

THE GLOBAL SOUTH ATLANTIC



KERRY BYSTROM & JOSEPH R. SLAUGHTER

EDITORS

"*The Global South Atlantic* is a critically important contribution to current debates and discussions toward remapping the cultural and political geographies of global literary and media production. Specifically, one could mention the changed and changing valences of terms like 'Third World,' the waning disciplinary and curricular influence of 'postcolonial,' and the disputations around questions of globalization, the undecidability of the parameters of the 'global South,' and the continuing impact of Paul Gilroy's idea of the 'black Atlantic.' The argument that underwrites the project of the 'global South Atlantic' is at once incisive in its recapitulation of recent intellectual history and even prescient in its anticipation of new directions in area/cultural/regional/international studies across myriad disciplines of the humanities and social sciences."—BARBARA HARLOW, University of Texas at Austin

NOT ONLY WERE MORE AFRICAN SLAVES TRANSPORTED TO SOUTH AMERICA THAN TO NORTH, but overlapping imperialisms and shared resistance to them have linked Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean for more than five centuries. Yet despite the rise in transatlantic, oceanic, hemispheric, and regional studies, and even the growing interest in South–South connections, the South Atlantic has not yet emerged as a site that captures the attention it deserves.

The Global South Atlantic traces literary exchanges and interlaced networks of communication and investment—financial, political, sociocultural, libidinal—across and around the southern ocean. From Spanish to Arabic, the book shows the range of ways people, governments, political movements, social imaginaries, cultural artifacts, goods, and markets cross the South Atlantic, or sometimes fail to cross.

As a region made up of multiple intersecting regions, and as a vision made up of complementary and competing visions, the South Atlantic can be understood only comparatively. Exploring the Atlantic as an effect of structures of power and knowledge that issue from the Global South as much as from Europe and North America, *The Global South Atlantic* helps to rebalance global literary studies by making visible a multi-textured South Atlantic system that is neither singular nor stable.

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The Global South Atlantic

KERRY BYSTROM
and JOSEPH R. SLAUGHTER
Editors

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INTRODUCTION

The Sea of International Politics

Fluidity, Solvency, and Drift in the Global South Atlantic

Joseph R. Slaughter and Kerry Bystrom

When Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt made their Joint Declaration of “hopes for a better future of the world” from a warship off the coast of Newfoundland on August 14, 1941, they were not thinking about the South Atlantic. They were anticipating a formal North Atlantic Anglo-American military alliance against German aggression and looking forward to a postwar peace that might, in the Charter’s words, “afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want,” based on principles of “sovereign rights and self government” and “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.”¹ The Joint Declaration, released to the press by cablegram and delivered to the world by radio operators aboard the ships, was quickly dubbed the “Atlantic Charter,” lending the name of the sea that both separated and united the United States and the United Kingdom to oceanic principles of liberty and peace intended to inspire (potential) allies and to reassure others of the justness of their war aims. Within six months, the Charter’s grand rhetorical commitments to the rights of “all the men in all the lands” to territorial sovereignty and democratic governance would be cited as the “common program of purposes and principles”

for the “Declaration by United Nations” that expanded its scope beyond the North Atlantic and laid the legal foundations for the later Charter of the United Nations in 1945. However, despite its promises and lofty principles for a “New World Order” (as many then described it), the first effect of the Atlantic Charter was to fortify the Anglo-American alliance between the old and new empires, and it ultimately secured the Anglophone North Atlantic hegemony to come.

Yet, while Roosevelt and Churchill may not have had the South Atlantic or other oceans in mind when they issued their statement to the world, many people living in the shadows of empire were already thinking about these North Atlantic promises and oceanic “expectation[s] of national self-determination” (Grovgui 1996, 146). Seeming to “have application to all the peoples of the world,” as the British West Indian anti-imperialist George Padmore insisted (Cunard and Padmore 2002, 137), the Charter fanned heated debates about “the legitimacy of colonialism and the shape of post-war internationalism” (Ibhawoh 2014, 835), both in colonial capitals and across the still vast terrains of empires. On his return from the Atlantic conference, Churchill felt compelled to assure his compatriots in Parliament that he intended only to restore self-government to European nations occupied by Germany, but he and Roosevelt soon had to answer questions about the extension of Atlantic Charter principles of self-determination to the great mass of “dependent peoples” still living under European colonial domination. In November 1941, Nnamdi Azikiwe, then editor of the *West African Pilot* and later the first president of Nigeria, cabled Churchill to ask, “Are we fighting for security of Europeans to enjoy the four freedoms while West Africa continues on pre-war status? . . . We respectfully request your clarification of the applicability of the Atlantic Charter regarding Nigeria. This will enable us to appreciate the correct bearing of 21 million Negroes in the sea of international politics” (quoted in Padmore 1942, 236).

