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Presentation

The Emerging Paradigm of South-South Comparison

José Luís Jobim[1]
Waïl Seddiq Hassan[2]

Silvio Renato Jorge
Editor-in-chief
(Literature)

This special issue of *Gragoatá* focuses on the emerging paradigm of South-South comparison. We invited submissions that address the following questions: What conceptions of comparison can be developed if we connect literatures from the Global South to one another? How can South-South comparison contribute to rethinking the scope and limits of postcoloniality? What type(s) of similarity or interconnection can be a basis for comparison between the literatures of the Global South? What types of hegemony and resistance become visible when considering the Global South as a category of Comparative Literature? What is the role of diaspora and minorities in constituting or challenging conceptions of nation and nationality in the Global South? How are these diasporas erased and/or remembered to define what constitutes national identities? What is at stake in interpreting different literary and cultural traditions within the broad frame of reference of the Global South?

At least since the nineteenth century, the dominant strand of the academic discipline that came to be known as Comparative Literature has declared itself internationalist, opposed to narrow nationalism. But this has been a highly qualified internationalism, more expansive and generous in theory than in practice. Although geopolitics has not been a frequent topic in the disciplinary discussions of Comparative Literature, the discipline has historically been steeped in European rivalries that

[1]Universidade Federal Fluminense, Instituto de Letras, Departamento de Ciências da Linguagem, Niterói, RJ, Brazil.
E-mail: jjobim@id.uff.br
[2]University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Department of Comparative Literature, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA.
E-mail: whassan@illinois.edu

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resulted in the valorization of a few national literatures (French, British, German, and to a lesser extent Spanish and Italian) and the neglect of smaller European literatures. Likewise, histories of the discipline begin with the German-French context of the 1820s-1830s, while earlier beginnings for both the discipline of Comparative Literature and the idea of world literature in Spanish-Italian literary dialogues of the 1780-1790s are systematically erased (Hassan, 2019, 2021).

Accordingly, criteria developed within a few European traditions were used to disqualify or classify others as inferior, both within Europe and beyond, including the written and oral traditions of Asia, Africa and the original peoples of the Americas and Oceania, many of which have existed for thousands of years. In comparing the "New World" to the Old, "theories of lack" (Jobim, 2023) often prevailed, such that the "New" was found to be lacking in comparison to what is already known. This is certainly also true of older Asian literatures, such as the Arabic, the Chinese, the Indian, the Japanese, and the Persian.

Although the political independence of Latin American colonies in the nineteenth century, and of most Asian and African nations in the twentieth, was important in itself, it did not guarantee cultural independence. As Machado de Assis wrote in 1873, "That other independence [i.e. the cultural] has neither a September Seventh [Brazil's Independence Day] nor Campo de Ipiranga [the place where Emperor Pedro I declared Brazil's independence]. This will not be done in one day but slowly so that it can be enduring. It will not be the work of one generation or two; many more will labor until it has been completed" (Assis, 2018, p. 407). Even today, there is little doubt that Eurocentrism persists in numerous cultural spheres throughout the former colonies.

This is especially true in literary studies. The expansion of the discipline of Comparative Literature since the 1980s to include literatures from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and South and East Asia, not to mention previously marginalized European and North American traditions, has rarely challenged the centrality of major European literatures. Many positions staked against the old Eurocentric matrix, including post-colonial studies, have often preserved Europe as a point of reference and main interlocutor in what was previously called the Third World, or today the Global South, thus perpetuating Eurocentric practices of critical and literary valorization/devaluation, inclusion/exclusion. Prioritizing the relations among regions of the Global South, or what we are calling "South-South comparison," points the way out of this impasse, albeit without guarantees so long as Eurocentric criteria, concepts, theories, and frameworks continue to guide the work of comparison. In other words, a different epistemology needs to guide the work of South-South comparison if it is to renew Comparative Literature.

In a sense, the notion of the "Global South" itself may be seen as a Eurocentric concept. It began as an economic designation proposed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to refer to Africa,

Latin America, the Caribbean, most of Asia, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) to distinguish it from the "Global North" (North America and Europe, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand). The "Global South," thus replaces pejorative terms such as the "Third World" and its post-Cold-War successor the "Developing world"—both of them comparative within a Western-centric theory of development. In that sense, "Global South" is offered as an alternative comparative term, a supposedly value-neutral discursive equivalent to the "Global North."

