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ABSTRACT
The *New World Embassy* was created by Dutch artist and activist Jonas Staal and Tuareg activist Moussa Ag Assarid in 2014 as an art installation to represent the recently established state of Azawad. This new state, currently unrecognised, seceded from Mali in 2012 after a brief armed struggle. An analysis of the spatialities of the *New World Embassy*, and of the region it represents, enables its interpretation as a critical utopia, a heterotopia, and as an example of smooth space. Such an analysis furthermore clarifies the underlying sociopolitical dynamic in the region, and in its newly established *Embassy*, as the contestation, by the other, of the oppressive geopolitical practices and institutions of the same. Lastly, the spatialities of the *Embassy* exemplifies a particular mode of agentic worldmaking.

One day (what will have happened?), a far-seer will abandon his or her segment and start walking across a narrow overpass above the dark abyss, will break his or her telescope and depart on a line of flight to meet a blind Double approaching from the other side. (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 202)

[T]he furthest-reaching telescope is necessary to see the real star of the Earth, and the telescope is called concrete utopia. (Bloch 1986: 315)

The *New World Embassy* is a political and artistic project created by artists and activists Jonas Staal and Moussa Ag Assarid in 2014 in Utrecht, The Netherlands. It existed from 6 September to 12 October 2014 as an art installation created on the premises of BAK (*basis voor actuele kunst*) in Utrecht. (BAK functions as a contemporary art institute and addresses the interface between art and politics). The *Embassy* was created to represent the state of Azawad, which seceded from the Republic of Mali in 2012 when the MNLA (*Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad*), a predominantly Tuareg rebel group, declared it an independent state. It is currently unrecognised. The geopolitical dynamic of the state of Azawad (described in greater detail below), is reflected in the complex spatialities that can be discerned in its embassy, the *New World Embassy*. The *Embassy* is read here as a dissident utopia, as a Foucauldian heterotopia and as a manifestation of smooth space as conceived by Deleuze and Guattari. In this reading of the *Embassy*, it is, lastly, construed as an example of agentic worldmaking. A clarification of the concept of utopia follows.

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Utopia

The term "utopia" is a neologism formulated by Thomas More (1478–1535) to name the island location of the perfect society he imagined. More created a term that designates a place that is simultaneously perfect and non-existent (Mumford 1968: 1). This dual nature of utopia can be linked to the function of utopia – that is, as the speculative critique of existing societies, accomplished by formulating social constructs that differ conspicuously from those in which their creator lives. Given the vastness of what utopia may entail, a framework by means of which the various kinds of utopias can be distinguished is helpful. Ruth Levitas (1990) provides such a framework, and proposes that a utopia may be categorised in terms of its format (thereby focusing on, for instance, literary utopias in the form of the novel, which would include More's *Utopia*); in terms of its content (which would enable a comparison of the details of various utopias); and with reference to its function. Considering the *function* of utopias, rather than the genre they happen to be presented in or the social minutiae that their authors describe, is regarded here as the most productive engagement, sociopolitically, with utopia.

Broadly considered, utopia functions as a critical reappraisal of a given sociopolitical order, and thus as constructive sociopolitical critique.[1] Both hypothetical utopias and concrete utopias, such as socialist or religious communes, can fulfil this function. Besides attempting to effect social reform, utopias can also fulfil the role of compensation for or escape from a society that is regarded as threatening, unequal or alienating.[2] Focusing on the function of utopia makes it possible to compare vastly differing constructs – from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848), to literary and cinematographic science fiction (such as *Star Trek*),[3] to visual art, such as the *New World Embassy*, discussed here. Furthermore, in foregrounding the sociopolitical function of utopia, the common criticism of utopia being 'unrealistic' is inverted. As a mode of social critique, its 'unreality' is what makes utopia useful and necessary. Raymond Ruyer's (1950: 9) description of utopia as 'a mental exercise in lateral possibilities' becomes utopia's central recommendation, rather than a rationale for its dismissal, and Lewis Mumford (1968: 24) notes that 'the cities … that people dream of are those in which they finally live'.

So far, the origin of the word utopia has been briefly outlined and a working definition of utopia as performing several sociocultural functions, including civic critique and reform, has been provided. As a mode of political engagement and social critique, the notion of utopia as broadly ineffectual and abstract, is refuted. In the following section, the role of agency in utopia is clarified before the *New World Embassy* is discussed as an example of a heterotopia, as an emergent and smooth space, and as an agentic world-making utopia.

