

Some experiences, perspectives, and challenges of Medieval Studies in Brazil in relation to current demands

Algumas experiências, perspectivas e desafios da Medievalística no Brasil frente às demandas atuais

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RESUMO

Neste artigo são evidenciadas e discutidas algumas experiências, perspectivas e desafios das pesquisas desenvolvidas na área de História Medieval no Brasil perante a necessidade de responder a demandas e articular-se a movimentos mundiais. Metodologicamente, dividiu-se a exposição em temáticas: a) os estudos da transculturalidade e do espaço social; b) o posicionamento acadêmico, tendo em vista que essas temáticas estão inter-relacionadas em um mesmo movimento que aproxima a pesquisa sobre Idade Média às reflexões sobre as experiências cotidianas. Teoricamente, as reflexões desenvolvidas neste artigo dialogam com o pensamento do historiador alemão Reinhart Kosellek. Ressalta-se a contribuição de medievalistas brasileiros em apresentar um novo olhar, o olhar do “outro”, sobre a historiografia europeia e a importância da divulgação crítica e renovação do conhecimento histórico.

Palavras-chave: Medievalística no Brasil – experiências e desafios; divulgação do conhecimento histórico.

ABSTRACT

Shown and discussed in this article are some experiences, perspectives, and challenges related to the research carried out in the area of Medieval History in Brazil in light of demands to connect with global movements. Methodologically, it is divided into themes: a) studies of transculturality and social space; b) academic positioning, taking into account that these themes are inter-related in the same movement which approximates research about the Middle Ages to reflections on daily experiences. Theoretically, the reflections developed in this article dialogue with the thinking of the German historian Reinhart Kosellek. Highlighted in the text is the contribution of Brazilian medievalists by presenting a new perspective, the perspective of the ‘other’ towards European historiography, and the importance of critical divulgation and the renewal of historical knowledge.

Keywords: Medievalists in Brazil – experiences and challenges; spread of historical knowledge.

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The experience of the twenty-first century reinforces the feeling that we are living in a world interconnected by the various types of economic, political, social, cultural, and scientific networks. At the same time, nationalist campaigns are rising in the international scenario and paradoxically use the same networks to disseminate prejudice, fear, and segregation, instead of strengthening human integration. Images of the Middle Ages are evoked in these discourses, carelessly based on an ethical medieval origin of nations, which reminds us of the words of Patrick Geary in his work *O Mito das Nações*: “The interpretation of History from 400-1000 became the fulcrum of political discourse in most of Europe” (Geary, 2005, p. 17). However, this phenomenon does not only affect Europe, but the world as a whole. Migratory currents which have begun to immensely worry industrialized countries (compared in the media to the ‘barbarian invasions’ of the fifth century), the attacks on Paris of 13 November 2015, strengthening religious stereotypes of dichotomies, as well as the demands of medieval Muslim regions for the self-proclaimed Islamic State, have caused historians to reaffirm that the past does not legitimate any current violence, exclusion, or political decision. These are some of the reasons why renowned medievalists feel motivated to clarify for the public in general the mistaken use of historical terms and interpretations long since revised (Bergolte, 2015, p. 38), since the position of the historian is a constitutive reference for historical knowledge, as Reinhart Kosellek (2012b) reminds us.

Kosellek also highlights in the same work that new experiences are added, at the same time that old experiences become outdated and new perspectives are opened. Soon new questions in relation to the past become evident, which lead us to rethink history, to observe it with other lenses, and to demand new investigations (Kosellek, 2012, p. 161). From this point of view, as current demands lead us to rethink the social role of knowledge produced in academia and its dissemination, what does medieval studies in Brazil have to offer? What are the challenges faced and the theoretical and methodological perspectives which are aligned with these demands?

These are the questions which it is intended to develop in this article, commenting on some works produced in Brazil in the area of Medieval History, linked to international tendencies. For some time, research in the area has stopped being uniquely ‘Brazilian,’ becoming inserted in the global academic scenario instead. This is the result of the work of researchers and research groups present throughout Brazil.² According to the Brazilian Directorate of Research Groups from the National Scientific and Technological

Council (CNPq), there are 68 of these groups. Consequently, one of the challenges presented to us is to continue to act in accordance with this reality, establishing greater connections between post-graduate programs in Brazil and international research centers.

It was decided not to make an inventory of publications, dissertations, and theses, as well as laboratories in the area Medieval History, which have risen considerably in number recent years in Brazil.³ Rather this text will be methodologically divided by themes, under the guise of reflecting on the questions presented. Furthermore, all the points raised here are inter-related. In this way it is intended to present the demands which instigated the perspective of transcultural entanglements (*transkulturelle Verflechtungen*), identifying examples of studies in the area of Medieval History produced in the Brazil which are aligned to this perspective and to the possibilities of analysis opened by the *spatial turn*, as well as reflecting on the limits and possibilities, or even moral obligation, of legitimately responding to discourses of social exclusion.

