

Resisting nationalism in *Rompepistas* (2009): Pan-national punk attitude in the working class fiction of Kiko Amat

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Abstract

In his third novel, *Rompepistas* (2009), Catalan writer Kiko Amat creates a semi-autobiographical first-person narrative that observes national crisis as inextricable from geographic and economic issues of migration and constructions/locations of class as markers of identity in Spanish and Catalan national imaginaries. In a context of internal tensions and official discourses of consensus to organize the city in terms of what ‘should’ be visible, a teen narrator describes an emotional punk attitude during the summer of 1987 in post-dictatorial Barcelona in terms of embodying a cultural misdemeanor in Catalan nationalist context. Amat’s affective literary response to the role of ‘foreign’ music in his early life imbues the novel with a soundtrack of a pre-internet, pan-national sense of solidarity among working-class teenagers as the disenfranchised ‘other,’ producing a counter-consensus within official national discourses and unfettered neoliberal urban development plans.

Key words: periphery, punk, masculinity, Barcelona, soundtrack

“... this is the *extrarradio* (outer ring), *extrafuerte* (extra strong), *extramierda* (extra shitty), and it’s like nothing else, we are in the confines of barbarism, left out by God, spit from his mouth, but not for being weak necessarily. We are the rings of Saturn, but more like rings made of human waste. A Milky Way of snot and handjobs. Barcelona’s wasteland.”¹

Rompepistas (53)

1 Introduction

Catalan writer Kiko Amat’s numerous first-person narratives based in post-dictatorial, post-1992 Olympics, as well as current realities of life in Barcelona have often collided with official versions of the Catalan democratic experience.² As the epigraph attests, his adolescent narrator is disheartened by his ascribed placement

¹ “... porque esto es el extrarradio, extrafuerte, extramierda, y no se parece a nada, estamos en los confines de la barbarie, dejados de la mano de Dios, escupidos de su boca, y no por tibios precisamente. Somos los anillos de Saturno, pero si éstos estuvieran hechos de detritus. Una Vía Láctea de mocos y pajas. El vertedero de Barcelona.”

² Amat has produced six novels to date--*El día que me vaya no se lo diré a nadie* (The Day I Leave I Tell No One 2003); *Cosas que hacen BUM* (Things that Go Boom 2007); *Rompepistas* (2009); *Eres el mejor, Cienfuegos* (You’re the Best, Cienfuegos 2012), *Antes del huracán* (2018); two chronicles: *L’home intranquil* (The Uneasy Man 2010); *Mil violines* (A Thousand Violins 2011); *Antes del huracán* (Before the Hurricane 2018); and an anthology of his published essays--*Chap, Chap* (2015).

and presumed fate on the outskirts of the city during the summer of 1987. In 2010, Amat explained the impetus for this semi-autobiographical novel: “when I was a teenager, I had the sensation that nothing they were telling us in high school was speaking of me... not me or my friends [Cuando era adolescente tenía la sensación que nada de lo que contaban en el instituto hablaba de mí...ni de mí ni de mis amigos].”³ Like his restless teen narrator, Amat abandons his hometown in the late 1980s for a series of misadventures in England, leading eventually to a successful career as a writer and cultural critic that frees him from an otherwise working class fate – service to the Catalan nationalist status quo. In consequence as a writer, Amat reviews music and literature for local, Catalan, and Spanish national newspapers and magazines,⁴ as well as promoting first person narratives in English, Spanish and Catalan that highlight un-official versions of life in times of personal, national, and global crisis and development.⁵

In similar manner, *Rompepistas* (2009) exposes through the self-deprecating humor of its first-person narrator how subcultural excess can allow for its assimilation as a desirable punk attitude. The wisdom of political entities to subsume subcultural movements as “proof” of their own legitimacy is what Amat’s socially aware writings critique by disassociating themselves from a Catalanist middle-class status quo in favor of masculine voices that often break down and cry in post-dictatorial context. Introducing Amat into the discussion of self-performance in terms of class and gender in democratic context helps shape our understanding of the peninsula’s national ‘crises’ as inextricable from geographic issues of migration and constructions/locations of class as markers of identity in the Spanish and Catalan national imaginaries. The hetero-normative, working class, migratory “white” male reality that is expressed in *Rompepistas* highlights individual identity formation as integral to an understanding of the overall reconfiguring of expressions of national identity in local, national, and European context. Amat’s emotional connection to his past as one of a marginal existence exposes an urban development plan that emphasizes aesthetics in the post-industrial city and in politics as a means to creating a discourse of consensus that governs “the organization of the visible, and what will be relegated to invisibility” (Balibrea 204).

