

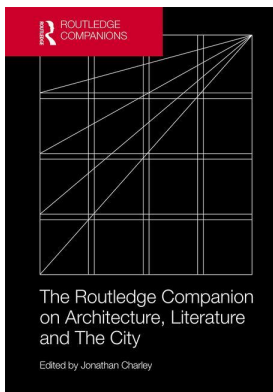
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Inequality in Aluísio Azevedo's *O cortiço*

Ana Baltazar

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It is now common in the social sciences and urban planning to talk of how 'space' is a pivotal force in the reproduction of social relations.¹ However, it usually appears as an abstract phenomenon rather than in its relationship to everyday social life. That is, space is not seen concretely as something that is simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by everyday social life.² In the case of Brazil, this situation is compounded by the fact that the official history of architecture praises Modernism through a colonised view that not only erases popular appropriations of European architecture, such as Portuguese colonial architecture and eclecticism, but also ignores the vernacular, without which one cannot understand the constructive rationality of Brazilian architecture.³ In contrast, in literary works such as the novel, the spaces of everyday life are often articulated in great detail, revealing fragments and clues about the more general process of urbanisation, including the ways social relations are reproduced. In short, literature can help reveal the complexities of everyday socio-spatial reality and narrate the ordinary spaces and places that tend to be excluded from the dominant discourse surrounding buildings and cities.

This shift in direction is reflected in the growth of a new and exciting field of research in Brazil that looks at the relationship between literature and geography. Scholars like Carlos Monteiro have argued that the essence or truth of the world transcends the interpretation of empirical data.⁴ As such, in contrast to traditional geography that is scientific in nature and searches for certainty, geographical readings of fiction, and indeed literary readings of geography, can open up a deeper understanding of our social-spatial history and disclose the *uncertainties* of what Henri Lefebvre termed 'lived space'.⁵

This chapter is situated within this new research field and recognises the crucial role that literature has played in Latin America both as a source of inspiration for decolonial thinking, and in the unique way it can disclose features that illuminate a deeper understanding of the contradictions that define the socio-spatial history of Brazil.⁶ A number of books have been pivotal in the development of my thinking in this area, all of which deal directly with the injustices and inequalities that are embedded in the process of Brazilian urbanisation.

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Pedro Pedreiro, by Odette de Barros Mott (1979), narrates the tale of a building worker and his wife who migrate to São Paulo in search of a better life. The novel tells of their daily struggle to survive. It is a precarious existence. Pedro is 45 and is constantly in fear of losing his job as a temporary hired labourer not least because he can no longer carry the heavy loads up and down the scaffold. Meanwhile, his wife earns a little extra as a housemaid, but together they retain faith in the idea that through hard graft their lives will eventually improve. Month by month, they invest almost all the money they earn in installments to pay a plot of land on the periphery where they build their own home. It is a tragic tale of hope and betrayal that ends with the death of Pedro and the eviction of his wife after she discovers they have been deceived. Although they had spent their life earnings, it turns out they had no legal title to the land that is repossessed by the returning Portuguese absentee landowner without compensation. Then, the best option for Pedro's family is to pay rent to be able to live in their own home.

*Child of the Dark*⁷ (1960), original title, *Dumping room: diary of a favela woman*,⁸ is the autobiographical diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus. Like Pedro and his wife, the author has herself migrated to São Paulo to escape poverty. However, unlike them, she is not able to find a job and lives in a slum with three children from different fathers that have never supported them. Her daily life in a slum is just one long battle to survive. She collects waste metal to resell, searches for leftover food in garbage cans, needs to walk miles every day just to fetch water and returns to sleep in a hut that constantly leaks. On top of all this is the stress she faces of living in a neighbourhood that is always tense, a result of poverty and the complete lack of social and economic infrastructure. The diary was a sensation and enabled her to buy a new 'dream home' built out of bricks and mortar. Encouraged by her success, she begins a second diary, *I'm going to have a little house* (1961).⁹ No longer eating out of bins, this tells of a different battle, in this case to be recognised, and to transcend the discrimination she has long suffered.

A paradox emerges. In the first diary, Jesus believes that all she needs to improve her family situation is to acquire a well-built house in a better neighbourhood. However, in her second diary, despite having money and a home, she discovers that she is still the same black woman with little cultural or social status. To make matters worse she also finds herself rejected by her former friends who now see her as a source of money. She finds herself in a sort of limbo: she left the favela, but the favela does not leave her. If before she only had time to aspire to a life without poverty, now she has the free time to contemplate the deep injustices that continue to overwhelm her.