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[1]Theorists Kateb (2008), Knights and Willmott (2002) and Reedy (2002) consider utopia as fulfilling such a critical role.

[2]Bloch (1986), Marcuse (1955) and Mumford (1968) interpret utopia in this way. For Bloch, however, not all utopias are compensatory, and he deems some utopias, such as the Marxist one he proposes in *The Principle of Hope* (1986), to be concretely practical. However, for Bloch (1986: 272), even the most abstractly theoretical idea of improvement is preferable to a complete lack of vision for a better society.

[3]Paul Gilroy (in Tucker 2004: 10), for instance, notes the value of *Star Trek* as making conceivable an alternative to dehumanising racial segregation and setting an example of 'multiracial humanism'.

Agency and utopia

Agency is defined here with reference to Karl Marx's (1852) observation that '[Wo]men make their own history [although] they do not make it under self-selected circumstances'. From this perspective, agency can be described as the ability to affect sociocultural dynamics by strategically engaging with a given set of circumstances, such as unequal social power relations or deep-structural violations of human rights. Agency is also informed by the dynamic of interaction between the same and the other, as addressed by theorists Michel Foucault (2002, 2008) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2005). They envisage agency specifically as the ability of the *other* to act in relation to the coercive or hegemonic machinations of the *same*, and Deleuze and Guattari (2005: 105) define the same as 'the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language'. The other, then, collectively includes children, people of colour, members of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) communities, women, and 'non-European' speakers of hybrid languages. The other is furthermore defined not in terms of lack of numerousness, but as holding a sociopolitically minoritarian position (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 105). Deleuze and Guattari (2005: 106) assign agency specifically to the other, because the other embodies the only subject position from which the sociopolitical status quo can be challenged. The other is hence, despite their politically abject position, agentic, par excellence.

Tactical manoeuvres in the face of coercion, exclusion, domination and oppression take on varied and compound forms. Saskia Sassen (2011: 574) nuances the experience of sociopolitical exclusion, noting that powerlessness is not simply 'an absolute condition that can be flattened into the absence of power … powerlessness can become complex … it contains the possibility of making the political, or making the civic, or making history'. Her conception of the relativity of powerlessness thus recalls Marx's description of agency as that which enables the making of history, and she regards the so-called Arab Spring, as well as recent global protests against austerity, corruption, police brutality, gentrification, human rights abuses and capitalism broadly, as concrete examples of such praxis (Sassen 2011: 573). Agency need not take the form of overt conflict, however. Further examples of agency include:

(1) Switching to a lingua franca in a diverse group to avoid the excluding practice of conversing in a language not spoken by all, or regarded by some as oppressive (Afrikaans, the language of the apartheid regime in South Africa, is a case in point);[4]
(2) Reconsideration of generally sanctioned sociocultural norms such as the social or personal desirability of marriage, the perceived benefits of capitalism, or the notion that parenthood as practised in the nuclear family is generally (or, at least, often enough) nurturing and wholesome;[5]
(3) Contestation of received cultural tropes;
(4) Self-informing praxis.

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[4]Choosing to converse in a specific language as a performance of defiance is a subject position informed by the linguistic identity of the agent in question, as embedded in sociohistoric particularities. Penny Silva (1997) weighs the perception of Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor against the equally valid conception of *English* as hegemonic.

[5]The nuclear family structure has been regarded as either inimical to general social development by utopians such as Plato, or as a definite dystopia. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley (1932), for instance, equates family life with oppression, madness and suicide. Deleuze and Guattari address the interface between normalised dysfunctional family life and capitalist society in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2000).

Utopias have not commonly been associated with agency, but rather with repression, intimidation and deception. In fact, Mumford (1965: 281) regards coercion as the fundamental characteristic of utopia. For Mumford, one of the primary functions of the first utopias (which he identifies as the first cities established after the emergence of the agricultural revolution), was to impose broad social order. Order in utopia can be (and has been) achieved through duress and disinformation. In Plato's *Republic*, for instance, the class and destiny of selected members of society are predetermined by the ruling class by means of enforced ignorance, censorship and deception. This provenance of utopia is the source of its broad vilification as tyrannical, and its manifestation as such is furthermore not limited to the ancient past. The utopia of the free market – which Christopher Grey and Christina Garsten (2002: 17) describe as having 'its own death camps, more usually called the third world' – presents itself as a current, popular utopia, widely touted as the best available option for global human development.