TRANSCULTURAL ENTANGLEMENTS: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

The term ‘transcultural entanglements’ (*transkulturelle Verflechtungen*) (Borgolte; Tischler, 2012) emerged in German medieval studies based on the interdisciplinary experience of the program “Integration and Disintegration in the European Middle Ages” (*Integration und Desintegration im europäischen Mittelalter*), carried out between 2005 and 2011.⁴ The idea of entanglements constructs mental images of a web or network, where each strand interconnected to an infinite number of other threads and strands is part of a historically larger fabric. However, when the researcher actually becomes conscious of this linked network, there emerges the question of how to methodologically work with this perspective. One possible way would be, based on the identification of a point of intersection in this web (a historic vortex), to analyze various threads and connections, thereby obtaining a broader vision of the historic phenomenon. Objectively, beyond metaphors, given the problem of dealing with large-scale theoretical models and, at the same time, with small scale practical problems in the analytic macro and microanalysis game, an alternative emerges which can achieve a balance between comprehensive cultural

systems and how they are made effective (or not) in smaller spaces. An example of this is favoring more specific comparative analyses which select elements from a macro phenomenon of exchanges and transformations in a small scale place and space, as suggested by Matthias M. Tischler in the editorial of the first issue of *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* (Tischler, 2014).

Examples of the work carried out in Brazil aligned to this methodological perspective include research concerned with themes such as the movement of economic, intellectual, political (diplomacy and war), and consequently cultural exchanges, of a specific place in relation to a greater space, such as the Mediterranean region. Or which also deal with themes such as *Translatio Studiorum*, intercontinental relations in the Middle Ages (Europe, Asia, and Africa) or the Silk Road. What connects these works is the conscience and demonstration of the insertion of their research subjects in a greater scale of inter-relations.

Considering these inter-relations, historical studies in Brazil of the Mediterranean from Antiquity to Modernity received a connecting proposal, both of research subjects and national and international institutions, in the organization in 2002 of the Mediterranean Research Group (*Núcleo de Estudos Mediterrânicos – Nemed*, <http://nemed.he.com.br/>). It is coordinated by Professors Fátima Regina Fernandes, Marcella Lopes Guimarães, and Renan Frighetto, from the Department of History, Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR). One of its most recent integrated projects, “Identities and Frontiers: historiographic perspectives for the study of political cultural relations in Iberian in the Middle Ages,” was constructed in partnership with the *Espai, Poder I Cultura* Center of Studies formed by medievalists from the University of Lérida (Spain), and received funding from institutions in Brazil and Spain (Capes/DGU). Furthermore, one of the results of this project was the publication of the book *Identidades e fronteiras no Medievo Ibérico* (Identities and Frontiers in Iberia in the Middle Ages – Fernandes, 2013), which expresses the maturing of research carried out in Brazil in partnership with European research centers about Mediterranean relations in Late Antiquity and the Medieval period. Concern with contemporary questions aligned to Medieval research is present in every chapter of this book. For example, look at an extract from the chapter “The Medieval Luso-Castilian frontier, the men who lived along it, and their role in the construction of Portuguese identity,” by Fátima Regina Fernandes, organizer of the book:

We live in times of globalization, of the breaching of frontiers at various levels of human activity, and perhaps for this reason we should review the concept of frontier in order to assess the real dimension that it has today based on historical reflection. An exercise which demands from us a large degree of abstraction from contemporary concepts which could drag us towards anachronistic interpretations of this reality. It would be good to start here, questioning up to which point it is a concrete reality or is it just a concept that is fully or partially accepted, and how it is perceived by those inserted in it. (Fernandes, 2013, p. 13)

The experiences and the efforts of the Mediterranean Research Group, as well as many other research groups about the Middle Ages in Brazil, show the challenge of connecting our institutional research outside and inside the country. It also reminds us of the importance of our positioning as non-European researchers and, consequently of the differentiated perspective we can offer international Medieval studies. This is only one example among many which deserve to be looked at, but which do not fit within the limit of what is proposed in this article.⁵

