

Foreword

Mapping the Post-Colonial Atlantic: Cultural and Literary Interactions

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ABSTRACT:

The collection of essays presented in this volume, the fifth issue of *Compendium*, provides a literary and cultural mapping of the Atlantic that, through a critical-theoretical post-colonial perspective and a comparative approach, enables us to (re)assess the circulation of texts and cultures within the Atlantic space in the light of unequal power relations that are intrinsic to colonial modernity. Furthermore, the collection highlights the multiple forms of micro- and macro-physical violence underlying contemporary migrations which have always borne the scars of the colonial nature of knowledge and power. This dossier comprises a series of essays that engage in dialogue with the social sciences, pedagogy, and literary studies, alongside two critical reviews.

RESUMO:

O conjunto de ensaios reunidos no presente volume, quinto número da *Compendium*, oferece uma cartografia literária e cultural do Atlântico que, a partir de uma perspectiva crítico-teórica de caráter pós-colonial e de uma abordagem comparativa, permita (re)pensar as circulações de textos e culturas no espaço atlântico, à luz das relações de poder desiguais intrínsecas à modernidade colonial. Além disso, a coletânea põe em evidência as múltiplas formas de violência micro e macrofísica subjacentes também às migrações contemporâneas, sempre marcadas pela *colonialidade* do saber e do poder. Compõem o presente dossier ensaios que dialogam com as ciências sociais, a pedagogia e os estudos literários, assim como duas resenhas críticas.

KEYWORDS:

Atlantic studies; postcolonial perspectives; coloniality; cultural interactions

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

estudos do Atlântico; perspectivas pós-coloniais; colonialidade, interações culturais

EUROPEAN EXPANSIONISM, with its maritime and overseas urge, was in fact a (trans)-Atlantic phenomenon and process. The ocean voyages left an indelible mark on the history of colonised societies as well as on the geopolitical, economic and cultural relations between these societies and the World. This historical influence was then reshaped through the often-subordinate role such colonised societies played in the new trading networks making their debut into the so-called Capitalist World-System (Wallerstein, 1980). ‘Atlantic world’ theorists such as Paul Gilroy (1993) and Alberto da Costa e Silva (2003) agree that the ocean-going voyages and exchanges were crucial not only for building a modern ethos, enhancing the dynamics and entrenching power hierarchies resulting from the European expansion, but also as regards understanding the persistent nature of the dynamics of colonial violence at the time.

From the occupation of the Americas to the processes of effective colonisation on the African continent, bodies, cultures, knowledge, techniques, and ideologies were disseminated on both sides of the Atlantic (Matory 2005). According to *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (<https://www.slavevoyages.org/>) housed at Rice University, about 12 million enslaved persons were shipped from the African continent to lands in the Americas and in Europe. At the same time and in conformity with the various colonial models and demands of the colonial powers, American and African spaces became the theatres of immersion processes (Mbembe 2021) in which the relationship between culture, identity, and space (Hall 2003) was refashioned through the violent, instrumental imposition of Western rationality. Such migration flows have gained new dynamic energy in contemporary post-imperial times while continuing to uphold unequal relations between the global North and South.

If the travel literature ranging from the 16th century to the so-called (post)colonial travelogue (Boehmer 1998; Mata 1989, 2016b; Mata and Lugarinho 2021) has testified to an antagonistic encounter with the Other, stereotyping and mythologising Africa (Mudimbe 1988) and taking part in the processes of constructing racialised, ethnicised, and gendered difference, the postcolonial approach (Hall 2003; Mata 2013, 2016a; Mignolo 2000) proposes a radical critical revision in modern perceptions of the Other. Such an approach would allow us to think of the Atlantic space from a multiple number of perspectives. At the same time, it would allow us to highlight the on-going violence and long-lived hierarchies in contemporary neo-colonial and endo-colonial configurations. Hence, postcolonial literature would be an amphibious literature, navigating, as might be expected, between the realms of aesthetics and politics (Santiago 2000). It would project a critical gaze upon analytical models that are based on the construction of difference that has shaped cultural relations in colonial societies (Bethencourt 2018). Moreover, it would also comprise the intertext of literary experiences that have been affected by coloniality (Mata 2016a). In his introduction to *Post/Colonialism and the Pursuit of Freedom in the Black Atlantic*, Jerome C. Branche says:

(Re)visiting the experiences of early displaced Africans as they confront the new worlds to which their captors take them, reading the declarations that emanate from the African societies themselves as things “fall apart” [...], and reflecting on

both the narrative architecture of colonial ideology and the responses from activist writers, poets and filmmakers, allows us to see a big picture, over time, of slavery, diaspora, and colonialism and its aftermath, and to appreciate the critical calls, made since the mid-century at least, for an eschewal of the West's gendered and raciological model of humanity, and its selective and self-centered deployment of reason and science. (2018, 14)

From a literary and cultural standpoint, the flows of geopolitical bodies and their cultures across the Atlantic Ocean occupies a central position in the studies making up this edition of *Compendium: Journal of Comparative Studies*. The displacements were characterised by abuse and exploitation: indeed, the violent nature of colonisation and slavery is a precondition for the transatlantic crossings, as discussed in the articles in this volume which illustrate various points of view. The same narrative involving different kinds of violence affects the contemporary experience of what Zygmunt Bauman (1999) has called the “vagabonds of the global era”, or rather, today's migrants who are taking part in the construction of what Achille Mbembe describes as “colliding cultures” – cultures that are “caught in the maelstrom of war, invasion, migration, intermarriage, and a history of various religions we make our own, of techniques we exchange, and of goods we trade” (Mbembe 2020, 58).

Ever since Paul Gilroy's ground-breaking publication in 1993, research into the Black Atlantic and its evolution in various linguistic and cultural contexts, has primarily focused on American geographies. The United Kingdom, however, stands out as a notable exception where diaspora studies, exemplified by Stuart Hall's work for one, have flourished. Over the past two decades, significant scholarly reflections on Afro-descendant literature in Europe have emerged. These discussions are part of a broader research panorama that seeks to critically engage with Europe's imperial legacy today and address reparative policies as well as deliberate upon community-led initiatives aimed at preserving the memories of violence underpinning colonialism and slavery. Within this framework, for example, are the studies made by Kwame Nimako, “Remembrance, Commemorations and Apologies: The Dutch Context and Implications for other European Nations” (Article No. 2), and Margarida Rendeiro (Article No. 7), “Memórias de Violência em Trânsito e Subjetividades Insubmissas em Aida Gomes e Yara Monteiro” (“Memories of Violence in Transit and Unsubmissive Subjectivities in Aida Gomes and Yara Monteiro”).

This issue of *Compendium*, devoted to “Writing the Post-Colonial Atlantic: Histories, Stories, and Memorialist Discourses”, begins with Percy C. Hintzen's article “The Caribbean: Horizons of Possibilities for a Future Without Guarantees”. As an American intellectual of Guyanese origin, he explores the potential horizons for a regional dialogue among neighbouring Caribbean countries, each of which has been shaped by the centuries-old transatlantic crossings that have become the bedrock of Atlantic cultures. His aim is to outline a path towards a sustainable future for the Caribbean region. Against the backdrop of the “Condition of Coloniality”, Hintzen's reflections focus on reconfiguring regional relations where forms of Westphalian sovereignty and Euro-American global centres of power have been circumvented.

Following Percy C. Hintzen's study, Kwame Nimako's article explores the Dutch role within the Atlantic system and the mechanics of the slave trade between

the African coastlands and various American shores. Nimako examines how public memory practices, such as commemorations staged by engaged Black communities (from the Antilles, Suriname and the Low Countries, as mentioned in his article), employ diverse artistic and literary forms – ranging from music, dance, theatre and performance art to various genres of literature – so as to critically reassess the legacy of slavery in contemporary settings. Nimako argues that these dynamics ought to resonate across other European societies, equally affected by their colonial and slave-holding pasts.

