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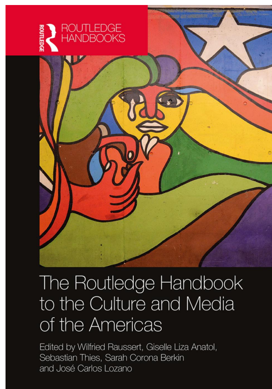

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AFRICAN-DESCENDANT LITERATURES

Anja Bandau and Christoph Singler

Given the sheer extent of the African diaspora across the Americas, from Canada to Brazil via the Caribbean, it comes as no surprise that a comprehensive account of its literatures is still lacking. Local, national and regional studies exist, covering a wide range of issues, literary genres and discourses, even if not all regions have been studied to the same depth. The African-descendant literatures in the U.S. and the Caribbean have been subjects of study throughout the 20th century, however they have only come into focus in Hispanoamerica since the 1970s, academic pioneers being Richard Jackson, Marvin Lewis, Martha Cobbs, William Luis as well as authors such as Manuel Zapata Olivella and Quince Duncan. While mapping African-descendant literatures throughout the Americas is still a virulent task, future comparative studies have to negotiate an obvious challenge. On one hand, the agenda and issues that diaspora groups have contended with, and continue to contend with, are very similar (→ Transnational Migration, I/44; Migration Literature, III/2); The role of the artist as being committed to her/his community is widely accepted, as well as several thematic and formal aspects in visual arts (→ Visual Cultures, III/45) and literature pointing towards shared issues and parallel developments. On the other hand, local settings defined by different ethnic structures (→ Ethnicity, I/25), multifaceted constellations, and power relations generated by these structures inevitably lead to differences – temporal or thematic asynchrony – which in turn motivate transfers, stimulating or blocking the circulation of ideas and paradigms. Brent Hayes Edwards (2001) refers to the concept of *décalage* ("disjuncture" in time and space), borrowed from Léopold Sédar Senghor, as a crucial characteristic of the African diaspora in the Americas. This basic notion might help grasp the highly diversified literary panorama of African-descendant literatures in the Americas.

Among other factors, Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993) has established a transatlantic framework for these connections (→ Atlantic, I/3) because, from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, the African continent and the former colonial metropoles became places where North- and South-Americans met. However, hemispheric relations do not necessarily have to include the USA; ties existing between the Caribbean and Brazil are as important as the relations between Mexico and members of the Harlem Renaissance. A diasporic point of view on literatures written by Afro-descendants should bring into focus issues and formal characteristics common or similar to both hemispheres, as should,

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in particular, references to popular art forms such as song lyrics and other non-written traditions such as folk tales and, more generally, musical and intermedia performative patterns (→ Popular Music Flows, III/16). Accordingly, not limiting the term to the U.S. and going beyond Afro-Latin Studies, "African American literatures" will encompass the entire continent in the following.

Intellectual and thematic currents and movements

During the 19th century, sporadic connections came to the fore combining parallel developments with significant differences and time lapses, as is the case with for example the slave narrative (→ III/20), which was prevalent in the U.S. as well as the Anglophone and Spanish-speaking Caribbean, scarce in Brazil, and non-existent in the Francophone Caribbean and Hispanic America. The literature of abolition came alive at different moments in time in different regions; the first texts appeared in the English-speaking countries and colonies. In Brazil and Cuba, where slavery (→ I/18) did not end before 1888 and 1886 respectively, abolition movements were apparently weaker; nevertheless, their main protagonists, Luiz Gama and José Patrocínio, among others in Brazil, and Cuban novelist Cirilo Villaverde living in exile in the U.S. were well aware of the publications and activities of like-minded Anglophone colleagues. Haitian politician, anthropologist and writer Antonin Firmin (1850–1910) wrote the foundational *De l'égalité des races humaines* (1885) that challenged the biological determination of race (→ I/39) and critically evaluated inconsistencies in positivist racism. His extensive work is most often understood as a counter-narrative about African cultural achievements based on ancient Egyptian and Ethiopian cultures as well as references to the achievements of racially mixed diaspora cultures (→ Hybridity, I/30). Firmin considered the author of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and the genre of slave narratives a typical example.

During the 20th centuries these inter-American entanglements of African-descendant literatures in the Americas intensified. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois prophetically stated that "the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line" (Du Bois 1903, 19). While it was difficult to define such a line in Latin America and the Caribbean, the double consciousness, also formulated in his seminal book *The Souls of Black Folk* would ring true throughout the century.

Du Bois was also among the main promoters of the Pan-Africanist congresses, organized in 1900 for the first time in London by the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams. Seven other conferences would follow until 2015, with a long break after the historical 5th conference held in Manchester in 1945. These first transatlantic gatherings of the African diaspora were echoed throughout the Americas by the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement founded in 1916 by the Jamaican Marcus Garvey whose declared goal was to return to Africa (→ Pan-Americanism, II/40).

