

Introduction

Ethnographic Perspectives on the Atlantic

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But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still forever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick* offered us a fascinating account of the world from an 'Atlantic perspective', producing what has recently been called an 'Oceanic ordering' (Long 2011), where the Atlantic appears as a fiction, an imaginary, and a perspective to understand the world, given to us by Ishmael, a whaler and seafarer who narrates a specific quest of search and discovery amidst the oceanic waves. Thus, the giant white whale has subsequently populated public imaginaries through multiple artistic refashionings. For instance, several decades later, Witold Gombrowicz would also offer us a *Trans-Atlantyck* narrative of European exile in America, in the wake of the Second World War. And throughout the twentieth century, other Atlantic imaginaries would ensue, within and beyond the realm of fiction, from the disastrous luxury of the Titanic to the mysterious Bermuda Triangle.

But the Atlantic is more than an artistic assemblage of routes and itineraries; it is a space of creativity, imagination, recreation and memory, displayed throughout multiple continuities and discontinuities, connections and disconnections. It is a 'human affair' (Balkenhol and Swinkels 2015) that binds people with history, faith, politics and creation. Immediately, an image comes to mind: that of the Yoruba goddess Iemanjá, also brilliantly described in works of the Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado, notably

Mar Morto ('Dead Sea'), published in 1936. On the shores of the northern Brazilian city of Bahía, the 'people of the sea' learn to survive with what Iemanjá, the 'Queen of the sea', would give them: death, but also worldview and hope. Iemanjá could easily be understood as a token of the historical, political, social and religious processes that have emerged from the histories of empire and colony in the Atlantic space, in particular in stories concerning trans-Atlantic slavery, exploitation, violence and survival.

There is, in such depictions and imaginaries, a certain degree of civilizational recognition, in similar terms to how Fernand Braudel (1972) described the Mediterranean: a *longue durée* human geography, which produced a socially recognizable maritime 'physical unity', as it were. However, as recently reminded by Stephan Palmié in *The Cooking of History* (2014), there is in this space as much historical weight as there is active mixing and fabricating on behalf of plural constellations of writers, intellectuals, producers and practitioners. And in this framework, we often appreciate how, despite its rhizomatic multiplicity, the Atlantic is often depicted, intellectually speaking, through categorizations that section it into distinct pieces.

Thus, as several authors have reminded us in recent years, the Atlantic is 'black' (Gilroy 1993) but also 'earth-colored' (Vale de Almeida 2004), 'red' (Weaver 2014), 'Lusophone' (Sansi 2007; Naro, Sansi-Roca and Treece 2007), 'Iberian' (Adelman 2006; Schwartz 2008), 'diasporic' (Johnson 2007), 'Christian' (Sarró and Blanes 2008), 'prophetic' (Sarró and Blanes 2009a), 'secret' (Palmié 2007), 'trance-national' (Routon 2006), and surely many other things. Such descriptions and analyses emerge in the aftermath of important innovations in the field of the study of Atlantic history, such as John Thornton's books *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (1998) or *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Heywood and Thornton 2007). Thornton's contributions were fundamental in the establishment of two historiographical advancements: the transcendence of traditional regional studies into a more flexible and dynamic understanding of the Atlantic as a 'zone' that is in constant flux and transformation; and the identification of the plurality and diversity of routes and trajectories through which that zone was configured – namely, through the description of the role played by central Africans in the process – against the hegemonic narrative that drew the history of the Atlantic slave trade with West Africa as its main point of departure.

These contributions came in a time when traditional conceptual (Eurocentric and white) hegemonies concerning the history of the Atlantic were also in process of deconstruction, several decades after

the inspiring works of W.E.B. du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon and others. After pioneering efforts by, for example, Melville Herskovits (1941), Roger Bastide (1967) and Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1976), perhaps the most poignant of such critiques was Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), which was a strong argument against cultural nationalism and the way discourses of/on modernity overshadowed an empiria of creative, black (and Jewish) transnationalisms in favour of victorious histories of white Euro-American progress and dominion. Thus, for Gilroy, the identification of a 'black Atlantic' was as much about the disciplinary work of historical and sociological investigation as about the semantic and political identification of an anti-hegemonic counterculture. One outcome of this political deconstruction was also the progressive abandonment of approaching cultures in the Atlantic as the result of syncretism and 'hyphenization', as it were.