In relation to *Translatio Studiorum*, it is an expression already used in the Middle Ages,⁶ which reappeared in the work of Medievalists such as Alain de Libera (2011), Léon Florido (2005), and others⁷ as the definition for the movement of knowledge in the medieval period. For many authors who use the term *translatio studii* and/or *translatio studiorum*, it designates the movement of texts and intellectuals within certain dimensions: a) spatial: the Mediterranean and the Middle East; b) chronological: it began in the sixth century after the closure of the Platonic School in Athens and its migration to Persia, and it ended in the sixteenth century. Considering that the term *Translatio Studiorum* has been, until the present, more diffused in the area of History of Philosophy and Medieval Literature, historic analyses which consider the intercontinental dimensions of *Translatio Studiorum* invite historians from inside and outside the country to meet the challenge of interdisciplinarity, trans-temporality, different spatial perspectives and cultural confluence present in the sources, such as the research of Professor Aline Dias da Silveira (UFSC) and the doctoral candidate Elaine Cristina Senko (UFPR) (Silveira, 2015; Senko, 2014). According to the similar proposal for expanding the dimensions of the perspective of the Middle Ages, the *Translatio Studii* – Dimensions of the Middle Ages research group was formed, (<http://www.historia.uff.br/dimensoes/>), based in Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). Developed in this group are

interdisciplinary dialogues with literature and philosophy with a varied spectrum of themes, such as the peasant world in the Middle Ages, researched by Professor Mário Jorge da Motta Bastos; Latin literature and its interfaces, developed by Professor Livia Lindóia Paes Barreto, and hagiography, gender, identity, and institutionalizations, by Professor Carolina Fortes do Nascimento.

The same challenge of working with historical analysis, considering the relationship between the different dimensions can be found in research about the Silk Road. Here the transcendence of the traditional periodization of History (Ancient, Medieval, Modern) is inevitable, as well as of space, since the focus is directed to the East far from the Mediterranean, as well as passing through Africa, even if what is being studied is intellectual change, the African ivory trade, or the Franciscan missions in the East.⁸ In Porto Alegre in 2002 a study group was created looking at relations between West and East in the Middle Ages, at the initiative of students from the Department of History of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). In 2004, the same group expressed its maturation in the research project “Following the Silk Road: relations between East and West during the Middle Ages (5th-15th centuries),” coordinated by Professor José Rivair Macedo. In 2011 the results of the studies were materialized in the book *Viajantes medievais da Rota da Seda – século V-XV* (Medieval travelers along the Silk Road – 5th – 15th centuries), which involved the research of its members over almost ten years, as well as external collaborators of the group, such as Professor Carmen Licia Palazzo (Centro Universitário de Brasília, UniCEUB) and Professor André Bueno (Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro, Uerj) (Palazzo, 2011; Bueno, 2011). Among the many institutional, financial, and methodological challenges, of special importance here is the conscience of the special contribution that the perspective of Brazilian researchers can offer to international historiography, in the words of José Rivair Macedo:

Studying the medieval travelers along the Silk Road, we are aware of our own angle of vision in relation to the knowledge produced by the European researchers about the same theme. We opted for a different approach to the one loaded with ethnocentrism, which attributes the medieval Christian ‘explorers’ and ‘adventurers’ a primacy in intercontinental journey which they did not have, observing the phenomenon of relations between travelers from the Old World in a privileged position: from the New World, then unknown, we can see from far

and assess more equidistantly the role of travelers from the three continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia) in the establishment of contacts. (Macedo, 2011, p. 18)

This is an instigating perspective for medieval studies in Brazil: using in a critical and comparative manner the international biography, offering new approaches for a 'decolonization of History,' as stated by Rivair Macedo (2003). Also raised is a challenge to European research centers: listen to what the 'other' has to say about a history which should transcend national and regional identity sentiments.

Also in relation to the temporal dimensions, the approaches and themes pointed to here are aligned with the perspective of transcultural entanglements announced in the *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies*. Matthias Tischler, the editor of this journal, emphasizes that the use of denominations such as 'Modernity' and 'Renaissance' is inappropriate, since they demonstrate disdain and devaluation towards the Medieval period. These are denominations legitimated by the Western European point of view and by the idea of a single path to development. Moreover, the Middle Ages should be seen beyond the limits of 500 - 1500 A.D. and much beyond Europe. The rhythm of economic and cultural exchanges in a pre-industrial era should renew our perception of the problems of multiple temporalities, discontinuity, and the fragmentation of History, and call for a new order of historic time: a transcultural time. In the time and space relation in History, what can be added is reflection about the space of memory as a meeting and a result of the crossing of time and space. Another contribution is in the question referring to a global history (in the inter-related meaning) in the Middle Ages, transcending the teleological perception of history (Tischler, 2014, p. 4).