On the other side of the North Atlantic, Roosevelt received a letter from Mohandas K. Gandhi pointing out that “the Allied Declaration that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow, so long as India, and for that matter, Africa are exploited by Great Britain, and America has the Negro problem in her own home” (quoted in Borgwardt 2005, 545). The African American and Caribbean press propelled the anticolonial interpretation of the Charter forward, strengthening transatlantic intellectual and political solidarities throughout what, fifty years later, would become known as the “Black Atlantic” (Von Eschen 1997, 25–28). For example, W. E. B. DuBois was

invited, along with future Ghanaian leaders Ebenezer Ako-Adjei and Francis (Kwame) Nkrumah (then students at Lincoln University in the United States), and others, to help prepare a 1942 study by a New York-based Committee on Africa, the War, and Peace Aims that outlined a plan for the application of Atlantic Charter principles of individual rights and collective self-government to a postwar, postcolonial Africa (Committee on Africa 1942).

Efforts to leverage the ideals of the Atlantic Charter proliferated around the globe. The Philippine statesman Carlos Romulo described the document as a “flame of hope,” and Algerian nationalist Ferhat Abbas invoked it as support for the cause of independence from France (Klose 2013, 22–25). In the Dumbarton Oaks negotiations that led to the founding of the United Nations, it was Latin American representatives from the old South Atlantic colonies of the Spanish and Portuguese empires who insisted on “amendments relating to the position of dependent peoples and to self-determination”; they cited the Atlantic Charter as an international precedent (Brownlie 1970, 97). Those same principles later helped to consolidate domestic and international opposition to dictatorships across Latin America (Liss 1984, 36). Indeed, as Elizabeth Borgwardt notes, in the wake of the declaration of what became known as the Atlantic Charter, “anti-colonial activists began to demand a ‘Pacific Charter,’ an ‘African Charter,’ or a ‘World Charter’ as companions to the Atlantic one” (2005, 554). This pressure pushed Roosevelt to contradict Churchill in early 1942 by announcing that “The Atlantic Charter applies not only to the parts of the world that border the Atlantic, but to the whole world; disarmament of aggressors, self-determination of nations and peoples, and the four freedoms—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear” (quoted in Committee on Africa 1942, 30). Writing in 2005, Borgwardt calls this reading of the Joint Declaration “Mandela’s Charter” (532), relocating the Charter’s spirit to the opposite pole of the Atlantic based on the South African president’s later recollection in *Long Walk to Freedom*: “Inspired by the Atlantic Charter and the fight of the Allies against tyranny and oppression, the ANC created its own charter . . . [so that] ordinary South Africans would see that the principles they were fighting for in Europe were the same ones we were advocating for at home” (Mandela 1994, 83–84).

Thus, while the Charter strengthened the transatlantic bonds of imperial and proto-imperial power that came to dominate world affairs (manifested most powerfully in the subsequent formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949), it also internationalized principles that would

form part of the legal basis for anti-imperial, anticolonial, and antidictatorial struggles across the Global South (often conducted against the two countries that originally made the Joint Declaration). Indeed, the Atlantic Charter principles of self-determination and territorial sovereignty were later reaffirmed in the Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference at Bandung in 1955 and again reconditioned for militant anti-imperialism in the General Declaration of the First Tricontinental Conference (which we might think of as the Global South Atlantic Charter) of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America held in Havana, Cuba, in 1966.² Drawing on the language of promises made (and betrayed) in the North Atlantic, those struggles reshaped global politics and postcolonial societies and cultures for the rest of the twentieth century; they not only remade the modes and terms of transnational and trans-regional political association, military alliance, and economic and cultural cooperation (and contest), but they also created new imperatives for renewed forms of associative thinking and comparative study.

