

JOINT INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP
**Hopes and Fears: Anti-colonial and Postcolonial Imaginaries
in the *Lusotopy* and Beyond**

This story is imaginary.
The actions are imaginary.
The characters are imaginary.
The country is imaginary-it has no name even.
Reader/listener: may the story take place in the country of your choice!
The story has no fixed time. - Ngūgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Matigari*

Project Description:

For decades, we have witnessed the transformation of the debates on postcolonialism and decolonisation. Decolonisation movements, primarily animated by the spirit of the 1955 Bandung Conference, where “Third World” countries strove to form an alternative front against colonialism and great power politics, have since seeped through various corners of the “Global North” and “Global South”. The 20th-century anti-colonial demands are now transmuted and extended through the exponential calls to decolonise: from the curriculum, the city, the museum, governance, the mind, and even the decolonisation movement itself, which compelled a global confrontation of the colonial pasts and prospects of decolonised futures. Nevertheless, what is conceived as a source of hope, a “horizon of expectations” (Koselleck, 1993), has also become a ruse for those in power that incite fear for what Frantz Fanon calls the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon, 1961).

The “Third World” concept itself is currently undergoing intense epistemological renewal. Considered obsolete from the 1980s onwards, then “old-fashioned” (Wallerstein, 2000: 18) during the following decade, it has recently been the subject of rereadings that go beyond the simple geographical or geopolitical dimension, or the framework of a notion widely mobilised by development experts. Tracing the trajectory of a notion widely used between the 1950s and 1970s, Argentinian historian Martín Bergel insists on the creative potential of this “formidable reservoir of images and narratives linked to possible future redemptions” (Bergel, 2019: 131), catalysing hopes of emancipation. One of the central tensions identified in a recent bibliography (Parrot & Atwood Lawrence, 2022; Field Jr., Krepp & Pettinà, 2020; Maasri, Bergin & Burke, 2022; Prakash & Adelman, 2023) lies in the paradox between the internationalism advocated by European leftists who identified with particular anti-colonial demands, and the nationalisms asserted during national liberation and revolutionary movements developing intense and dynamic South-South relations.

Such ambivalences that sustain the interplay between hope and fear are no less felt in the present condition of former Portuguese colonies, or what we refer to here as

“Lusotopy”, an *imagined geography* (Said, 1979; Cahen & Dos Santos, 2018), replete with intertwined histories and overlapping territories, representations of space and time that are suspect to rearticulations, resignifications, and critique. Like other former colonies, the nationalist and independence movements in the Lusotopy inspired struggles in the neighbouring countries and across the globe as they imagined a future disentangled from colonialism. Yet, also like many other former colonies, their postcolonial present/s are marked by uneven development, neocolonial expropriation, corruption, cronyism, violence, authoritarianism, and other tormenting realities that eclipsed anti-colonial imaginaries, leading to postcolonial disillusionment and anxieties. Indeed, the arrested fruition of these imaginaries remains an important subject in scholarly debates, policy analysis, and popular discussions, especially in the global south.

It is precisely the precarious divergence of the past from the present that constitutes this project’s main thrust: the need to “go back” or revisit the imaginaries of the past to understand why and how the decolonisation continues to be a process and unrealised end, in the Lusotopy and beyond. We use the trope of imaginary to capture the fluid web of dreams, fantasies, and ideas that formed and informed a “framework of new consciousness” for the colonised (see Anderson, 2016). It also prompts, invoking Ngũgĩ, a candid confrontation with postcolonial realities directed towards renewal, to “represent a degraded reality in order to sublimate it”, where possibilities for self-incarnation and -actualisation continue to emerge despite the disillusionment that followed Independence, and the new (neo)liberal world order (Cheah, 2003). Indeed, the fifty years since the end of Portuguese African colonial rule give an ample distance to critically revisit Lusotopian imaginaries, intending to reflect upon what can be reclaimed, discarded, or repurposed in view of the future.

Thus, this project of a Joint International Workshop between the **Institute of Contemporary History of the NOVA University of Lisbon** (IHC-NOVA), the **University of São Paulo** (USP), and the **Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul** (PUCRS) aims to forge a transnational and innovative collaboration for knowledge exchange to develop theories and concepts, and consider this history from a comparative and diverse perspective.

We want to draw links, connect researchers and researchers, and offer alternative imaginaries of the future. Aside from reflecting upon anti-colonial and postcolonial imaginaries, this project also raises questions that de/link the past to the present: How does revisiting anti-colonial and postcolonial imaginaries transform our understanding of present-day politics in the former Portuguese colonies? How have our interpretations of these imaginaries of anticolonialism, postcolonialism and decolonisation as moving targets enabled or stifled (or imprisoned) alternatives? Indeed, why do we need to interrogate these imaginaries and the histories/stories that inform them? How can interrogating these imaginaries from a transnational

perspective, as well as subjecting them to multiple, yet entangled, temporalities and spatialities, affect the formation of collective visions of the future?