It can be perceived in the examples cited that the difficulty of dealing with different spatial and temporal dimensions and the entanglements of these in research leads researchers to use two methodological processes: a) in the case of research groups, the construction of integrated projects, in which group discussions connect different research themes and foci, constructing a unity based on diversity; b) in the case of the researcher who works individually, starting the analysis at a point of intersection, where the different dimensions can be observed in their formation and development, and in the works and spaces of medieval translation, as well as in the routes of commerce and pilgrimage and documentation related to diplomatic relations. Actually both processes can be carried out concomitantly.

The Spatial Turn

Time, a guiding category of historical analyses, differentiating them in relation to other disciplines, can only be thought of in spatial metaphors in an intrinsic relationship between space and time. Temporal and spatial questions always remain interconnected, so that the metaphorical power of all images of time initially correspond to spatial perceptions, as argued by Reinhart Kosellek in his work *Zeitschichten – Studien zur Historik* (Kosellek, 2000, p. 9; in Portuguese, 2014). However, reflection about space in the historical discipline still appears to be a challenge to be overcome in relation to the preponderant concern with time. The *spatial turn*, which occurred in the 1970s, has offered the human sciences rich tools for this reflection. The perspective of the social space and its derivatives, such as the symbolic space, was received with great enthusiasm by sociologists and principally by geographers, but timidly by historians. History has adequately developed its own reflection about time and space in direction of memory: the space or place of memory (Le Goff, 2003; Nora, 1997). With apologies in advance for allegories: Mnemosyne became the most evident point of convergence between time and space in the perspective of those following the profession of Clio. This direction of reflection about time and space is extremely coherent and pertinent, but it should be developed even more, with a greater opening for interdisciplinarity with geography, sociology, and philosophy.

The *spatial turn* emerges from the perception that social changes cannot be satisfactorily explained without a reconceptualization of the categories related to space. In the human sciences, space should not be seen as a ‘container’ or an *a priori* reality of nature, but needs to be thought and investigated as a condition and result of social processes (Löw, 2013, p. 17). At the same time that each space is constructed and transformed based on action, it is also an agent in social changes and relations. This perception of social space developed principally from the 1970s onwards among philosophers and sociologists from the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS), such as Jean-Claude Passeron, Pierre Bourdieu, and Henri Lefebvre, developed in geography in the writings of Davis Harvey and Milton Santos, an internationally recognized Brazilian geographer. Considering that reflection about the social space follows different directions, in accordance with the manner in which each discipline occupied it, there exist particularities in each perspective which can contribute to studies of medieval history.

For example, the study of the perception and representation of the space of the medieval Islamic world was developed in the doctoral dissertation of Beatriz Bissio and in the book (Bissio, 2013) arising out of her doctorate. It shows one manner of how the 'spatial turn' is expressed in medieval research in Brazil. She analyzes writings by erudite fourteenth century travelers, *Muqaddinah (The Prolegomenon of Universal History)* by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and the book of Ibn Battuta (1304-1368) translated in the West under the title *Through Islam*, and explains that due to the importance which space played in the Medieval Arab culture, it would be difficult not to work with this aspect in her work (Bissio, 2013, p. 14). She perceives social space in this form:

Admitting that the social space is constituted of a set of systems of relations, it is possible to analyze how the space in which Arab-Islamic civilization contributed to mold its history and how this space was molded by the outcome of this human conglomerate. And, if language and writing are part of the social space, it is possible to study the function which they have played during the course of history. And since it is an interiorized space of the symbolic device, leading to the concept of place and thus to the notion of belonging, researching how the idea of limit was traced in classical Islam will help to understand how the dividing line between those who belonged and did not belong to this space was traced. (Bissio, 2013, p. 25)

To reach this fundament of the concept of social space, Bissio drew on the thought of the philosopher Henri Lefebvre and the geographer Milton Santos. She notes that in the concept of space developed by Lefebvre there is not just one social space, but many. At the same time while no space disappears during the growth and development of other spaces, for example, the global does not eliminate the local, the social space has its form defined by the meeting or the simultaneity of everything produced by nature and by society in cooperation or through conflict (Lefebvre, 1986, cit. em Bissio, 2013, p. 23). The importance of the observation and analysis of the landscape is highlighted by Bissio, taking as a reference the work of Milton Santos, since the constant changes of landscape accompany social transformations (Santos, 2004, cit. em Bissio, 2013, p. 24). Other works are used by her, such as those of the paleontologist and researcher of the pre-historic era André Leroi Gourhan, the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, and the French ethnologist Georges Condominas, and the historian Jacques Le Goff, amongst others, demonstrating how rich the interdisciplinary

reading of the research subject can be (Bachelard, 1972; Condominas, 1984; Le Goff, 1983).