The common factor in all of these utopias is the limitation or eradication of the agency of the other by the same. However, utopia is also potentially empowering. What crucially distinguishes coercive utopias from agentic ones is whether a utopia's sociocultural dynamic can be identified as furthering and entrenching sociopolitically majoritarian discourses and systems, or as destabilising these from a minoritarian perspective. In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault (2008: 16, author's emphasis) notes that one may attempt to describe different sites 'by looking for the *set of relations* by which [they] can be defined'. Such a critical appraisal of the sets of relations that affect the sociopolitical dynamic of a utopia reveals it as a utopia of the same, or of the other, and informs the current spatial interpretation of the *New World Embassy* as an agentic utopia. In order to support such an analysis, heterotopia, as described by Foucault, is compared to smooth space. The spatialities pertaining to critical utopias, heterotopia and smooth space are subsequently correlated with Staal and Ag Assarid's praxis of establishing an independent state, and its embassy.

Heterotopia and smooth space

Reading utopia as a specific kind of space is apt, given the term's etymology ('no place', 'good place'). Foucault (2008: 17) pre-empted the analysis of the spatial praxis of the other, creating the term heterotopia, literally 'another place', to designate zones which have the ability to 'suspend, neutrali[s]e, or invert' ordinary spatial practices. Heterotopia is regarded as a variant of utopia in the current analysis, notwithstanding Foucault's rejection of utopia as 'unreal'.[6] The dismissal of utopia on this basis is addressed above, and the six principles of heterotopia Foucault delineates in *Of Other Spaces* can all equally be applied to utopia, given its range of permutations.

For instance, the principle that heterotopia is probably ubiquitous across cultures (Foucault 2008: 18), is a position held by Ernst Bloch (1986) regarding *utopias*. The second and sixth principles, relating to the social function heterotopia (Foucault 2008: 18–19; 21–22), are also entirely applicable to utopia. As a fourth principle, Foucault (2008: 20) identifies the temporality of heterotopia, and utopias can similarly be analysed in terms of their

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[6]For Foucault (2008: 17) utopias are 'emplacements with no real place', whereas heterotopias are 'effectively reali[s]ed utopias … actually locali[s]able'.

inherent temporal frameworks.[7] Utopias can correspond to the fifth principle of controlled access or exclusion masquerading as access that Foucault (2008: 21) assigns to heterotopias – the utopia of the free market again comes to mind. Lastly, the third principle, which describes heterotopia as having 'the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces … that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault 2008: 19), delineates the spatial structure that is argued here to manifest in the *New World Embassy*, interpreted to function as a utopia in the form of a heterotopia. The essential difference between heterotopia and utopia is, for Foucault, that heterotopias embody these principles in 'real' space, to which it can be countered that utopias do, or can, too. In the current analysis, heterotopia is thus invoked not on account of its heightened 'reality', but for its spatial dynamic: the particular spatiality of heterotopia (which is, to reiterate, regarded as a particular kind of utopia here), is what makes utopia so potentially destabilising, politically. For this reason, the spatiality of heterotopia is considered here in some detail.

Foucault (2008: 14–15; 17; 19) describes heterotopia as a matrix or network, 'a sort of configuration … an ensemble of relations' characterised by simultaneity, juxtapositioning, proximity and propinquity. Rather than hovering impassively within this matrix, however, heterotopia *inverts* given spatialities and relations, which is what distinguishes it, and makes it politically useful. Although Foucault (2008: 14) compares what he takes to be the 'current' focus on space with the preceding *historical* framing of social phenomena, he observes that the existential framing of space itself has a history which predates this shift. In this way, spatial conceptualisation in the Middle Ages was characterised by localisation within a fixed, hierarchical framework (Foucault 2008: 15). A subsequent growing awareness of cosmological phenomena, as well as accelerated territorial appropriation, 'opened space up', introducing movement, and making it possible for space to be experienced in terms of *extension*, rather than localisation. Lastly, Foucault (2008: 15) conceives the current spatial imaginary as 'emplacement', envisaged as a multidimensional grid, or network of relations, which includes the heterotopia. Emplacement is interpreted here to include localisation and extension, encompassing these 'previous' modes of experiencing space, and contributing to heterotopia's spatial complexity and political potential.

