

Report on Eduard Arriaga’s Master Class “Afro-Latinx Digital Storytelling: A Twine Journey to Narrative Decolonization” and Keynote Lecture “Afro-Brazilian Community Data Networks: Technological Hybridity, Data Decolonization and Human Reaffirmation”

Events in the Framework of the Weaving Knowledge Event Series at the GCSC, Justus Liebig University Giessen, May 9, 2023, Germany

Fiona Quast

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

fiona.quast@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

How to cite:

Quast, Fiona: “Report on Eduard Arriaga’s Master Class ‘Afro-Latinx Digital Storytelling: A Twine Journey to Narrative Decolonization’ and Keynote Lecture ‘Afro-Brazilian Community Data Networks: Technological Hybridity, Data Decolonization and Human Reaffirmation’”. In: KULT_online 68 (2023).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2023.1398>



Report on Eduard Arriaga’s Master Class “Afro-Latinx Digital Storytelling: A Twine Journey to Narrative Decolonization” and Keynote Lecture “Afro-Brazilian Community Data Networks: Technological Hybridity, Data Decolonization and Human Reaffirmation”

Fiona Quast

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

In July 2022, the GCSC community had the pleasure of connecting with EDUARD ARRIAGA (Clark University) for the first time. The GCSC’s Research Area 5: Media and Multiliteracy Studies organized an online book discussion with Associate Professor Dr. Eduard Arriaga on his latest publication *Afro Latinx Digital Connections* (Gainesville 2021). The 2021 volume represents a pioneering work that deals with different uses and approaches to digital technologies, tools and platforms by Afrodescendants in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since participants of the book discussion were very interested in the issues *Afro-Latinx Digital Connections* deals with, RA5 decided to dedicate further research area meetings to topics revolving around digital connections of Afrodescendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Together with the Emerging Topics Research Group Migration and (De)coloniality and Research Area 9: Ecology and the Study of Culture, RA5 invited professor Arriaga to host a master class and give a keynote lecture within the framework of the Weaving Knowledge Event Series (est. 2022).

The ongoing Weaving Knowledge Event Series, which is co-organized by the ETRG Migration and (De)coloniality, RA9, and RA5, compiles critical perspectives on knowledge production and distribution. The event series is intended to spark interdisciplinary reflections on the ways epistemologies are constructed and upheld. One central aspect of the Weaving Knowledge Event Series is to learn through what processes scholars, activists, and practitioners can weave their knowledge and produce sustainable networks of alternative knowledge(s).

The poster is a blue rectangular graphic. At the top right is the JLU logo with the text 'NEUE WEGE SEIT 1607' and the Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen logo below it. The main title 'GCSC KEYNOTE LECTURE SERIES' is centered in white. Below the title is a row of six colorful illustrations of diverse people. A blue banner at the bottom contains the text: 'Afro-Brazilian Community Data Networks: Technological Hybridity, Data Decolonization and, Human Reaffirmation' and 'Prof. Dr. Eduard Arriaga (Clark University, USA)'. At the very bottom, there is the GCSC logo, the date and time 'Tuesday, May 9, 2023 | 6-8 p.m. | GCSC & online', and a QR code.

On May 9, 2023, the GCSC welcomed Eduard Arriaga, chair of the Language, Literature and Culture department at Clark University, in person. Professor Arriaga’s scholarship is interdisciplinary in nature. He works at the intersection of critical race studies, Afro-Latinx and Afro-Latin American studies, digital studies and digital humanities. As an Afro-Colombian US-based academic, Eduard Arriaga has furthered research and taught at institutions in Colombia, Canada and the USA including as chair of the Global Languages and Cross-Cultural Department at the University of Indianapolis.

Right at the start of the summer term 2023, Arriaga presented GCSC and JLU members with a double feature event on Afro-Latinx digital practices and culture in the Americas in a keynote lecture on “Afro-Brazilian Community Data Networks: Technological Hybridity, Data Decolonization and Human Reaffirmation” and in a hands-on master class on “Afro-Latinx Digital Storytelling: A Twine Journey to Narrative Decolonization.”