Nevertheless, interdisciplinarity is still an institutional and theoretical-methodological challenge for medieval in Brazil, as mentioned by Andréia Frazão da Silva:

Interdisciplinary dialogue is also important for knowledge of the *topoi*, philosophical concepts, literary genres, toponymy, specific social contexts, etc., related to the Medieval period, essential for the analysis of testimonies. How can a philosophical text be examined while ignoring its social and geographic place of production? How can a poem be read historically, without knowing the literary rules on which it is based? How to verify the originality of a theological treatise, without being familiarized with the philosophical concepts and the *topoi* which were used in its composition? (Silva, 2013)

Silva also relates interdisciplinarity to internationalization in her article about interdisciplinary dialogue in medieval studies in Brazil, stating that for international recognition interdisciplinarity is a fundamental strategy (Silva, 2013, p. 11). Actually, interdisciplinary dialogue leads the researcher to the erudition necessary for our craft, expanding intellectual horizons in the international scenario.

The interaction between time and space in medieval studies stops prefiguring the scenario or historic context to be perceived as a constituent element in the formation of perceptions, exchanges, and cultural reconfigurations. Thus, the actual perception of History has presented changes such as the observation of transculturality in studies about frontiers, their social reconstructions in time and space, demonstrating through the perspective of the researcher the reflection of the spatial turn in the human sciences. As a consequence, this experience leads to, for example, sensitivity in relation to religious and political spaces in their relations with the construction of spaces of memory and knowledge. In addition to themes such as medieval frontiers, among more recent studies we can also cite those referring to the relationship between the center and the periphery, intercontinental relations (Africa, Asia, and Europe), spaces of translation, hierarchy, and representation of social spaces, inter and intra-religious relations, migrations, the sacred space, and routes and the formation of ghettos of minorities, amongst other themes.⁹

VÖLKERWANDERUNG IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY? OR AN EXAMPLE OF A CHALLENGE FOR ACADEMIC POSITIONING

Völkerwanderung is an expression used in German historiography to describe the migration of the Germanic peoples to the region of the old Roman Empire, principally from the fifth century onwards. In traditional French historiography of which we are heirs, this term finds its equivalent in the expression ‘*les invasions barbares*,’ in other words, the barbarian invasions. It is important to note that concepts have their own history (Kosellek, 2012a), thus the construction and choice of the terms *Völkerwanderung* and ‘barbarian invasions’ are politically dated and served the legitimation of the German and French national states respectively, dividing the studies of European institutions between Germanists, or those who defended that these institutions were of Germanic origin, and the Romanists, who defended a Roman origin (Fabbro, 2004, p. 3). Current historiography, both Brazilian and international, has correctly criticized, debated, and revised these expressions, giving them another meaning or excluding them (Silva, 2008; Geary, 2013).

However, the images of the ‘Barbarian invasions’ appears to have returned to the dreams (or nightmares) of European Summer nights in 2015. Alongside the compassion of seeing children barefoot children in the arms of desperate parents, a great fear or panic was created in various environments, while television channels showed the multitude with nothing left moving towards Europe’s frontiers.¹⁰ Here the comparison with *Völkerwanderung* and with the images of medieval ‘savagery’ become inevitable. On 1 November 2015, an article in the economic section of the newspaper *Frankfurt Allgemeine*, one of the most read in Germany, called attention with its unusual title to the proposed section: *Völkerwanderung: a term makes a career (Völkerwanderung: ein Begriff macht Karriere)*, the first paragraph of which is translated here:

A term makes a career though it had almost been forgotten by the specialists. It refers to an event of around 1500 years ago, which however sounds very current: *Völkerwanderung*. When hundreds of thousands of refugees take the road to Europe, this parallel appears to be very close. Furthermore, when the maps with the routes through the Balkans and other regions remind us of those maps with large arrows which symbolized the movement of the Germans in schoolbooks. This word also scares. Often it consciously transmits a panic. Since the historical *Völkerwanderung* of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. was not just any

migratory movement. It involved a rupture of civilization, perhaps the one with the most permanent consequences in history. It involves the so called 'barbarians' who, according to the propagated history, invaded the Roman Empire and brought an end to the ancient Civilization. Only a thousand years later, during the Renaissance, would the West recover from this reverse. This is what many remember from the books in history classes.¹¹

The article in question compares on a 1:1 scale current migratory movements with the movement of Germanic people, using this comparison as the grounds for its criticism of the policy of the German chancellor Angela Merkel to accept the refugees and to pressurize other countries to do the same. Finally, through this comparison, the author Ralph Bollmann makes his prediction for the future, which would be the return to medieval monotony: "life in each city became more monotonous and the color of the ways of life disappeared" (Bollmann, 2015, p. 10).