Spurred by the selection of Barcelona to host the Olympic Games in 1992, Catalan authorities chose to “rapidly eradicate such ‘street realities’ which could

³ *Rompepistas* won the majority vote among 3,000 young readers. Sergio Duce produced this 3’14” video illustration based on the novel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2ScIjXa8E> (Proyecto Mandarache 2010/Jóvenes Lectores de Cartagena). That same year the novel was awarded “Best Literary Work” by la Unión Fonográfica Independiente del 2009.

⁴ He writes for the supplement *Cultura/S* in *La Vanguardia*, *Babelia* in *El País*, *Jot Down*, *Playground*, *VICE*, *Gent Normal* and the magazine *Rockdelux*, and co-edits the fanzine and blog *La Escuela Moderna*. He offers a compendium of all of his writings and activities on his own blog, *Bendito Atraso* <https://kikoamat.wordpress.com/>

⁵ For the past four years Amat has co-directed with Miqui Otero the festival *Primera Persona* in the CCCB (Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona) <http://www.cccb.org/en/activities/file/primera-persona-2015/219762>

make the socioeconomic and urban transformation of Barcelona difficult" (Nofre 201: 27). As a result, politically active youth subcultures such as punk scenes defending squatter movements and opposition to the construction of a new "socially sanitized city" (Nofre 2010: 134) suffered police repression and campaigns by the inner city's ruling classes to "(re)catalanize" the suburban working classes (Nofre 2012: 8). These efforts were met by a contested otherness that Jordi Nofre terms a "Spanished youth scene" that emerged in reaction to a "new institutionalized Catalan(ist) rock scene" aimed at de-activating radical "Spanished" (i.e. undesirable) behavior from the margins of the Catalan status quo (8).⁶ In this context of internal tensions, Amat describes performances of emotional punk attitude adopted from Anglo-cultural realms of reference that imbue the act of being young, working class and uncooperative in 1987 as a cultural misdemeanor in Catalan nationalist context.⁷ Amat's affective literary response to the soundtrack of his early life thus emerges as the soundtrack of a global inter-city landscape encompassing disenfranchised teenagers in a sort of pan-national solidarity. Youth in similar situations were (and are) adopting punk attitudes in service to a form of trans-identification as the disenfranchised other within.

2 It won't kill you

As a self-proclaimed Anglophile, Amat quotes British musicians and writers as his inspiration in establishing a self-deprecating, often sensitive masculinity throughout his work. John Osborne's famous phrase, "Don't be afraid of emotion, it won't kill you," is the author's battle cry when it comes to developing male narrator-protagonists who are unabashed when expressing their fears and stumbling manifested in the songs that guide them into less traditional Spanish modes of 'becoming a man.' Holden Caulfield in the American novel *Catcher in the Rye* (J.D. Salinger, 1951), an unnamed teen photographer in the British novel *Absolute Beginners* (Colin MacInnes 1959) and Jimmy in the British film *Quadrophenia* (Franc Roddam/The Who 1979) come to mind as precursors to the tone of alienation plaguing Amat's angst-ridden narrators and their confusion as to how to perform as sons, lovers, and protagonists of their own lives. It is unsurprising in this neoliberal, democratic context that Amat's protagonists turn to "foreign" characters and soundtracks that better underscore their lived experiences and personal crises of identity in post-Franco Catalonia. In this respect, *Rompepistas* stands out as the

⁶ See Van Liew ("The Scent of Catalan Rock" 1993) for an overview of the emergence and appeal of U.S./Anglo influenced *rock catalá* and *rock agrícola* in the Catalan provinces in the 1980s and its appropriation by the 1990s by politicians aware of its utility in promoting Catalan identity as commercially viable.

⁷ One of Barcelona's proto-punk bands from the *extrarradio*, La Traperera del R   from Cornell   de Llobregat, has been described by Amat as hailing from "one of Modernism's experiments in exclusion, a suburban housing project designed for factory workers but filled by the late 1970s with largely poor and unemployed immigrants" as the perfect setting to earn a following since they "articulated the feelings and thoughts of young people in Cornell  . It was like an Indian reservation, far away from Barcelona and the world" (*Shit-Fi* 1

strongest ode to the emotional response of disenfranchised youth of the overlooked peripheral neighborhoods established under Franco.