In the cultural field, active members of the Harlem Renaissance traveled to the Caribbean. Among them was Zora Neale Hurston, who conducted anthropological fieldwork on Vodou in Haiti, Louisiana and Jamaica (→ Religious Beliefs, I/40), and also wrote a novel inspired by Haiti titled *Their eyes were watching god* (1937). Langston Hughes, who had traveled several times to Mexico, also stayed in Cuba in 1930 and Haiti in 1931. Hughes translated Spanish-speaking poets (in particular Nicolás Guillén), while his poems were translated into Spanish as early as 1926, in the Cuban weekly *Ideales de una raza*, a supplement of the conservative *Diario de la Marina*.

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Contemporaries of the Harlem Renaissance, the francophone *Négritude* movement, founded in Paris by Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Léon Gontran-Damas (French Guyana) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), promoted African heritage while also giving a voice to the Black subjects of (French) colonialism on both shores of the Atlantic. Its main means of expression was *Présence Africaine*, a journal founded by Alioune Diop in 1947. The impact of *Négritude* was perhaps more tangible in the Francophone and Spanish-speaking areas of the Americas than in Anglophone regions. One of its founding texts, the *Cahier du retour au pays natal* by Césaire, published in 1939, was translated into Spanish by Cuban anthropologist and writer Lydia Cabrera as early as 1943. *Présence Africaine* was instrumental to the organization of the first International Congresses of Black Writers and Artists in Paris (1956) and Rome (1959). Négritude lost influence in the 1980s, when Pan-Africanist views were adopted in Brazil, while in the Caribbean the creolization paradigm became dominant (→ Hybridity, I/30).

In the 1950s, the African independence movements drew attention in the African diaspora. Since then, ties with Africa have grown stronger, finally questioning the idealized visions of Africa circulating in the diaspora. What started with Caribbean intellectuals (→ Public Intellectuals, III/18), employed in the colonial administration decades before, has turned into a new type of revolutionary travels, and has recently transformed into heritage tourism (→ Memory Politics, I/34). For such authors as the Barbadians George Lamming and Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Guadalupan Maryse Condé, U.S.-American Maya Angelou, and Costa Rican Shirley Campbell, among others, the main destinations were Ghana (independent in 1957) and Guinea.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power were also important factors of entanglement in trying to build an alliance with the Third World movement (→ Social Movements, I/41). U.S.-Black feminism and Third World feminism pursued parallel topics and lines of discussion (→ Gender Identities, I/28). They constituted a relay station for the circulation of motifs, topics, and narratives in the Americas and the Caribbean. Revolutionary Cuba played a major role in this constellation, bringing the Black Civil Rights Movement closer to anti-colonial Third World struggle. After banning racial discrimination in its new constitution, Cuba received several Civil Rights activists and artists in 1960, among them LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), who then made a radical change from Beat poet to political consciousness (Young 2001). Other Caribbean writers joined the Cuban revolution (→ Revolution, II/44), like the Haitian René Depestre (1959–1978). The journal *Casa de las Américas*, founded in 1959, became a motor of circulation for major concepts of and ideas on anti-colonial struggle all over Latin America and the Caribbean.

The increasing disenchantment with the outcomes of independence in the African and Caribbean states led to a massive migration of scholars, artists and writers to the U.S. (→ Transnational Migration, I/44), confirming its role as an important intellectual hub for African diaspora studies and literatures, besides Great Britain and France. To name but a few, Kenyan Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Nigerians Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and recently Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have reinforced ties to Africa, bringing back attention to African retentions in diaspora cultures, while Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Maryse Condé, Edouard Glissant or Dany Laferrière strengthened exchanges with the Caribbean archipelago, introducing the paradigm of creolization (→ Hybridity, I/30). In the 1980s, Audre Lorde (Virgin Islands) and Paule Marshall (Barbados) belong to those female writers of Caribbean background who were subsumed under the labels of Black feminism and African American or Women of color literature (→ Gender Identities, I/28), but actually introduced their Caribbean experience into those frames.

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Latin American dictatorships have contributed to this second diaspora as well. From 1968 to 1980, Abdias do Nascimento, towering figure of the Afro-Brazilian community, lived in the U.S., where he adopted Pan-Africanism. In 1976 and 77, he lectured in Nigeria. The contemporary Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Europe and the U.S. has created additional spaces, that is, infrastructure for this exchange – from special radio (→ III/40) programs (on RFI and the BBC) to numerous websites, blogs and social media (→ II/41; Digital Culture, III/28).

The Inner-Caribbean and South-South circulation of cultural agents and production have also intensified and come to the attention of academic research (Puri 2007). Colombian author Manuel Zapata Olivella organized the first *Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas* in Cali (Colombia 1977). This was the first manifestation of Pan-Africanism in South America followed in 1980 by a congress in Panama on *Identidad Cultural del Negro en las Américas*, and in 1982 by another meeting in São Paulo on the topic "African Diaspora, political consciousness and African culture" with Nascimento as the leading figure. The various literary awards offered by *Casa de las Americas* also created visibility and exchange.

