Jewish and Arabic manuscripts in the famous library of Sarajevo and became a witness of the war in Bosnia. Other chapters focus on the commandant charged with the resolution of the crime, also in form of first-person narratives. Using personal third-person narrators or first-person narrators, the narrations offer a very high potential of identification. The reader slips into the role of a future victim, a scientist and a commandant who has to reveal the crime committed. Using various different narrators, Goytisolo creates not only closeness, but also a certain objectivity. On the one hand, the reader feels the threat as if his own life

was in danger, but on the other, he analyses the complex background with the eyes of a commandant to reveal the crime.

Destruction as a Tool for Marginal Identities?

Destruction (or decomposition) and fragments run like a golden thread through the novel. In the first chapter, Goytisolo describes how suddenly everything breaks into pieces (“Bruscamente, todos saltó en mil pedazos.” (Goytisolo 1995, 19) and in the next chapters –together with the commandant – the reader has to put the little pieces together to get a complete idea of the occurrences. To answer the second question of this paper, whether destruction serves as a tool for politicized uses of marginal identities, it is necessary to analyse the entanglement of the discourse on ‘Sarajevo’ and the discourse on marginal identities. Besides famous figures, lots of non-European figures, largely unknown in Europe, are referred to. As a matter of course, these unknown or marginal figures are mentioned together with the famous characters. In this way, Goytisolo attributes both of them the same importance. The common denominator of both of them is that they are all representatives of liberal thinking. Goytisolo dedicates one chapter to Ben Sidi Abu al-Fadail, a Maghrebi saint. Quoting a particular part of his work he shows the closeness to occidental religious and philosophical ideas (Goytisolo 1995a, 115-17). Another chapter is dedicated to Richard Burton, known as early fighter for the emancipation of homosexuals. The title of this chapter “Sotadic Zone” alludes to Burton’s famous (or infamous) Pederasty essay, where he puts forward the theory of a “Sotadic zone” (Goytisolo 1995a, 98-102). Goytisolo refers also to himself as the author of *Cotovedado* – an autobiographical novel – and as circulator of Richard Burton’s work (Goytisolo 1995a, 43). He is considered to be a “self-marginalized figure in the literary world” (Davis 2010, 2). He lives in Marrakech and in Paris, his literature is considered to be marginal pointing to marginal themes and despite of having published numerous books in Spanish he is quite unknown in Spain. Furthermore, being homosexual, he himself belongs to a marginalized group.¹⁰

Moreover, in his novel, he makes mention of the prosecution of various marginal groups, e.g. homosexuals and communists and their particular prosecution during the Spanish Dictatorship (Goytisolo 1995a, 158) and the religious persecutions of Jewish and Islamic people, not only in Sarajevo, but also during the Spanish Inquisition and German National Socialism. Besides mentioning the discrimination of these marginalized groups Goytisolo points to their contribution to the cultural heritage. The destruction of thousands of Jewish and Arabic manuscripts due to the burning of the national library in Sarajevo is described as destruction of European cultural heritage. This entanglement of the discourse on Sarajevo and the discourse not only on famous European figures or works but also on marginal figures and works illustrates the cultural entanglement. Besides of being ‘the place of the places’ where crime against humanity becomes manifest, Sarajevo is described as ‘place of the places’, as point of cultural intersection, where cultural entanglement and intermixture become evident. For this reason the destruction of Sarajevo and its famous library is described as the destruction of a dream:

“[E]l pesar y desánimo que me corroen no provendrían de las dificultades de la vida cotidiana ni de la muerte que sin cesar nos acecha: nacieron del derrumbe de un sueño, del hundimiento de una encrucijada de culturas y saberes [Sorrow and desperation that demoralized me were not caused by the difficulties of everyday life nor by the omnipresent death, they were caused by the collapse of a dream, by the destruction of a point of cultural intersection]” (Goytisolo, 1995a, 111).