On the morning of May 9, Arriaga facilitated a workshop on digital storytelling both as “creative and critical thinking practice to question traditional narratives (representations of time, space, and body materiality) on and about Afro-Latinx cultures” (Arriaga 2023). Arriaga particularly designed a Twine workshop for GCSC and JLU members on the basis of his decolonial and feminist research approach. Twine is an open-source tool that can be used to digitally tell stories or create text-based games. In a four-hour workshop, Eduard Arriaga brought eight participants,

PhD candidates from the GCSC but also post-doctoral researchers of the FBo4 involved in the “LevelUp: Data Literacy and Serious Games” project, closer to basic features and coding techniques of Twine. The scholar also made participants think critically about game and narrative production/construction. The workshop was comprised of four moments: 1) Creating Narratives as an Act of Re-existence (a decolonial perspective), 2) Analyzing Twine Games, 3) Playing with Twine, 4) Developing Your Own Game/Story.

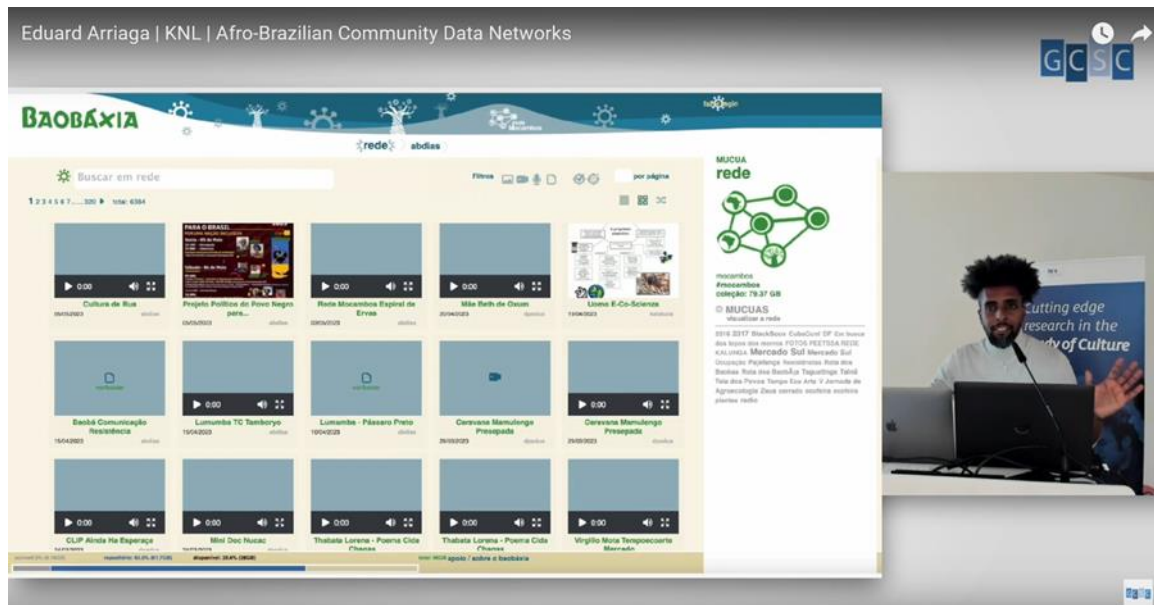
As introduction to the workshop, Arriaga gave input on narrative creation as a process, the relation of narrative to community and nation as well as the coloniality of power. Further, he introduced the notion of re-existence understood as creation of own alternative worlds by marginalized communities. Participants were then invited to discuss several questions, such as: Who gets to create stories, who gets to tell another person’s story, what does it mean to represent people and cultures accurately through narratives and how do we reclaim an active role in telling or creating our own stories and games. This introduction allowed participants to immediately engage in a conversation with the scholar and the other participants. Through this interactive introduction to the workshop, Arriaga created a pleasant atmosphere for workshop participants where they were happy to openly share their ideas and knowledge(s).

In the workshop’s second moment, Eduard Arriaga presented key features of Twine. This had the objective of teaching participants to identify those features in the analysis of four different twine games that Arriaga shared with the group. In pairs, participants analyzed Anna Anthropy’s (2013) “Queers in Love at the End of the World” (<https://w.itch.io/end-of-the-world>), Mary Standfield et al.’s (2016) “A Witch’s World!” (<https://rainbowstarbird.itch.io/a-witchs-word>), Michael Lutz’ (2019) “The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo” (<https://ztul.itch.io/the-uncle-who-works-for-nintendo>) and Tylyn Johnson’s (2022) “Communal Creativity: A Game of Poetry” (<https://tykywrites.itch.io/communalcreativity>). The analysis process started with each pair playing one designated twine game. Each pair was to take notes on the different aspects of game type, argument, design decisions, interactivity, target audience, player character relation, representation of identities, and possible changes to the games. Afterwards, each pair had the chance to present their findings. The discussion resulted in a very interesting exchange of perspectives. In some cases, players of the same pair had completely different experiences playing the same game.

