

Transatlantic Iberian, Latin American, and Lusophone African Ecocriticism

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Transatlantic ecocriticism engages cultural production from nations around the Atlantic Basin to study the ways in which environments and cultures are affected and transformed by the multidirectional circulation of animal and plant species, capital, commodities, development and land management practices, forms of activism and resistance, and people across the Atlantic Ocean. Until very recently, transatlantic ecocriticism has been synonymous with North-North (that is, North American and Northern European) approaches to the representation of environment and ecological discourse. The incorporation of perspectives emerging from other transatlantic circuits has the potential to enhance significantly ecocritical debate, particularly with regards to the geopolitics of socioenvironmental degradation and coordinated environmental activism. Although there are substantial numbers of activists, artists, and scholars from the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America, and Lusophone Africa involved in intercontinental collaboration and dialogue on issues related to ecocriticism, little critical attention has so far been devoted to this phenomenon. This collection of essays looks to draw attention to the transatlantic socioecological movements that have arisen in response to the drastic environmental and social transformations, displacements, and transplantings that the colonial and postcolonial history of the Southern Atlantic has entailed.

Since the late 1980s, a variety of theoretical correctives to neocolonial, hegemonic Euro-American strains of environmentalism have appeared, prominently among them Ramachandra Guha's seminal essay "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." In this essay, Guha deconstructs the inappropriate claim of universality and the unrecognized cultural bias ingrained in one of the most radical strains of Euro-American environmentalism, deep ecology. Guha exposes deep ecologists' lack of concern with social equality and the preservation of livelihoods in peripheral regions in the world economic system. In their 1997 book *Varieties of Environmentalism*, Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier developed the concept of "the environmentalism of the poor" to highlight further the unequal social distribution (asymmetries between benefits and risks, responsibility and vulnerability, etc.) of the ecological depletion caused by economic growth and capital accumulation.

These asymmetries are often ignored, if not concealed, by Euro-American dominant environmental discourses. The fruitful convergence of ecocriticism and postcolonial thought in the last decade has further contributed to critique Westernized and Anglophone ecological discourses and their often neocolonial, ethnocentric, militarized, managerial, and technocratic approaches to environmental issues.¹ Mainstream Euro-American environmentalism—an offshoot of the epistemology of North Atlantic hegemony in the capitalist global economy—focuses on ecological modernization, eco-efficiency, green growth, and sustainable development, grossly overlooking or minimizing Southern Atlantic ecological practices and semiotic realities that do not align with its cultural hegemony. This politically toothless—when not overtly perverse—dominant environmentalism has been consistently challenged and contested by decolonial, ecofeminist, and anti-capitalist socioecological movements and theories (e.g., the environmentalism of the poor, climate and food justice movements, degrowth, postdevelopment, and indigenous movements) that bring to the fore the interlocking structural causes of environmental destruction and social injustice. These movements target the disaster-manufacturing power asymmetries that arose from colonization and continue to underpin globalizing capitalist cultural practices, modes of thinking, infrastructural inertias, and modern institutions.

In order to be transformative, decolonial, and diverse, ecocriticism must openly dialogue with and learn from these counter-hegemonic socioecological movements as well as open itself to be infused with ecological philosophies that are external to the dominant Euro-American environmentalism (Prádanos, “Toward a Euro-Mediterranean” 31-38). As Ursula Heise has remarked, the global turn in ecocriticism has significantly expanded the theoretical, temporal, and geographical scope of ecocriticism since 2000 (637). For this global ecocritical turn to be emancipatory, and not a mere multicultural version of the dominant neocolonial system of socioecological relations based on systematic exploitation of humans and non-humans, it must be epistemologically diverse. As Santos, Nunes, and Meneses argue, this project entails the “recognition of the epistemological diversity of the world, that is, of the diversity of knowledge systems underlying the practices of different social groups across the globe” (xix). Furthermore, according to these authors, the “reinvention of social emancipation” requires “replacing the ‘monoculture of scientific knowledge’ with an ‘ecology of knowledges’” (xx). This special number of *Ecozon@* seeks to provide a platform for discussing diverse ecocritical perspectives from regions and epistemologies usually ignored or suppressed by mainstream Northern Atlantic ecological imaginaries.

¹ Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Environmentalism* (2010), DeLoughrey and Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011), and Caminero-Santangelo and Myers's *Environment at the Margins* (2011) have been particularly influential in catalyzing postcolonial approaches to ecocriticism.

The conceptualization of the "Anthropocene," or the geological epoch of humans, exemplifies to a large degree the apolitical, managerial, and technocratic mannerisms typical of anthropocentric and hubristic cultural hegemony, particularly as it is manifested in Euro-American Atlantic environmental articulations. In contrast, Jason W. Moore's contestational term "Capitalocene" opens the floor for a meaningful, decolonizing political ecology and calls for enacting diverse alternatives to "capitalism as a world-ecology of power, capital, and nature" (Moore 6). As Sharae Deckard observes,

the world-ecological perspective of humanity-in-nature enables an extension of environmental criticism beyond its usual boundaries to encompass the whole historical range of regimes of organizing nature that constitute the capitalist *oikeois*. Finance and maquiladoras, haciendas and mass urbanization, free trade agreements and resource nationalism, global empires and world markets are all forms of environment-making that knit together human relations and extra-human processes, and are thus ripe for analysis with respect to cultural form. (4)