In this same spirit, but with a closer empirical attention, in this book we propose an ethnographically based route to explore alternative itineraries towards an anthropology of the Atlantic. We continue to look for alternative 'black Atlantics': historical and social engagements that not only complexify the Atlantic map, but also reframe the memory work that surrounds it. We do so by conveying a particular emphasis in the issue of 'perspective', appealing to the importance of positionality in the creative (re-)constructions of the Atlantic space. This requires an immediate clarification: we are not referring directly to what is known in the discipline of social anthropology as 'perspectivism', but rather to the exploration of how worldviews, and the points of view from which they are observed, are navigated. Gerd Baumann has aptly described this with the metaphor of the sextant, 'the instrument that sailors use to calculate their own position relative to a changing night sky' (Baumann 1999: 78–79). Within this framework, perspective is more than a mere act of observation – a gaze that seemingly comes from nowhere. Rather, we understand the term 'perspective' as a political act of positioning that is deeply embodied, involving subjects and objects, bodies and things, and the relations between them (Balkenhol 2018). Such a view, we argue, goes beyond the false alternative of radical constructivism and positivism, as well as the unquestioned authority of an unqualified 'insider' perspective that is becoming dominant in some quarters of the Atlantic world in all kinds of tribalist views of culture, whether nationalist or subaltern (Al-Azmeh, as cited in Baumann 1999: 70). It is more akin to what Donna Haraway (1988) has called 'situated knowledge'. Insisting on the 'embodied nature of all vision', Haraway argues for an 'embodied objectivity' that comes from 'specific and particular embodiment' instead of a false

vision that promises transcendence (see below). This book is made up of such 'partial' perspectives that do not promise a view from above, but nevertheless, in the notion of Atlantic perspectives, they become more than the sum of its parts.

Such 'Atlantic perspectives' are neither totalizing strategies ('views from above') nor capitulations against social complexity, in the sense of the 'cartographies of the absolute' that Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle (2014) discussed. They are theories of the world that are consciously conceived of as part of plural and often competing histories. Hence the plural conceptions of the Atlantic that emerge from the references above and from the different ethnographic contributions to this volume. The reader will find contributions that do not stem from strictly 'Atlantic' sites. While we work within the physical cartography that connects Africa, America and Europe, we expose logics of Atlantic connection that are go far beyond the Oceanic coasts (e.g. Peru in America, Burkina-Faso in Africa) but that reveal an undoubtedly Atlantic directionality in the geographical and historical imagination of the people whose lives have been shared by the ethnographers. To use Herman Melville's epigraph, these are places where the Atlantic, too, is in their 'being'.

Within and Beyond the Christian Atlantic

As a lived experience, and not only as an object of academic research, the Atlantic Ocean is today a space of both memory and hope: of memory, because after the centuries of colonial enterprise, slavery and forced mobility, it has become the very soil through which many peoples search and locate their past genealogies and roots, settling accounts with turbulent histories of slavery, mission and conversion (see e.g. Diouf 2007 for a recent compelling account); and of hope, because those processes of location have often been mediated and confronted by both secular and religious movements – diasporic, extra-territorialized or re-territorialized – that have brought past memories into contemporary, thriving experiences. Some authors have described these movements as *branchements* (Amselle 2001) or *extraversions* (Bayart 2000); or, more straightforwardly, as diasporic cultures (Johnson 2007). For instance, at a time in which UNESCO is generating a heritagization of the history of slavery with the 'Slave Route' project, several religious and political grass-roots movements, from West Africa to Central Africa, from Latin America to North America, and from Portugal to the Netherlands, promote their own engagements with the history of Empire. This is the case, for instance, of Bakongo prophetic cultures such as Kimbanguism, which

is currently enacting a 'back to Africa' movement (see Sarró and Mélice 2012).

