

# FOREWORD

## Duties: remaking nexuses, coexisting

*Nothing human demands community from those who want it. Going far demands combined efforts, at least one following another, not stopping at the possibilities of one person. If he cut the links surrounding him, the solitude of a man is a mistake. A life is only a link in a chain. I hope that others continue the experience that others began before me, dedicating themselves like me, like others before me, to this test: to go to the end of the possible.*

Georges Bataille<sup>1</sup>

This issue of *Gragoatá* was conceived by the editors in the second half of 2019. The overall aim was to gather together theoretical and critical reflections on the intricacies and challenges associated to one of the foremost issues of our time: theories of the common and rhetorics of the community as they appear in different Portuguese language cultural contexts, where the need for structural diversity would seem to call for more in-depth analytical responses capable of robustly addressing one fundamental and deceptively simple question: How can communities be generated in contexts where singularities are excluded?

The experience of colonial traditions seems to have circumscribed meanings of community to a set of excluding instructions forged in modernity and imposed as development models, which have ended up gouging visible chasms across contemporary societies. At the same time, it seems to have attempted to assimilate, incorporate, and unify alternative forms of life, which, in their resilience, have *rexisited* – to draw on the useful neologism proposed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro<sup>2</sup> in reference to Amerindian traditions – in contexts that could well be described as apocalyptic.

The vetoes colonial modernity imposed on ancestral, traditional, or pre-modern forms of life seem to have subjugated – often quite brutally – whole social groupings with different roots and different epistemic orientations, whose failure to adhere to the requirements of a modernity

BATAILLE, Georges. *On Nietzsche*. Transl. Stuart Kendall. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991. p. 23.

VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, Eduardo. *On an Aesthetics of the Preterite*. Rio de Janeiro: N-1 Edições, 2014. Available at: <https://n1edicoes.org/obra/esteticas-do-preterito>.

means they were and still are alienated from any shared sense of belonging, in an integrated notion of community. Essentially, the fraught coexistence of groups given access to and excluded from the riches of the common is what inspired the theme of this issue, which we have entitled *Traces of Community, Coexistence, and other Forms of Survival*.

Back in 2019, nobody could have imagined that in the middle of preparing this volume, the world would be struck by the coronavirus pandemic, which would only go to make more flagrant the gulfs opened up within communities. Under lockdown, many of us could stay at home to avoid spreading the disease; yet for many others of us, this was not an option because even the minimum means of self-preservation were lacking. These socioeconomic rifts rose to the surface and imposed themselves to the point of seeming self-evident. Nevertheless it is also clear that such gaps have always threatened the social and political fabric. What they do now is bear dramatic witness to the vulnerability of a community.

Groups traditionally excluded from the community, whether by the cogs of modernity or by colonial hierarchies, have come to be identified as a risk to the greater social body. They have found themselves inscribed socially as potential vehicles of mass transmission and contagion, threatening not just the privileges enjoyed by the most advantaged, but even their lives. Many countries have passed legislation for emergency payouts in order to ensure that socially vulnerable individuals can circulate in society in a bid to subsist, which has made them potential vehicles of contagion. Yet this gesture has failed to take shape as inclusion.

Throughout the long centuries of colonialism and the ensuing decades of neoliberalism, the exclusion of social groupings, while obviously undesirable, was tolerated. The enforcement of public policies geared towards fiscal austerity and necropolitics, along with exterminations and “epistemicide” in more remote parts, seem to delineate projects and – why not say it? – desires to mold an encapsulated form of community integrated constitutively with the hegemonies of financial capital. Radicalized and “decommunitarized” sectors of voided societies even celebrate the exclusion of such groups to the point of caricature, building walls between countries or

enabling generalized free access to firearms for the protection of private property.

At such a unique moment in time, when the invisible particles of a little-known virus are threatening to freely cross what are now such glaring social divisions in the air we all breathe, responses are being articulated in the clearest terms possible: some are left out of the official rhetoric of the common good. In this new setting, theories devised in spaces of incomparably more excellent social equilibrium and other discourses have been harnessed in an effort to urge a denaturalization of inequalities of opportunities, underlying asymmetries, hierarchies between forms of life, and normalized thinking about coexistence, community, and collective living. In other words, what they have done is reveal the lingering presence of colonial rationales, which “subsist structurally in modern western thinking and continue to be constitutive of the excluding cultural and political relations maintained in the contemporary world system,” to quote Boaventura de Sousa Santos.<sup>3</sup>

It is in this context of apprehension and perplexity that this volume, *Traces of Community, Coexistence, and other Forms of Survival*, presents a set of robust responses that draw on their authors’ capacity for critical thinking to project the primacy of literature for pondering, mediating, and, crucially, developing critical gazes on all that is shared. Of all forms of linguistic expression, literature is surely the one that is most receptive to taking on as a task, a duty, the act of questioning – whether consciously or not – what it is that connects us all, this thing that is out there.