Given that the capitalist world-ecology emerged in the long sixteenth century from predominantly Southern transatlantic circuits, we believe that a comparative ecocritical approach to cultural production from these regions can contribute to a nuanced, epistemologically diverse, historical understanding of the ongoing processes that sustain the capitalist world-ecology, as well as the recognition, development, and visibility of alternatives to it. It would therefore be useful to expand and go beyond the environmental imaginary of the dominant Northern Atlantic conceptualizations of modernity, not only geographically, but also temporally, by considering the drastic transformations in the ecological organization of the world wrought by the expansion of capital not only in recent decades, but also prior to the industrial revolution. If the current global structure of combined and uneven development, that is, of the continual expansion and rescindment of capital on frontiers of commodities and labor and its accumulation in centers of finance and geopolitical power, began as a Southern Atlantic circuit more than five centuries ago, the Atlantic Basin continues to serve as privileged site not only for the development of new technologies of capitalization, extraction, and exploitation, but also for resistance and alternative world-making.²

Approaching the South Atlantic

As Horacio Legrás has noted in his discussion of Hegel's conceptualization of world history and the historical subject, the Mediterranean Sea is usually conceived of as linking Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa, while the Atlantic Ocean is portrayed

² As Deckard summarizes, "The early modern appropriation of the 'Great Frontier' in the Americas provided an astonishing wealth of uncommoditized ecological surpluses that reduced production costs and increased profitability, jumpstarting and fueling the engine of capitalist accumulation for centuries" (7).

as separating the Americas from Europe (135). For Hegel, Europe embodied the geographical "end" of History; it had manifested the universality of humanity (the *Weltgeist* or World Spirit) through encompassing the globe. As a mere extension of European historical agency, colonized America could not position itself antithetically to European world history and therefore had no possibilities for producing a new historical subject. For this reason, Legrás continues, "the Atlantic cannot occupy the third position in the Hegelian system, that is, the position of medium, the place of inscription of the contradictions, the very surface of the ontological *Aufhebung*. In spite of being a region of passage, nothing actually comes to pass on the Atlantic" (135). And, of course, Hegel dismisses summarily any agential role for Africa within world history as well, a posture that Legrás traces to the master/slave dialectic underpinning the bourgeois grand narrative of subjectivity as proprietary production (137).

While Hegel's imperialistic conceptualization of world history—which, as Marx would subsequently argue, relied on the willful negation of the dialectics of capital accumulation—has largely been dismantled, there remains this sense that the Atlantic Ocean is itself little more than an hours-, days-, or weeks-long lag in the transit of people and goods between continents. To be sure, that lag has been costly in terms of efficiency and even human lives, but it has little bearing on how the territories on either side are perceived. The ocean's vast distances operate as a disconnecter that partitions the continents into seemingly discrete entities, turning opaque the economic, political, and ecological connectivity that binds the Atlantic's multiple shores into a single geopolitical assemblage that has, in fact, played a paradigmatic role in configuring modernity as a world economic system and ecology (Quijano and Wallerstein 552; Mignolo 3). As Legrás points out, citing Susan Buck Morss, it is precisely the discreteness of distance that allowed Hegel to downplay the reality that the rise of the European bourgeois subject of history relied almost entirely on the inflows of capital from the Americas (136). Nearly the entirety of this transatlantic capital was produced with enslaved African or indigenous American labor, either from raw materials extracted from American environments or, in the case of export agriculture, American monocultures transplanted from African soils, as occurred with coffee, bananas, and sugarcane.³ For Hegel, history was made by the Master; there was no form of historical agency beyond colonialism.

While much has been done to recover the historical agencies of both the colonized and postcolonial subjects at locations around the Atlantic Basin, little attention has been paid to the roles that the oceanic environment itself played in those same histories. The modern imaginary of the ocean as a dead space of transit has the effect of negating the realities of currents, that is, the imbricated natural and sociopolitical processes that inform and govern intercontinental circulation.

³ Although sugarcane was cultivated in Persia as early as the seventh century CE, it came to the Americas via Northern Africa and Southern Spain ("Map 2").

Without an understanding of the fluidity of currents, transcontinental movement appears as a static fixture; the ocean becomes a piece of infrastructure whose paradoxical function is to deterritorialize everything that passes through it, transforming materials into commodities and people into commodified labor. Very little thought is given to the multiscale dynamics that emerge from these interconnected, synchronous natural and sociocultural movements.

The Atlantic Ocean clearly possesses a unique set of attributes that both channel and contravene political and economic projects in ways that are quite often entirely beyond human control. As a case in point, the Atlantic's ocean currents not only determine climactic conditions on its three inhabited continents, but they have also coordinated the spatiality and chronology of European colonization of Africa and the Americas, from dictating Columbus's point of arrival in the Caribbean to the routes of transatlantic trade, which in turn set the vectors of conquest and settlement, including the locations of all the major African, Latin American, and North American cities on the Atlantic seaboard.⁴ It is particularly illuminating to consider the roles that ocean currents have played in the geopolitics of the slave trade, determining the parts of Africa in which enslavement would be most intense as well as the enslaved peoples' destinations in the Americas.⁵ Indeed, the human geographies and economies of enslavement depended directly on the Atlantic's currents, both in their aspect as shipping lanes and in their climatic influence, which governed population distribution in Africa as well as the kinds of monoculture plantations that could be established in specific regions of the American colonies. On the other hand, the Atlantic's frequent hurricanes have also played powerful roles throughout the history of the Americas, sinking commercial and military ships, severely damaging infrastructure and cities, and transforming politics at local and even national levels.⁶

It is not our intention to dwell at greater length here on the historical agency of the Atlantic as an assemblage with its own particular ontological status; nonetheless, the Atlantic is clearly much more than an inert border between continents, and any consideration of the human history of the Atlantic Basin cannot discount its environmental history. At the same time, however, the emergence of a "transatlantic" framework for approaching African and Latin American cultures has garnered extensive critiques, particularly from scholars invested in decolonial

⁴ This relationship is transparent when one juxtaposes maps of Atlantic port cities and ocean currents. See, for example, Maps 4 ("Wind and Ocean Currents of the Atlantic Basins") and 5 ("Major Regions and Ports Involved in the Slave Trade, All Years") of Emory University's *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*.