In pursuit of asserting a collaborative role in Spain and the European Union during the democratic transitional process in the 1970s and 1980s, Catalan leadership during the years of urban reconstruction in Barcelona, as the post-industrial city *par excellence*, discussed Catalan nationalism in terms of provoking the political epicenter of ‘Spanish-ness’ in Madrid and fomenting a polarized reaction regarding its ‘peripheral’ identity on the peninsula. Ironically, centrist notions of ‘Catalan-ness’ in Barcelona produced an internal suburban periphery – the *extrarradio* – surrounding the city, most notably since waves of Spanish migration occurred in the 1950s and 1960s in search of work. Younger members of this peripheral realm have relied on imported aesthetics to uphold their difference from the Catalan nationalist center working to distinguish itself from Spain as one of a more nativist position. As such, foreign soundtracks that accompany the musings of Amat’s young male narrators in his first three novels underscore youthful working-class frustrations in punk and pop solidarity with other disenfranchised youth abroad.

In this third novel, an adult Rompepistas [Breakdancer], whose given name is never revealed, returns to his birthplace of St. Boi de Llobregat on the southern outskirts of Barcelona for the funeral of a childhood friend. Upon walking around his hometown and noting numerous changes, including the impending demolition of the open-air market, he sees a photograph of his teenage self beside his best friend seated, as they often were, on the market steps. As a result, he devolves back into his adolescent self during the summer of 1987, allowing for a first-person account of a coming-of-age tale full of humor, pathos and violence. While the Llobregat river invites a comedic correlation with Lazarillo de Tormes’ birth in the Tormes river and, by association, his questionable identity, Amat’s narrator refuses to divulge anything in his ‘confession’ but his youth tribal nickname, Rompepistas: “There was a time when I was not who I am. At that time I was other, and responded to a different name. Or, perhaps it’s not that I was other; but rather just that I was seventeen, and seventeen is another planet altogether / *Hubo una época en que yo no era quien soy. En aquel tiempo era otro, y respondía a otro nombre. O quizás no es que fuese otro; quizás es sólo que tenía diecisiete años, a los diecisiete son un planeta distinto*]” (13).⁸ Drawn back to the male dominated cast of his life in Sant

⁸ Amat likes to play this naming game in much of his writing: “My name is K. A. They call me K. A. In reality my name is Francesc d’Assís Amat Romeu, like the imprudent saint... But I beg you to not call me by my given name / Me llamo Kiko Amat. Me llaman Kiko Amat. En realidad me llamo Francesc d’Assís Amat Romeu, como el imprudente santo... Pero les ruego que no me llamen por mi nombre y apellidos bautismales...” (*Chap, Chap* 5, 2015). In like fashion from the first chapter of the anonymously written picaresque novel, *The Life and Adventures of Lazarillo de Tormes* (first published in 1554) the adult narrator, in defense of himself in front of a judge, reverts back to his pre-pubescent self to explain his identity: “You must know then, in the first place, that my name is Lazaro de Tormes, and that I am the son of Thomas González and Antonia Pérez, natives of Tejares, a village of Salamanca. My surname was acquired by the singular circumstance of my birth, which happened in the river Tormes, and in the following manner...” (translated into English by Thomas Roscoe in 1881, p.

Boi through its smells, sounds, silhouettes, he heads towards the cemetery "to speak of us again... Those songs and ourselves / *para hablar de nosotros una vez más... Aquellas canciones, y a nosotros mismos*" (16). Thus begins the past, divided into two sections: "Rompepistas" and "This song needs lyrics / [*Hay que ponerle letra a esta canción*]" through which the narrator relates how he spends the summer at high speed with his best friends: Carnaval (the chubby drummer in his group Las Duelistas), Clareana (his ex-girlfriend), and el Chopped (leader of los Skinheads por la Paz [Skinheads for Peace]), an ironic group title poking fun at the radical/politicized punks under siege by Barcelonan authorities closer to the city center (JoniD 13: 2011).⁹

He invites us into a world of shaky family dynamics, an angry ex-girlfriend, and *las ratas con botas* [rats in boots], a group title for working-class teens whose geographic and social situation stems from the southern Spanish migratory waves under Franco to the Catalan capital. *Las ratas con botas* also gesture towards the British working-class garb of Doc Martins and intentionally torn attire adopted by these Mediterranean post-punks, a male-dominated tribe that becomes the 'we' with which the narrator most identifies; "a group that only makes sense as a group [un grupo que sólo tiene sentido en grupo]." Carnaval, el Antología, el Bomba, Sútil, el Puños, La Zapato, and others all adopt an alternative identity to that by birth, which serves as a means of differentiating themselves from the "normal" parent-culture of Spaniards/Catalans who were educated under Franco. All adults in the novel call the narrator by his given name, to which he refers only as "Normal Pérez." This Joe-Schmoe or Joe Anybody functions ironically in collaboration with a global inter-city network of tribal identifications that signal internal otherness of nonetheless specific local distinctions. This act of rebaptising oneself as a member of a chosen tribal group that establishes identifiable similarities (in speech) and uniformity (in dress) is coextensive with what Stuart Hall discerns as "the desired qualities of subcultural style: hardness, masculinity and working-classness" (Hall cited in (Hebdige 114). In this way, "the symbolic objects – dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music – were made to form a *unity* with the group's relations, situation, experience (114).