There is much more that could be said about these books, but what these introductory notes underline is how literary works can capture some of the key contradictions that govern the process of urbanisation. Large-scale migration, the exploitation of low skilled labour, the inequalities of land ownership and class and racial discrimination continue to define the contemporary Brazilian city. But they also have deep historical roots, which form the narrative structure of one of the most important works of Brazilian literature, Aluísio Azevedo's *O cortiço* (*The tenement*) (1890).¹⁰ Such is the stature of this novel, that it has already been analysed from a variety of perspectives. These range from Monteiro's¹¹ essay, 'Literary realism and geographical determinism in *O cortiço*', to Santos's contention that the roots of the 2008 financial crisis can be traced back to the emergence of the economic system that Azevedo describes in the novel.¹² But here my main focus is on the fragments of the narrative that reveal the real-life character of Brazilian socio-spatial development (Figure 5.1).

O cortiço was written in a turbulent political period of Brazilian history. It tells the story about the reproduction of slavery within a tenement, the class domination of the Portuguese

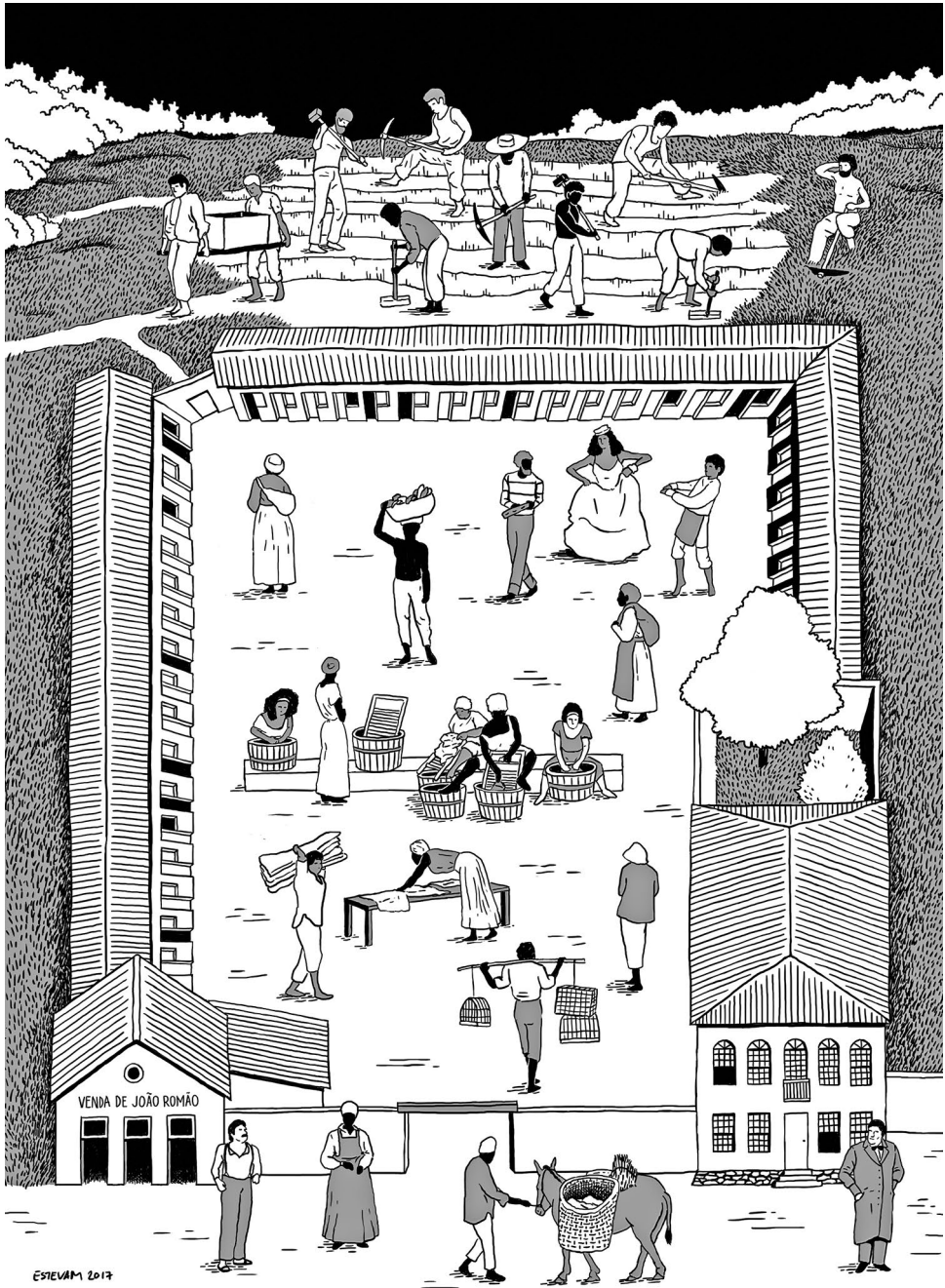


Figure 5.1 O Cortiço – Original Illustration by Estevam Quintino Gomes Junior, Architect and Illustrator.