Paul Gilroy's above-mentioned *The Black Atlantic*, which focused on cultural studies, opened up a new transatlantic perspective that included virtually all areas where the plantation system had been introduced (→ Atlantic, I/3; Colonial Economies, I/4), in particular Black British culture. The term "virtually" is used here because protest surfaced in Latin America regarding Gilroy's neglect of the South Atlantic, essentially ignoring Brazil and the non-Anglophone Caribbean as well as other Latin American countries with important black minorities like Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Central America. Only during the last 40 years has Latin American literary history begun to discover its literatures of African descent, in particular since many of these countries have now recognized cultural plurality in their constitutions, i.e. their ethnic minorities. In Brazil, the largest African diaspora community in the Americas, the concept of *literatura afro-brasileira* or *afro-descendente* is "under construction" at present (Duarte 2008), spanning from the group *Quilombhoje* (founded in 1978) to novelist Conceiçao Evaristo – applicant to the Academia Brasileira for the chair of Abolitionist Castro Alves in 2018 – and includes highly experimental authors like Ricardo Aleixo, as well as musician and poet Ronald Augusto.

This dynamic is reflected in the *Enciclopedia Brasileira da Diáspora Africana* (2004), edited by poet Nei Lopes that adopts a continental perspective. In Colombia, as in other parts of Latin America, academic research is progressively including the contributions of African-descendant authors into national literature. As a symptom of this process, the Banco de la República has launched its Digital Library of Afro-Columbian authors (*Biblioteca digital de autores afrocolombianos*). Even in a country like Cuba, with its long tradition of Afro-Cuban writing, recognized since the historic avant-garde period in the 1920s (→ Modernism, III/14), a renewed debate on race (→ I/39) is taking place.

Common issues

In *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), James Baldwin wrote, "[i]t is quite possible to say that the price a Negro pays for becoming articulate is to find himself, at length, with nothing to be articulate about" (6). If Baldwin assumes his task somewhat reluctantly, he does so because he believes that a writer must start with his own experience – something white society prevents any Black subject from doing – as a gateway to "anything else." In fact, he is not willing to commit all of his writing to community issues. In this sense, the topics described in the following as common to the African-descendant literatures of the Americas can be found in a majority of works, but

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do not constitute a necessary element of their definition. Nevertheless, the "burden of the black writer" – consisting in the elucidation of a specifically Black condition in Western societies – is probably the general background against which African-American literature is generally written. Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau, in *Écrire en pays dominé* (1997), describes his way towards a personal aesthetic against the background of French cultural domination. One of his dialogue partners is the "old warrior," who reminds the writer of his ancient convictions and collective duties. His interventions appear in a section called "inventory of melancholy."

That said, memory appears among the main topics (→ Memory Politics, I/34). In particular, memory of slavery (→ I/18) is present throughout the Black Atlantic, as well as the motif and narrative of the Middle Passage as "bridge and breach" (Pedersen 1994). The genre of the slave narrative (→ III/20) connects to the abolitionist struggle in the 19th century and is concentrated in the Anglophone areas, currently the U.S., Great Britain, and the British colonies (*Olaudah Equiano* 1789, *Mary Prince* 1831). In the Spanish-language world, there are fewer cases like Juan Francisco Manzano (1835) and, in Brazil, the *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, first published 1854 in Detroit (and only in 1997 in Brazil). While pointing out the scarcity of slave texts in Brazil, Krueger (2002) mentions a series of interviews with several very elderly slaves, between 100 and 124 years of age, conducted from the 1970s up until the 1990s.

Slavery and its devastating consequences are, from a Black point of view, not considered to be finished. Its haunting memory is at the core of Toni Morrison's landmark novel *Beloved* (1987), based on the story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who killed one of her children to prevent them from being enslaved when she was caught. The consequences of slavery are manifest even today in marginalization, exclusion, racism (→ Race, I/39), unemployment and poverty of Black subjects (→ Social Inequality, II/20). Somatic memories of slavery and its impact on a racialized presence resist a discourse that declares the trauma of slavery overcome (→ Trauma Literature, III/21). They elaborate other forms of writing memory, independent from archive or testimony (Santos Febres 2009).

Thus, another main issue is subjectivity: the construction of a Black Self independent of the view from the outside, as Du Bois' quotation declared; a Self that slavery, defined by Orlando Patterson as "social death" (1982), had tried to suppress. For instance, Paget Henry (2001) explores a specific Afro-Caribbean mindset studied by Frantz Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), exploring its vulnerability due to racist discourses that project the Afro-Caribbean psyche in self-contempt or in "a zone of non-being." "Ego-collapse" is inevitable when self-affirmation and social recognition are lacking. Fanon, as a psychiatrist dedicated to ego genesis, discusses the issue for a region like the Caribbean, where the color line is often located between Mulatto and Black, or within the same family (→ I/26). Henry concludes that, beyond resistance to racial discourse, it is cultural affirmation of Africanness that is called for in emancipation from a hegemonic Western discursive practice. As another example, Ecuadorian novelist Estupiñan Bass creates in *El último rio* (1966) a black anti-hero who, in his attempt to use white power, mirrors white racism in his stances that border on insanity. The novel is a painstaking and daring exploration of black psyche through inner voices, madness, and self-hatred in a setting characterized by discrimination. The successful upper middle-class protagonist in Quince Duncan's *Los cuatro espejos* (1973) also loses sight of his self, waking one day unable to see his face in the mirror anymore. Only after reconnecting with his African origins outside the capital, at the Costa Rican Atlantic coast does he overcome his breakdown and the illusion of a raceless society.