The workshop's third moment represented the hands-on exploration of twine and the close-reading of a test game ("A Grad Student in a German University") created by Arriaga himself. Professor Arriaga showcased the exemplary game in order to analyze the back end of the game together with participants. Participants were able to learn about simple and more complex operations for twine code. Afterwards, participants were invited to experiment with different code on their own. At this point participants were very excited to get to coding. The participants used the online-browser version of twine. First, the workshop participants explored twine by themselves, clicking on buttons to see what happened. Then Arriaga guided the group through the process of creating a new project, building passages and links between passages, how to edit and design text, and further actions. The workshop time went by quickly and did not fully suffice for the plans Arriaga had of, fourthly, building stories based on real life scenarios connected to microaggressions toward Afro-Latinx and Black students. In the end participants shared the common sentiment that another session with Eduard Arriaga would have been needed and much appreciated.

On the same day of the workshop, the GCSC community had the chance to hear about "Afro-Brazilian Community Data Networks: Technological Hybridity, Data Decolonization and Human Reaffirmation" in Eduard Arriaga's keynote lecture. Arriaga is currently writing a book that examines how Afro-Brazilian marginal communities, "through hybrid and communal digital practices challenge algorithmic determinism in search of data and social justice" (Arriaga, KNL 2023). In the keynote lecture which formed part of the Weaving Knowledge Event Series, Arriaga gave insight into his ongoing research with focus on strategies of Afro-Brazilian groups and organizations to create "networks of hybrid technologies in search of data and technological decolonization" (Arriaga, KNL 2023). In his presentation, Arriaga first discussed two perspectives and approaches to the meaning of "data." He proceeded to explain what Afro-Brazilian community data networks meant in the framework of his scholarship. Following this, through several case studies that Arriaga's yet-to-be-published book will deal with, he showed how the examined communities and organizations "adapt and adopt diverse media, digital tools, and platforms" (Arriaga, KNL 2023). His research comes from an Afro-Brazilian Black feminist perspective and examines how Afro-Brazilian communities challenge data and technological determinism. In line with this, Arriaga presented how Afro-Brazilian practitioners "get connected to local, regional, and global nodes to develop critical pedagogies of the digital

from the South” (Arriaga, KNL 2023). Finally, Arriaga discussed how the cases represented examples of “hybrid Black communal digital practices that require complex approaches that go beyond the boundaries of fields such as the digital humanities” (Arriaga, KNL 2023).



The very insightful keynote lecture was followed by a response by DANAE GALLO GONZÁLEZ (Justus Liebig University) and a Q&A session with the audience. Gallo González’ work encompasses research on non-heteronormative identities, literatures, and cultures of the Afro-Romania, mainly on the national contexts Spain and Portugal, but also on Equatorial Guinea, Colombia, and Brazil. In March, together with Julia Borst, Gallo González organized a conference on “Afrodescendants on the Iberian Peninsula: Projections and Positionalities in Literature, Art, and Media (Past and Present)” at University of Bremen. Gallo González is a postdoctoral researcher at the GCSC whose research deals with aesthetic activism by Afro-Colombian and Afro-Brazilian YouTubers. She gave a thought-provoking response to the presented issues on Afro-Brazilian data networks.

Gallo González moderated and mediated the many questions that the audience had for Arriaga. For example, the audience was eager to know in what ways the pandemic had affected and impacted digital practices and connections of the communities under examination. Scholars in the audience raised questions about the ancestor’s role and space in digital data networks. Further questions concerned the concept of re-existence or questions on the digital collaborations of Afro and indigenous communities. Eduard Arriaga gave detailed answers to

the very different questions. The full keynote lecture can be accessed via the GCSC's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@gcsc>.

On Wednesday morning, May 10, Prof. Arriaga used the opportunity to join RA5's meeting at the GCSC. RA 5 members had the chance to speak about their own projects and hear Prof. Arriaga's perspectives on them, which resulted in a very interesting and fruitful conversation for the attendees. GCSC members are left inspired by Eduard Arriaga's versatile expertise and his open ear to young career researchers. The research center is very much looking forward to further collaborations with Eduard Arriaga.