This task of shared existence seems to be materialized in or repose on a kind of symbolic membrane made of meanings, symbols, values, and assumptions of different kinds and orders, internal vectors that have to be constantly renegotiated with human history and the histories and stories of common men and women. By this logic, this membrane is precisely what links us while simultaneously giving our lives meaning.

Literature, an artistic practice that presupposes the capacity for shared imagination – at least between author and reader – poses us with a fundamental question: How can we imagine together? Or better: How can we bring our imaginations into dialogue, given that the work of

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representation is eternally incomplete? This is arguably one of the pillars that sustains our fundamental need for literature. This is arguably the reason why societies love their authors, their artists, their poets: because they are the ones who liberate our imagination, our fantasy about reality, our collective shadows. The Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes, in his well-known chronicle *Receita para me lerem* ["Recipe for Me to be Read"], writes:

Faulkner, of whom I no longer like what I used to, said he had found out that writing is a marvelous thing: it makes men walk on their hind legs and project a huge shadow. I ask you to take this on board, understand that it belongs to you and, more than understanding it belongs to you, it is what, in the best of hypotheses, provides a nexus for your life.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> ANTUNES, António Lobo. *Receita para me lerem*. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Segundo livro de crónicas*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote: 2002, p. 109-111.

This "huge shadow," this ever provisional work of imagining reality, seems to be the perpetual worksite of literature. Here we all are – writers, poets, readers – seeking out a "nexus" for our lives. For our individual lives, for sure, but also for our collective, social life, our life *with*.

In a broad sense, the word *nexus* refers to a conjunction of two or more things; a link, connection, union. Or else a link between situations, events or ideas. This preliminary definition points to the fact that a nexus is a link, and at the same time, it is what links, what produces meaning. In this ligation, the invisible, yet organic membrane that composes us and at the same time makes us coexist as contemporary is the minimum we are bound to accept.

Sheltering under this thematic umbrella are eight essays and three reviews, which, brought together here, share concerns with the ongoing negotiations and renegotiations of the nexuses and duties of community. They are written by researchers from nine different research and education institutions who were inspired by the proposed theme for this issue and in their contributions draw on individual or collective research endeavors.

The opening article is *Espaço fictício, comunidade alheada e situação-limite em narrativas de língua portuguesa* [Fictional Space, Alienated Community, and Limit Situations in Portuguese Language Narratives]. In it, Nazir Ahmed Can examines the relationship between fictional space and alienated

communities by looking at three works: the novel *Biografia do Língua* [Biography of a Language] (2015), by the Cape Verdean writer Mário Lúcio Sousa; the novella *O Assobiador* [The Whistler] (2002), by the Angolan author Ondjaki; and the novel *Campo de Trânsito* [Transit Camp] (2007), by the Mozambican writer João Paulo Borges Coelho. The author reflects that “any alternative identity requires a mutual understanding and the inconceivability of reciprocity in the absence of a horizon for shared space”.

The second paper is *Língua comum indecifrada: Grace Passô, Adília Lopes* [Undeciphered Common Language: Grace Passô, Adília Lopes], by Helena Martins. In her analysis, Martins demonstrates that “by translating the common, Grace Passô and Adília Lopes ‘catastrophize it’, shaking the deep-seated ways in which we tend to oppose the inside and outside of languages, communities, bodies”.

The following article is *Testemunhos em fragmentos: memórias do colonialismo português na peça Amores Pós-Coloniais* [Witnesses in Fragments: Memories of Portuguese Colonialism in the Play *Amores Pós-Coloniais*], an analysis of the Lisbon-based play (“post-colonial loves”), by André Amálio and Tereza Havlícková. Its author, Roberta Guimarães Franco, explains that the play is based on “testimony of Portugal’s recent colonial period and its ramifications since decolonization, foregrounding how fragments may be a ‘place’ for the emergence of memories still silenced in society at large”.

In the next article, *A produção ficcional de mulheres escritoras na década de 1960 em Portugal: incorporações e recusas* [Fiction by Female Writers in 1960s Portugal: incorporations and rejections], Jorge Vicente Valentim reworks some important arguments about the “fiction by women writers in Portugal in the 1960s from the analytical prism of contacts established with echoes of the prevailing politics of Salazar’s *Estado Novo*”. Bearing in mind the “many resonances and continuities of the neo-realist (sic) social tendency that are still [...] experienced”, Valentim reflects on “certain trends in these potential dialogues, either in a gesture of appropriation and thus of affinity with the *Estado Novo* discourse, or in its rejection in a movement of resistance and survival in an environment of political exceptionalism and censorship”.

In the following article, *Translúcidos e escancarados: corpos de barro e de sonhos em Ondjaki e Chiziane* [Translucent and Blatant: bodies of clay and dreams in Ondjaki and Chiziane], Imara Bemfica Mineiro identifies the “need to decolonize the imagination”. To this end, she takes on board African and South African epistemologies, encompassing “diverse perspectives, [which] combine seeds of alternative knowledge with the potential to open up outlets, find cracks, and reveal gaps in the naturalized structure of the anthropocentric, ethnocentric, patriarchal, modern, and colonial world-system we experience”.

