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Deltas as Intermedial Contact Zones: Reimagining Entanglements between Water and Dutch Colonialism

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In 1646 in the Brazilian town of Tejucupapo, women of African descent fought against invading Dutch soldiers by throwing boiling water infused with chili peppers at them, thereby defeating the Dutch by means of a spicy concoction. Lacking documentation in any official records, this historic event nevertheless remains alive till this day through oral storytelling. The oral history incited a body of intermedial aesthetic reiterations, ranging from a yearly theater production organized by the Tejucupapo community, a photography series by artist Jonathas de Andrade that displays the actors reperforming the battle, to the artist's solo exhibition at the Foam Photography Museum in Amsterdam. These intermedial reiterations retell the historic event in a contemporary context, reimagining the battle's meaning and significance. The battle and its subsequent reiterations take place in Tejucupapo's delta, an important environment because deltas worldwide were strategic sites for Dutch colonial settlements, and they continue to play a role in the aftermath of Dutch colonialism. Deltas are sites where materials like riverwater, seawater and land mix to create murky and brackish environments. Taking a material-discursive approach, this article explores how the aquatic terms 'murky' and 'brackish,' physical characteristics of the delta environment, can reflect the cultural dimensions of the Tejucupapo delta. The delta becomes a contact zone where different materials entangle with colonizing and colonized cultures in ambiguous, hybrid and oftentimes conflictual manners. Through a visual analysis of De Andrade's *Teatro das Heroínas de Tejucupapo* (*Tejucupapo Heroines Theater*), this article explores how water is entangled in Dutch colonialism, and how water resists domination and exploitation. The intermedial aesthetic reiterations of the battle reimagine relationalities between humans and water by illustrating the ambiguities of the delta's material-discursive contact zone. This article responds to the following research question: In what ways does the delta as a murky and brackish contact zone between water and colonialism reimagine the Battle of Tejucupapo and its intermedial aesthetic reiterations?

Keywords: blue humanities, delta, environmental and colonial entanglements, intermedial reiterations, material-discursive

In an image in Jonathas de Andrade's photography series titled *Teatro das Heroínas de Tejucupapo* (*Tejucupapo Heroines Theater*), a woman throws a bucket of water at an armed soldier, who ducks as the water splashes over him (see figure 1). The scene seems to be staged: the dark background contrasts to the light foreground, illuminating the figures and the splashes of water. The motionless figures, one of whom looks directly into the camera, contrast with the water, which is caught in action as it is thrown by the woman. The water is shiny yet ephemeral as it sways in the air between the figures.



Fig. 1: *Teatro das Heroínas de Tejucupapo* (*Tejucupapo Heroines Theater*) from Jonathas de Andrade; Photography series printed on Falconboard; 2022; Courtesy and copyright of the artist.

De Andrade's photography series refers to a historic event in the 17th century, and simultaneously signals to contemporary theatrical reenactments of that event. In 1646 in the Brazilian town of Tejucupapo, women of African descent fought against invading Dutch mercenaries who had been colonizing the region since 1630. Surprisingly, the women threw boiling water infused with chili peppers at the Dutch invaders, defeating them by means of a spicy concoction. This battle is known as the first Brazilian conflict with female participation, and has been retold in the community through oral storytelling (Lyra 93). Since 1993, the community in Tejucupapo performs the historic battle in an annual theater performance. De Andrade's performative photographs capture the actors of the theater performance as they reiterate the heroic actions of their ancestors. The Battle of Tejucupapo becomes more than merely a historic event, as it is adapted through oral history, performance and De Andrade's photography series. Spanning across different media, these stories retell the battle anew within a contemporary context, all the while referring back to previous iterations.