Mark Allinson discusses the 1980s as "the gradual alignment of Spanish youth culture and the 'youth problem' [drug use] with the rest of Europe" (266). And while I agree that the resultant culture of "living for the moment" and "loyalty to peer groups" becomes more marginal and dangerous (267-270),¹⁰ there is also a

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⁹ See JoniD and Nofre for extensive discussions of Barcelonian youth cultures under siege in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹⁰ Nichols and Song's recent study of subcultural and countercultural movements in the 1980s makes a point of dispelling the assumption "that issues of class or economics hardly mattered in Spain in the 1980s when politics trumped any other social or cultural issue" (7). As they point out, one needs to include the intersection of youth and class to better understand not only transitional counter-cultural scenes of the past, but also its significance to the current crisis for youth in Spain today regarding high unemployment that leaves them vulnerable.

healthy aspect for punk performance in the widening of the generation gap whereby gender norms established under Franco are losing their grip on young men and boys seeking new aesthetics of self-expression to differentiate themselves from a generation educated under the Catholic Military dictatorship. This is where Allinson's notion that the late 1980s are marked by "something of a deficit in national youth cultures at the expense of imported cultural products" (270) falls short of examining the potential of the same in expanding the emotional repertoire of Spanish/Catalan youth in emotional crisis.

3 Soundtrack of a generation

The commodification of Catalan identity by conservative national forces prompted its rejection by punk-oriented youth of the *extrarradio* who adopted a predominantly 'foreign' soundtrack to express their subaltern experience, a life that included a level of violence and desperation that had no outlet in the narratives of mainstream Barcelonan culture, whose soundtrack was 'other' to the *ratas en botas*. This led to participation in a global trend of a variety of punk images available to youth, although difficult to sustain once mainstream marketing techniques were engaged – the most obvious Iberian example being *La Movida Madrileña*, promoted so intensely that 'punk' was soon packaged as toothless pop. These were years in which youth cultural manifestations along the lines of British and U.S. working class/artistic influences began to appeal to post-Franco Spanish youth tastes in clothing and music as a way to distinguish themselves from the 'normalcy' of their parents' generation. From the official establishment of *La Movida Madrileña*, which apparently died from its own success (Lechado 95, 2013), to other 'movidas' in Galician, Basque and Catalan cities,¹¹ Spanish youth were ablaze with Anglo-Saxon and U.S. urban musical influences, most notably punk, glam and rock, which inspired them to reach beyond their national boundaries for new codes of conduct which oftentimes blurred the lines of delineation in the aesthetics of gendered behaviors 'at home.'¹² What arises in Amat's writing that returns to the first decades of the democratic transitional years is a youthful emotionality when faced with personal crises that defy the precepts of virility designated for men, especially threatening Franco's politics of *continuismo*.

Dick Hebdige's iconic study of subcultural performance through punk style (1979/2002) is a masterpiece of masculinization of the entire 1970s punk scene in

¹¹ José Manuel Lechado explains that "movidas" were taking place simultaneously in numerous cities on the Peninsula, and suggests that their success overshadowed more "authentic" movidas in the "barrios" that were essentially ignored nationally (9).

¹² Javier Cercas' novel *Anatomía de un instante* (2009) came out the same year as *Rompepistas*, and offers a view of hegemonic masculinity in early transitional Spain in terms of the lingering contours of Francoist virility on national display. The novel interrogates images of the *coup d'état* in Madrid on February 23, 1981, during which the cameras of TVE recorded Prime Minister Alfonso Suárez standing up to rebellious military personnel shooting their way into Parliament, a scene that "has remained in the collective memory of Spaniards [ha permanecido en la memoria colectiva de los españoles]" (Martínez Góngora 6). As such, depictions of these male acts of offensive and defensive 'bravery' parallel the Francoist mode of basing a male's value on his physical strength and capacity for physical risk.