Besides destabilising normative spatial praxis, heterotopia constitutes *agentically* disputed space (Foucault 2008: 17), and the network comprised of nodes of decentring heterotopias (dispersed among ordinary spatialities), can be closely correlated with rhizomatic, smooth space as conceived by Deleuze and Guattari (2005). They contrast smooth space to striated space, and use the terms nomadic space and sedentary space to indicate the same spatial and sociopolitical poles. Thus 'sedentary space is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomad space is smooth' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 381). Smooth space is also described as the plane of consistency, and as deterritorialised space, while striated space is associated with the instrumentalising plan/e of organisation and with (re)territorialisation (reification). The two kinds of space (striated and smooth) are indexed by the opposing dynamics of ordering, and of 'chaos-ing'.

The plane of consistency and smooth space are pre-eminently characterised by heterogeneity and their capacity to convene disparate elements. The juxtaposing of dissimilar

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[7]There are timeless utopias where history is eliminated, of which More's is exemplary, and contingent utopias that respond to sociopolitical constraints, such as formulated by David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* (2000).

elements on the plane of consistency does not, however, signify a harmonious co-exist-ence, nor assimilation to a deep structure, which would provide a common foundational and organising principle that unites the disparate components encountered there (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 254). The structural (anti)organisation of *felt* (the fibrous aggregate created by nomads as a kind of cloth), is used as an example of a matrix similarly consti-tuted of separate, haphazardly intersecting heterogeneous elements, which nevertheless constitute an assembly (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 475–476). Felt, as an 'entanglement of fibres' has no 'right side' and no centre, making felt (and the plane of consistency/ smooth space), comparable to a rhizome that (re)constitutes itself from any segment (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 475–476).[8] The rhizome produces decentred space through destabilising lines of flight (the proliferating segments), similarly to the way in which a nomad constitutes smooth space by dwelling in it. Felt, then, is dynamic 'anti-fabric', whereas woven cloth circumscribes a structured and closed space (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 475).[9]

Smooth, nomad and rhizomatic space, as well as felt and the plane of consistency, are thus contrasted with striated, sedentary and arboreal space, and with woven fabric and the plan/e of organisation. These opposites are not regarded as representative of wholly inde-pendent pure states, however, but as co-constituting a sociospatial sphere in which the given interpersonal dynamics between the same and the other continuously stand to be destabilised *by* the other. Agency and opposing systematised power relations are therefore the prerogatives of the other, who 'makes' smooth space by traversing it in a specific mode of disputation (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 157). Smooth space is, lastly, liable to restra-tification, necessitating ongoing intervention on the part of the other/agent. To summar-ise, smooth space and heterotopia are ontologically indexed by agency, by radical heterogeneity and by becoming, and to be other/nomadic is to make smooth space. That is, to be a nomad is to 'make a world' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 280).

Embassy for a contested world

If smooth space is the region in which it is possible to make a world, as Deleuze and Guat-tari define it, the *New World Embassy* is an exemplary manifestation of smooth space. At the inauguration of the *Embassy*, Staal (2014c) indeed invokes socialist author Upton Sin-clair's identically worded exhortation to the artist not to make art, but 'to make a world'.[10] The *Embassy*, created by Jonas Staal and Moussa Ag Assarid,[11] was inaugurated on 9 Sep-tember 2014 in Utrecht, The Netherlands, to diplomatically represent the as yet

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[8]Deleuze and Guattari (2005: 15) contrast the rhizome with the tree, which is centred and sedentary.

[9]The ontological heterogeneity of smooth space mirrors Foucault's deliberation on the relationship between unorganised and unorganisable knowledge in *The Order of Things* (2002). In an attempt to sound the spatiality of the conditions that make knowledge possible – the 'epistemological field' within which it is possible to conceive – Foucault (2002: xix, orig-inal emphasis) describes 'a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous* … [namely] the disorder in which frag-ments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, [the disorder] of the *heteroclite*' which can never find a common locus, other than the heterotopia. Deleuze and Guattari make a home for this perturbing disarray on the plane of consistency, and in smooth space.