over the Brazilian, of white Brazilians over the black Brazilians (former slaves) and of the bourgeois Portuguese over the working-class Portuguese, three levels of socio-spatial inequality. It depicts the difficulties former slaves and immigrants had to face to be recognised socially, culturally and spatially in a period when Brazil was adapting to the end of slavery and to its Republican aspirations. The Golden Law, completely abolishing slavery, was only decreed in 1888. However, Brazil started to move towards the abolition of slavery more than half a century before. In 1831, a law banning maritime slave trade was decreed, but it only really came into effect in 1850, when a new act was sanctioned criminalising such a trade as piracy and imposing sanctions on the importation of slaves. Moreover, in 1871 another law made children born to slave mothers free, and in 1885 slaves over the age of 60 were made free by law. The path towards abolition was set, and immediately after the Golden Law, in 1889, the Republic was proclaimed. A process of rapid and massive urbanisation was to follow as vast numbers of freed slaves and immigrants, from other regions, states, and Europe, mainly Portugal and Italy, flocked into the cities. However, no public policy was proposed for the socio-spatial inclusion of former slaves or poor immigrants, who struggled, and still struggle up today, economically and politically as second-class citizens.

The style of the narrative of *O cortiço* is associated with Naturalism, and draws on Émile Zola's belief that "every individual is governed by instincts and passions, as well as one's character, and that morals are defined by inherited instinct and by the environment in which one lives".¹³ In fact the narrative goes beyond this and engages the reader in a 'tour' that shows how the environment not only forges people, but is forged by them.

O cortiço is both the title and also the main *character* of Azevedo's book. At the end of the nineteenth century, tenements were perhaps the main alternative for most people searching for a better life, migrating to Rio de Janeiro from other cities, states and countries. The tenement depicted in this book is contrasted with its neighbouring house (sometimes referred to as *sobrado*—a two-floor loft—, sometimes as *palacete*—mansion), both owned by Portuguese immigrants. The tenement's owner is João Romão, a working-class man with little education, no family and who is driven by a determination to get rich. The mansion owner is Miranda, a businessman, whose Brazilian wife's dowry enables him to set up a prosperous wholesale fabric store.

The first pages of the book introduce João Romão and Bertoleza as central characters in both the construction and running of the tenement. João Romão, 25 years old, is presented in the first paragraph as having worked for a grocery shop owner from the age of 12. With the death of his employer, he inherits the shop with all the goods, and a small amount of money, which was actually his delayed payment for several years of work. João Romão, then, reveals himself as a greedy man, who is "possessed of the delusion of getting rich".¹⁴ He works all the hours he can and spends as little as possible. In his first years as the shop owner, he sleeps on the shop's counter, dresses in the same clothes, and eats cheap food prepared by Bertoleza, a neighbour creole slave in her thirties, who is the lover of a Portuguese that lives off cargo transport. As slavery was slowly moving to its end, Bertoleza is able to pay her master a monthly instalment for allowing her to live with her lover as if she were free. At the same time, she saves money to pay for her manumission. When her partner dies through exhaustion from hard labour, João Romão offers to help, firstly by taking care of her money, and then, by bringing her to live with him to 'share' all the work. Soon she finds herself maintaining the house, taking care of the shop, selling goods, cooking and serving costumers. Bertoleza also becomes 'his woman'. She thus becomes a source of money, a servant and a lover.

Bertoleza trusts him blindly and gives him all her wealth, which he supposedly uses to buy her liberation, promising her to add some of his own money to complete the sum needed. However, he actually falsifies the manumission document and uses her money to buy a plot at the left of his shop and to build a small house with two doors. The house is divided in two by a wall in parallel with the street, the front becoming an extension of the shop and the back serving as their home, furnished with Bertoleza's old stuff. The relationship with João Romão is convenient for Bertoleza, who rejects black men and "instinctively searches for a man in a race superior than hers".¹⁵ And for that she seems to close her eyes to the evidence of João Romão's deception and theft.

As the story progresses, he focuses more and more on the possession of goods, which as narrated by Azevedo "was no longer an ambition, but a nervous malaise, a madness, a desperation to accumulate".¹⁶ He never stops working, not even on Sundays or holidays, and takes advantage of whatever is possible;

failing to pay as often as he can and never ceasing to receive, deceiving the customers, stealing in weights and measures, buying very cheaply what slaves steal from their masters' houses, increasingly tightening their own expenses, piling deprivations on deprivations, working together with Bertoleza as donkeys.¹⁷

In keeping with his greedy personality, João Romão, through a public auction, acquires a piece of land at the back of his own plot. He immediately builds three little houses to let. This coincides with a period of massive urbanisation, with the whole neighbourhood under construction.

The street outside was filling up with people in an astonishing way. The buildings were badly done, but many; houses and cottages came up overnight; the rents went up; properties doubled in value. A factory of Italian pasta and another of candles were built, and the workers would pass in the morning, midday and the end of the afternoon, and most of them would eat at the cheap eating-house João Romão had arranged at the back of his porch.¹⁸

João Romão sees an opportunity to make more money by building and letting rooms and small units for individual workers and families. Because of the abundance of water, he also builds and rents out a water trough for laundresses. And so, bit by bit, he buys all the land that he can surrounding his plot and builds as much as it was possible to let. This was a common practice at the time. As the State was not able to provide housing for former slaves and immigrants, private investors saw a profitable opportunity.