Great Britain. Rarely does any mention of a female punk performance occur in his study, allowing the terms: punk, skin, mod, Rastafarian, to insinuate an innately masculine response to social and political realities. This representation of youth culture as a male emotional realm in solidarity with other disenfranchised others is reflected in the *ratas en botas* soundtrack, "side A" and "side B", at the end of the novel (313), offering thirty-seven songs by the Jam, Generation X, The Clash, The Beat, etc., among which only one female voice can be heard: Marcia Griffiths, 'Queen of Reggae' from Jamaica, while there are also only two 'Spanish' bands represented, Kortatu of Euskadi, and Brighton 64 from Catalonia. The particular songs chosen take us yet deeper into the mindset of these Catalan post-punks: "Promises, promises," "Israelites," "Wet dream," "Jump boys," "Runaway boys," "Boredom," "Too much pressure," "Smash it up," "Never grow old," "If the kids are united," "Too much too young," "I confess," "Stay free," and others.

In a sense, *Rompepistas* is an ode to the harmful effects of tribalism for young, disenfranchised Catalans as a dangerous mode of development and survival on the *extrarradio*, while celebrating its excesses as a means of shedding the detrimental side effects of an official education (Catholic school, the labor market and family). Instead, they choose imported music, attire and attitude as a means of self-development aligned with international cultural trends in tastes and behaviors that often reject mothers and fathers as outdated role models, and which parody parent culture by appropriating and distorting signs of local working-class identity.

4 Emotional masculinity

Rompepistas' robust father embodies standards of virility under critical scrutiny in this new democratic age. His son offers a description of a tall, muscular, blonde, blue-eyed father with "hands like baseball gloves," "an ass sculpted out of marble," and a bad temper: "He's an auto mechanic in his own workshop... which he set up *with his own hands* (as he likes to say), and he listens to Creedence Clearwater Revival [Es mecánico de coches en un taller suyo... que levantó *con sus propias manos* (como dice él), y a mi padre le gustan CCR]" (26-7). Throughout the narrative, when confronted with men physically stronger than himself, Rompepistas mentions the music they like as a means of critical categorization. Anything that is outside his tribe's taste in music is aligned with 'outdated' modes of rock and singer-song writers. As an example, he associates the neighborhood "Necks" (jocks) with Bruce Springsteen, his father with Creedence, and his mother, when upset, with Simon and Garfunkel. Nonetheless, Rompepistas is indignant that he has inherited none of his father's physical traits, a fact he deems as "unjust," openly stating that he would prefer to look more like his dad (26). While dressed in torn t-shirts that say things like "Kill Hippies," "Priests against the Wall," or "Put a España" (often "ruined" in the wash or "lost" from the clothes line), the narrator misinterprets being called a "scarecrow" at the dinner table for paternal disappointment at having a son uninterested in sports and who looks more like a male version of his mother: "Identical to me, with breasts and longish hair... Didn't God go too far in granting my inheritance from only one source? [Igual que yo, con

pechos y media melena... ¿No se pasó un poco Dios al coger toda la herencia de una sola fuente?]" (26).¹³

Rompepista's physical affinity with the female and the feminine can be understood as an alliance (by birth) with a "softer new masculinity" that Sean Nixon describes as self-conscious in creating a stylized alternative to the tough, old-style masculinity of the laboring body while drawing something from it (2001: 375-6). Rompepistas never rejects his father outright, although they have their moments of potential violent upheaval. More prevalent in the novel is the contrast of their physical and stylistic differences, while uniting emotionally in times of family and personal crisis. Thus, the desire to disassociate from the father stems more from an attempt to participate in global style and taste in alliance with his generational tribe than from the rejection of his father's overt maleness important to "old style working men" involved in strenuous physical labor (Nixon 2001: 376). Despite his pursuit of difference in style, the narrator often states how terrified he is of his fate on the *extrarradio*, perhaps noticing more of a resemblance than he would like to admit to his hard-laboring parents.

In general, punk aesthetics deliberately segue with an androgynous mode of rejection of established gender norms in tandem with glam aesthetics that include a shared virility which, in this working-class context, promotes a tribal conformity to its own rules and expectations, thus engendering style as a uniform means of rebellion against the past and 'no future.' An aesthetic of mutual cross-dressing encourages men and women to play with gender conventions and give women the freedom to be 'ugly,' as well as for all involved to parody conservative sexual conventions. Nonetheless, "neither essentialist, progressive, nor regressive, it [cross-dressing] can, under certain circumstances, coincide 'with the excesses of male supremacy' and/or 'codify a unique social rebellion'" (Kennedy 2002: 91, Halberstam 202:6)