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African-American literature has developed a great wealth of autobiographical forms, including testimonials, autofictional texts, as well as other forms of first-person fictions. This thematic allows for dealing with skin color and other features of the Black body. It is a first step towards examining issues of difference, but also the place of Blackness inside or opposed to Western hegemonic society, and consequently, agency. In his poem *I, too* (1998), Langston Hughes was one of the first to address (in)visibility in U.S. society, divided by the color line. Interestingly enough, a song widely known throughout the Spanish-speaking Caribbean answered the question about the place of the Black subject in a similar way. "*Y tu abuela, ¿dónde está*?" (And your grandmother, where do you hide her?), the shared answer being: in the kitchen, where Hughes' poetic voice is speaking from. Visibility, the central topic of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952), circulated throughout the Americas as it was linked to the critique of Western representation of the Black subject and to common political demands such as social recognition and, ultimately, citizenship (→ II/27).

The grandmother also alludes to ancestry: concealing skin color means concealing – shamefully – the African past, as well as slavery, which every diasporic subject of African descendant embodies by its mere existence. The issue of "blanqueamiento" (whitening), a colonial heritage of Latin America, and lingering in Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1879), is addressed as early as 1943 by the Venezuelan author Juan Pablo Sojo in *Nochebuena negra.* The novel stages the ambivalence of mestizaje as national ideology (→ Hybridity, I/30), a fiction which hinders the construction of de-hierarchized race relations in a society whose politics denies its mixed reality (→ Inter-ethnic Relations, I/12). Visibility is driven by a demand for recognition, not only of past enslavement, but also of the contributions made by slaves to the formation of the nation-state (→ Nation and State Building, I/16). Edimilson de Almeida Pereira (2007) argues that a main point of the agenda of Afro-Brazilian literature is to reexamine the national imaginary, dominated until today by essentially White colonial patterns (→ Whiteness, I/46).

The Middle Passage, the journey of millions of people into the diaspora, that threatened to cut the ties of tradition, continues to be the main conundrum. Important historical research has been carried out on its material conditions, but personal accounts are rare, except for short passages in Equiano and a few others. To the slave, the Middle Passage represents a radical and traumatic historical experience of colonial modernity that will probably stay forever in the realm of the unspeakable. Poets and novelists fill the gap, trying to voice the feelings of the recently enslaved Africans and to reflect on what they were able to preserve of their ethnic heritage and encounters with different African cultures on board (Zapata Olivella 1983). Paul Gilroy has described the slave ship as a chronotope, binding together time and space in a specific way, as a "living, microcultural, micropolitical system in motion" (1993, 4). In this sense, it represents a third space, an in-between constitutive of a Black transatlantic counter-modernity. As a part of the counter-narrative of resistance, remembering the countless deaths along the journey to the Americas, Derek Walcott (St. Lucia 1930) asks, "Where are your monuments, your battles, your martyrs?/Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,/in that grey vault. The sea. The sea/has locked them up. The sea is History" (1979).

But the Middle Passage was not so much an end as a beginning of a new culture, the result of a process of fragmentation and dissemination rather than destruction. The Guyanese novelist, poet and anthropologist Wilson Harris, reflecting on the coexistence of "continuity and discontinuity" of the African origin in the formation of Caribbean culture, interprets the Limbo dance as the embodiment of Anansi (the spider), a trickster figure of clearly

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African origin and very popular in Anglophone Caribbean folktales (Harris 1998) (→ Dance, III/7). Piled up in the hold of the ship, the slaves were only able to crouch; the human body transformed into a spider, a figure of its own dismembering. Limbo dance enacts this first moment when the dancer begins slipping under the bar, but in a second movement, the body rises again from below, reenacting its re-assembly and recovering its human shape. Thus, (Limbo) imagination is intimately linked to memory, and creativity. Both memory and imagination strive to reassemble what violence has broken into pieces. In 1992, in his Nobel Prize address, Walcott stated that this reassembling of fragments, this bridging of blanks and silences (→ Silencing, III/19), is ultimately an act of love (1998). Nevertheless, the scars of the reconstructed vase will always remind the user of its fragmentation. Walcott explicitly integrates Asian fragments, a gesture echoing the fact that African descendants share the "New World" with immigrants of Asian and European origin.

As Sharpe (2012) points out, at the end of the 20th century, the Middle Passage describes "multiple crossings that transform the meaning of diaspora into a vital and ongoing process … the temporal simultaneity of past and present suggests a narrative of history as repetition" (29). To her, Edwidge Danticat's *Children of the Sea* (1995) uses the simultaneity of past and present and the symbolic value of the Middle Passage as a space of death to interrupt a stalled temporality with the prophetic temporality of Voodoo beliefs, shifting the meaning of the Middle Passage from death to life.