The essays collected in *The Global South Atlantic* respond to this imperative to compare in order to trace pathways, networks, transactions, and systems of interchange and imagination that have historically defined the South Atlantic (and that continue to drive its futures) but are obscured or suppressed by the hegemonic North Atlantic orientation of knowledge production and the division of disciplines tasked with producing it. This collection brings together a wide variety of approaches to studying the South Atlantic in order to explore ways to read productively both what is and what is not (or what is no longer) visible even to an oceanic approach like Atlantic studies that too often retreats to a description of systems of transatlantic exchange or that merely documents some relations between regions, primarily Europe and the United States. The frameworks and varied modes of comparison brought to bear on the topic in this volume sometimes complement and sometimes chafe against each other, creating a productive friction that reveals closures not only in Northward-tilted academic formations but also in certain renewed investments (both libidinal and literal) in the Global South and South-South linkages. We ultimately pose the South Atlantic as a problem. It may be a geopolitical *region* (think of, say, a “South Atlantic Rim”), yet at the same time it is also a *vision*, an ideal or aspiration of solidarity and interconnection (whether across the South Atlantic Ocean or between Southern locales, as the Global South imagines the Atlantic) that has come to pass (or not) precisely because of the structural and epistemological impediments that make the

South Atlantic difficult to apprehend as a coherent region. To help establish this bifocal perspective, this introduction draws from the story of the Atlantic Charter and its variegated implications for and uses in the Global South a series of questions about how we might best grasp the heterogeneous space of the South Atlantic historically, conceptually, and methodologically.

New International Formations

The New World Order that followed World War II brought new international institutions, such as the United Nations, and new regional alliances and associations, such as NATO, the Eastern Bloc, and the Non-Aligned Movement among others, along with new contests of power during the era of decolonization and the Cold War. These arrangements had implications not only for geopolitics and economics but also for the liberal arts and sciences, making some new forms of studying and thinking about the world possible while overshadowing and undercutting others. The NATO-centrism that characterized the approach to global affairs among the powerful North Atlantic nations fostered and demanded new academic formations and organizational approaches to knowledge in order to make sense of (and often to better dominate) the new dispensations of the international political order. Just as Oriental and African studies emerged in Europe in the context of imperial pursuits in the nineteenth century, area studies, as is well known, originated in the United States to serve foreign policy interests and military objectives of the new hegemon. In a sense, then, area studies in the North Atlantic was a Cold War enterprise designed to help manage any realization in the Third World of the sorts of promises of self-determination and territorial sovereignty made in the Atlantic Charter—that is, area studies could be understood as the academic mode of containing the troublesome aspirations underwritten by the Atlantic Charter and the international institutions built on its unmoored foundation. (Of course, many scholars housed in area studies centers have resisted the original instrumental impulse that brought the research institutes into being.) And postcolonial studies, world systems analysis, Third World studies, various transnational regionalisms, and oceanic studies could be understood as alternative academic formations that have sought to challenge the alliance between area studies knowledge and neoimperialism. Yet, all of these rubrics emerged as modes of understanding and managing the realignment and redistribution of power, people, resources, and solidarities around

the world. Those rubrics had implications for the fields that most concern us in this volume—cultural studies, history, and especially comparative literature—that have changed the way we talk about cultural and social interactions among peoples.

It could be argued that the Atlantic Charter helped to spawn modern oceanic thinking in the postwar era of new internationalism that imagined a sea basin and its rim as both a “physical unity” and a “human unit,” as Fernand Braudel described the Mediterranean in his seminal 1949 study (1995, 231).³ Indeed, according to Bernard Bailyn, the academic field of Atlantic history emerged from the postwar “Atlanticist climate” on both sides of the northern ocean, treating “the Atlantic world” as a single “unit, historically as well as politically” (2005, 15). The task of the Atlantic historian was to document the networks of political, economic, and intellectual transactions across and around the sea that constituted “The Atlantic System,” or, as it was more popularly known, “The Atlantic Community” (Hoffman 1945; Davis 1941). However, the Anglo-American military and political alliance affirmed in the Atlantic Charter inflected the ideological bias of much Anglophone Atlantic history. Often propagandistic, serving the interests of North Atlantic geopolitical hegemony, the early Atlantic history that Bailyn identifies as the field’s opening salvos promoted a NATO-centric vision of transoceanic commonalities, connections, and interactions across the ocean that emphasized both the exceptionalism of the region and the supposed universality of the ideals that its exceptional history had produced. Thus, for example, as early as 1945, Ross Hoffman, professor of European history at Fordham University, characterized the Atlantic Ocean as “the inland sea of Western Civilization” and as the “citadel” of “British, French, and American ideals of liberty and constitutional government” (Hoffman 1945, 25), eliding at once the history and experiences of perhaps the vast majority of people living along the full stretch of coasts and submerged at the bottom of Western Civilization’s sea. The slippage between an (imaginary) oceanic geography and lofty political ideals that we find in the writing of Hoffman and other early Atlantic historians repeated the rhetorical overflow from “the Atlantic . . . to the whole world” in Roosevelt’s expansive interpretation of the Atlantic Charter. The sweeping gesture that engulfs the globe will suggest to many in the South Atlantic (and the Global South more generally) that it is not just Atlantic states that need to be free of colonialism; as Luiz Felipe de Alencastro’s essay in this volume so pointedly demonstrates, the oceans and their histories also need to be decolonized.