In De Andrade's photograph, the body of water hovers in mid-air, taking up significant space in the image, and becoming a shiny, yet elusive object that reflects white light against a dark background. This suggests that, for the Tejucupapo community, water not only functioned as a weapon during the battle in 1646; water continued to be important for retelling the historic event. The Battle of Tejucupapo and its subsequent

artistic adaptations intersect coloniality and the aquatic in Dutch Brazil. This article examines how water plays a role in the narration of the Dutch colonization of Brazil's northeastern region. The entanglement between water and colonialism is embodied in the town's surroundings: the town lies in a delta, a point of contact where land meets water, and where freshwater from rivers meets saltwater from the Atlantic Ocean. The delta at Tejucupapo is more than merely a place of material encounters: deltas worldwide were strategic sites for Dutch colonial settlements (Sutton 86), embodying conflictual contact zones between colonizing and colonized cultures. These terraqueous environments continue to play a role in the aftermath of Dutch colonialism. According to Mary Louise Pratt, 'contact zones' signify "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (34). Departing from Pratt's concept, this article approaches deltas from a material-discursive angle, examining how deltas are contact zones where both materials and cultures entangle with each other in ambiguous, hybrid and oftentimes conflictual manners.

In this intermedial case study, water is more than a material that features prominently in the Tejucupapo delta and a medium for the women's victory in the battle of 1646. Water is also an epistemic metaphor that can inspire alternative, more 'aqueous' ways of relating to a particular space and its aesthetic iterations. Water's characteristics, such as its murkiness and brackishness, can invite ways of relating to the world that do not assume certainty and stability, but that are open to ambiguous possibilities. I use the 'aquatic' terms 'murky' and 'brackish' to refer to ambiguous contact zones where distinct materials encounter and engage with each other. When using these terms, I not only refer to water in a delta being saturated by mud, sediments and minerals (i.e., murky), nor do I merely refer to a mixture of seawater and freshwater (i.e., brackish). These terms also refer to the politics and discourse surrounding bodies of water: deltas are not neutral, transparent and definable, but opaque, ambivalent and implicated in colonial power dynamics. Water's murkiness and brackishness provide a framework for understanding how aquatic environments are saturated with human activity.

The term 'troubled' is useful for bridging the gap between the material and the discursive. Its etymological root resides in the Latin term *turbidus*, meaning 'murky' and 'turbid.' The Latin term made its way into old French, where the verb *trubler* means 'to stir up' and 'to make cloudy.' The Dutch adjective *troebel* similarly means 'cloudy' or 'muddy,' and the Dutch verb *vertroebelen* means 'to make impure or unclear.' Nowadays, in the English language, *trouble* is used to indicate conflict, often carrying a negative connotation. However, Donna Haraway shows the value of 'staying with the trouble': instead of denying or attempting to fix a conflict, acknowledging and experiencing the issues that we are facing might result in new awareness and unexpected relationalities (*Staying with the Trouble* 1). Using the term 'troubled' in the context of deltas emphasizes how these aquatic environments have been troubled by encounters between different materials and cultures. The aim of this article is to 'trouble'

the dominant narrative of water, which all too often attempts to either manage water or to reduce it into a mere resource for humans, thus restricting other ways of relating to water (Chen et al. 5).

By engaging with aquatic environments in a material-discursive manner, I explore how intermedial narratives can tell alternative stories of and with water that emphasize the ambiguous relationalities between humans and water. I thus address the following research question: In what ways does the delta as a murky and brackish contact zone between water and colonialism reimagine the Battle of Tejucupapo and its intermedial aesthetic reiterations?

I firstly analyze the dominant narrative towards water in the Netherlands. In order to 'trouble' this dominant narrative, I engage with the Tejucupapo delta as a contact zone between various materials and cultures. I then take a material-discursive approach to water in De Andrade's photography series to discuss intermedial reiterations as a way of imagining colonial history otherwise. Although thinking with water may assert the ambiguity of the Tejucupapo delta and its intermedial reiterations, there are nonetheless limits to thinking with the delta, which are examined in the final section.

The Dutch 'Battle against Water'

The Dutch have had a complex relationship with water, ranging from facing the risks of living in a flood-prone delta, to using their water management expertise to their advantage as a colonial strategy.