Memory linking to resistance is another overarching thematic strand that runs through all other themes: resistance to colonialism, slaveholder's historiography and the contemporary consequences of slavery (→ I/18), racism (→ Race, I/39) and discrimination, leading to further rebellion and liberation. The historical figures of the maroons (*neg mawon*, *nègre marron*, *cimarrón* or *quilombola*) – the runaway slaves who founded their own, independent communities all over North, Central, South America as well as the Caribbean as early on as the 1600s (in Jamaica, Suriname, Brazil, Colombia) – became its most widely circulating motif. Edouard Glissant, in his *Discours Antillais* (1981), distinguishes between maroon activism including violence and intellectual "marooning." His fictional work develops around the topic – spanning from *Le 4e siècle* (1964) to *Ormerod* (2003) – as does the work of numerous other Caribbean authors (Rochmann 2000). In *La noche oscura del Niño Avilés* (1984), the Puerto Rican author Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá imagines an enclave of *cimarrones* (*palenque*) as a paradigmatic symbolic space where the plantation system is contested and Afro-Caribbean cultural practices evolve (→ Plantation Literature, III/15). Condé's *Traversée de la Mangrove* (1989) ascribes the descendant of the runaway slaves Xantippe the position of the subaltern, who is excluded from various forms of history (classic historiography as well as oral history) but provides, nevertheless, the novel's concluding perspective. In *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (1965), a text constitutive for the Latin American *testimonio* genre, Cuban writer and anthropologist Miguel Barnet reconstructs the life story of the runaway slave Esteban Montejo who becomes a heroic figure in the context of the Cuban Revolution (→ Life Writing, III/11). In 1980, Abdias do Nascimento published his Pan-Africanist program for Brazil under the umbrella of *quilombismo*; the same year, poet Luiz Silva aka Cuti, who had launched the journal *Cadernos negros* in 1978, founded the group *Quilombhoje* (Quilombo today).

The maroon is also linked to questions of agency, the possibility of freedom (→ I/27), the *quilombo* and *palenque* representing alternative spaces of emancipation and freedom as well as, more recently, transitional spaces. Several literary texts draw a connection between *marronage* and rebellion in their representation of the Haitian revolution (→ Revolution, II/44). In itself a widely circulated and crucial *lieu de mémoire* of successful slave emancipation that influenced the imaginary and understanding of Blackness and later of Négritude, Haiti not only became

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an important reference point for U.S.-Black intellectuals and writers. Figures such as the revolutionary leaders, especially Toussaint Louverture, circulated already broadly at the time; especially the struggle of liberation and emancipation from the 1950s onwards became a complex *lieu de mémoire*.

Caliban, Shakespeare's character of the rebellious, uncivilized islander, has come to represent this struggle between liberation and emancipation in many of the ensuing works. Aspects of Caliban can be seen in Césaire's *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963) relates closely to the process of decolonization, which in an ensuing play is taken to Congo (1966). The Black leaders of revolution later become Caliban in his rewriting of the play *The Tempest* (1969) linking various discursive and literary traditions. In 1971, Cuban literary scholar Fernández Retamar again transformed Shakespeare's character into a concept-metaphor embodying anticolonial resistance. Torres-Saillant (2006) reads this character as synecdoche of (Afro-) Caribbean culture; Brathwaite's "Caliban" (1969) is a Limbo dancer. The re-writings of these heroic figures are numerous, accentuating different aspects, pluralizing them and adding an intertextual web of references and re-interpretations (Fignolé 2004; Métellus 2003; Placoly 1983, 1994; Pasquet 2001). Lamming (1960) and Walcott (1998) rely on Caliban to discuss the question of language. In *Rosalie l'Infâme* (2003), Evelyne Trouillot proposes a literary female equivalent of the Haitian *marron* through the character of Lisette, a house slave, providing a new historical perspective, which shifts away from the emphasis on male heroes and pays tribute to invisible actors that have made Haitian history.

Formal features

For a long time, researchers assumed that slavery (→ I/18) was responsible for the disappearance or deformation of African cultural memory. At the beginning of the 20th century, anthropological studies were carried out to reconstruct the African origin of certain concepts, idiomatic expressions or figures of speech, but also of African-American religions. The assumption was that none of these aspects had survived in original condition, but had merged into creolized forms, made the search for "Africanisms" even more urgent.

Brathwaite (1974) defined four degrees of "Africanness" in (Caribbean) literature, beginning with 1) a rhetorical, romantic level; 2) a literature investigating African survivals; 3) a literature of African expression ("attempting to adapt or transform folk material into literary experiment"); 4) a literature "consciously reaching out to rebridge the gap with the spiritual heartland" (81).