Promise of Oceans

The Atlantic Charter might seem an unlikely point of departure for a collection of essays on the Global South Atlantic, but there are peculiarly oceanic qualities to the charter, its principles, and its history that can help illuminate some of the problems and prospects of studying an undelimitable South Atlantic from the shifting perspectives of the Global South that we are concerned with in this book. As Hester Blum has written, oceanic studies “deriv[es] from the fluidity of its object of study a constitutive position of unboundedness, drift, and solvency” (2013, 152), and these qualities—qualities of fluids—disturb (or disregard) geopolitical demarcations and sociocultural distinctions that are characteristic of traditional transnational analysis that are themselves modeled on the Westphalian fiction of the timeless territorial integrity of nation-states. In the case of the Atlantic Charter, the oceanic qualities of solvency, drift, and unboundedness perhaps become clearer if we approach the historic Joint Declaration through three questions that can also be applied to the South Atlantic as an entity, an ideal, and a rubric: (1) Does it exist, or what is the nature of its existence? (2) What does it imply, and (how) do those implications change? (3) To whom does it apply? In beginning by discussing these three questions in terms of the Atlantic Charter, we want to give a sense of the contours of some modes of oceanic thought that are relevant to studying something so polymorphous as the Global South Atlantic, to which we turn later.

“Atlantic Charter” was the late name given to a radio and cablegram announcement about the Anglo-American alliance that never existed as a legal document—at least not as such. Just as the “Atlantic” originally envisioned by the Joint Declaration was not the whole Atlantic, the “Charter” was not a charter, and questions about its existence and force as a legal document were soon raised by domestic commentators and politicians, especially in the United States, who were against the creation of supranational intergovernmental institutions. Challenged about the Charter’s legal status by a hostile American reporter in 1944, President Roosevelt acknowledged, “There isn’t any copy of the Atlantic Charter. . . . The nearest thing you will get is the radio operator on the *Augusta* and on the *Prince of Wales*. . . . It was signed in substance. . . . There is no formal document—complete document—signed by us both” (quoted in Borgwardt 2007, 38). Nonetheless, as has been typical of the development of international law in the customary mode, the Charter did acquire legal (not just moral) importance by the back door of citation, through subsequent

references to it in other international legal texts, namely the “Declaration by United Nations” and the Charter of the United Nations.⁴ There is something oceanic about a legal text that is not a text, a Charter flowing in the radio airwaves that carried the announcement of principles, “signed in [watery] substance,” to the shores of the Atlantic and beyond. Questions about the existence of a signed document were motivated, of course, not merely by an ontological obsession with original documents but by political interests in validating or invalidating the legitimacy of the law.

These questions about solvency—about what can and cannot be dissolved or absorbed by an idea—are important ones to ask also of any oceanic or regional formation that is being studied as a single system: does the Atlantic, or, for us, the South Atlantic, actually exist, or is it something like an inchoate set of subsequent citations and cross-references still to be assembled by historians and cultural studies scholars from dispersed archives? Or is it something else altogether? In a review of the limits of Atlantic history, Allison Games has provocatively asserted that “if the Atlantic is a less obvious and coherent unit than the Mediterranean, it is also an anachronistic one. Historians have first had to invent the region: the emergence of the Atlantic as a single unit of analysis reflects trends in historical geography” (2006, 742–743). Games suggests that in the case of the Atlantic—and perhaps oceanic regions more generally—the structure that Braudel describes as a “human unit” is the retrospective invention of historians. There is probably a lot of truth to that claim, but it also undervalues the myriad economic, political, and cultural forces that do bring people into social assemblages and sentimental arrangements across a region in something like “real time.” After Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), we have become used to thinking about nations and other communities as imaginary structures of feeling among the people who share a sense of political commonality and moral purpose. Famously, for Anderson, it was novels and newspapers that made it possible for people to begin to imagine themselves in relations of community with people whom they would never meet across a large geographical territory. “Print-literacy,” he wrote, “made possible the imagined community floating in homogeneous, empty time” (1983/2006, 118). If “floating” is more than a metaphor in Anderson’s reconfiguration of Benjaminian time, it suggests that the sense of belonging to a “human unit” is fluid and in flux, subject to change and dependent upon other modes of creating a feeling of being suspended in a sea of shared time. In the traditional Westphalian model of nation-states—and of nationalist sentiment—the sense of community and commonality is