The Netherlands consists of four major rivers spilling into the North Sea and creating a delta that has frequently flooded throughout history. Water management techniques such as draining marshes, poldering and reclaiming land were developed in an attempt to prevent natural disasters, to create livable conditions and to protect arable land (Timmerman et al. 1232). Such techniques functioned to separate water from land: what was once a spongy delta marsh turned into a relatively dry land protected by dikes, sluices and other water management infrastructures. Despite these repeated attempts at controlling water, the Netherlands continued to get flooded by the North Sea and the numerous rivers flowing through the delta. These efforts created a "durable national narrative" in public discourse as well as in art and literature of the Dutch being "at war" with water (Helmreich 36). The narrative of the 'battle against water' aided in forming a Dutch unified sense of identity that was based on 'othering' water (Jensen 218).

These water management efforts were not limited to the Dutch delta; the Dutch similarly attempted to manage water in the colonies. The West India Company (WIC) strategically chose landscapes of "low-lying, marshy, clay ground that could be agriculturally developed" for plantations, and which resembled the marshy landscape in the Netherlands (Sutton 86). Unlike other colonizers like the Portuguese, who chose "high and dry" landscapes for colonial settlements, the Dutch had the necessary water expertise to drain wetlands for agricultural land and settlements (Sutton 86). For instance, the deltas of Jakarta (Indonesia) and Paramaribo (Suriname) were colonized by the

Dutch, who were able to manage and navigate such wet territories. The northeast of Brazil where Tejucupapo is located was no exception: the region consists of multiple rivers meeting the Atlantic coast, creating spongy marshes and deltas. This aquatic region was deemed valuable for the WIC, and was thus implicated and wielded for Dutch colonial purposes.

Dutch water management projects abroad are not limited to the Dutch colonial era; they persist today in spaces formerly colonized by the Dutch. Following the 2022 and 2023 heavy rains in Recife (Brazil, near Tejucupapo), the 2022 floods in Paramaribo, and coastal erosion in Palu Bay (Indonesia), the Dutch Risk Reduction Team was requested to analyze these regions, identify water challenges and build necessary infrastructure to manage the numerous bodies of water ("Support Recife 2023"; "DRR-Team Mission Suriname"; "DRR-Team Indonesia"). Dutch water expertise has turned into an export enterprise for places at risk due to environmental crises such as sea-level rise, coastal erosion and flooding.

This narrative of the 'battle against water,' and consequently the hubris that the Dutch can control water, spans across space—from the Dutch delta to colonized Dutch deltas worldwide—and time—from the Dutch colonial era to the present. The materiality of water has been and continues to be implicated in asymmetrical socio-political negotiations and power dynamics. Through its transpatiality and transtemporality, this relation towards water has become the dominant one in spaces that were colonized by the Dutch. The instrumentalization of water, either through its control or through its use as a colonial strategy, assumes the 'otherness' and objectification of water, thereby foreclosing alternative relationalities with water.

The Delta as a Contact Zone

The dominant narrative of the 'battle against water' presupposes a hierarchy between humans and water, where the former is supposedly able to control and manipulate the latter. However, aquatic environments such as deltas 'trouble' this hierarchy, since they are places where humans engage with water in various ways. How can the delta of Tejucupapo as a medium between humans and water 'trouble' (i.e., make murky) the dominant narrative towards water? And, how can this material-discursive contact zone inspire alternative relationalities with and epistemologies of water?

According to Jørgen Bruhn and Beate Schirmacher, the "material aspects of media shape what is communicated and what can be communicated" (10). Inspired by Haraway's urge to notice that knowledge is situated and embodied ("Situated Knowledges" 583), Melody Jue suggests that terrestrial and aquatic environments are media that inspire different ways of relating to the world. She examines how our terrestrial habitat on Earth influences our habits, since *habitat* and *habit* share the same etymological root from the Latin word *habitare*, meaning 'dwelling' (Jue 7). Due to our terrestrial normative habitat, we have certain 'terrestrial biases' that favor 'groundedness' and 'stability' over, for instance, the fluidity and flux of water. Arguably,

the dominant narrative of water described above, assumes that water can be made stable and predictable, thus projecting 'terrestrial' concepts onto a non-terrestrial environment. By contrast, this article stays with the aquatic characteristics of murkiness and brackishness that are observed in deltas, and examines what cultural implications these physical characteristics may have.