⁵ Again, this relationship is transparent when one compares Map 1 ("Overview of the Slave Trade Out of Africa, 1500-1900") and Map 4 ("Wind and Ocean Currents of the Atlantic") of Emory University's *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*.

⁶ On this point, consult Stuart B. Schwartz's *Sea of Storms: A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina* and Chapters 1 and 2 of Mark Anderson's *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America*.

projects. Beyond the problem of non-human historical agency, scholars have questioned both the theoretical underpinnings and the political economy of transatlantic studies. Transatlantic hispanism in particular is suspect as a facade of cultural fraternity concealing the ways in which Spain has sought to reassert cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance over Spanish America following the collapse of Franquismo and the turn to a neoliberal political economy (Gabilondo 91-92; Monasterios 147-48; Trigo 25-36). Additionally, many Latin American scholars view the transatlantic approach as simply the latest North American intellectual fad, particularly since most of the scholars developing the field work at universities in the US or the UK.⁷ While most of these same critics laud Guyanese British scholar Paul Gilroy's seminal attempt to rewrite the cultural history of the Atlantic Basin from a subaltern perspective in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), many of them feel that the triangular connections that Gilroy finds between African modernity and diasporic populations in Britain and the US are much murkier in non-English speaking nations in the Atlantic Basin. Furthermore, some of these scholars contend that Gilroy's and subsequent "transatlantic" scholars' focus on transcultural hybridity downplays the violence of colonial encounters through a kind of multiculturalist discourse that they see as a neoliberal palliative for the social dislocations of capitalism; they feel that these encounters may be addressed more adequately through existing theoretical frameworks such as postcolonialism, decolonialism, and subaltern studies. Indeed, as Abril Trigo points out, these approaches already examine the circulation of people and commodities through the lens of colonial power relations, while the term "transatlantic" seemingly would do little to deepen the critique of these same highly asymmetrical and coercive power relations (40-41).

While we concur with many of these critiques, we believe that transatlantic perspectives have the potential to add important dimensions to scholarship on the ongoing socioecological effects of colonialism and capitalism as well as that of the increasingly interconnected movements of resistance that work to reimagine and

⁷ The basis for these critiques is immediately evident when Julio Ortega details his early efforts towards developing the field of Hispanic transatlantic studies in the mid-1990s, describing the process as beginning at Brown University, then reaching out to other US Ivy League institutions as well as British universities like Cambridge. In particular, he marks the founding of the field in a series of "Ibero-American" seminars held in 1995 and 1996 at Brown and Cambridge, thus imbuing the field with a North-North institutionality, despite the Latin American origins of many of the seminars' participants (Ortega 93-94). Of course, this special number of *Ecozon@* will be subject to similar criticisms since the co-editors and most of the article authors also work at North American and British universities; however, we feel that an explicitly decolonial, ecocritical approach to transatlantic studies can counter this hegemonic geopolitical positionality. Our twin goals are to open the field of ecocriticism to internal critique by making visible South-South circuits and collaborations as key ecological agents and producers of ecocritical knowledge and practices, and to revalidate that same knowledge and practices beyond their geographical locations as general models for alternative, sustainable modernities.

recreate modernity from decolonial points of view. As Gustavo Verdesio argues, bringing Enrique Dussel's concept of transmodernity to bear in the conceptualization of Atlantic studies endows it with a powerful critical apparatus, subverting the precept that Europe and European settler cultures are at the center of modernity (231). Indeed, Gabilondo emphasizes that transatlantic frameworks such as that developed by Gilroy insist that rather than a static metropole/colony or First World/Third World (core/periphery) dialectic, asymmetrical circulation itself is at the heart of modernity (94). A transatlantic perspective allows us to understand that modernity did not begin in Europe and then radiate outwards, albeit imperfectly, to its colonies, but rather arose as a series of interconnected socioeconomic, political, ecological, and cultural systems from the colonial encounter itself, and its successive forms and transformations emerge from the continual renegotiation and reenactment of geopolitical power relations, particularly as they relate to specific commodity and production frontiers.⁸