As we will see from several contributions in this volume, other movements reinterpret and recreate the history and topography of religious missionary encounters in this space. Thus, for instance, in what concerns the history of Christianity in particular, many such movements reflect classic itineraries in the Atlantic history with which we are all familiar today: European mission, heading towards Africa or South America; and the outlook of the so-called Afro-hyphenated religions (Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Cuban, etc.), as well as Rastafarianism and other pan-Africanist religious movements. Others, perhaps less notorious for many, are equally relevant: for example, late nineteenth-century international ventures such as the Nazarene movement, or the North American genesis of southern African Zionist churches; or the transcontinental effects of sorcery; or the southern Atlantic expansion of prophetic, messianic and neo-Pentecostal modalities of Christianity (see e.g. Sarró and Blanes 2009b; Parés and Sansi 2011; van de Kamp 2012; Ramos 2015). Discussions on contemporary religiosity in the Atlantic space have recently been mapping out these diverse trajectories, revealing historically unexpected directionalities: from historical evidence on missionary effort from the 'south to the north', to bouncing-back trends of Christian 'southernization' of Euro-American domains; from specific processes of Pentecostal expansion in Africa and South America, to African Christian transnationalization into European or West African transnational religious networks, or African 'religious extraversion' through the Caribbean (Mary 2000, 2002; Killingray 2003; Harris 2006; Routon 2006; Capone 2007a and b; Clarke 2007; Sarró and Blanes 2008, 2009a; Adogame and Spickard 2010; Noret 2010; Formenti 2014).

In the religious context, several authors have attempted a similar rethinking of the Atlantic space through innovative positionings and arguments that question the classic linearities and tropes. One example is J. Lorand Matory (2005), who has argued for a historicization of the mutual transformations in the black Atlantic, moving beyond the understanding of Afro-Brazilian culture as a 'survival' and heading instead towards a recognition of the hyphenated Afro- as a matter of strategic choice. Taking Candomblé, the archetypical Afro-Brazilian religion, as a case in point, he explores its 'counterparts' – that is, the different manifestations in such diverse places as Nigeria, Benin, Cuba and Trinidad. Another case in point in the same geographical context is Luis Nicolau Parés and Roger Sansi's debate on 'sorcery' in the black Atlantic (2011), in which they unveil the transnational dimension of what has been historically defined as an 'African phenomenon'. In a similar vein, Stephan

Palmié (2002, 2007, 2014) has established a critical understanding of 'Africa' as seen from other shores (e.g. Cuba), exploring the conceptual potential behind the otherwise neglected notion of creole-ness. In both cases, historical knowledge is about both place and movement simultaneously. As Kenneth Routon (2006) framed it, there are 'religious imaginaries of belonging' at stake in the Atlantic, offering new understandings of historical consciousness, mobility and, ultimately, globalization and transnationalism. From this perspective, Toyin Falola and Matt Childs' *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (2004), as well as Hermione Harris's *Yoruba in Diaspora* (2006), also depict new mappings and political imaginaries in the 'transatlantic dialogue' (Capone 2007b).

Together with these Yoruba debates, those around the Christian legacies of Portugal have been particularly helpful in the rethinking of Atlantic fluxes and refluxes. In a previous article (Sarró and Blanes 2009a), two of the editors of this volume proposed the concept of 'prophetic diasporas' in order to frame the plurality of 'moving religions' in the Lusophone Atlantic, exploring new directionalities and politics of belonging – namely, the place of Angolan and Congolese prophetic Christians in the diasporic scenario of Western Europe. Considering the complexity and vitality of the space, both in historical and contemporary terms, we argued that the Christian Lusophone Atlantic deserved further questioning in its own terms. No matter how rooted in the Lusophone colonial and postcolonial heritage, the transnational Christian networks observed today – those involving Catholicism, prophetic movements, Afro-Brazilian cults, Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism – are multiple, and follow diverse paths that do not necessarily have the former metropolitan Lusophone capital of Lisbon as either an origin or a final harbour. Furthermore, we also found the 'Lusophone Atlantic' (see Naro, Sansi-Roca and Treece 2007) a privileged space to rethink contemporary Christianity, not only through the contemporary transnational dynamics but also because of its unique historical legacy after centuries of constant flux of people, ideas and things.