Tejucupapo lies in a delta where various materials saturate each other and where cultures have met each other in conflictual ways. Rather than distinguishing between land and water as Dutch water management tends to do, terms like "murky water," "soft and muddy soil," and "swamp" are used in Luciana Lyra's ethnographic account of the delta at Tejucupapo (97). The town is located close to the Atlantic coast in a marshy wetland where numerous rivers meet the ocean. As the rivers in the delta seep into the ocean, the mixture of freshwater and saltwater creates a brackish environment. This brackish zone contains between 0.5 and 30 grams of salt per liter, and has a lower salinity than oceans but higher than freshwater rivers. This wide range of salinity levels means that brackish water is not a stable, defined condition, but rather a fluctuating characteristic of deltas. This brackish zone creates a unique ecosystem for mangrove trees, oysters and shellfish, which thrive in Tejucupapo's delta (Lyra 94), but which are particularly vulnerable to salinization as a result of climate change (Mitra 137).

Furthermore, the brackish water in a delta is saturated with mud, nutrients, organic matter and minerals that flow down rivers. Kimberley Peters and Phillip Steinberg argue that we should conceptualize the sea not as 'wet,' but as "more-than-wet" because it "extends itself as it infiltrates the terrestrial sphere" and soaks sand, mud and soil (296). As seawater seeps into the terrestrial, it "exceeds the chemical state of liquidity and the felt property of wetness" (Peters and Steinberg 297). Extending Peters and Steinberg's idea, the same can be said about land in a delta: terrestrial materials extend themselves and infiltrate the hydrosphere as they get carried away by surface runoff into rivers and ultimately the ocean. Land in a delta is not solid and dry since it is saturated by fresh- and salt water. Thus, water is never *just* water, nor is land *just* land: water in the delta is not clear or transparent, but murky as it is mixed with solid particles. Water becomes more-than-wet and land more-than-dry.

The brackish (salt-freshwater) and murky (land-water) delta at Tejucupapo blurs boundaries between otherwise distinct materials. Following Jue, an aquatic environment as a medium can incite alternative experiences, relationalities and ways of thinking, and can disorient us from our terrestrial habitat (Jue 6). Murkiness and brackishness as concepts emphasize the space *in-between* materials, where materials saturate each other to create new environments. These aquatic concepts acknowledge the inability to 'grasp' or fully comprehend the medium.

These terms not only signal to the material saturations, but also the discourse and culture surrounding bodies of water. Deltas are not apolitical, but are implicated in power dynamics, historic events and contemporary narratives. Extending Pratt's concept of the 'contact zone' (34), deltas are conflictual places of encounter between colonizing and

colonized cultures. Water's murkiness and brackishness invite an engagement with this material-discursive contact zone. The following section further investigates these political and cultural implications.

Reimagining Aquatic Relationalities

In 1646 when the Battle of Tejucupapo took place, the Dutch colonial power in Brazil was already crumbling. Along with threats from the Portuguese, conflicts between ethnicities in Brazil and frictions between Dutch authorities, food and water were becoming scarce (Van Groesen 9). Suffering from hunger, the Dutch soldiers started to scavenge for food in the surrounding villages. Legend goes that they arrived in Tejucupapo in search of food, and were defeated by women, who threw boiling water with chili peppers at them (De Andrade et al. 00:04:59–00:05:50). The Tejucupapo community was of African descent, but it remains unclear whether they were enslaved people, a maroon community or otherwise.

Lacking documentation in any official records, this historic event nevertheless remains alive until this day through oral storytelling. The event grew in popularity when, in 1993, the town of Tejucupapo started hosting an annual theater performance in which community members reenact the achievements of their ancestors. Each year, the town is transformed into a stage where “housewives, civil servants, farmers, and oyster and shellfish gatherers [from the nearby mangrove forest]” reiterate history (Lyra 94).