5 Parody and violence

Rompepista's angry ex-girlfriend, Clareana, although a female minority in a context of hetero-normative white male values and desires, swaggers into the first 'flashback' chapter and sets the tone of crisis for working-class members of Catalan society suffering the 'no future' established for them as urban plans for 'development' attempt to render them invisible. In tandem, all of the punks emulate what Hebdige describes as a generation "clothed in chaos" and producing "noise in the calmly orchestrated Crisis of everyday life in the late 1970s – a noise which made (no)sense in exactly the same way and to exactly the same extent as a piece of *avante-garde* music" (Hebdige 114-15). This intended shift destabilizes the entire play of gender among the *skins del barrio*, insinuating that "when women

¹³ To emphasize the theatricality of the point, Rompepistas' sister has a Ken doll version of her brother "que está mucho más bueno y tiene mucho más éxito que el de verdad. Aunque sea entre Barbies destrozadas e insalubres [who is much better looking and has more luck than the real on. Although that's with broken and unhealthy Barbies]" (30).

attempt to redefine their identity, masculinity is destabilized and enters into crisis [cuando las mujeres tratan de redefinir su identidad, la masculinidad se desestabiliza y entra en crisis]" (Carrabí 2000: 26). But this crisis is more violent than abstract as depicted on the *extrarradio* when conflicting generational and stylistic reactions to 'no future' collide.

The punk tribe of Sant Boi is less invested in their maleness and more concerned with parodying their socially and geographically disenfranchized situation.¹⁴ In reference to British youth responses to the same sense of no-future, Hebdige explains the safety pins and torn clothing of the original punk scene as signs of a relative material poverty which was "either directly experienced and exaggerated or sympathetically assumed, and which in turn was made to stand for the spiritual paucity of everyday life." Rompepistas and his friends exhibit, even copy, what Hebdige further describes as "clownish make-up" beneath which "lurked the unaccepted and disfigured face of capitalism; that beyond the horror circus antics [of punk attitude and performance] a divided and unequal society was being eloquently condemned" (Hebdige 115). In this respect, explanation is given to los Skinheads por la paz and their performance/appearance as described by narrator/protagonist: "Look: everyone has a closely shaved head... like former prisoners of war, like children with lice, like the sick, the insane. Their lack of hair is full of symbols of dispossession [Mirad: todos llevan la cabeza rapada al tres... como presidiarios antiguos, prisioneros de guerra represaliados, como niños con piojos, como enfermos, locos del manicomio. Su falta de pelo está llena de símbolos de desposesión]" (*Rompepistas* 40). Other paragraphs describe his own punk uniform-ity in great detail, down to the pins that announce his passion for the soundtrack of their performance (*Rompepistas* 28-29). The symbolism of dispossession is not lost on his parents, who are horrified at his ragged appearance exhibiting the tone of exaggeration, humor, and theatricality filtered through the logic of a rebellious adolescent mindset. But what trumps class and gender as the defining characteristics of youth on the periphery of Catalan centrism is the brutality of daily life as a teenager.

The persistent threat of violence thrives on the Planet of St. Boi, pitting tribe against tribe: punks, *pijos* [preppies] or the drug-addled *Chungos*, a situation that resembles the 'need' of self-defense. In the mosh pit, pogo dancing is an expression of a controlled, collective, even celebratory violence of pushing and bouncing off of each other. Encounters with tribal others on the street, however, prove potentially fatal and are to be avoided. As noted earlier, Rompepistas divulges his identity in

¹⁴ According to the study, "Nationalism and Public Opinion in Contemporary Spain: The Demobilization of the Working Class in Catalonia" (2010), the Catalan nationalist political class can be understood as a top-elite movement that has marginalized Catalan/Barcelonian citizens whose first language is Spanish and whose class standing is lower to poor from the political and public sphere (García 4-5). García argues that more can be learned by analyzing public opinion components other than polls, such as social, informational and experiential inquiry to fully understand a "sentiment of alienation" as better explained by socio-economic status than by place of origin on the part of the working class that, unconcerned with issues of national identity, "feels excluded from [Catalan] political discourse" (22).