The couple start their enterprise by stealing stones from a quarry just behind their plot, along with all sorts of building materials and tools from other building sites in the neighbourhood. Later, João Romão starts to dream of a sort of hostel, bigger and better than any other tenement in his suburb.

He started to live exclusively for this idea; dreamt about it every night; attended every auction of building materials; ... bought second-hand tiles; made bargains of lime and bricks; which was all deposited on its vast empty ground, the appearance of which soon took on the strange character of a huge barricade, such was the variety of objects that crowded there: boards and battens, tree trunks, ship masts, rafters, the remains of carts, clay and iron chimneys, dismantled stoves, piles and piles of bricks of all shapes, cement barrels, sand and red earth, agglomerations of old tiles, broken stairs, lime deposits, the

devil at last; and as a person who knew perfectly well how these things were stolen, guarded them, releasing at night a formidable watchdog.¹⁹

With this huge stock of building materials, they begin to build the 95 little houses that would make up the tenement. The building only stops when it arrives at the businessman Miranda's wall, a character who is introduced at the beginning of the book and who has done well in life due to his wife's dowry. Their marriage however turns out bad.

Dona Estela was a damnable little woman: she had been married for thirteen years and during that time had given her husband all sorts of trouble. Even before the end of the second year of their marriage, Miranda caught her in adultery; he was furious ... but his commercial house was guaranteed with the dowry she had brought. ... Besides, an abrupt disruption would be a scandal, and in his view any domestic scandal would be very bad for a trader. He praised above all his social position and trembled only at the idea of being poor again, lacking the resources and courage to start life again, after having become accustomed to a few perks and to the manliness of a rich Portuguese who no longer has a homeland in Europe.²⁰

After the adultery they live in separate rooms, hating each other, although they develop a strangely happy sex life. In the evenings, Miranda enters Estela's room and, at first, she pretends to be asleep. As time passes, she willingly responds to his nightly visits and they start frequently having wild sex. This lasts a long time and seems to ease Estela's fire. But as Miranda gets older, his nightly visits diminish and Estela again begins flirting, this time with his workers, a situation that predictably creates great tension at Miranda's workplace. In order to remove Estela from temptation, Miranda buys a house, sometimes referred in the book as a mansion, that is located far away from his shop, and which turns out to be next door to João Romão's property.

As soon as Miranda moves into the new neighbourhood with his wife and daughter, he starts a dispute with João Romão over a piece of land between the two houses, which as yet is not built upon or fenced off. João Romão immediately refuses to sell it, and offers instead to buy Miranda's backyard, as he also has plans to expand his business.

A fierce but soundless struggle ensued between the Portuguese merchant of wholesale fabric and the Portuguese merchant of groceries. The former could not decide to make the wall of the yard without having reached the piece of land that separated it from the hill; and the other, for his part, did not lose hope of getting at least two or three fathoms at the back of the house; part of which, according to his calculations, would be worth gold, once he had completed the great project which had come to his mind at last—the creation of a hostel in a great place, a monster hostel, without precedent, destined to kill all the small tenements that spread throughout the suburb of Botafogo.²¹

Neither of the neighbours raise a wall to demarcate their boundaries, and both wait for the other to surrender. Meanwhile, João Romão, who was accumulating all sorts of stuff in the back of his house, releases a dog every night. This is another reason for the dispute to escalate between the two Portuguese. Miranda and his family are not able to leave the house when the watchdog is around, and when Bertoleza and João Romão's chickens cross the border, they disappear, probably becoming Miranda's family dinner. While the decision about the wall is postponed, João Romão's business steadily grows.

He created warehouses for keeping the goods, abolished the grocery store and transferred the dormitory, taking advantage of the space to enlarge the shop, that doubled the size and gained two more doors. It was no longer a simple tavern, it was a bazaar where everything was found, haberdashery, hardware, porcelain, office utensils, workers' clothing, women's clothing, straw hats for working under the sun, cheap perfumes, horn combs, handkerchiefs with love verses, and rings and earrings made of ordinary metal. And all the rabble in the neighbourhood would go there, or else to the side cheap eating-house, where the factory workers and the quarry workers would meet after the service, and they would drink and talk until ten o'clock, between the thick smoke of the pipes, the fish fried in oil, and the kerosene lanterns.²²

João Romão starts to build all over his land and as the little houses are nearing completion, they are rented at once. Its location is perfect for the many workers who live in the neighbourhood, particularly the quarry workers, who are just a few steps from their workplace. As the tenement takes shape, Miranda is consumed by rage. "A tenement! he exclaimed, possessed. A tenement! Damn that fucking landlord! Making a tenement under my windows!... the villain has ruined my house!"²³ At this point Miranda decides to put up the wall. However, this does not stop João Romão from continuing with his dream to build a hostel.