While the battle is celebrated and popular in the region surrounding Tejucupapo, the historic event remained largely unknown in the Netherlands, until 2022 when the Foam Photography Museum in Amsterdam commissioned Brazilian artist Jonathas de Andrade to create a new body of work. According to the museum curator Hinde Haest, De Andrade's work aims to confront the Dutch audience with “an uncomfortably shared past” (De Andrade et al. 00:08:32–00:08:46). De Andrade's intermedial project *Teatro das Heroínas de Tejucupapo* (*Tejucupapo Heroines Theater*, 2022) consists of a photography series and installation in which he photographs the actors of the theater performance and exhibits domestic objects such as pots and pans, which they use as props in their performances.

The aesthetic reiterations of the battle form a series of adapted media. The historic battle is retold by generations through oral history, adapted into a theater performance, transformed into a photography series, and exhibited in the Foam Museum. At each subsequent step, information is handed over, but the story itself also shifts by the teller's experiences and context. In the following, I analyze how De Andrade's photographs signal the historic event, and simultaneously reimagine the battle in a contemporary light.

Watery Mediations

In the image with which this article started (see figure 1), the historic Battle of Tejucupapo is represented, featuring two actors from the Tejucupapo theater acting as a ‘Dutch’

soldier and a woman from African descent. In between the two figures, water sways in mid-air, traveling from the woman's bucket to the soldier. Some of the water has already reached the soldier, who ducks in an attempt to avoid it, while droplets spray the air between the two figures. The water reflects a glowing white light, attracting the viewer's attention, and the sprays seem ghostly and ephemeral. Hovering between the woman and the soldier, water becomes a connector or negotiator between them, however conflictual it may be.

This photograph represents what the battle of 1646 could have looked like, where water was used as a weapon with which the women defended themselves. At first sight, one might conclude that, by portraying water as a weapon, the photograph reduces water to a mere resource or object available for humans, perpetuating the instrumentalization of water.

However, De Andrade's photograph simultaneously challenges this reading. Until now, this analysis focused on two figures in the photograph: the woman throwing the bucket of water and the soldier ducking from the splash. Next to both figures, two other figures are staged. The image seems to be occupied by four figures: one woman facing the camera holds a bucket of water on her head as another woman standing next to her throws a bucket of water at two soldiers, one of whom aims a gun at her and the other who ducks from the water. Upon closer inspection, the photograph actually consists of two shots overlapping each other: the two female figures are one and the same, and the two male figures are one and the same. The image is occupied by two bodies at two moments in time, thus creating four figures. The two scenes are separated from each other by a few seconds, thereby creating a 'before' and an 'after' shot. The duration in between these two shots is measured by the displacement of water: the 'before' and 'after' shots occur before and after the bucket of water is thrown at the soldier. Water moves through time and its movement shows the passing of time. The displacement of water blurs the boundaries between the past and the present, creating a liminal space where the historic event re-emerges in its contemporary artistic reiteration.

Moreover, the movement of water connects the woman with the soldier. The man's gun is pointed in a diagonal line from the top-left to bottom-right corners, and the water, which sways in mid-air and splashes onto him, creates a line from the top-right to bottom-left corners. This chiasmic composition—a large X in between the woman and the soldier—shows that the water and the gun are on equal footing: both are recognized as weapons. This X symbolizes the conflict between both figures, as it is created by the angle and movement of their weapons, yet it simultaneously bridges the conflicted space between them. Water is an active agent in this composition as it becomes a connector or mediator between both parties. Moreover, because the water becomes equivalent to the gun, the binary between attacked/attacker becomes murky: the woman, who was originally the attacked, becomes an attacker as well, while the soldier is simultaneously attacker and attacked.