The description of Sarajevo as point of cultural intersection seems to continue Goytisolo’s idea of a “tree of literature” presented in his essay “El bosque de las letras [The forest of arts]”. This essay (dated 1994) was included in his collection of essays with the same title, published 1995. In this essay, Goytisolo describes every national literature as a hybrid tree that has multitudinous roots in multiple cultures and that grows in the universal ambiance of humankind (Goytisolo 1995b, 12-3). Every (literary) work is characterized as fruit or flower of this hybrid tree. The collection of essays serves to illustrate this hybrid tree of Spanish literature, referring to various known and unknown occidental and oriental poets and thinkers, but focusing particularly on marginal figures or representatives of marginal ideas – one of them is the Bosnian writer Dževad Karahasan. Considering the parallels between *El bosque de las letras* and *El sitio de los sitios* and seeing that both works were published in the same year, the novel *El sitio de los sitios* appears as another illustration of cultural hybridism that attributes a fix part of this tree of literature to marginal ideas. Goytisolo’s description of Sarajevo shows the cultural interdependence and points to the fact, that the destruction of Sarajevo means also a destruction of European cultural heritage and he criticises the indifference not only of the European Union but also of European people towards the occurrences during Bosnian War.

Conclusion

Based on Sarajevo (during Bosnian War), as an anthropological place, Goytisolo’s novel *El sitio de los sitios* describes Sarajevo as non-place in two respects: as a common place of crimes against humanity and as a common place of cultural intersection. It is not only a place, where various European conflicts and crimes become manifest, but also a place that illustrates the benefit of cultural hybridity and emphasizes the importance of ideas that are unknown or marginalized in Europe. According to the concept of a European site of memory of den Boer, Duchhardt, Kreis and Schmale, Goytisolo’s novel relates a reception history approach of European crime and European culture to Bosnian War as one particular historical moment where an extremely negative remembrance becomes manifest and creates an idea of commonality. Nevertheless, this commonality is based on criticism; the novel points to the indifference of the European Union and the European people towards the crimes committed in other (marginal) countries on the one hand, and towards cultural intersection and hybridity on the other hand. Therefore Goytisolo’s Sarajevo must not be

understood as a European site of memory but as a European site of admonition that reminds of the European values, e.g. human dignity, equity and (particularly religious) liberty. As a conclusion *El sitio de los sitios* is not only a performance of a European site of admonition, but also a performance of a fragmented European memory and identity.

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Biographical note:

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¹For further information on Reiner Keller's Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (in German called *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse, WDA*), see also Keller 2013a, 2013b, ³2011 and 2005)

² Michel de Certeau draws the difference between *lieu* (place) and *espace* (space) explaining that the relation between *lieu* and *espace* corresponds to that one between word and pronounced word and he comes to the conclusion that space is a practiced place. ("L'espace serait au lieu ce que devient le mot quand il est parlé [...]. En somme, *l'espace est un lieu pratiqué*." (Certeau 1990, 173, italics from the original text)

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty introduces the term *espace anthropologique* (anthropological space) in contrast to *espace géométrique* (geometrical space) in his *Phénoménologie de la perception* (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1969).

⁴Ina-Maria Greverus draws a parallel between Augé's concept of *lieu anthropologique* and the German word *Heimat* (cf. Greverus 1997). Since *Heimat* refers as well to a concrete place (a country, a region, a city etc.) as to a symbolic/imagined place, this comparison illustrates Augé's idea of a 'concrete and symbolic construction'.

⁵"Les lieux de mémoire, ce sont d'abord des restes. La forme extrême où subsiste une conscience commémorative dans une histoire qui l'appelle, parce qu'elle l'ignore." (Nora 1997, 28)

⁶ On European sites of memory, see also Boer 1993 and Nora 1993.

⁷"Europäische Erinnerungsorte [...] sind nur als Konstrukte vorstellbar, die einen breiten rezeptionsgeschichtlichen Ansatz mit dem verbinden, was das Wesen dieses Konstrukts ausmacht: ein Punkt im Ablauf der Geschichte, an dem sich positiv oder negativ besetzte Erinnerung breiterer, nicht nur elitärer Schichten kristallin verfestigt und eine Idee von etwas Gemeinsamem – einem gemeinsamen Erbe – entstehen lässt." (Boer et al. 2012b, 10)

⁸ The chapters in Goytisolo's novel are not consecutively numbered, a fact that seems to emphasize the exchangeability of the places and occurrences.

⁹ Neither the name of the district nor the name of the city are mentioned in the novel, but due to the names of the streets and subway stations, the reader realizes that this chapter refers to Le Sentier. On further information why Goytisolo chose this district of Paris, cf. Kunz 2003, 215-226.

¹⁰ On Goytisolo's marginality, cf. Vagueresse 2000.