But there is another genealogy to the concept of "Global South" that locates its beginnings in the anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles which animated movements such as the Black International of the 1920s-1930s, the Non-Allied Movement that emerged from the Bandung Conference of 1955, the Tricontinental Movement of the 1960s, and more recently organizations such as the BRICS. Far from accepting the global order benefitting former and current imperialisms, this form of Global South solidarity, whose genealogy is analyzed by Anne Garland Mahler (2018) in *From the Tricontinental to the Global South*, seeks to change the status quo on both the geopolitical and the cultural plane.

In literary studies, the term "Global South" has come to be used more widely than in international relations, referring primarily to the literatures and cultures from regions covered by the term, but also to literatures and cultures of disadvantaged minorities within the "Global North" and to minority literatures within the "Global South" itself. Indeed, Theo D'haen (2025) argues, in his contribution to this issue, that criticisms of Eurocentrism tend to consider Europe as an undifferentiated bloc, overlooking what may be described as "an intra-European South-South relationship if one directly compares works from two or more European so-called minor or smaller literatures."

The concept also covers a wide range of already existing practices within established frameworks, such as postcolonial language spheres — the Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Lusophone — and their corresponding language-specific departments. A legacy of European colonial empires, work in these areas tends to be confined within one or two of those languages, although it may well group together different national or regional traditions, such as studies of Latin America and the Caribbean, Lusophone Africa and Brazil, francophone Africa and the Caribbean, or Anglophone South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Within these frameworks, countries and regions with multiple languages tend to be divided along linguistic lines, such that Arabic and Francophone North African literatures are studied separately; likewise, Caribbean literatures in English, French, and Spanish are studied in their respective language departments but rarely comparatively.

Another already established framework within which South-South relations are examined is U.S.-style area studies, which include Latin American and Caribbean studies, African studies, Middle East

studies, South Asian studies, and East Asian studies. In each of these multidisciplinary fields, majority and minority cultures and traditions are studied across several countries within the same macro-geographical region. One example of comparative studies within an inter-regional, or area studies, framework is the previous issue of *Gragoatá* (vol. 29, no. 65, 2024), which dealt with the work of an important comparatist, Ana Pizarro (1985), who coordinated debates on literature in Latin America and edited the three volumes of *América Latina: palavra, literatura e cultura*. Those debates and publications represent an example of South-South intellectual cooperation, albeit within one region, and a collective attempt to construct ways of seeing literature and culture that still give rise to heated discussions today.

Another established area is that of ethnic and racial minorities, such as African diaspora studies or indigenous studies. These may present special problems when major and minor traditions are in question. In the case of the northern region of Brazil, for example, Carvalho, Santos, Mibielli and Campos (2025) consider that, among other things, "the tradition that exists is not configured as literary, in the sense of being published, but as a narrative tradition, and by narrative we mean the tradition of orality, as support for the development of indigenous verbal arts." The very notion of "cultural void" (Mibielli, 2017, p. 237), applied to the Amazon, would be derived from the application of inadequate criteria that use the southeastern and southern regions of Brazil as a model, in which there is a strong presence of print culture.

In the field Comparative Literature, a discipline that has always centered Europe and which requires the study of literature not only across national borders but also and fundamentally in multiple languages, the South-South paradigm would represent a significant breakthrough if the combination of languages and literatures studied does not fall within established patterns of area and postcolonial studies. This type of work represents a new trend in Comparative Literature, and it faces obstacles due to the fact that it requires knowledge of languages not commonly studied together, but it is a growing trend. Examples include work on Arab-Latin American literatures (Abdel-Nasser, 2022), Arab-Argentine (Civantos, 2007), Arab-Brazilian relations (Hassan, 2024), Egyptian-Cuban (Morsi), African-South Asian studies (Desai, 2013), South Atlantic studies (Bystrom; Slaughter, 2017).

It is important to keep in mind, however, that even anti-Eurocentric positions often continue to use Eurocentric frames of reference or maintain Europe as one of the poles of the comparison. Although South-South relations are sometimes examined within the established frameworks of postcolonial and area studies, this should not obscure the fact that their operative or overarching paradigm remains that of North-South, since the historical constitution of those fields of study was premised on centrality of colonial or imperial relations. The question, then ought to be, what type of new knowledge does the South-South paradigm enable?

Does that knowledge reinforce existing power structures, or does it offer a decolonial alternative of the kind described by Walter Mignolo and Karen Walsh (2018)?[1] It is our hope that the theme of this special issue and the articles included in will stimulate reflection on those and other relevant questions.

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