Seemingly less categorical, Henry Louis Gates (1998) develops his theory around the trickster figure of Exu, the Yoruba orisha of the crossroads. In Gates' theory, Exu represents a meta-metaphor of reading and the interpretative process. Exu is indeed called for, as African-descendant literature is "mulatto," enmeshed in Western tradition while being informed by African retentions. Gates thus proposes two basic features: a) double voicing (African/Western; oral/written; profane/sacred, semantics/musical patterns, etc.), and b) an "extraordinarily self-reflexive tradition, a tradition exceptionally conscious of its history and of the simultaneity of its canonical texts" (1988, xxiv). African-descendant writing deals with fragments, and "to reassemble fragments, of course, is to engage in an act of speculation, to attempt to weave a fiction of origins and subgenerations" (xxiv). Still, the structural difference to Western writing presupposes an invariably African way of thinking, surviving all kinds of mixtures, unconscious and inescapable, somewhat negating the idea of the mulatto character of African-descendant literature.

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Anthropology has been a basic reference point for African-descendant writing in the 20th century, as it was for literary Indigenism (→ Indigeneity, I/31). It provides information on African cultures, belief systems and religious practices, linguistic documentation, visual representations and popular culture of African origins. Many authors document themselves or do field work. To name but a few: Kamau Brathwaite in Jamaica; Zapata Olivella in Colombia; in Brazil, de Almeida Pereira or Mestre Didi, a visual artist and Candomblé dignitary; Zora Neale Hurston, in the U.S. After Lydia Cabrera's debut in 1938 with *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (*Black tales of Cuba*), first published in Paris and under the surrealist influence felt by many other authors in the 1930s and 1940s, she blurred the frontier between fiction and scholarship in *El Monte* (1951). In this work, Cabrera eliminated all anthropological explanation in what is a montage of Afro-Cuban voices around the primordial Santería sanctuary by the same name.

Linked to anthropological approaches, polyphony in Latin America – in its sense of orality transcribed into the poetic and literary register – is today interpreted as a voicing of marginalized or silenced minority groups (→ Silencing, III/19) and as a form of cultural resistance. As has been argued with Indigenism, orality is seen as a critical stance against the hegemonic Hispanic or Portuguese canon, i.e. the colonial literary canon; at the same time, these works strive for recognition as part of a national literature. Until recently, the exclusion seemed due to regional discrimination, as in the case of Costa Rica, Peru or Colombia. This was reinforced by anthropological works that focused on rural areas, when in fact it coincided with racial and ethnic divides.

Since African-descendant writing is located at the crossroads between African or vernacular oral traditions and Western written traditions, at least in works claiming a commitment to African diasporic values, the question of language (→ I/13) is widely discussed. Positions on this range from Glissant (*Discours antillais*), Chamoiseau (*Chemin d'école*, 1994, *Écrire en pays dominé*, 1997) to Brathwaite and Afro-Brazilian or Afro-Costa Rican poetry (Eulalia Bernard 1991), among others. On the one hand, authors may feed from vernacular oral literature, as a repository and living archive of African culture. On the other, the text will inevitably be written in the language of the oppressor, against which the first cry of the enslaved is uttered, rising from some unspeakable location.

Interspersing Créole languages and Africanisms has been used as a means to subvert white standard practice (→ Whiteness, I/46). Another way of inscribing Africanness into the language of the former master is to structure it through musical patterns and rhythms, mainly "repetitions" – in fact variations – in which words are modulated, transformed and decomposed in order to create a dense network of significations (→ Popular Music Flows, III/16). In his poetry, Langston Hughes referred to the Blues. Ralph Ellison and Amiri Baraka – who wrote an influential book on the Blues – through to Jazz musicians such as John Coltrane, Coleman Hawkins or Thelonious Monk. In his *History of the Voice* (1984), Brathwaite argues that (African) musical structure is an underground language, expanding linguistic limitations of Western standards. Outstanding in the Spanish-language world is Nicolás Guillén, even though he quickly switched from a short period of Afro-Cubanism to "mulatto" poetry. His 1930 *Motivos de son* and 1931 *Sóngoro Cosongo*, featuring semantically undetermined onomatopoetic speech (the *jitanjáforas*) and the use of the Cuban *Son* stanza, breaking away from traditional Hispanic models, paved the way for a fusion of avant-garde poetics and contemporary Afro-Cuban urban popular culture, influential throughout Latin America.

Each of these approaches – the "catalogue of forgotten gods" set up by anthropology, "fiddling with the obvious limitations of dialect", the reduction of language to the "groan of suffering" and cult of "manic repetition" – was harshly criticized by Derek Walcott

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(1998). Opposing all other readings, Walcott celebrates Caliban's mastery of Prospero's language, which enables him to defeat his master literally on his own terms. Walcott fought a losing battle concerning the revival of African religions (→ Religious Beliefs, I/40), but in 1997 he paid tribute to Patrick Chamoiseau. The latter is one of the main experimenters with Creole language (Walcott 1998). Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco* (1997) infuses the French language with the diction of orality. Both writers unite in the effort of creolizing Caribbean literature, against Négritude and generally the Afro-centrist stance.