The notion of transmodernity is important because overemphasizing the binary opposition between metropole/colony obscures the historical reality that before the frontiers of extraction were expanded to the colonies, they were often internal to the "metropole" itself; they were the condition for the primitive accumulation that made the colonial expansion of capital possible.⁹ Tellingly, many of the techniques used to subjugate indigenous populations in the Spanish colonies and exploit their labor in extractive enterprises were not unique to the colonies; they had been applied first to Morisco populations in Spain and Guanches in the Canary Islands, both of whom were used as forced agricultural labor in an *encomienda* system that, as would occur in the Americas, also involved forced conversion to Catholicism. Similarly, the ethnic division between Christians and Jews in Spain would become key to colonization as well, if one considers the role of the *pureza de sangre* concept in the implementation of the *casta* system in New Spain and the appropriation of Jewish wealth that occurred following the 1492 Alhambra Decree expelling all Jews who did not convert to Christianity, some of which was used to finance New World ventures, including Columbus's voyages. And the iconic colonial and postcolonial Latin American form of land tenure and labor organization, the *latifundio*, had its roots in the Roman *latifundia* in Iberia. Each of these cases reveals how the frontiers of forced labor and cheap (conquered) land/resources were pushed outwards to the Americas (and Africa) as their availability in the Iberian Peninsula diminished; the colonial frontiers thus arose within the core itself before being expanded outwards to the periphery. In this sense, the colonies were internal as much as external and the ecological revolution that the Iberian conquest brought about in Latin America—that is, the drastic environmental transformations

⁸ See Jason W. Moore, "Feudalismo, capitalismo, socialismo, o teoría y política de las transiciones eco-históricas."

⁹ Regarding the processes involved in primitive accumulation, see Marx's *Capital*, volume 1, chapters 28 and 29.

that occurred with the shift from indigenous polycultures to export monoculture, mineral extraction, and cattle ranching—had its precedent in the Iberian Peninsula itself during Roman and "Reconquista" times, while these colonial practices continued to be employed simultaneously if asymmetrically in the metropole and the colonies.

On the other hand, modern biopolitics followed the rise of the liberal state wherever it took root, which occurred nearly simultaneously in Spain and Latin America. The nineteenth-century political revolutions were accompanied by socioecological revolutions arising from the gradual, uneven implementation of liberal capitalism and the construction of infrastructure linking nations to transatlantic circuits, the development of new technologies of mineral extraction, and the "modernización del campo." Agroindustrialization occurred nearly simultaneously in the Iberian Peninsula, Latin America, and Spain and Portugal's African colonies (Angola, Equatorial Guinea, and Mozambique) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often financed by the same, primarily British investment firms.¹⁰ At the same time, the conflicts and economic pressures that resulted from the capitalization of rural areas (which often took the form of land-grabs by *latifundistas*, or large landowners) led to the massive displacement of small farmers to urban areas, generating the precipitous growth of African, Latin American, and Iberian cities in the twentieth century, and providing the labor force and consumer base that allowed industrialization to take hold. With these shifts, the sustainable farming practices of subsistence farmers were replaced by energy-intensive industrial modes of production that involved the use of heavy machinery and massive amounts of agrochemicals produced and distributed by transnational corporations. Migration from the countryside and urbanization thus implied drastic ecological revolutions on every scale.

These parallel and interconnected, if asymmetrical patterns of capitalization and development—which also implied radical shifts in the ways in which people perceived and interacted with their environments through specific labor regimes—intensified hyperbolically with the rise of neoliberalism in the second half of the twentieth century. One need not look far to note that the large-scale Iberian labor migration to Northern Europe mirrors African and Latin American northward migrations, while the same or similar transnational agro-industrial corporations produce strawberries or tomatoes in Northern Africa, Mexico, and Spain, taking advantage of cheap land, surplus labor, free trade, and lax environmental regulations. Of course, the traditional colonial distribution of capital has been somewhat complicated by neoliberalism; while Spanish investment conglomerates own hotel chains in Mexico and Africa, Mexican financiers invest in Spanish

¹⁰ Financiers from the United States had a strong hand in the capitalization of Latin America and the Caribbean as well, but they were more of a hemispheric than a transatlantic or global presence until after World War II.

corporations that have holdings in Africa, and Nigerian billionaires undoubtedly include Latin American and European corporations in their portfolios. From this angle, an important role of transatlantic studies is to scrutinize how global capital interfaces with transatlantic circuits, maintaining some intact, constructing new ones, and disrupting others. In hypercapitalism, capital and capitalized bodies not only flow along a South-North axis, but also in reverse and laterally. For this reason, the political and economic history—which is also the environmental history—of the nations on the Atlantic Basin cannot be understood independently; the circulation among them of capital, commodities, policies, cultural practices, soil nutrients, and human, animal, and vegetal bodies must be taken into account, but without downplaying the contextual differences and asymmetrical power relations that characterize these interrelations.

At the same time, in a historical moment in which transnational political consensus and neoliberal trade agreements often overwrite local governance, local popular movements and activists frequently have insufficient resources and tactical formation for sustaining resistance against the imposition of economic projects that threaten their way of life. The overwhelming weight of mobilized capital easily crushes any opposition, especially when working in tandem with the repressive apparatuses of the neoliberal state. However, the 1994 Zapatista indigenous movement in Southern Mexico led the way in developing new strategies for creating transnational communities linked through the then recently-formed internet and other forms of traditional and alternative media. Since that moment, indigenous movements, environmental activists, and social justice proponents in Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and Latin America have increasingly relied on social media and other forms of digital activism to generate international awareness of social and environmental issues, promote solidarity and alliances, coordinate local and international political action, share strategies and tactics, and raise the funds needed to maintain their struggles.