In *O Apocalipse Revisto por Deus-Dará* [The Apocalypse Revisited by Deus-Dará], Carolina Anglada de Rezende offers a “response to the provocation” by the writer Alexandra Lucas Coelho in her book *Deus-dará* (2019), which “revisits the places of our [Brazilian] background, especially the transits that constituted us, from the perspective of mobility, wordplays, and the phenomenon of simultaneity, which make creation and destruction, order and disorder, fact and value, irreconcilable”.

Paulo Eduardo Benites de Moraes is the author of the following article, “Da sobrevivência das imagens como fantasma: uma leitura de *A ocupação*, de Julián Fuks” [On the Survival of Images as Phantoms: a Reading of Julián Fuks’s *Occupation*]. He draws on theoretical concepts developed by Aby Warburg, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Jacques Derrida to investigate “images of resistance to forms of violence in the novel *Occupation* (2019), by Julián Fuks, which interweaves three concomitant narratives in which the characters’ experiences present different meanings of occupation and resistance”.

The final article is *Línguas e outros mecanismos: uma leitura descolonial sobre os códigos da modernidade* [Languages and Other Mechanisms: a decolonial interpretation of the codes of modernity], by Edgar César Nolasco and Tiago Osiro Linhar, who “propose a decolonial interpretation of the function of modern languages in the consolidation of Eurocentric paradigms imposed on the world”. Drawing on a “theorization of border biographical criticism”, they speak of “impressions” of the Portuguese language spoken in border areas.

In the second part, we celebrate some recently published texts in the form of reviews that are in close alignment with the theme of this special issue.

The reviews section begins with *In Dialogue...*, by Eduardo Coutinho, which in this case enters into dialogue with *Literatura comparada e literatura brasileira: circulações e representações* [Comparative Literature and Brazilian Literature: circulations and representations], by José Luís Jobim, published in 2020 by the Roraima Federal University Press (Editora da Universidade Federal de Roraima) and Edições Makunaima. Coutinho stresses the centrality in Jobim's work of literary and cultural circulation, in particular the "discussion about theoretical issues that involve circulation and refer to its temporality, its modes of existence, its places, and the material objects and concepts involved in it", as developed by the author. This is particularly relevant in the current state of globalization, especially in view of the "contributions made by the aesthetics of reception, which drew attention to the figure of the reader and the relationship between the work and its contexts of production and reception". As such, Coutinho highlights the way Jobim sums up the two main trajectories of comparative literature in Brazil and Hispanic America as "theories of lack" and "theories of acclimatization". He also foregrounds his reflections about the importance of establishing a "geopolitics of the gaze", enabling the scholar of literature to make a "less hazy distinction between their own focus and the figure of the other".

In the second review, Maurício Silva writes about *Escrever sem escrever: literatura e apropriação no século XXI* [Writing without Writing: literature and appropriation in the twenty-first century], by Leonardo Villa-Forte, published in 2019. He comments that Villa-Forte sees contemporaneity as a prime time-space for the introduction of "unprecedented procedures of writing/rewriting of literary language, as is the case of the *literature of appropriation*", enabling a richer array of narrative possibilities, like "versatility, which is translated into the most varied of trends, processes, stratagems, and systems".

Concluding this issue of *Gragoatá* is Eloiza Gurgel Pires's review of *Nó em pingo d'água: sobrevivência, cultura*

e linguagem [A Knot in a Drop of Water: survival, culture, and language], a work that combines “articles by authors who emphasize not just cultures of survival, but also writings, literacies, histories, and testaments of survival”, with the collaborative work of the linguists Daniel Silva and Adriana Lopes and the anthropologist Adriana Facina.

All that remains for us is to express our hope that our readers appreciate this set of essays brought together around such a challenging, thought-provoking, and contemporary issue. No definitive answers will be given, and no topic will be exhausted. Rather, what we hope for is a strategy or a view on the present. At a time when the hegemonies of science and technology seem unable to find any way out for the crises of our present moment, this interpretative perspective is our offering.

By reformulating colonial questions and their specific forms of continuity – a lingering colonial mindset, persistent underlying asymmetries, and ethnic and cultural tensions opposing the rationales of community unity – alternative interpretations and readings can be manifested that, in broader terms, indicate the potential for renewal contained in the texts brought together here. Our foray into the artistic and literary projections and experiences that different cultures and places have fermented on the imaginary and symbolic planes of the Portuguese language has brought forth a rich repertoire of critical, theoretical, and methodological innovations arising from cross-contaminations between the humanities and the social sciences.

At this particular juncture, when global economic hegemonies are locked in battle, showing just how entrenched the age-old practices and rationales of imperialism remain, the act of addressing the challenges and impasses of community, based on literary and intellectual endeavors from the global North and South, becomes more than opportune; it becomes an imperative.

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