Water in this image is more-than-instrumental: it becomes a transhistorical medium that ambiguously connects the past to the present by overlapping two images, and that mediates the woman (and her 'attackedness') to the soldier (and his 'attackerness'). The term 'more-than-instrumental' refers to water being at once a resource (i.e., a material that is used by the woman to defend herself) and more (in this case, functioning as a temporal and relational mediator). Importantly, De Andrade's photograph does not transcend the instrumentalization of water, since it is still being used as a resource by the woman defending herself. Nonetheless, water *also* takes other forms: by liminally swaying between the woman and the soldier, water becomes a protagonist in this conflict between different peoples. This ambiguous space in-between an instrument and an active agent challenges the dominant narrative of water, urging us to reconsider relationalities with water.

Intermedial Reiterations

Another photograph in De Andrade's series is captioned *Panorama da Batalha* (*Panorama of the Battle*) and represents the battlefield (see figure 2). Ironically, the image is far from panoramic, as the landscape is barely perceivable. The black-and-white image is dark, and while the winding road in the foreground is relatively discernible—because it is lit from the front—the background is very difficult to make sense of. The dull, grey meandering river is the only visible thing in the black landscape. Dark, overhanging storm clouds make it even more difficult to distinguish shapes. This all makes viewing the photograph a rather frustrating experience. However, De Andrade has transcribed arrows pointing toward nearby towns and a caption indicating the Capibaribe-Mirim River onto the image with a white pen, thereby rendering the landscape more legible. Along the river, little white specks are drawn and captioned 'AVANÇO HOLANDÊS' (DUTCH MILITARY OFFENSIVE) to indicate the movement of Dutch soldiers. In the foreground, specks are drawn symbolizing the women, with the caption 'MULHERES ENTRINCHEIRADAS' (WOMEN BEHIND TRENCHES). Between the soldiers and the women, a battlefield takes place with chaotic white specks, bullseye targets and cries of 'ATAQUE!' (ATTACK!) and 'PIMENTA!' (CHILI PEPPER!), illustrating the contrast between the soldiers' and the women's battle methods. The image is, indeed, a 'panorama' of the battlefield: it oversees the battle, positions the two camps in a space and renders the landscape comprehensible. Despite the darkness of the background, the viewer gets an impression of the physical layout of the landscape with the help of the artist's interventions. However, De Andrade's drawings and inscriptions simultaneously ridicule this reified cartography by adding a cartoon-like and playful dimension, in the form of 'ATAQUE!' and 'PIMENTA!'. De Andrade *counter-maps* the territory by turning the legible and strategic into the humorous and excessive.



Fig. 2: *Teatro das Heroínas de Tejucupapo* (Tejucupapo Heroines Theater) from Jonathas de Andrade; Photography series printed on Falconboard; 2022; Courtesy and copyright of the artist.

This counter-mapping technique obscures the panoramic landscape: the initial comprehensible and transparent reading of a panoramic landscape is reconfigured with a second reading that 'troubles' the first. By reconfiguring the landscape, De Andrade's interventions in this counter-map playfully rewrite the historic event, thus contributing to the way in which the Battle of Tejucupapo is retold.

Indeed, what we know about the Battle of Tejucupapo is reiterated by actors in a theater production and by an artistic photographer, who have, in turn, been inspired by oral storytellers. This raises the question of the reliability of the sources of the historic event. As mentioned, there are no official, documented sources of the battle; what remains are oral accounts from the community, retold and passed down through generations (Lyra 93). These oral histories are retold in a contemporary context, weaving contemporary issues into the narrative. To what extent have these contemporary aesthetic narratives reshaped the history of the battle? Can we speak of 'reliability' in the context of oral history? And, how does water in a material-discursive sense unsettle biases towards stability and objectivity?

In Western academia, documented history often takes precedence over oral history, because the former is seemingly more objective and capable of presenting historical 'facts' (Williams and Riley 222). By listening to multiple voices, oral history can result in contradicting narratives that create a confusing and 'murky' account of the

past. One could conclude that, because it is not clear how the past unfolded, these oral stories are not valid enough to account for a historic event.