From an action-research perspective, we would finally like to make a modest attempt to reflect on the possible contributions that such collective work could make. The “Global South” faces countless challenges that anti-colonial thinkers and movements did not anticipate. Climate change, the possibility of a nuclear catastrophe, AI and technology, the rise of right-wing populism and other pressing issues induce anxieties and dread that appear to be global, borderless, and thus far removed from the “nation-building” projects of the past. Nevertheless, we also think of these issues as reasons to revisit anti-colonial utopias as reflections and action points.

This project invites scholars, artists, political analysts and activists to explore and debate these questions through theorising, archival research, analysis of literary works such as novels (e.g. Pepetela’s *A Geração da Utopia*), poetry, and autobiographies, filmes, among other things, under one of more of these sub-themes :

- **Decolonised utopias, postcolonial anxieties**, where we examine utopian hopes and the anxieties accompanying the “failed” realisation of utopian dreams *during* and after the anti-colonial and liberation struggles, or how attempts to realise utopias expose its dystopic underside. This could also include discussions about various shades of Afro-pessimisms and new waves of utopianism (e.g. Messianism).
- **Circulating and travelling utopias**, alluding to Edward Said’s notion of travelling theories, this theme explores how utopian visions have travelled through neighbouring countries and across continents, examining how they were interpreted, appropriated and transformed by the receiving agents from a transnational or comparative historical perspective. Possible topics include the reception of Third Worldism in the USSR, the influence of Latin America in Africa and vice versa, and Asia-Africa relations.
- **The role of intellectuals, “passeurs”, actors in the mediation between worlds**, where we can examine how figures of decolonisation helped mobilised ideas and peoples, compare ideas of decolonisation then and now, and how they have shaped various modes of resistance after Independence.
- **Tricontinentalism and the future of Global South**, where we aim to challenge persistent allusion to the Cold War bipolar divide and revisit the concepts and aspirations that animated the courage to envision a world beyond this great power politics. We can also examine current alternatives such as BRICS rise of China from the perspective of utopian/dystopian politics.

- **Memory, forgetting, and the politics of ignorance**, where we tackle the use and abuse of memory, agents, stories and materialities left out in the discourse, and how authoritarian-leaning leaders pursue historical revisionism.
- **Politics and governance in “post” colonial Lusotopia**, where we look at the absolute distance between the parties stemming from the national liberation movements and the parties currently in power (PAIGC, MPLA, FRELIMO, etc.) and the move from a liberating utopia to a state of seeming perpetual captivity under authoritarian governments.

Quoted references:

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- Cahen, Michel & Dos Santos, Irène (2018), “Lusotopie, Lusotopy. What Legacy, What Future?”, *Lusotopie*, nº 17, vol. 2, p. 187-203.
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- Fanon, Frantz (1961), *Les Damnés de la Terre*, Paris: Éditions Maspéro.
- Field Jr., Thomas C., Krepp, Stella & Pettinà, Vanni, *Latin America and the Global Cold War*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Koselleck, Reinhart (1993), “ ‘Espacio de experiencia’ y ‘horizonte de expectativa’, dos categorías históricas”, *Futuro pasado. Para una semántica de los tiempos históricos*, Buenos Aires: Paidós, p. 333-357.
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- Parrot, R. Joseph, Atwood Lawrence, Mark (2022), *The Tricontinental Revolution. Third World Radicalism and The Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prakash, Gyan & Adelman, Jeremy (2023), *Inventing the Third World. In Search of Freedom for the Postwar Global South*, Londres: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Said, Edward (1979), *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2000), “C’était quoi, le tiers-monde?”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, nº557 (August).

Future Activities and Planning Calendar

14th March 2025

First information meeting in Lisbon with colleagues interested in the project, after circulating the scientific rationale and intentions. Creation of a dynamic pool of participants for initiatives and activities.

10h-13h

Room B301 (Torre B) FCSH, Avenida de Berna, Lisbon

Between March 17 and 20, 2025

JIW organizing committee internal meeting with Brazilian members Marçal Paredes (PUCRS) and Alexandre Moreli (USP).

July 2025

First webinar (short online event: 2 or 3 hours)

Think of an original format and possible speakers

+ informal meeting in Lisbon with the pool

December 2025 or January 2026 (2 days)

First Presential Workshop in Lisbon

“Poetry of Revolutions”: Combined or mixed imaginaries. Expectations, Dreams, Fears in the Independence of the PALOP *and beyond*”

⇒ Call to announce in June 2025

Late 2026

Second Workshop/Conference on broadly on anticolonialism, postcolonialism decolonisation/decoloniality and the politics of governing.

⇒ Look for external fundings?

⇒ Call to announce in the spring 2026

Other possible activities/outputs

- Edited Volumes
- Exhibitions
- Special Issue on “Fanon” or “Fanon/s” in *Lusotopie*
- International Conferences/Workshop
- Course/Seminar/lunch lecture series (co-taught with visiting/invited scholars, practitioners, artists)