Initially, much of this work was done in English through translators; they used the language of globalization to pressure power from within. In this sense, this kind of activism was not specifically informed by South Atlantic geopolitics, but more generally by North-South relations. However, recent years have seen the rise of more and more Spanish and Portuguese language sites and social media networks, often with bilingual translations in indigenous languages and/or English, dedicated to social and environmental activism. This rise of transnational activism in the languages of the former empires has constructed networks that do not depend directly on the mediation of Northern activist or NGO networks, even if they do often continue to rely on social media platforms (such as Facebook and Youtube) owned by Northern corporations, which necessarily affects the form that these collaborations will take.¹¹

¹¹ It also subjects them to surveillance by the Northern governments, although it has not been clear to what degree that surveillance has been employed. By subpoenaing these corporations' records,

In reality, the history of transatlantic social and political activism can be traced from the present back to the earliest moments of the colonial period, if one considers the diverse corpus of work advocating indigenous rights in the Iberian colonies, which was written between indigenous American, *mestizo*, and Iberian authors, or the parallels between the *comuneros* movements in Spain and popular uprisings in the colonies. Even if there was no direct communication between these movements, they shared tactics whose similarities arose from the uniformity of the structures of power and repression throughout the Spanish Empire (which thereby generated similar forms of resistance) as well as whisperings of resistance spread by word of mouth. Transatlantic collaboration intensified in subsequent centuries in the liberal political activism that led simultaneously to the independence movements in the Spanish colonies and the 1812 Constitution of Cádiz in Spain, the independence of Brazil under Portuguese Prince Dom Pedro in 1822, and the transatlantic flow of migrants and political exiles due to civil wars and dictatorships in Iberia and many Latin American nations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as political collaboration between socialist guerrilla movements and sympathizers throughout the Atlantic Basin. Likewise, we must recognize the effects of the international pressure exerted on the Spanish regime to recognize the independence of Equatorial Guinea in 1968 and the role of the Portuguese military following the 1974 overthrow of the Estado Novo in supporting the Carnation Revolution that ended Portuguese rule in Mozambique as well as the Alvor Agreement that ended the war for independence in Angola. Most recently, there have been several highly visible transatlantic collaborations. These include the transnational alliances working to achieve justice for the human rights abuses committed by military dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala and Spain and others coordinating dissent movements against neoliberal capitalism like the "Indignados," which appeared in response to austerity measures in Spain but spread within a matter of days to Argentina and Mexico as well as other Latin American nations. Finally, there are many similarities between the degrowth movement in Southern Europe and postdevelopment projects in Latin America, as well as between the notion of ecological time embraced by Andean indigenous cosmopolitics and the "slow" movement in Mediterranean Europe.¹²

North American and European security agencies have an unprecedented ability to monitor activism on a global scale, which, given these nations' history of economic, military and political intervention in other nations' affairs, is a frightening prospect indeed. Nevertheless, this is not an issue that this volume is designed to address.

¹² See Luis I. Prádanos's "Decolonizing the North, Decolonizing the South," which studies the commonalities and possible alliances between current Euro-Mediterranean socioenvironmental radical movements and the current revival of Andean indigenous movements and postcolonial environmental thought in Latin America.

Toward a South Atlantic Ecocriticism

As scholars of popular movements have argued, fostering global alliances of diverse counter-hegemonic movements may be our best chance for remaking the world in a way that ensures its continued inhabitability for all (Martínez Alier 66; Escobar 31; Santos, Nunes, and Meneses viii). In a global context of unacceptable social inequalities and ecological collapse, it is urgent to confront the assumptions behind capitalist ecological relations through the promotion of diverse emancipatory and decolonial imaginaries able to change the power differential in a socio-ecologically desirable, just, and viable way. For that purpose, it is crucial to forge “alliances between diverse forms of knowledge, cultures, and cosmologies in response to different forms of oppression that enact the coloniality of knowledge and power,” but these alliances “presuppose mutual intelligibility” (Santos, Nunes, and Meneses xlv, xxv). To nurture intelligibility across diverse ecological knowledges, narratives, and discourses, it is paramount to advance a transnational, comparative, decolonial, post-capitalist, and epistemologically diverse ecocriticism.

Many scholars in recent years have engaged in postcolonial ecocriticism related to Latin America and, with less intensity for a number of reasons, to Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.¹³ Although the transatlantic connections among these regions could be both theoretically illuminating and politically relevant, they are often mentioned only in passing or missed entirely. Forging these connections could lead to practical counterhegemonic alliances not only across the Atlantic Ocean, but around the planet. One powerful example is the collaborative, open-access, and

¹³ Examples of recent studies that use postcolonial, ecocritical methodologies to analyze cultural production from the Atlantic Basin include the essays in Anderson and Bora’s edited volume on *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America*; Laura Barbas Rhoden’s “Activismo medioambiental multimodal en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica: medios digitales, patrimonio biocultural y decolonialidad”; Byron Caminero Santángelo and Garth Andrew Myers’s *Environment at the Margins*; Caminero Santangelo’s *Different Shades of Green* and “Witnessing the Nature of Violence: Resource Extraction and Political Ecologies in the Contemporary African Novel”; Jennifer L. French’s “Voices in the Wilderness”; George Handley’s “The Postcolonial Ecology of the New World Baroque: Alejo Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos*”; Gisela Heffes’s *Políticas de la destrucción/poéticas de la preservación*; Jorge Marcone’s “Filming the Emergence of Popular Environmentalism in Latin America: Postcolonialism and Buen Vivir”; Lizabeth Paravisini Gebert’s “Caribbean Utopias and Dystopias: The Emergence of the Environmental Writer and Artist”; Steven F. White’s “Like a River: An Introduction to Contemporary Latin American Eco-Literature”; and Lesley Wylie’s *Colonial Tropes/Postcolonial Tricks*. There are a host of others that take complementary postcolonial, if not explicitly ecocritical approaches to literature, deconstructing the symbolic regimes that have upheld the colonial orders governing human and nonhuman bodies. One key example would be Gabriela Nouzeilles’ edited volume on *Naturaleza en disputa: retóricas del cuerpo y del paisaje en América Latina*. Similarly, Ileana Rodríguez takes a transatlantic postcolonial approach to literary cartographies in *Transatlantic Topographies: Islands, Highlands, Jungles*; however, she focuses almost exclusively on the problem of representation, rarely addressing explicitly the materiality of the environments in question.