“Práticas Pedagógicas para De(s)colonizar o Atlântico” (“Pedagogical Activity to (De)colonise the Atlantic”) by Eduardo Russell, concludes the initial triptych of essays aimed at viewing the Atlantic as both a geographical and a symbolic space conducive to considering emancipatory policies that promote the development of sustainable futures, historical reparations, and decolonial pedagogies. Russell's field of analysis delves into linguistic and literary school education, where he suggests that the ‘resignification’ (of works, authors, concepts) is crucial for dismantling colonial patterns. Russell underlines the pivotal role of the educator as an agent of transformation where his/her contribution leads to decolonial pedagogical activity.

In the sphere of geosocial studies, the article “Macaronesia: Ontological and Epistemological Tensions of a Name” by Francisco C. Marques shares Percy C. Hintzen’s focus on a regional scenario; Marques has chosen to focus his attention on Macaronesia’s four Atlantic archipelagos. According to the author, such geographies overlap the traditional historical categories, hence inviting a nuanced understanding of their identities, historical roots, and the fluid interplay between their spatial and temporal dimensions.

In her article, “Inextricably Tied: Cultural Connections and Political Solidarity between Angola and Brazil through the Experience of Mário Pinto de Andrade”, Elisa Scaraggi studies the intellectual relationships Andrade forged with journalists, intellectuals and political movements in Brazil. Taking into account his experience in Africa, Europe and the Americas, Mário Pinto de Andrade (1928-1990) was an Angolan of imposing cross-Atlantic stature. The South Atlantic axis was extremely prolific in terms of producing literary and cultural exchanges and interactions.

The section devoted to articles ends with Margarida Rendeiro’s essay as mentioned above, together with Benjamín Alías’s study “Formas de la crítica planetária en *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953) de George Lamming” (“Types of Planetary Criticism in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953)”, and Norma Sueli Rosa Lima’s study, “Exílio e Memória na Poesia de Yolanda Morazzo” (“Exile and Memory in Yolanda Morazzo’s Poetry”), where both may be called case studies. Located between planetary melancholy and post-imperial melancholy, Benjamín Alías proposes making an examination of the kinds of resistance against the modern colonial project as described in the work of George Lamming. Rendeiro reveals her thoughts situated in the Portuguese literary sphere where she scrutinises the Atlantic crossings between Angola and Portugal from a gendered perspective. She investigates memory through the literary representation of diverse kinds of violence by looking into Aida Gomes’ novel *Os Pretos de Pousaflores* (2011) and Yara Monteiro's *Essa Dama Bate Bué* (2018) and offering a thought-provoking reading of post-colonial and post-national discourses from the standpoint of the female body.

In her essay, Norma Sueli Rosa Lima emphasises the fact that the Atlantic crossings which moulded the poetry of Yolanda Morazzo, a female voice expresses the hardships of exile, prejudice, and social injustice through the spoken word and various performance genres. Also featured in this edition are reviews by Ana Aires e Castro and Danielle Baracho: critiques of *Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida: Tecelã de Mundos Passados e Presentes* (2023), a collection of essays edited by Sheila Khan and Sandra Sousa, and the critical edition of *Recordações d'uma Colonial (Memórias da preta Fernanda)* (1912/2022), by A. Totta and F. Machado.

The collection of essays presented in this volume provides a literary and cultural mapping of the Atlantic that, through a critical-theoretical post-colonial perspective and a comparative approach, enables us to (re)assess the circulation of texts and culture within the Atlantic space in the light of unequal power relations that are intrinsic to colonial modernity. Furthermore, the collection highlights the multiple forms of micro- and macro-physical violence underlying contemporary migrations which have always borne the scars of the colonial nature of knowledge and power.

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