What should a medievalist do in relation to this article? Michael Borgolte, professor of Medieval History from the Faculty of Philosophy, Humboldt University of Berlin, wrote a readers' letter¹² in response to ruminations of this type:

Images of the 'Barbarian Invasions' or *Völkerwanderung* certainly lead us to an erroneous comprehension of the present. Between the fourth and sixth centuries no peoples invaded the Western Roman Empire, but ethnically heterogeneous groups who learned under the influence of Roman models to organize themselves politically in the region of the Empire under stable monarchies. If it is advisable to learn any lesson for history today, it is this: *rebus sic stantibus*, everything depends on how to integrate the recently-arrived in our society, so that they do not form diasporas, do not retreat into ghettos, and certainly do not organize themselves in an excluding manner. In this case, the threat to relations which Buchsteiner and many others fear, could really happen. The integration of the 'other' or even the 'unfamiliar,' however will only be successful if we, from the society that hosts them, are open and willing to change our culture. This cultural innovation has nothing to do with the fall of the West.¹³

Michael Borgolte wrote this response from the perspective of someone who had coordinated various interdisciplinary and interinstitutional research groups with funding from both the German government and the European Union, covering themes which show cultural exchanges in the Middle Ages

beyond European frontiers, such as migrations and inter-religious dialogues. The proposal of how the integration of the 'other' should occur in current global society thereby emerges not just from studies about the Middle Ages, but the diversity which marks research groups. This is an example of academic positioning with intellectual positioning which contributes to the clarification of a historic terms, which is carelessly used in hierarchizing and exclusive discourse – something that is very current.

In Brazil, there do not lack examples of mistaken pronouncements, principally offered by politicians, who carelessly use references to history, in order to legitimate exclusion and social hierarchy between “the good men” and the “scum of the world.”¹⁴ What is the response of Brazilian academia to these pronouncements? Can we completely exclude the possibility of these absurdities becoming an increasingly recurrent reality?

Here is placed the last challenge to be mentioned in this article: the role of the dissemination of historic knowledge and academic positioning in relation to the current social and political reality of the historian. A challenge suited to medievalists due to their temporally wide-ranging perspective of the past. This does not involve meeting prognostics and solutions in the past for expectations in the future, exactly the opposite, it involves clarifying what the past explains, not legitimating any decision or attitude in the present. And, furthermore, that the old style writing of history be substituted by more rigorous and critical analyses.

EXPERIENCES, EXPECTATIONS, AND ACTIONS

Time, space, and people directly affect the movement and the writing of History. In a similar manner to the constant presence of this triad in the work of the historian (Kosellek, 2012, p. 161), it is also a constituent part of our perceptions, experiences, actions, and expectations. Kosellek, influenced by the thought of Heidegger,¹⁵ highlights the time, space, being relationship in the constitution of temporalities, in which the being or the person is the referential element of the perception of the time/space experience. This signifies that, as human actions constitute the final action of historical research – human actions in time and space –, similarly, the experiences, expectations, and positioning of the historian mold the point of reference for the analysis of the sources and the choice of theoretical-methodological tools. It is for this reason

that the historical analyses and questions produced at the moment could not be thought of 50 years ago. Questions such as those presented in this article about relations between the East and West, frontiers and identities, migrations in the Middle Ages, cultural exchanges, inter-religious dialogues, and the construction of social spaces are some of the thematic perspectives possible in medieval studies in Brazil, which approximate us to the centers of research and international movements, since they are formed on the basis of common experience in a world inter-connected by various types of networks. And, while on one hand, this world is flattened by communication, paradoxically it is also hierarchized by identity *performances*.

The expectations and challenges discussed in this article are constituted based on the developments of experiences in the Medieval era in a context of international discussions about cultural and political relations and social space. In the 'trans-perspective' of these topics, the possibility of deconstructing hegemonic interpretations of societies can be found, emphasizing the importance of asymmetry in its various elements under the consideration of multifaceted references, without there being a valorative and excluding hierarchization in the analyzes. Experiences and expectations are treated by Kosellek as meta-historical categories, since all histories are constructed by lived experiences and by the expectations of people. Both are categories with a high degree of generality, however, their uses are absolutely necessary, since they indicate the universal human condition, without which history would not be possible, or even imaginable (Kosellek, 2012, pp. 305-327).

Experience and expectation create action, the movement to glimpse and confront challenges. Considering this relationship, the intellectual and institutional challenge of the action of internationalizing our work receives new instigations based on the conscience of the importance of our critical perception towards Medieval History written by Europeans. Through joint work, we have to present them with the perspective of the 'other.' We have thus also worked for a 'decolonization' of the Middle Ages, as Rivair Macedo states. Interdisciplinarity also consists of an important strategy in internationalization, as well as to an increase in publications in English, both of which stimulate global dissemination and dialogue.