modifiable Environmental Justice Atlas. This Atlas documents and catalogues social conflict around environmental issues with the goal of connecting affected communities and forging transnational networks and alliances to effectively respond to corporative or governmental socio-environmental aggressions. Thus, different communities experiencing similar ecological conflicts can share educational, legal, organizational, and other informational resources as well as collaborate in different ways.

This special issue of *Ecozon@* seeks to engage the power of comparative, collaborative critique across continents in problematizing the geopolitics of globalized capitalism. We seek to draw visibility to what Jennifer Wenzel, dialoguing with Gayatri Spivak and Tim Ingold, has called "subaltern planetary perspectives". These challenge the neoliberal concept of the globe as a virtual space designed to dismantle all borders to the smooth flow of capital while sequestering human and nonhuman bodies into different kinds of enclosures. As Wenzel queries,

Can we hear the phrase "global capitalism" in ideological as well as spatial terms: not only as a capitalism that spans the entire earth (or aspires to) but also one that depends on a certain idea of the earth as a globe? In an anti-capitalist, decolonizing, deconstructive reversal of such thinking, "planetary" would aim to reveal and undermine the hegemony of the global: refusing to cede to capitalism the impulse toward totality, but instead thinking totality otherwise, to rethink what it means for the earth to have a shape like its own, and to be a home for all. (21)

At the same time, this work of "thinking totality otherwise" is particularly delicate; it runs the risk of reinforcing what it attempts to dismantle through reincorporation into the Western tradition of humanist universalism. As DeLoughrey, Didur, and Carrigan point out in the introduction to *Global Ecologies*, there is a real danger in "the 'over-worlding' of postcolonial texts and contexts whereby social and ecological anxieties are projected onto the indigenous or Global South" (4). Indeed, this was one of the methodological issues that Franco Moretti confronted in his seminal reformulation of "World Literature," in which he advocated a change in critical focus away from nationalistic philologies—the search for ur-texts and national idioms—towards "distant reading," a technique designed to make visible the systematicity of the viral spread of capitalist ideologies, forms, and practices. The abstraction of distant reading, however, necessarily generates a sense that it reproduces the very totalizing/totalitarian ideology that it seeks to expose. Moretti addresses this issue via Roberto Schwartz's notion of "misplacement": if the novel, as the iconic form of bourgeois self-representation, both embodied and registered the spread of capitalism, the aesthetic "cracks" that appeared between the totalizing form itself, the local plotlines (social representation), and authorial agency (the position of the author with respect to both the form and plot) expose the traumatic social transformations that were occurring with the implementation of successive forms of capitalism.¹⁴ The specificity of these "cracks" thereby undermines the sense of

¹⁴ Moretti builds from Schwartz's Lukacsian assertion that "forms are the abstract of specific social relations" (qtd. in Moretti 65).

capitalism as a global "human" condition conveyed by the novel as a homogeneous "universal" form.

Subsequent scholars such as Sharae Deckard and Michael J. Niblett have engaged this formulation from an ecocritical point of view vis-a-vis Jason W. Moore's critique of capitalism as a world-making machine that fundamentally and simultaneously transforms societies and environments. Drawing on Michael Löwy's formulation of irrealism, Niblett advocates reading for these "cracks"—now irruptions of the unreal that contrast with and contradict the novel's roots in realism (that is, the "practical" world as perceived by the capitalist subject)—as evidences of socioecological revolutions, shifts in world-making regimes. In this formulation, irrealism appears as the indirect representation of the traumas provoked by these socioecological revolutions (Niblett 21). Precisely because of its relationship to the rise of the capitalist world ecology, therefore, the novel is a privileged form for mapping the spread of capitalism as well as its traumatic socioecological effects. Of course, one could say the same of film, which until the advent of digital media was produced almost exclusively by wealthy individuals and corporations due to its high production and distribution costs. On the other hand, less monetized forms of cultural production—poetry, performance art, *testimonio*, raw video—tend to play more clearly defined roles in portraying those "subaltern planetary perspectives" that contest directly the system of global representation and its virtual "pragmatic realities."

Like Șerban Văetiși, we advocate a transatlantic perspective deriving from below, from the shared strategies of resistance of those who have been exploited in colonial and transnational neocolonial projects.¹⁵ We are looking for something akin to Spivak and Wenzel's planetary perspective as a counterhegemonic alternative to the global, but attuned to the specific, translocal voices, patterns of movement, and socioecological transformations in the South Atlantic Basin. As a methodology for cultural criticism, this transatlantic approach works to find a middle ground—the translocal—between the distant reading which Moretti advocates in making literature (and film) visible as part of the capitalist world-ecology and the nationalistic close reading that draws out what is singular to the national subject. In reality, this is a false opposition, since nationalistic close reading more often than not lends itself to Ericka Beckman's modernizing "capital fictions"—that is, the capitalistic development fantasies that disrupt social and ecological relationships at the local level, generating the conditions for the commodification of people, cultural production, and environments within national and transnational economic circuits.¹⁶ This occurs because the liberal state has typically viewed capitalism as an instrument for the construction of national unity; in this foundational fiction, the idealized national citizen is envisioned as an autonomous, entrepreneurial subject.