From Miranda's second floor windows the mansion's residents can watch the neighbour's chickens eating outside and the low-income citizens, mainly poor working-class people, struggling to survive in the overcrowded tenement. There is tension between the two sides, which is reinforced by the two Portuguese. Miranda, on his side, envies João Romão, who has become richer than himself without having to marry a Brazilian woman for money, and who in his view, lives freely and happily with his black woman. João Romão, on the other hand, loses sleep thinking of Miranda's social accomplishment. When João Romão reads in the newspaper that Miranda has been given the title of Baron, he becomes deeply envious.

However, as João Romão gets richer and richer, the two neighbours start to mend their differences. "Up to the point that there wasn't a Sunday that passed without Bertoleza's friend having dinner at Miranda's house"²⁴ He decides to conquer Zulmira (Miranda's daughter) and seek her parent's permission to marry her.

Then one day the tenement is accidentally set on fire. During this episode, the inhabitants of a rival tenement just a few blocks away, come to lend a hand, even though the residents of both tenements had never got along with each other. João Romão's tenement was considered better than its neighbour, appears more powerful, and at one point in the narrative assumes human characteristics.²⁵ Nevertheless, when the fire destroys a great part of João Romão's tenement, the rivalry is suspended. A few residents even go to live in the other tenement temporarily. After the fire is over, João Romão, resigned to his fate, starts to rebuild the tenement as if disasters were an unavoidable part of life, 'a blessing in disguise'.

The works began on the left side of the tenement, the Miranda's side; ... These months, during the works, were a special time for the hostel. The tenement had no idea of its former character, so accented and yet so mixed: it now seemed like a great improvised workshop, an arsenal, in which people would only understand themselves by signs. The laundresses fled to the backyard, because the dust of the earth and the wood soiled their washed clothes. But in a short time everything was ready; and, with great amazement, it was noticed that the grocery shop, the greasy cellar, where João Romão made himself, was also about to be changed. The owner had decided to use only some of the walls, which were one metre wide, cut to the Portuguese; he decided to open the arched doors,

suspend the ceiling, and raise a house, taller than Miranda's, and certainly more ornate. This building was supposed to put the other in the shade; four front windows, eight on the side, with a terrace in the background. The place where he slept with Bertoleza, the kitchen and the cheap eating-house would be vaulted, forming with the part of the tavern a large warehouse, in which its commerce would be strengthened and enlarged.²⁶

João Romão takes the opportunity to build a bedroom for himself in his new mansion, far away from Bertoleza. It is "a wide room lined with blue and white with yellow florets imitating gold; ... and all the furniture was ready for a married couple, because the smart man was not going to buy furniture twice".²⁷ This description appears in the novel when João Romão is in his new big bedroom for the first time, walking from one side to the other, thinking of Bertoleza, who is sleeping downstairs, in a stairwell at the back of the warehouse. Despite his mixture of remorse and worry, he puts his aspirations first. The refurbishment of the tenement after the fire changes it completely. Its new far more illustrious appearance brings João Romão great prosperity and seems to entitle him to forget ethical and moral principles. One could say that Azevedo was describing an early example of Brazilian gentrification.

The tenement was no longer the same; was very different; He hardly knew what it was. The courtyard, as João Romão had promised, had narrowed itself with the new buildings; now it looked like a street, all equally paved and lit by three large, symmetrically arranged lanterns. Six latrines, six water faucets and three bathrooms were made. The small gardens, the four-and-eight-sided gardens, and the immense deposits of empty bottles had disappeared. To the left, as far as Miranda's building went, there was a new row of houses with doors and windows, and from then on, following all the way to the bottom and then turning to the right until it ran into João Romão's house, there was a second floor, enclosed on top of the first by a narrow, wide balcony of wooden railings, accessed by two staircases, one at each end. The numbering of the rooms increased to more than four hundred; and all washed up and painted fresh; white walls, green doors and red gutters. Few places had been left vacant. Some locals put plants by the door and window, in half sawn vats or pots of clay.²⁸

Moreover, Azevedo²⁹ equates the prosperity of João Romão's commercial house with the urban space just outside. After the tenement becomes a hostel, in order to get a place, a letter of guarantee and a special recommendation is required.

The prices of the rooms rose, and many of the former Italians, mainly, went, for reasons of economy, to the 'Cat-Head' [the neighbouring rival tenement], and were replaced by cleaner people. The number of laundresses also declined, as most of the houses were now occupied by small families of workers, artists, and secretaries. The tenement was becoming aristocratic.³⁰

From the beginning of the book, the narrative focuses on the tenement as a lived space. According to Sá³¹ the tenement is described for the first time

through a panoramic scene that shows the movements of men and women going from the houses to the bathrooms and to the faucets to wash themselves, and from there to the shop to buy bread. Though highly visual in a choreographic sense, this scene includes few details about the place itself.