The work and the promotion of interdisciplinarity in medieval research groups faces barriers in the difficulty of communication between disciplines, in which the categories of analysis are very diversified, as well as the departmental bureaucracies of our universities. However, interdisciplinary dialogue

is necessary, both through the theoretical-methodological path, and through the analysis of material, literary, iconographic, and documentary sources in general in the comprehension of a very distant past. This interdisciplinarity was proclaimed decades ago, but little work in Medieval History has been carried out in Brazil. An example of successful research is the above mentioned book by Bissio and the social-space perspective operationalized within it.

In a similar sense to the importance of ‘decolonizing’ History, this is the challenge of academic positioning in relation to the careless uses of History. These are instigations which also, due to their moral importance, cannot be ignored. The position of the historian can be very subtle, observable in the methodological choices and in interpretation, however, it is an indispensable part of the construction of historical knowledge. Academic positioning is not the same as partisanship or political opinion. It is an important result of the decades of studies and experiences, which concedes legitimacy to our words, carrying with it the weight of social responsibility, often abnegated in the name of a naive academic impartiality.

No one disagrees that the institutional, social, and intellectual demands are numerous, and that the weight of responsibility on these demands can both motivate our papers and discourage our actions. However, if we do not continually construct our space of development in historical understanding, if we do not use the means of dissemination of knowledge and information, we will make impossible the continuities and transformations of history written by medievalists in Brazil. An awareness is necessary that, as has been demonstrated in this article, work produced in the area of Medieval History in Brazil has much to offer contemporary historical reflections and have the conditions to face all the challenges listed here, as the examples presented have shown.

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NOTES

¹ Doctorate in History. Post-Doctoral Foreign Research Fellow until 30 July 2016, process no. BEX 0673/15-3, in Humboldt University, Berlin.

² References of Research Groups which study the medieval theme registered in the Brazilian Directorate of Research Groups/CNPq can be found at: http://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/faces/consulta/consulta_parametrizada.jsf; Accessed on: 8 Mar. 2016.

³ Some overviews and analyses of research carried out in the area of Medieval History can be found in the following works: ASFORA; AUBERT; CASTANHO, 2008; ALMEIDA, 2013; ALMEIDA, 2008; AMARAL, 2011; BASTOS; FRANCO JUNIOR, 2003; COELHO, 2006; DE BONI, 2011; MUNIZ, 2009; NOGUEIRA, 2002; PEDRERO-SÁNCHEZ, 1994; RIBEIRO, 2001, pp. 155-158; RUST; BASTOS, 2008; SILVA; SILVA, 2007; SILVA, 2012.

⁴ This program was funded by the German Society of Research (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – DFG) and included specialists from History, Philology, Linguistics, Oriental Studies, the History of Art, Archeology, Jewish Studies (Judaistik), Byzantine Studies (Byzantinistik), Arab Studies (Arabistik) and Oman Studies (Omanistik). The program's proposal is to carry out with wider perspective themes such as cultural exchanges, identities, frontiers and diversity in the Middle Ages. The scientists involved consider their work as a laboratory in which the experimental field is much more wide-ranging (covering both the western and eastern medieval space, the Judaic and Islamic worlds and inter and intra-cultural relations). For this reason, methods were developed to deal with the diversities of the disciplines and themes. Taking advantage of the *on-line* space, the work program was divided, first into three interdisciplinary themes, which led to the publication *Mittelalter im Labor* (2008). See <http://www.spp1173.uni-hd.de/index.html>.

⁵ Amongst other works I refer here to the research carried out by the: Program of Medieval Studies (PEM, <http://www.pem.historia.ufrj.br/>); Laboratory of Medieval Studies (LEME, www.usp.br/leme); Laboratory of Studies of Antiquity and the Middle Ages (*Vivarium*, www.vivariumhist.com); Dimensions of the Medieval, Language, and Philosophy Group (*Translatio Studii*, www.historia.uff.br/dimensoes); Interdisciplinary Group of Medieval Studies (Meridianum, www.meridianum.ufsc.br).

⁶ In Western Medieval writing *translatio studiorum* belonged to the movement of *transla-*

tio imperii, the term used to designate the transfer of *potentia* and *sapientia* from the East to the West, from Egypt, Athens, and Rome to Paris. Otto von Freising established this relationship in the prologue of his work *Historia de duabus civitatibus* (1157); see: FREISING, 1960, pp. 12-14. In the Muslim world it was the philosopher al-Farabi (ninth century) who would make this type of reference to philosophical thought related Athens to Baghdad, passing before through Antioch, Harran and Merv.