[10]Staal (2014c) quotes the following utopian urging by Sinclair: 'The artists of our time are like men hypnotized, repeating over and over a dreary formula of futility. And I say: Break this evil spell, young comrade; go out and meet the new dawning life, take your part in the battle, and put it into new art; do this service for a new public, which you yourself will make … that your creative gift shall not be content to make art works, but shall at the same time make a world'.

[11]Staal was born in Rotterdam in 1981. Ag Assarid was born in the region of Gao, northern Mali, in c.1975 (Maracci 2013; Staal 2014d).

unrecognised state of Azawad, declared independent by the MNLA in 2012. At the time of its secession, Ag Assarid was a member of and spokesperson for the MNLA in Europe.[12] Figure 1 shows an interior view of the *Embassy*. A table in the centre of the room takes the shape of the state of Azawad, which comprises the three northern zones of Mali, namely Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal, as well as – traced in lines on the floor and visible in the foreground – the southern section of Mali from which Azawad has seceded. On the back wall is a replicated map of the state of Azawad as well as two banners on which appear the Azawadian flag and the name of Azawad in French, Arabic, and Tamasheq.[13]

Staal (2014a: 25) refers to his artistic praxis as 'interventions in public space' through which he attempts to interrogate 'the relationship between art, democracy, ideology, politics and propaganda'. Staal is a highly controversial artist. For instance, he was arrested in 2005 when his first artworks, namely street installations in the form of memorials dedicated to Geert Wilders (the right-wing and ultranationalist leader of the Dutch political party the PVV), were interpreted as death threats against the politician. He was acquitted of all charges in 2008 (Jonas Staal 2015, personal correspondence). Staal has also organised a series of New World Summits for which he invited blacklisted members of terrorist organisations or unrecognised states, and their lawyers and representatives, to form alternative parliaments for 'organizations that currently find themselves excluded from democracy' (Van Gerven Oei 2012: i).[14] Staal uses the very means by which individuals or organisations may be declared terrorist in one region of the world but not another to, firstly, make the legal assembly of such individuals and organisations possible, and, secondly, to emphasise the arbitrary nature of their assignation as 'terrorist' (New World Summit Leiden 2012).

Through his art, Staal thus creates spaces in which he highlights what are for him the problematics of contemporary western state practices and party politics. These include the current applications of the term democracy to rationalise wars and human rights violations such as the killing of civilians with drone aircraft. Staal (2014c) and BAK (n.d.) refers to such democracy as capitalist democracy, or democratism, and to the collusion of the state with capitalist interests in a way that disregards human rights, as the Deep State, which conducts a global superterrorism through its deployment of the prison-industrial-war complex. He accordingly envisages alternatives to democratism and the Deep State in the form of stateless democracy and the stateless state (Staal 2014a: 22; 2014c; 2014d; in New World Embassy 2014b; in New World Summit Brussels 2014b: 3, 53–57). Staal's praxis constitutes the creation of a utopian alternative that functions in the mode of sociopolitical critique, foregrounds the agency of the politically other, and upends the spatial/political framework of the same. The spatiality of his utopia is

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[12]The MNLA was torn apart when of its members signed the Algiers Accord on 20 June 2015 (MNLA Europe CQÉ 2015). Ag Assarid withdrew from the MNLA and founded the movement *Free Azawad* on 11 April 2016 in Kidal (Abba 2016; Monti 2016).

[13]Tamasheq is the language spoken by the Tuareg, who refer to themselves as Kel Tamasheq, or, those who speak Tamasheq (Ag Assarid in Staal 2014e: 29).

[14]There have been six New World Summits to date. The first was held in Berlin, Germany (4–5 May 2012), and the latest in Utrecht, The Netherlands (29–31 January 2016). The fifth Summit (16–17 October 2015) took place in the city of Derîk in Rojava, an independent Kurdish State declared in the region of West-Kurdistan/Northern Syria. *The New World Embassy: Rojava* was created in Oslo, Norway (26–27 November 2016) as part of the 2016 Oslo Architecture Triennale. Ag Assarid represented *Free Azawad* in the panel on Culture and Self-Determination (New World Embassy Rojava 2016).

Figure 1. Interior of the *New World Embassy*. Lange Nieuwstraat, Utrecht, The Netherlands. Source: Image supplied by Jonas Staal.

indistinguishable from heterotopia and from smooth space, particularly in its manifestation as the *New World Embassy*, co-created with Ag Assarid.