Nevertheless, the reader can appreciate the lived space, which is depicted in rich detail in the narrative. It is literarily lived when Azevedo speaks of the tenement as if it were human, saying that “the tenement woke, opening, not its eyes, but its plethora of doors and windows lined up”.³² But it is also lived by the poetic narrative that brings the reader to imagine the dynamic presence of people in the environment.

As though it was still felt, in the indolence of mist, the last notes of the last guitar of the night before, dissolving in the blond and tender light of the dawn, like a sigh of nostalgia lost in a foreign land. The washed clothes, which had been left over in the open, had dampened the air, putting a large acre of ordinary soap on it. The stones on the floor, whitish where the washing took place and, in some spots, bluish by the indigo, showed a gray and sad pallor, made of accumulations of dry foam. However, from the doors arose heads congested from sleep; there was a wide yawn, as strong as the sound of the waves; loud throats came from all over the place; The cups began to clink; the warm smell of the coffee overwhelmed all others; the first words, the good mornings, were exchanged from window to window; conversations interrupted at night were resumed; a naughty little girl was already out, and from inside the houses came muffled cries of children who did not yet walk. In the confused rumor that was forming, there were laughs, changing sounds of voices, without knowing from where; croaking of ducks, singing of cocks, cackling of chickens. From a few rooms came women who went out to hang the parrot’s cage outside on the wall, and the birds, like their masters, greeted each other noisily, indulging themselves in the new day light.³³

The lived space of the tenement is pivotal to João Romão’s capitalist network. With the profits from the rented rooms and units, he is able to buy the quarry and starts to excavate it with a few workers, who are also his tenants. This is another step, as noted by Sá, “towards controlling the means of production of space” and becoming a true capitalist.³⁴ As João Romão also owned the shop, the cheap eating-house and the tenement, he becomes “the creator and controller of a social space”, making people economically dependent on him. Azevedo brings the discussion of the environment as one of the variables that together with social and economic conditions contributes to changing a person’s nature.³⁵

The book depicts João Romão as an avaricious man, who first accumulates goods, then money in the bank, and later, after becoming a successful property owner and merchant to other shops in Rio de Janeiro, seeks the confirmation of his social status and distinction in the form of a title. According to Sá “In the second half of the novel he ‘comes to his senses’, to use Marx’s expression, by adopting a lifestyle more in line with his accumulated capital”.³⁶ João Romão starts to spend money on himself, buying clothes, eating out, and also spending time off work, hanging out with Miranda’s family and friends, all the while harbouring an ambition to become a Viscount, considered superior to the title of Baron enjoyed by Miranda. He then manages to get engaged to Miranda’s daughter, but in order to marry her he needs to get rid of Bertoleza. With a complete lack of ethics and morals, he lets the son of Bertoleza’s former master know of her whereabouts. As João Romão had never paid the manumission, and had forged a false document to show Bertoleza, the son immediately comes to claim his slave.

The book ends with João Romão following Bertoleza’s owner “through the shop, then into a small corridor that led to a paved patio, finally arriving at the kitchen”,³⁷ where they find Bertoleza. She had just finished serving dinner to the customers and was crouched on the floor, pulling the scales of the fish she was about to cook specially for her man. She

recognises the son of her former owner and immediately understands that João Romão has not only deceived her, but doesn't even have the courage to kill her, and worse still, "was about to send her back to her captivity".³⁸ She can't bear such a fate, and so, she uses the knife in her hand to cut her belly from one side to the other, falling forward and dying at once, right there on the kitchen floor. At this very moment, a Commission of abolitionists arrive to pay their respects to João Romão with a diploma that confers the title of 'meritorious partner'. Shocked by Bertoleza's suicide, but without reflecting on his own deceit, he arranges for the commission to be conducted to the living room.³⁹

João Romão's and Bertoleza's partnership starts because of a convenience for both sides. Bertoleza saw in him the white foreign man she idealised (and needed to replace, as her former white Portuguese partner died), and João Romão saw her as a source of money, an unpaid worker and a lover. However, João Romão envisaged himself as a rich man in the future and would do anything for it, while Bertoleza only dreamt of being free from slavery. As the novel develops, João Romão and his business progress, helped by Bertoleza, but she never actually manages to become free. First, because João Romão has deceived her with a fake manumission, but mainly because she doesn't know how to survive other than by serving someone. In the end, when João Romão decides to get married, Bertoleza overhears him talking to a friend, suggesting that he buy her a food and vegetable shop in another suburb, so as to get rid of her. She comes into the room and refuses it with indignation. She cannot accept him getting married and leaving her, saying that "I am black, yes, but have feelings! Who has eaten my flesh has to have my bones!"⁴⁰ In this dialogue she also makes reference to the everyday use of her body, for work and sex, the reason why she believed she had the right to be by João Romão's side up to his death. In her way, she believed this would be enough to enjoy what they had built together. Bertoleza's optimism seems a contradiction, as she assumed her slave-like duties with resignation and was already living separate from João Romão within the same house. But for her, to sleep and spend the day as a slave was almost bearable, or rather preferable, than to be thrown away with the arrival of a new woman.