However, perhaps the subjectivity of oral history should not be compared to the supposed reliability of conventional or official documentation, but should rather be seen as a fundamentally different way of understanding and recording the past. The events of the Battle of Tejucupapo may or may not have occurred in the way that the theater director or De Andrade retell them. It seems that the point is not to retell the battle accurately, but rather to make connections between past and present struggles and experiences. As Brian Williams and Mark Riley argue, oral history should not be seen as a 'tool' to excavate facts, but as a means of engaging with the past in a more relational and subjective manner (208).

As Lyra states in her ethnographic account of the Tejucupapo theater production: "When the performers experience the lives of female warriors in *A Batalha das Heroínas* [*The Battle of Heroines*], I assume that they act as *f(r)iction artists*, that is, they perform in the gaps between what is fiction and what is real, between themselves and the characters, their bodies in constant flow and transformation, reverberating several experiences, thus creating the possibility of a social action that could bring change" (102). The play and the actors hover in between fact and fiction, and by doing so, "shed[...] light on the fictional dimensions of what is real" (Dawsey 170). Their everyday reality is saturated by the fictive and imaginative, and thus challenge desires for accuracy, reliability and certainty. The oral histories of Tejucupapo offer an embodied, intersubjective and affective account of the past, providing a means to relate to it from a contemporary perspective.

Oral history tells alternative stories that highlight the entanglements of the past, present and future, and thus reveal the relevance of historic events in the present day. A more *aqueous* way of adapting an event, oral history emphasizes the ungraspability of the past, showing how the 'truth' of the past is always deferred, always just out of reach. Instead of attempting to contain and preserve the past through official documentation by finding out how something 'really' occurred, oral history offers a past that is retold anew by subsequent generations.

As mentioned, the Battle of Tejucupapo has become an intermedial series throughout the centuries, adapting the historic event into oral history, a theater performance, a photography project and an exhibition. However, each subsequent reiteration does not function as a 'representation' of the battle; this would imply that the reiteration in a different medium reflects or mirrors the battle. Instead, these aesthetic adaptations revive the past and modify it transhistorically and relationally across media. Adaptation is not just a change in medium, but also an alteration in content and context. As the battle is transported from one medium to the next, its meaning changes. De Andrade intervenes in the photographs by overlapping the images to bring the past into the present, and by counter-mapping the landscape with cartoon-like inscriptions. This contribution to the narrative of the Battle of Tejucupapo not only necessarily changes

and reimagines the battle's meaning, but also shows how it is indebted to previous reiterations.

The aesthetic interventions that are inspired by oral history produce opaque, ambiguous and relational epistemologies of the battle. By doing so, the narratives pose resistance to the preferences for a 'stable,' 'grounded' and 'objective' account of history. Following Jue, these preferences can be seen as 'terrestrial biases' (6), and these are unsettled by Tejucupapo's aquatic environment. The narratives that are told anew and adapted in the Tejucupapo delta, reflect the environment's murkiness and brackishness: different accounts saturate the past, creating an ambiguous retelling of history. Water is more than a material as it becomes an epistemic metaphor, inviting murky and brackish ways of knowing and relating to the colonial past.

Limits of Thinking with the Delta

Thinking with the Tejucupapo delta sheds light on the blurry entanglements between materials and cultures. However, to what extent does the Tejucupapo delta as a material-discursive contact zone overlook un-watery processes of obstruction, isolation and containment? And, what are the consequences and limits of murkiness and brackishness in a delta?