In *Traversée de la Mangrove* by Maryse Condé (1989) a polyphony of equally important voices calls into question the preeminent role of the intellectual. The voice of the author succumbs to the benefit of a mosaic of fragments of collective imaginary and discourse. The different voices in Duncan's *Un mensaje de Rosa* (*A message from Rosa*, 2004) narrate their view on events such as being captured, enslaved, on rebellion throughout Africa and the Americas, the middle passage, as well as alienation and self loss that comes with assimilation and economic success. The different stories that compose the novel are loosely connected by characters, recurrent motifs and an oral form of presentation. A transgenerational memory emerges from these different stories, micronarratives, told and retold. Duncan's afrorealism (2005) calls for the use of creole, ancestral memory, destruction of stereotype and inferiority. In *Changó el gran putas*, Zapata Olivella mixes in what he calls mythical realism the voices of the orisha with those of the slaves (coming from various ethnicities) and the different actors involved in the slave trade. Different time frames, dreams, visions and the main narrative of slaves compose a puzzling diegesis.

"Mythical realism" is not far from Magical realism (→ III/12), a proximity also notable in Costa-Rican Dlia McDonald's *Cofradía cimarrona. El cantante cimarrón* (2018), whose labyrinth of voices reminds of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and echoes Latin American avant-garde poetry. Peruvian Charún Illescas draws in *Malambo* (2009) a picture of the population of African descent and other ethnic groups in colonial Lima's popular quarter by the same name. Formally it draws both on costumbrist and postmodern narrative features (→ Modernism and Postmodernisms, III/14), making visible the link between African-descendant writing and classic Latin American literary currents.

Literary genres

Another, less apparent aspect of intermediality with music is the antiphonal call-and-response of African music, which provides a model for multiple perspectives particularly in theater. First-generation Caribbean authors, such as C.L.R. James (*The Black Jacobins*, 1938), Derek Walcott (*Henri Christophe: A Chronicle in Seven Scenes*, 1949), Edouard Glissant (*Monsieur Toussaint*, 1961), Aimé Césaire (*La tragédie du roi Christophe*, 1963), all have used the polyphonic genre of theater to express the complex situation of de-colonization (→ Postcolonialism, I/38). These plays give voice to the silenced subaltern agents of slave revolution and enable a complex vision of the postcolonial condition (→ Silencing, III/19).

In the sphere of prose writing, *testimonio* and first-person narrative constitute central forms of representing African-American subjectivity that re-read and counteract the anthropological self-descriptions and descriptions penned by others, which have been present since the beginning of the 20th century. Morrison (1990) pointed to the overlaps of autobiographical writing, memory, as well as questions of visibility and difference with the genre of slave narrative aiming to inscribe gendered and racialized subjectivities into a collective status quo. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the classical slave narrative (→ III/20) has served as an important intertext and reference for first-person narratives. The "contemporary narratives of slavery"

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(Keizer 2004; also termed neo-slave narratives, see Rushdy 1999; Smith 2007) often fill the void in historiography as well as in the first slave narratives, emphasizing gendered black subject-formation (Morrison 1987; Santos Febres 2009) (→ Gender Identities, I/28). In Latin America, these narratives find their equivalent in the testimonial tradition (Beverley 1996). Based on oral histories, testimonial literature often deals with the tension between the scribe/editor and narrator/witness of recounted events. A hybrid genre between the oral and the written, literature and non-literature, suggesting authenticity, *testimonio* nevertheless developed a fictional branch called *novela testimonial*.

African diaspora autobiographical writing has also explored the complex dynamics between individual and collective identity-formation in female writers, spanning from *autohistoria*, to autoethnography and auto-fiction (→ Life Writing, III/11). "Biomythography" is a term Audre Lorde provides for her female artist's novel *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) – indicative of the transformation of the protagonist into a black lesbian poet – provides a model for numerous autobiographical texts by women of color throughout and beyond the U.S. context. The Puerto Rican author Arroyo Pizarro positions her collection of short stories *Las Negras* (2012) explicitly in both literature by women of color, as well as the neo-slave narrative. Carolina María de Jesús' diary *O quarto do despejo* (1960) on her life in the Canindé favela of São Paulo brought autobiographical writing of Afro-descendants into the Brazilian and Latin American context, where the genre nevertheless did not take root. This is perhaps because poetry, exploring subjectivity, has functions similar to autobiographical writing. Her text is an important source for Afro-Brazilian Female writing in both poetry and fiction, as well as for the recently emerged *escrita periférica*, fictions located in the favelas. The best-known novel of this genre remains *Cidade de Deus*, by Paulo Lins (1997).

Poetry makes up a large share of African-descendant literatures. Once informed by anthropological and linguistic studies as well as the above-mentioned references to African-descendant music styles, these approaches are far from exhausting the works of poets like the Colombian Jorge Artel, whose thematics and formal language exceed regionalism and oral style. Newer tendencies in Brazil, represented by poets Arnaldo Xavier (1948–2004) and Ronald Augusto, experiment with concrete poetry and visual poems. Both writers create a dialogue, as de Almeida Pereira (2007) puts it, between different cultural (i.e. Western and African) references. Ronald Augusto, against the politics of the *Quilombhoje* group and its founder Luiz Silva (Cuti), exceeds Pereira's circumspection coining the poetics of "transnegressão" and, thus, refusing the "senzala" (the slave quarter) of identitarian categorization (Augusto 2007). These texts stand for the great formal diversity achieved in contemporary African-descendant writing.