Bertoleza is trapped in what Souza⁴¹ calls a 'structural rabble', a class that is required to perform all sorts of heavy and badly paid labour, that is exploited by the middle class, and which has no cultural or social aspirations to live for. However, João Romão also starts as part of such a 'rabble', but becomes what Souza⁴² terms a 'Brazilian fighter', an individual who struggles to ascend economically and manages to have aspirations, however limited and even if restricted to the possession of goods. Illich⁴³ explains such a 'need' as something imposed top down from outside, not a proper necessity, rather a manufactured desire that comes with the development of consumer society. João Romão is wholly consumed by such imposed needs, and is a victim of a certain type of alienation explained by Mbembe⁴⁴ as "the denigration of virtues such as care, compassion and kindness" in the name of economic success and status. Azevedo⁴⁵ shows that individuals such as João Romão will do anything for their own benefit, including playing on both sides. On the one side he appears in society as an abolitionist, and on the other he is capable of maintaining Bertoleza as a slave, falsifying her manumission and instigating the chain of events that would end in her suicide.

Azevedo⁴⁶ shows that the end of slavery did not signal the end of socio-spatial inequality in Brazil. In many ways it continued almost unchanged as shown in the sexual and labour exploitation of Bertoleza, and the cramped kitchen spaces in which she spends most of her life. The book also shows the venal nature and amorality of the search for social distinction, and the limited nature of social freedom that comes with the accumulation and consumption of mere goods. When Azevedo was writing, there was no public policy from the State to deal with freed slaves and immigrants. The development of Rio de Janeiro's poor suburbs

happened mainly by means of private investments from those willing to profit from it, such as João Romão. All these might be seen as socio-spatial patterns repeated all over the country. In some ways little has changed. The other books mentioned in the beginning of this chapter reinforce such a view.⁴⁷ Brazil is still subordinate to a form of economic colonialism, is ruled by a hegemonic patriarchal elite, and produces spaces mainly for profit. Nevertheless, the awareness of such processes, that a novel like Azevedo's can help create, is fundamental to any sustained attack on endemic socio-spatial inequality.

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Notes

- 1 This argument is developed by Henri Lefebvre, *The survival of capitalism: reproduction of the relations of production* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976).
- 2 In Brazil an orthographic Portuguese agreement came into force in 2009 making the hyphen between socio-spatial no longer possible. However, Marcelo Lopes de Souza, *Os conceitos fundamentais da pesquisa sócio-espacial* (2013), invites people dealing with space to keep the hyphen, as long as they intend to discuss space beyond mere background for social development. In the same line, Silke Kapp (2018), *Socio-spatial groups or whom technical advisory practice serves*, discusses the meaning of a socio-spatial group as that in which the space shapes society and society shapes the space.
- 3 Marcelo Puppi, *Por uma história não moderna da arquitetura brasileira* (Campinas: Pontes:Associação dos amigos da história da arte: CPHA: IFCH: Unicamp, 1998).
- 4 Carlos Augusto de Figueiredo Monteiro, *O mapa e a trama: ensaios sobre o conteúdo geográfico em criações romanescas* (Florianópolis: Editora da UFSC, 2002), argues that literary fiction enables “doubting and daring”, and suggests that the essence or truth of the world transcends the interpretation of empirical data. He comes from the field of physical geography, and critical of its scientific approach and lack of ‘people’, has attempted to unite it with human geography so as to reconcile nature and society. Importantly, as part of this project he has looked at how literature can open up possibilities for a deeper interpretation of our social and spatial history. In the same spirit, Pinheiro and Silva (2004), *Visões imaginárias da cidade da Bahia: um diálogo entre geografia e a literatura*, edited the first companion of ‘imaginary visions’ of Bahia by means of a dialogue between geography and literature. They drew from Milton Santos’ thesis, inspired by Sartre’s theory of emotions, that geography should be defined as both a science and an art (Pinheiro and Silva, 2004, p. 17). It is a new area of research that is heterogeneous in outlook and which accommodates different approaches that range from the abstract to the concrete. These include work on topoanalytical categories that draw on the work of Bachelard (Borges Filho, 2008), analyses of the representation of reality in the novel—ranging from semiotics (Bastos, 1998, 1993) to cultural geography (Olanda, 2008)—, spatial analyses guided only by the narratives proposed in fiction (Araújo et al. nd), geographical investigations of ‘place’, ‘landscape’ and ‘space’ in literary works (Araújo, 2008; Uehbe, 2014), and the research of literary scholars (Grossman, 1993) on “the space in literature” and “the space of literature” (Bento, 2012).
- 5 Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (London: Blackwell, 1991), develops lived space as part of a dialectical triad, together with perceived space and conceived space.
- 6 Enrique Dussel, *The decolonizing turn* (Interview: October 2013) argues that the literary boom in Latin America is one of the main sources of the decolonising turn. Through literary works one can go deeper into the contradictions of the production of space than by means of colonial theory. Soja says that conventional Eurocentric (colonial) historiography, with its rigid canonical beliefs, takes the urbanisation process as an effect and not as a cause. So, he argues that we should think regionally, keeping in mind the generative capacity of urbanisation and a decolonising perspective. In his view, “an extraordinary inventiveness and innovation ... arose from urban agglomeration”, not the opposite (Soja, 2013, p. 146). Moreover, an interesting critique of the limit of colonial theory, pointing towards the need to understand the contradictions of the everyday, is presented by Chilisa and Ntseane (2010), *Resisting dominant discourses: Implications of indigenous, African*