I return yet again to De Andrade's image of a Tejucupapo actress throwing water at a 'Dutch' soldier (see figure 1). As mentioned above, the photograph in fact consists of two images overlapping each other. De Andrade calls this technique "overlapping memories," which transforms the actors into "transparent figures, almost like phantoms interacting" (De Andrade et al. 00:07:15–00:07:20). By blurring the edge between the past and the present, De Andrade's photograph visualizes the continuation of the battle and gives voice to the numerous other battles still being fought in the northeast region of Brazil. Director of the Tejucupapo theater production, Luzia Maria da Silva states in an interview: "it's a struggle that goes on. Today, we don't fight the Dutch colonizers anymore, but we have the invading hunger, the invading misery and the invading lack of medicine. These are the 'Dutch invaders' of today" (De Andrade et al. 00:09:22–00:09:39). De Andrade elaborates: "it's a battle for basic rights, for human rights, for guarantees against the pandemic,¹ [for] everything that this government that we have now in Brazil doesn't recognize, doesn't do" (De Andrade et al. 00:09:40–00:09:52). For the women, the Battle of Tejucupapo did not end in 1646 with victory: their battle persists as they voice not only the discrimination, racism and sexism of Dutch Brazil in the 17th century, but simultaneously articulate the social, political and economic struggles of contemporary rural Brazil. Their yearly performance names and challenges these transhistorical issues.

This also explains the subtitle of De Andrade's work: *A Batalha do Todo Dia de Tejucupapo* (*The Daily Battle of Tejucupapo*). The photographs transcend the historic

¹ De Andrade's photographs were shot in 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

battle to show how the historical colonial struggles persist in the *daily* lived experiences of the women in Tejucupapo. De Andrade explicitly asked the actresses to wear their everyday clothes rather than their theater costumes, in order to emphasize their everyday struggles with socio-political and economic issues ("Teatro das Heroínas"). The photographs contain real women in the real world, not actresses in a fictitious world.

As such, there is a dissonance between the material hybridity of the delta in which Tejucupapo is situated, and the isolation and discrimination experienced by the delta's inhabitants. It is necessary to be wary of a delta's murkiness and brackishness, since uncritically mirroring the physical dimensions of a delta onto the cultural aspects of delta life may limit the possibilities of understanding the delta's complex contact zone (Krause and Harris 2). Those living in a delta might actually experience boundaries, stagnation and rigidity, rather than unchecked fluidity. Franz Krause and Mark Harris warn against using analytical terminology such as 'brackish,' 'murky' or even 'delta' that might *not* reflect the daily experiences of delta inhabitants (3). A material-discursive approach may overlook how ways of life do *not* reflect material processes. As such, deltas become places of material and cultural saturation, as they simultaneously become containers of separation and discrimination (Richardson 28).

Conclusion

By engaging with the Battle of Tejucupapo and its aesthetic reiterations, this article explored how materials and cultures interact with each other to tell and reimagine stories in a troubled delta. Each subsequent reiteration reinvents the historic battle, showing that context and medium matter. Although De Andrade's photography series exhibits the 1646 battle, it *also* troubles ('makes murky') it by bringing the past into a distinctly contemporary context. These contemporary reiterations reflect the importance of the battle to the Tejucupapo community, but also its significance for a Dutch audience visiting the Foam Museum exhibition who is confronted by the Dutch colonial past.

Intermediality reaches beyond aesthetic media to examine how one's milieu can determine discourses, narratives and lives. The Tejucupapo delta is not a backdrop or stage where stories are told and retold; instead, the delta's materiality actively participates in the reimagining of the battle. Its murky and brackish mixture of saltwater, freshwater and land shapes how the battle is retold. Entangling different cultures, materials and temporalities, the delta at Tejucupapo functions as a murky and brackish contact zone, which reimagines interactions between humans and aquatic environments. By approaching the contact zone from a material-discursive angle, this article reconfigured Pratt's concept in order to visualize the reciprocal relationships between the delta, its human inhabitants and its colonial history. The Tejucupapo delta thus embodies a contact zone that emphasizes the watery dimensions of conflictual encounters between colonizing and colonized cultures.

Oral history and its intermedial narratives offer relational epistemologies that trouble the attempt to 'pin down' facts and results, showing the fluidity and subjectivity

of stories. These intermedial aesthetic reiterations produce narratives that reimagine the entanglements between water and colonial histories. Thus, water in the Battle of Tejucupapo is more than a military weapon; it is also a conflictual mediator between peoples, an ambiguous environment and an epistemic metaphor that can inspire alternative ways of narrating and reimagining the colonial past.

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