While Staal's motivation in establishing the *Embassy* is embedded in critique of western political institutions, Ag Assarid has been more directly involved in literal worldmaking, and the creation of the *Embassy* is for him part of the Tuareg struggle for independence. Ag Assarid participated in the 2011/2012 armed struggle in his capacity as international spokesperson for the MNLA, gauging the importance of conveying the causes, nature, and scope of the struggle from an insider's perspective to an international audience – battles of liberation are also fought as information wars. In 2015 he was elected Vice President of the World Amazigh Congress, indicating his involvement in the broader struggles of the autochthonous peoples of the region, including those in diaspora (Ag Assarid 2015).[15] A brief outline of events leading up to and occurring immediately after the secession of Azawad, is necessary to clarify the analysis of the spatiality of its embassy.

Azawadian independence was declared by the MNLA on 6 April 2012 after an armed rebellion, the last of four Tuareg rebellions since the creation of the state of Mali in 1960. Ongoing failure to address developmental and infrastructural needs in the northern region of Mali (now Azawad), government corruption, and human rights abuses of the Tuareg by the Malian state continue to fuel the Tuareg desire for autonomy (Ag Assarid 2014: 107; Declaration of the Independence of Azawad 2014: 45–48; Eyre 2014: 55; Mali: Polémique

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[15]The Amazigh constitute a globally dispersed Berber group of which the Tuareg are a subgroup. There are, according to the former president of the World Amazigh Congress, Fathi Ben Khalifa, 60 million Amazigh resident in North, West and Central Africa, as well as in Europe and North America (New World Embassy 2014b). For Ag Assarid, the struggle for Azawad and for the rights of the Amazigh are inseparable (Maracci 2013).

2015; Maracci 2013; Morgan 2014; New World Summit Brussels 2014a; Sèbe 2014: 130; Staal 2014b, 2014d: 92, 2014e: 31).

The 2012 rebellion was conclusive – the Tuareg drove Malian soldiers from the north and established their headquarters in Kidal. The return of heavily armed Tuareg forces from Libya after the fall of Muammar Qaddafi's regime in 2011 is cited as a contributing factor in the success of the rebellion (Staal 2014a: 21). Suspiciously soon after this victory for the Tuareg, the region was overrun by a coalition of Islamist militant movements operative in the Sahel and the Sahara (Diarra and Diallo 2015; Flood 2012). The main groups involved in what, from the perspective of the Tuareg, amounted to a coup, are Ansar Dine, MUJAO and AQIM (Flood 2012; Ag Assarid in Staal 2014e: 36).[16] The MNLA contends that the jihadist groups have been welcomed by the Malian government itself (New World Summit Brussels 2014b: 44). Lastly, in response to the presence of the jihadists, Operations Serval and Barkhane, led by French troops, were deployed to Mali/Azawad (2013–the present), with assistance from MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali), led by Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders. MINUSMA is also still in place.

Smoothing utopia, making the world

The complexity of the postcolonial legacy in West Africa and the Sahelo-Saharan region sets the scene for the creation of a sociopolitical counter-space, firstly in the form of the state of Azawad itself, and, secondly, in the form of its embassy. The current analysis reads the *New World Embassy* as a critical and agentic utopia, a heterotopia, as a permutation of smooth space, and as concrete worldmaking praxis. The *Embassy* of the stateless state of Azawad acts as a site of sociopolitical contestation – a utopia in which an alternative world is made. Establishing the *New World Embassy* in an urban site in Europe brings the margin – a remote desert region – to the 'centre', to confront the structural forces implicated in its marginalisation. Thus, as a space, the *Embassy* is an imbrication of localities in the sense in which Foucault (2008: 17) describes heterotopia, that is, as 'another place' related to and simultaneously contradicting 'all the other sites,' which gives it the ability to 'suspend, neutralise, or invert' institutional and sanctioned space and the politics that inhere in such space. The *New World Embassy*, as a city (Sassen's urban history machine) within a city (Utrecht) that represents a stateless state indexed by criticality and rebellion, also takes on the form and function of the heterotopia as described by Stager Jacques. He notes that the heterotopia 'floats in a polydimensional reality [which] is firmly tied to the unravelling of Western modernity' (2002: 29).