feminist theory and methods for gender and education research. Despite drawing from Western gender theories, their analysis also applies to socio-spatial theories. For them, Western gender theories tend “to reduce women and girls’ experience to categories of ‘victim’ and ‘other’”, and fail to get to the contradictions experienced by them in the construction of their identity and sense of power. They indicate the need to understand that

“Western male hegemony enters the school through subjects such as religion and can be typically reinforced through [...] culture, embodied in language and rituals, generating multiple centres of oppression for girls and women in the education system and public space.”

There is a need then to explore the “ethical and transformative ways of approaching this complexity that can account for how girls and women negotiate and resist patriarchal power”. Chilisa and Ntseane, op. cit., p. 617.

- 7 Carolina Maria de Jesus wrote her first diary in 1960 and it was translated to many languages, being the English version published in 1962. Jesus (1960). *Quarto de despejo*. And Jesus (1962) *Child of the dark*.
- 8 Jesus (1960), op.cit. She was quite aware of her socio-spatial position, and interprets Brazilian society as a ‘rich house’ where the middle class is represented by the living room and those like her as the ‘dumping room’.
- 9 Carolina Maria de Jesus wrote her second diary in 1961, one year after the publication of the first diary. Jesus (1961), *Casa de alvenaria*. And Jesus (1997), *I’m going to have a little house*.
- 10 There is an English translation by David H. Rosenthal (Azevedo, 1999), entitled *The slum*. But I would rather translate *cortiço* to *tenement*, which also seems to be the case of other Brazilian authors, such as Lúcia Sá (2010), *Zola in Rio de Janeiro: the production of space in Aluísio Azevedo’s O cortiço*. In the 19th century, a tenement, even if poor, was built by someone to invest in renting rooms or small houses to people that could not afford to buy or build their own houses. It differs from a slum, as it was not characterised by being dirty or unpleasant, or even by being a set of individual informal shelters, built by different individuals, usually in invaded land, to solve immediate problems. The tenement depicted in the book, was built as an investment, in a land that was bought for this purpose, even if the living conditions were poor and the rent expensive.
- 11 Monteiro, op.cit.
- 12 Vivaldo Andrade dos Santos, ‘An economic reading of Aluísio Azevedo’s *O cortiço*’. *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*. (Editora 34: São Paulo, 2012).
- 13 Ibid., p. 57.
- 14 Aluísio Azevedo, *O cortiço* (São Paulo: Ática, 2006).
- 15 Ibid., p. 16.
- 16 Ibid., p. 24.
- 17 Ibid., p. 18.
- 18 Ibid., p. 24.
- 19 Ibid., p. 23.
- 20 Ibid., p. 19.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 22–23.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 24–25.
- 23 Ibid., p. 25.
- 24 Ibid., p. 172.
- 25 The tenement is said to wake up, “opening, not its eyes, but its plethora of doors and windows lined up”. Ibid., p. 35.
- 26 Ibid., p. 171.
- 27 Ibid., p. 187.
- 28 Ibid., p. 181.
- 29 Ibid., p. 198.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 198–199.
- 31 Lúcia Sá, ‘Zola in Rio de Janeiro: the production of space in Aluísio Azevedo’s *O cortiço*’. *Portuguese Studies* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2010). np.
- 32 Azevedo, op.cit. p. 35.
- 33 Ibid., p. 35.
- 34 Sá, op.cit. np.
- 35 Ibid. np.
- 36 Ibid. np.
- 37 Azevedo, op.cit., p. 206.

- 38 Ibid., p. 207.
39 Ibid., p. 207.
40 Ibid., p. 195.
41 Jessé Souza, *A ralé brasileira: quem é e como vive* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2009).
42 Jessé Souza, *Os batalhadores brasileiros: nova classe média ou nova classe trabalhadora?* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2010).
43 Illich, *Needs*. Unpublished Manuscript, 1990.
44 Achille Mbembe, 'The age of humanism is ending.' *The Mail & The Guardian*. (SouthAfrica: December 22, 2016).
45 Azevedo, op. cit.
46 Ibid.
47 Odette de Barros, Mott, *Pedro Pedreiro* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1979). And Jesus (1960, 1961, 1962, 1997). op. cit.

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