¹⁵ In "Global Development and Local Communities: Toward a Post-Developmental Paradigm of Transatlantic Studies," Văetiși advocates a critical geopolitics involving translocal alliances.

¹⁶ See the introduction to Beckman's *Capital Fictions*.

In this sense, nationalistic close reading often reproduces the fictions that underpin the capitalist world-ecology, while a transversal, comparative reading reveals not only the fictionality of nationalistic narratives, but also that what is purportedly national singularity is more often than not a variation on global capital forms that have emerged from particular historical regimes of commodification.¹⁷ The articles included in this special issue analyze the cultural production of the South Atlantic, looking to draw out what is specifically transatlantic within what Moretti calls the capitalist "system of variations"; at the same time, they scrutinize those variations for the "cracks" in the fictions of capitalism (Moretti 64).

This comparative approach does not allow one to read these aesthetic cracks in capitalistic forms as stylistic failings that indicate incomplete modernization, but rather as fissures within the capitalist world ecology itself. It is through those cracks that what has been suppressed, the reverse of the capitalist world-ecology, reemerges as something that can no longer be purely local, if such a thing ever existed autonomously, but that nevertheless reinstates the counterhegemonic force of the local. In this sense, the translocal emerges as a system of common differences across geographical areas; these commonalities do not arise from an internal logic of sameness (the variational logic of neoliberal multiculturalism within the invariability of capital accumulation and cultural consumerism), but rather as shared resistances against the homogeneity of commodification. It is the commodity itself—as a variational form—that generates the commonalities between radically different bodies in the process of commodification, but the materiality of those bodies necessarily exceeds full appropriation, thereby preserving difference within the structure of commonality. Shared patterns of difference and resistance thus emerge in all points along the commodity circuit.

For this reason, local socioecological practices and imaginaries cannot help but emerge onto a stage that is planetary. In the digital era in particular all local practices are potentially translocal. On the one hand, the moment these practices are filmed and uploaded to Facebook or Youtube, they are commodities that bring in advertising revenue from a potentially global viewership; in this sense, there has been a near total commodification of representation. On the other hand, however, under globalization any local form of representation cannot be read as other than what Wenzel terms "scenes of world-imagining from below, a topos wherein marginalized literary characters or documentary subjects situate their own precarious local condition within a broader, transnational context" (20). The synchronicity of the local cracks within global representation and the coordination between them politicizes the translocal, creating the conditions for the emergence

¹⁷ This becomes quite clear when we think of the roles of sugar and cattle in Latin American nationalisms, for example. During the postcolonial period, a large proportion of Latin American and Caribbean nations constructed nationalistic identities and associated performative cultural practices (dance, film, food, literature, music) around variations on the figure of the *vaquero* or the sugarcane plantation worker of African descent.

of socio-ecological cosmopolitics, to borrow Isabelle Stengers's term for describing the political force of agential consortia that depend on alliances between diverse human and non-human actants. In contrast with what Wenzel describes as the "Apollonian view from high above the earth and the highminded cosmopolitanism often associated with that perspective" embraced by neoliberal capitalistic planning processes, cosmopolitics are "dirty," that is, they are grounded, impure, unhygienic (Wenzel 20). In this way, the "cracks" in hegemonic forms of representation converge with counterhegemonic self-representation, not only to disrupt the ideologies that underpin the modern, capitalist world ecology and the unsustainable socioecological forms that it produces, but also to suggest and implement alternatives.

Rebecca Jarman's essay on "Bolivarian Landslides? Ecological Disasters, Political Upheavals, and (Trans)National Futures in Contemporary Venezuelan Culture" examines the ways in which Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez's regime used literal cracks within the socio-ecological landscape—the 1999 Vargas landslides—to implement and sustain his political program, portraying the disaster as a propitious revolutionary event. However, the regime's totalitarian imposition of a homogenous national identity and the reliance on commodity exports within the neoliberal global economy stymied the possibilities for the creation of a "post-capitalist" and "post-catastrophic" order capable of creating a sustainable subject, a thesis that Jarman develops through analyzing representations of childhood in Juan Carlos Méndez Guédez's novel *Una tarde con campanas* and Marité Ugás's film *El chico que miente*. Ironically, she argues, it is the displacement of people affected by the disaster to Madrid that permits them to imagine a sustainable future in which humans live within, not beyond nature. Inverting this approach to the translocal, John Trevathan's "Submergence: On Transatlantic Ecocriticism, Islands and Archipelagos" deploys the trope of the archipelago to connect the colonial and dictatorial aquatic histories that affected Caribbean islands as well as deserted (or submerged) Spanish rural towns. Trevathan argues that Caribbean and Iberian regions—like archipelagos—form "insulated" geographies shaped and connected by their geohistorical entanglements of water and capitalist expansional trends. The ecological necrosis triggered by both imperial desires inscribed in Caribbean geographies and Franco's hydroelectric biopolitics that condemned rural towns to insulation and terminal decay can be explored through the liquid poetics of memory found in texts by José Lezama Lima and Francesc Serés, respectively. Taking a more direct approach to the critique of capitalist forms of environmental injustice and encouraging the emergence of posthumanist modes of empathy and ethics of care to resist it, Maryanne L. Leone's essay on "Trans-species Collaborations in Response to Social, Economic, and Environmental Violence in Rosa Montero's *Lágrimas en la lluvia* and *El peso del corazón*" studies two recent futuristic novels by Spanish author Rosa Montero from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective. She draws on the notion

of slow violence to draw attention to the unequal distribution of the socioecological risks manufactured by capitalist development.