The multilocationality of the *New World Embassy* is a reflection of the way in which it extends across geopolitical and sociocultural realities: the 'first' and the 'third' worlds; the centre and the margin; the terrain of the coloniser, and that of the colonised; the densely populated urban node, and the sparsely inhabited desert. The ambivalent position that the

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[16]Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), is also referred to as Ansar Eddine and Ansar al-Dine. MUJAO is the *Mouvement pour l'Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest*, or Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, and AQIM stands for Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Ansar Dine was formed during late 2011 or early 2012 by Tuareg rebel leader Iyad ag Ghaly. MUJAO and AQIM are, however, regarded as opportunistic and invasive movements involved in drug trafficking and other illegal enterprises (Flood 2012; New World Summit Brussels 2014a). The MNLA briefly attempted a coalition with Ansar Dine in 2012 but has since consistently distanced itself from all three movements (Ag Assarid in New World Embassy 2014b; Ag Assarid in Staal 2014e: 36, 38; Maracci 2013; MNLA Europe CQÉ 2015).

Embassy occupies foregrounds the way these seeming opposites are interconnected, dialectically acting upon each other. It also speaks to the contingency of the utopia that simultaneously inhabits the world it is in and a future world it seeks to be in. Lastly, its heterotopic qualities at once encompass localisation (the *Embassy* as fixed location), extension (the Sahelo-Saharan region as colonial artefact) and emplacement: it acts as an unhomely conjuncture in which are distilled the layered history and geographical interconnectedness of the space/s of the same and of the other, in such a way as to make renewal possible. In this sense, the *Embassy* fulfils its role as messenger alluded to in the etymological root of the word – its acts as an envoy between several spatialities and, hence, between opposing historical actualities.[17]

Besides interpreting the *New World Embassy* as a kind of heterotopic, geographical telescope productive of deterritorialising chaos, it is furthermore possible to identify *contrasting* permutations of smooth and striated space in the *New World Embassy* and in the desert region it represents. Doing so assists in foregrounding the interrelatedness of these spatialities, a dynamic that utopians can tactically exploit in order to create an alternative dispensation.

To begin with, the space currently referred to as Azawad, described by Sèbe (2014: 126) as 'an extremely porous, almost borderless open space' in the precolonial period, was subjected to striation by various state apparatuses, such as those of the coloniser and subsequently those of the postcolonial African states that now constitute the region.[18] It is in contestation of these successive waves of striation, and of the political institutions that have imposed them, that the establishment of Azawad and of its embassy recalls the work of constituting smooth space through the minoritarian counter-praxis of the nomad, who is the figure of the sociopolitical other. The interpretation of the space of the *New World Embassy* and of Azawad as *contestatory* smooth space is, however, straightforward, and more intricate permutations of the tensions between smooth and striated space in the utopia of Staal and Ag Assarid can be identified.

For instance, the declaration of Azawad as an independent *state* evokes the striated space of the state apparatus. Ag Assarid (New World Summit Brussels 2014a; in Staal 2014e: 41–42) concedes that the Tuareg have adopted late modern geographical terminology despite their ambivalence regarding the suitability of the state as a relevant political form, able to adequately represent the Tuareg. In discursively addressing this ambivalence, rather than attempting to resolve or deny it, Staal and Ag Assarid are deconstructing the concept of statehood per se. The political implications of Azawad as a stateless state furthermore mirrors Deleuze and Guattari's conception of smooth space as *simultaneously* the region of sociopolitical dissent (nomad space) and as the space of the Deep State in its hypercapitalist form. They observe of capitalism that it 'recreated, reconstituted, a sort of smooth space', and that although striation endures in 'the state pole of capitalism', at the 'dominant level of … *world capitalism*, a new smooth space is produced in which capital reaches its "absolute" speed' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 492, original emphasis). Thus the state works towards the striation of space as a national project, but also facilitates the hypersmoothing of late-capitalist space, and of 'military-industrial, and multinational

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[17]I am indebted to the comments of a reviewer who flagged the root of the term and who also questioned the suitability of a fixed location for the *Embassy*, given the overall nature and scope of the project.
[18]The territory in question has been subdivided into five states namely Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Burkina-Faso (Sèbe 2014: 127).

complexes' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 387). To summarise, smooth space is at once the spatial matrix of dissent and the zone constituted by hypercapitalism – the global arena of the militarised Deep State.