Circulation/transfers

Augusto's position reconnects to Baldwin's problem with being a black writer. The moral imperative to speak up for his/her community, be it through cultural and/or stylistic identity markers, has come under scrutiny since Walcott bade farewell to his African and European ancestors. The specter of the "sellout," the traitor – often embodied in the hybrid, the "degenerate" *mulato/a* – is lingering in definitions such as Eduardo de Assis Duarte's five points. All of these points must be present: 1) the topics, 2) the author, 3) his point of view (a worldview totally identified with the history and culture of his/her community), 4) the vocabulary and certain discursive particularities of that group, 5) a specific audience with which the text wishes to communicate (Duarte 2008). In this sense, Boisseron (2014) speaks of "Creole renegades" when discussing the work of Jamaica

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Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Dany Laferrière or Maryse Condé. All are second-generation diaspora writers who relate to their community from a distance, which seems questionable while being both productive and ambivalent. Laferrière's irony later evolved into a subdued tonality, contrasting the categories very much in vogue among critics of Latin American literatures (such as Neobaroque or Carnivalization) – supposedly subversions of Western canon. In 2008, he published his statement on identity politics: *Je suis un écrivain japonais* (*I am a Japanese writer*). However, it is not necessarily the diaspora's diaspora that creates this distance. Augusto's point is also that important writers like Machado de Assis, or Cruz e Sousa, traditionally accused of their lack of Afro-centric consciousness, become interesting again when these political and moral (ideological) criteria are loosened.

Common backgrounds, identical geographical or historical circumstances do not translate into similar or at least comparable literary forms or styles. Rather, the multifarious forms of exchange of actors and works across national, linguistic and regional borderlines are just as important. This entangled history remains to be written. In many cases, research on motifs, thematic and formal specificities of African diaspora literature rely on a *pars pro toto* principle: whatever the focus of research, e.g. author, region, forms of interaction among artists, groups of artists or movements, it will be taken to represent the whole. The cultural origins or identities of the actors in question usually seem to provide an acceptable frame for these interactions. Researchers tend to ignore the danger of essentialist approaches and minimize references to local specificities.

Some encounters have caught the attention of researchers, e.g. Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén, Claude McKay's involvement in the Harlem Renaissance, the friendship between Zapata Olivella and Abdias do Nascimento, Cuba and the Civil Rights Movement, Aimé Césaire and Lydia Cabrera or Wifredo Lam. Glissant wrote on Faulkner, inscribing the American South into the Caribbean coastline. Walcott and Chamoiseau were able to have conversations in Creole, etc. Summing up, it is safe to say that Aimé Césaire, Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, Fanon, Gilroy and Glissant are the most frequently quoted authors of the African diaspora in the Americas. Some represent theoretical positions – Glissant, creolization (→ Hybridity, I/30), Gilroy, the transatlantic dimension (→ Atlantic, I/3), Fanon, a third-world point of view – while others have made an artistic impact: Guillén, Césaire, Hughes. However, these are only fragments of an aesthetic history of the relevant texts of these literatures, their translations and moments of reception. Institutions, groups and movements, journals, university departments, etc. must also be addressed. Common issues and features are undoubtedly present, but so are discontents, shortcomings and adjustments. The study of the circulation of ideas, transfers and debates is crucial for any tentative survey of the African diaspora literatures in the Americas, beginning with Pan-Africanism, *Négritude*, Afrocentrism and the influence these currents had on national or regional level. Interestingly enough, Augusto – with the original version of his text published in 1995 – seems to anticipate what the curator Thelma Golden, director of the Studio Museum Harlem, together with Glenn Ligon would come to call "Postblack Art" popularizing the term in the 2001 *Freestyle* exhibition.

The necessarily arbitrary spotlights this article sheds on the African-descendant literatures of the Americas bring to light different ongoing research questions in terms of esthetics, topics and affiliations. How can the relationship between creolization and Africanness, tradition and transformation be described? The creolization paradigm (Glissant) is associated with Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz' concept of transculturation (1940) that stresses the dynamics of mutual transformation, affecting the dominant as well as the dominated groups, White, Black and Indigenous (Hall 2003). Creolization thus designates the relation

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between different cultures. How has this relation been shaped in the different regional African-descendant literatures, in Afro-centric circles, or in Brazil, engaged in a process of "construction" of Afro-Brazilian expression? In the light of this paradigm should be also reexamined the relationship between African-descendant writing and Poesía negrista – often considered superficial, inauthentic and exoticist (Puertorican Luis Palés Matos, Cuban Emilio Ballagas among other "white" poets). If, as Gates points out, all Black writing is essentially "mulatto", i.e. creolized, this does not mean that Africanness, whether mythic or reconstructed, should be put to rest: it is the tension between African retentions and appropriation of Western features, in literature as well as in visual arts, that has certainly stirred the creativity of African-descendant writing.

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