connection to each official institution (state education, the labor market and family) as none other than 'Normal' to demonstrate (in)different subject positions which add up to an ambiguous performance of a peripheral working class identity increasingly unsustainable due to his emotional and physical exposure to violence, which pushes him to hysteria. However, these *ratas con botas* are not mere victims, capable of wreaking havoc, damaging property, and even beating up their former school master, Padre Pío [Father Pío] during a chance encounter three years after their expulsion from school: "Carnaval and I jump him without even looking at each other... like a reflex of the nervous system [Carnaval y yo le saltamos encima, ni nos hemos mirado... como un acto reflejo del sistema nervioso]" (270). In another less humorous chance encounter, Rompepistas and his friends are set upon by *los Chungos*, who viciously attack for sport; "behind their eyes there is no humanity [detrás de las retinas no hay humanidad]" (168), landing three of the boys in the hospital. Upon hearing that el Puños almost dies in the encounter, the boys realize that they are not immortal or immune from "misfortune [desgracia]," and less so on the *extrarradio* (172). At this point in the narrative, there is no turning back from a trauma that signals geography and class as defining features of Rompepista's identity as he tries not to cry "como una niña [like a sissy]." Rompepistas realizes that the Hospital del Bellvitge is the grand metaphor for his life: "Home is this, this being the place of my birth, not by choice, and at this point, I think... I have to get out of here, someone save me. From this town, and from myself [Casa es esto, que éste es el sitio donde he nacido, que me tocó aquí, y en ese momento pienso... tengo que salir de aquí, que alguien me salve. De este pueblo, y de mí]" (172). His critical eye opens to the more philosophical ramifications of his punk performance, now premised on fear – for his safety, for his future, and for the loss of childhood: "Isn't this adolescence, after all? An inhuman, unnatural and damaging stretching out of childhood. A last shot before old age? [¿No es eso la adolescencia, después de todo? Un estiramiento inhumano y antinatural y dañino de la niñez. Un disparar los últimos cartuchos antes de ingresar en la vejez]" (182). To bring this point home, Rompepistas' intended escape is stalled as he is called back to the hospital, the looming metaphor of 'no future' when his beloved grandfather falls ill. His temporarily virile punk attitude and performance as consumer of foreign culture as a 'salve' for the threat of violence at home cedes to a bout of hysterics – he cries for himself, for his grandfather, and even decides: "Perhaps from now on I'll cry about everything. I'll have to get used to the new sissy Rompepistas... I never would have suspected that there would be so much crying in this book [Quizás a partir de ahora lloraré por todo. Tendré que irme acostumbrando al nuevo Rompepistas Niñata... Jamás hubiese sospechado que habría tanto llorar en este libro]" (248). "Normal Pérez" under siege offers the groundwork for weakening the rigidity of former class and gender roles in Catalan national context through the revelation of a vulnerability and a willingness to adapt to a new reality of self-imposed exile to escape the confines of a servile post-industrial city and centrist nationalism that force "Normal" towards more liminal possibilities of realizing a 'softer,' less violent sense of self, of place, and of national identity.

Although Rompepistas' father is described as potentially violent, strong, and imposing early in the novel, the expected scene of domestic violence as a form of male hysteria due to working-class impotence lingers only as a vestige of the past, a specter left unrealized.⁸ The near fatal violence that Rompepistas and his friends suffer at the hands of *Los Chungos* is terrifyingly 'now,' revealing how the co-existence with an unpredictable, illogical form of male embodied violence reduces the protagonists to tears. This emotionality persists throughout the second part of the novel when the performance of masculinity in St. Boi becomes a war between teenage vulnerability and distorted virility. This clash of present modalities of what it is to be 'a man' sends Rompepistas to the hospital, a locus that serves as class mirror in which he can see his no-future: "If some day I forget what class hatred is, I'll come back here. To relearn, extracurricular review [Si algún día se me olvida lo del odio de clase, volveré aquí. A reaprenderlo, a repaso extraescolar]" (246). It also determines his punk performance as linked to a nation (within a nation) in a state of crisis in its exclusion of the working-class experience in the name of global capitalist strategies of development. Rompepistas is lured through family ties, this time his ailing grandfather, an ally and gentleman of the Francoist age, back into the tribe, this time, of his family, where he is emotionally secure although determined to leave. The sincerity with which the three generations of men express their alliances and love at this moment in the novel underscores an emotional masculinity seeping into the national fabric of newly acceptable, more fluid behaviors that are leaving rigid gender dynamics behind the more obviously divisive mirror of class challenges.