⁷ Other ideas about this theme: BERTOMEU, 2013; KNAUTH, in print; SENKO, 2014; SGARDI, 2012; APPETITI, 2013.

⁸ I refer to the themes covered in the collection: MACEDO (Org.), 2011.

⁹ For some examples, see: SILVEIRA, 2009; MACHADO, 2008.

¹⁰ However, it is not publicized by the mainstream media that, according to 2014 UNHR data, 8.3% of refugees try to migrate to Europe, while 25% head towards Southern Africa, and 39.9% to the greater Middle East, in which North Africa is included. Source: UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014*.

¹¹ Translation of the following: “Ein Wort macht Karriere, das die Fachleute schon fast vergessen hatten. Es bezieht sich auf ein Ereignis vor rund 1500 Jahren, und doch klingt es höchst aktuell: Völkerwanderung. Wenn sich Hunderttausende von Flüchtlingen zu Fuß auf den Weg machen, dann scheint diese Parallele nahezuliegen. Das gilt umso mehr, als die Landkarten mit den Balkan- und anderen Routen an jene Grafiken mit den großen Pfeilen erinnern, die in den Schulbüchern einst die Züge der Germanen symbolisierten. Das Wort macht auch Angst. Oft soll es genau diese Panik bewusst transportieren. Denn die historische Völkerwanderung des 4. und 5. nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts war nicht irgendeine Migrationsbewegung. Es geht um einen Zivilisationsbruch, vielleicht den am längsten nachwirkenden der Geschichte. Es geht um vermeintliche „Barbaren“, die nach dem verbreiteten Geschichtsbild das Römische Weltreich überrannten und der antiken Hochkultur den Garaus machten. Erst ein Jahrtausend später, in der Renaissance, erholte sich das Abendland wieder von dem Rückschlag. So haben es jedenfalls viele aus dem Geschichtsunterricht in Erinnerung” (BOLLMANN, 2015, pp. 1-2).

¹² Borgolte refers to another article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine* on 31 October 2015 in the section “Politik”, written by Jochen Buchsteiner (BUCHSTEINER, 2015, p. 10).

¹³ Translation of the following: “Bilder von der „Invasion der Barbaren“ oder der „Völkerwanderung“ führen jedenfalls beim Verständnis der Gegenwart in die Irre. Zwischen dem 4. und 6. Jahrhundert drangen gar keine Völker ins weströmische Reich ein, sondern ethnisch heterogene Gruppen lernten allenfalls unter dem Eindruck römischer Vorbilder, sich auf Reichsboden unter einem stabilen Königtum politisch zu organisieren. Wenn sich heute etwas aus der Geschichte zu lernen empfiehlt, dann ist es dies: dass rebus sic stantibus alles darauf ankäme, die Neuankömmlinge in unserer Gesellschaft so zu integrieren, dass sie keine Diasporagemeinschaften bilden, sich nicht in Wohnghettos zurückziehen und erst recht nicht politisch exklusiv organisieren. Dann nämlich droht wirklich ein Umsturz der Verhältnisse, den Buchsteiner und viele andere so fürchten. Integration der „Anderen“ oder gar der „Fremden“ wird allerdings nur dann erfolgreich

sein, wenn sich auch wir, die Aufnahmegesellschaft, öffnen und zum Wandel unserer Kultur bereit sind. Mit einem Untergang des Abendlandes hat eine solche kulturelle Innovation nichts zu tun” (BORGOLTE, 2015, p. 38).

¹⁴ I refer to the statement by the Federal Deputy Jair Bolsonaro (PP-RJ) to the newspaper *Opção* from Goiânia, published on 18 Sept. 2015, ed. 2097, by Frederico Vitor: “I do not know what is the support of the commanders, but if they reduce the size (of the Armed Forces) there will be less people on the streets to fight the criminals of MST, the Haitians, Senegalese, Bolivians, and all the scum of the world and now the Syrians are arriving as well. The scum of the world is arriving in Brazil as if we did not have enough problems to solve” (Dep. Jair Bolsonaro). Available at: <http://www.jornalopcao.com.br/ultimas-noticias/bolsonaro-ve-imigrantes-como-ameaca-e-chama-refugiados-de-a-escoria-do-mundo-46043/>; Accessed on: 18 Dec. 2015.

¹⁵ The greatest influence of Heidegger can be seen in the following works: KOSELLEK, 2000, p. 9 (in Portuguese: KOSELLEK, 2014) and KOSELLEK, 2012. Heidegger’s work which influenced many modern and post-modern authors: HEIDEGGER, 2006, p. 335; was published in Portuguese by Ed. Vozes: HEIDEGGER, 2005.