Focusing more broadly on colonial legacies, in “Transatlantic Sertões: The Backlands of Ruy Duarte de Carvalho and Mia Couto,” Victoria Saramago Troianowski examines the circulation and decolonial repurposing of a colonial geographical term in Brazil and Lusophone Africa. For the Portuguese colonizers, “sertão” was used to describe barbarous, inland territories that had not yet been fully territorialized. Saramago discusses how Brazilian authors Euclides da Cunha and Guimarães Rosa reappropriated the term for the postcolonial project of constructing hybrid national identities. In their writing, the sertão becomes a space of creative possibility. Following Guimarães, African authors Duarte and Couto engage the term in a decolonial way. Since it had disappeared from common usage in Mozambique and Angola, it lost its colonial connotations and alluded only to creative possibilities for subjective engagement with the savannah environment. In a similar vein, Anne-Laure Bonvalot’s essay on “La guerra de los mundos en algunas ficciones del Antropoceno: Agonística ambiental y poéticas de la habitabilidad” looks for a decolonial aesthetic for the Anthropocene, analyzing three 21st-century novels published in Angola, Brazil, and Spain. These socio-ecological narratives from the Southern Atlantic region deconstruct fictions of capitalism while proposing decolonial ways to relate to human and nonhuman others.

Carlos Fonseca Suárez’s essay on “Viral Events: Epidemiology, Ecology, and the Outbreak of Modern Sovereignty” proposes an innovative, ecocritical reading of the Haitian revolution and the rise of modern concepts of republican sovereignty through the figure of the epidemic. Fonseca Suárez argues that the simultaneous, viral spread of mosquito-born yellow fever and the practice of mesmerism or “animal magnetism” led to a reconceptualization of sovereignty as residing within the multitude, as an assemblage of bodies interconnected precisely through the rhizomatic spread of material affects and practices. Working from a similar principle, Palmar Álvarez-Blanco mobilizes decolonial theories and practices that contest hegemonic neocolonial and capitalist modes of organizing knowledge and understanding learning. Álvarez-Blanco’s “‘Matrices de aprendizaje’ emancipadoras. OVNI (Observatorio de Video no Identificado) y el videoactivismo” proposes that a decolonial, decentralized, transnational, collaborative, and inclusive videoactivism could be a powerful convivial tool for epistemological decolonization and practical resistance.

Conclusion

Our hope is that this special issue contributes to a more diverse understanding of Atlantic socio-ecological discourses and movements beyond the dominant North Atlantic monopoly on meaning-making and its totalizing

descriptions of modernity. We believe that re-imagining the Atlantic from decolonial ecocritical perspectives and from the locus of enunciation of South Atlantic geographies, bodies, and epistemologies beyond euromimesis can be intellectually stimulating and politically relevant. Our intention is not to replace the dominant North Atlantic descriptions of modernity for other totalizing narratives, but rather to open the floor to nuanced and complex ecocritical explorations of the South Atlantic in order to contribute to the ongoing postcolonial global ecocritical debate. We concur with Benita Sampedro Vizcaya that the Atlantic should “allow itself to be theorized persuasively, from its different loci, but should probably not—and perhaps cannot—be defined, or confined, in any totalizing way” (919).

The contributions to this special issue read South Atlantic cultural manifestations as privileging aesthetics of interdependency, “systemic narratives,”¹⁸ and stories of relatedness, to challenge the dominant imaginary that promotes teleological readings, neoliberal fantasies, hyperbolic individualism, and ideologies of disconnection. A diverse ecology of knowledges (decolonial, posthumanist, postcapitalist, feminist) is mobilized in these essays to contest the boring, unjust, and destructive monoculture of capitalist modernity and its hubristic (colonial and neocolonial) ideology of death. Several of the essays included here not only provide a corrective to North Atlantic technocratic environmental hegemony and its proverbial blindness with respect to ongoing catastrophic material and semiotic realities—namely, global power asymmetries, colonial structural legacies, persistent neocolonial inertias, and the disturbing inequality at the root of the ecological crisis—but also propose alternative ways of reading, learning, listening, relating to others (humans and nonhumans), and being in the world. The conditions of possibility for living well depend on the collective and collaborative cultivation of more and more of these alternative seeds as well as the massive dissemination of their decolonial *naturecultural* diversities. Otherwise, the “cruel optimism” (Berlant) ingrained in the capitalist world-ecology will continue promising limitless material growth and synthetic happiness while delivering manufactured disaster, ecological collapse, unnecessary suffering, constant dissatisfaction, massive extinctions, environmental refugees, unacceptable exploitation, social corrosion, disturbing inequalities, and the media celebration of the inflated egos of madmen with no capacity for empathy.

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¹⁸ See Prádanos’ “Writing an Engaged Novel”.

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