6 Conclusion

Through Rompepistas, Amat reclaims his adolescent attraction to Anglo-Saxon punk/pop music as the soundtrack of his life in Sant Boi de Llobregat as "the only beauty at my reach... records... For me and my friends it was the only form of creativity that seemed to speak to us [la única cosa bella y palpable que tenía a mi alcance... los discos... Para mi y todos mis amigos era la única forma de creación que parecía que nos hablara a nosotros]" (Venturini 2009). As such, it is not surprising that Amat's novel ends with a punk song to establish a tone of resolution. "Stay Free" (The Clash 1978) plays at the funeral in the novel's epilogue. Most punk songs indicate 'now' as the only point in time a self-proclaimed 'no future' movement can disconnect from prior generations to live intensely in the moment. But "Stay Free" tells the story of male friendship that leaves us with an ambiguous story of "resigned realism" tainted by melancholy: "In Stay Free there is the past... It's an ambiguous song, in part bitter, in part festive, with something of resigned realism. A bit of modest *carpe diem* for the neoliberal, conservative, policed world promoted by Reagan [and] Thatcher... [En Stay Free hay pasado... Es una canción ambigua, en parte amarga, en parte festiva, con algo de realismo resignado. Una suerte de *carpe diem* modesto para el mundo neoliberal, conservador y policíaco que impulsaban Reagan, Thatcher...]" (Díaz "Acción Literaria"). Amat's remembering of his reality on the *extrarradio* brings our attention to the

neighborhoods that do not fit into the urban totality proposed by "the manufacture of consensus" (Balibrea 203, 2001) in contemporary Barcelona. In a sense, Amat and *las ratas con botas* merge with a global cadre of other disenfranchised youth in defiance of a cohesive Catalan identity. They look beyond their local exclusion from official national discourses of 'cohesion' towards other youth cultural movements struggling with similar socio-economic pressures to fail, or to simply serve the status quo. By demonstrating themselves aesthetically and emotionally counter to official Catalan national context, storytellers like Amat create characters in defiance of prescribed models of behavior that can perpetuate the violence of exclusion in local/global context.

Epilogue

Amat's fourth novel, *Eres el mejor, Cienfuegos* (2012) introduces us to an adult male first-person narrator living centrally (rather than peripherally) to all that Barcelona has to offer in 2011. But this forty-something journalist for *La Nación* has been abandoned by his wife, and feels 'betrayed' by the records that made 'promises' in his youth while the post 2008 economic crisis rages around him:

There was a time not too long ago... a long period in which the music always was a part of it all and spoke of my existence, my location in the vast cosmos: *You are here. You are this.* But one day not too long ago (when Eloísa left me) I realized that those records had tricked me. I had believed in their salvation, in their sentimental care, in all the inoffensive-three-minute-drama, because in the end everything was alright (at least it said so in those songs)... Eloísa left without leaving space for side B, and I realized that no one can save you, least of all a ton of pop music records. (35-6)¹⁵

If heterosexual white male protagonism feels betrayed (despite its success and access) in 21st century Barcelona, perhaps this is a good thing, because "Normal Pérez," now as an adult version of the adolescent voices in Amat's prior novels, attests to the survival of a gentler, even 'hysterical' masculinity in contemporary context. "Normal" realizes that the soundtrack of his youth might have saved him from a life in service to the neo-liberal mainstream, but its betrayal of the 'promises' (of resolution) allow him to see that his adolescent experiences of isolation and disenfranchisement are now packaged and mainstreamed on the back of new media genres, nostalgic novels, pop/punk/rock music and even teen movies and television.

¹⁵ "Hubo un tiempo no muy lejano en que siempre cantaba canciones como ésa, un largo periodo en que la música siempre venía a cuento a relataba mi existencia, mi localizacieon en el vasto cosmos. Usted está aquí. Usted es esto. Pero un día no muy lejano (cuando Eloísa me dejó) me di cuenta de que aquellos discos me habían estafado. Que yo había creído en su salvación, en su oferta de curación sentimental, en lo inofensivo de todo aquel drama-en-tres-minutos, porque al final todo se arregla (decía, de hecho, una de aquella canciones), y entonces Eloísa fue y me dejó de verdad, a pesar de la promesa infinita de de mejora y reconciliación de todas aquellas malditas tonadas, Eloísa se fue sin dejar espacio para estribillos o caras B, y allí me di cuenta de que nadie puede salvarte, pero mucho menos un montón de discos de música pop (35-6).

Simon During suggests that the most important aspect of masculinity's transformation in Western culture has happened in relation to emotion, citing popular male figures such as James Dean, Elvis Presley and Kurt Cobain as angst-ridden performers of "post-war affect" (During 181). And we could add to this the pantheon of male voices dominating the salvatory soundtracks interwoven into Amat's chronicles of life in Barcelona.

If salvation is not possible, then what does a new 'softer' masculinity want? During suggests that it wants to marginalize men "somewhat," to see them as limited and historically formed, "as a gender-marked social identity amongst other social identities" (181). What the performance of a new, more vulnerable masculinity has achieved is the defiance of any gendered subjectivity as the national norm, thereby allowing citizens to grow up in collaboration with other pan-national performances of tribal hysteria as central to any resistance to promises of 'no-future.'

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