This reinscription of smooth space by and as striated space, and vice versa, explains the sociopolitical polyvalence of the region of Azawad, serving, as it does at present, as the medium of resistance for the Tuareg and their allies but also as a region in which various reportedly criminal jihadist organisations freely circulate. A *confluence* of smooth space as constituted through the absolute speed of late capitalism on the one hand, and through the supranational and covert circulation of the opportunist organisations in question, on the other hand, emerges. The jihadists can be said to have reached the absolute speed of late capitalism in the contested region of Azawad, functioning in a similar mode of universalisation and totalisation. However, in *contrast* with smooth space in its absolute and universal form, the smooth space of the Tuareg asserts the particularity of a minority position. Encapsulating in a single observation the agentic position of the other, as well as the revolutionary potential of such a position, and its implications for worldmaking and historymaking praxis, Deleuze and Guattari (2005: 472) note of the 'power of minority, [and] of particularity' that if minorities are revolutionary,

> it is because they carry within them a deeper movement that challenges the worldwide axiomatic … The minorities issue is … that of smashing capitalism, of redefining socialism, of constituting a war machine capable of countering the world war machine [to] delineate a new Land.

Lastly, the permutation of statelessness as a smooth space is further nuanced and deconstructed by Staal, who emphasises the difference between supranationalism (such as pursued by the current proliferation of fundamentalist groups) and the stateless internationalism that Tuareg rebels such as Ag Assarid seek.[19] Staal interprets space as created by Islamic fundamentalist ambition, that is, the space of enforced sharia law, not as an intensified variant of smooth space, as described above, but as its opposite, namely as an extreme manifestation of striated space in the form of the universalised state. Staal (2014c) notes: 'The performative gestures of Islamic State fighters publicly destroying their passports and thus allowing no administrative way back … actually oppose statelessness … committ[ing] to one absolute and total state'. The Tuareg struggle, on the other hand, represents for Staal and Ag Assarid a stateless internationalism that rises above the designation of statehood, even as it lays claim to statehood. Staal's reading thus makes it possible to identify the claims to the total state, as made by jihadist absolutists, as constituting extreme striated space, in contrast to a reading of their praxis as the creation of smooth space similar to that of the hypersmooth space of capitalist fundamentalism, or of the Deep State.

Conclusions

The *New World Embassy* and the state of Azawad that it represents are interpreted here as utopias that critique and resist the geopolitical and postcolonial status quo. They are furthermore read as heterotopian spaces produced by the other. In addition, both the

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[19]Staal refers specifically to the ambitions of Islamic State, also known as ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), and as ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham).

Embassy and the state of Azawad manifest as the agentic smooth space of minority socio-political contestation. However, smooth space itself is threefold: it manifests as minority space, but also as the space in which extremism (both capitalist and jihadist) reaches its absolute speed, outside of state processes. Azawad in its present form, constituted through parallel and opposing projects in the region, accordingly appears as the smooth space of the nomadic rebels, as that of opportunistic jihadist groups, and as that of the Deep State of neocolonial Empire, which continues to hover over the region's resources. Conversely, as a region subject to the imposition of sharia law, Azawad takes on the hyper-striation of what Staal calls the superstate. The Azawadian rebels thus perform the work of combatting striated space on two fronts: against the state of Mali, and against the superstate of the jihadists, while at the same time contending with globalising Deep State interventionism that constitutes the world as its hypersmooth arena.

In conclusion, the *New World Embassy* created by Jonas Staal and Moussa Ag Assarid is a particular kind of utopia that reflects the intricacy of global geopolitics, and the machinations by which institutions (whether political, social, discursive, economic, or religious) attempt to abolish agentically constituted smooth space. Their utopia is worldmaking and smoothing in the nomadic sense foregrounded by Deleuze and Guattari, and functions as a destabilising Foucauldian heterotopia characterised by agency, sociopolitical alterity, contestation, heterogeneity, rhizomatic micropolitics and complexity. However, having constituted the *Embassy* and the stateless state of Azawad through critical (and armed), smoothing praxis, Staal and Ag Assarid have not produced a concluded project. The establishment of a productive utopia entails the constant labour of disputation and the agentic praxis of the other in defiance of the normalisation/institutionalisation of human rights abuses by the same. In its smooth form, their utopia interjects alterity, dislodges the axiomatic, renews the world.

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