However important these debates may be, the Atlantic religious exchange cannot be resumed to the Christian sphere. There are many other 'religious Atlantics' operating alongside the Christian and/or Lusophone one (see e.g. D'Alisera 2003; Lovejoy 2004). As several authors have argued (e.g. Sweet 2003, 2011), an excessive focus on the so-called Christian Atlantic (Sarró and Blanes 2008) is exercised to the detriment of many actors and entire belief systems – a point also endorsed by many contributors to this volume. Thus, we offer an invitation for a parallax and a shift of focus in the study of the Atlantic from a grounded ethnographic perspective.

When collecting the essays that became chapters of this book, we realized that it would be impossible to put them into a particular geographical order, or even to create sub-thematic units. Rather, two ‘perspectives’ emerged in the way different authors looked at the intersection of places, spirits and heritage, as they had been invited to do. The first perspective could be captured by the notion of ‘friction’, that is, an intersection – whether confluence or conflict – between different social, political and religious movements, and the anthropological exploration of the interlocutory processes shaping them. The ethnographic analyses under that concept unveil not only processes of identification, self-ascription and distinction, but also the emergence of spaces ‘in-between’.

The second perspective could be encapsulated in the very concept of ‘gaze’, by which we mean exploring expressive and aesthetic dimensions of the processes in which places, spirits and heritages unfold. Gaze is understood here not as a passive ‘worldview’, but as a social activity of ‘world-making’ in which looking at the world is part and parcel of creating meaningful spaces of belonging. Attention to these two perspectives may help to navigate the dense ethnographic content of the volume.

Atlantic Frictions

Approaches to religious, social and political creativity in the Atlantic space must incorporate questions of pluralism, cohabitation and confrontation. Ramon Sarró (2009), in his ethnography of iconoclasm and religious change in the Republic of Guinea, describes how the history of Christianity and Islam in that country throughout the twentieth century cannot be understood without considering the history of iconoclastic campaigns against each other, as well as against traditional religiosity – and all with a backdrop of transatlantic colony and mission, and subsequent emancipation. At the same time, such dialectics appear against a background of dramatic political transformation. As he described, the memories and worldviews of the Baga were composed of acts of destruction and the recreation of landscapes, topographies and materialities.

Similarly, in his study of the emergence of an Angolan prophetic movement known as the Tokoist Church in the late colonial period and throughout the first decades of independence, Ruy Llera Blanes (2014) also identified how it was shaped by shifting transnational political contexts, from the demise of the transatlantic Portuguese empire to the emerging cold war politics, and also by transforming religious interlocutions, from

Euro-American protestant mission and Portuguese Catholicism to Pan-Africanist prophetic and messianic cultures.

Attention to friction does not necessarily imply a rejection of the historical, social or political relevance of specific categories pertaining to religion, race and ethnicity in the Atlantic space, but is a reframing of their significance from the spaces of intersection and heterodoxy. It allows us to reframe both traditional conceptions of sociality in the Atlantic as syncretism, and as a discrete, bounded reality. We attribute equal epistemological validity to processes of resistance, rupture and creativity, as to the political and academic processes of stabilization (see Chapter 1 by Diana Espírito Santo) and validation/legitimation.

Several contributions to this volume highlight the interlocutory character of Atlantic perspectives, which in turn appear as not self-contained in the space of the Atlantic itself, but extending relationalities and referentialities beyond it. The starting point is perhaps best identified in Roger Sansi's contribution (Chapter 2), where he addresses the reproduction of binaries in theories of religion in the Atlantic space: syncretism/adaptation, recreation/resistance, authenticity/invention, etc. In order to overcome the limitations of such binary approaches, Sansi rightly readdresses this history in terms of 'revelation' – the disclosures, announcements and expositions that populate the religious worldviews and expressions across the Atlantic. This operates a not very obvious yet fundamental distinction: instead of seeking 'truths' in this space, we acknowledge narratives that point towards different truths, which vary according to one's own positionality.

One good example of this is the contribution by Carmen González Hacha (Chapter 3), which narrates the story of a 'new Israel' across the Atlantic, even if it is in fact taking place in the rather 'Pacific' site of Peru. González Hacha describes the emergence of a prophetic messianic movement known as the Evangelical Association of the Israelites Mission of the New Universal Pact (AEMINPU), also known as *Israelites*, founded by Ezequiel Ataucusi Gamonal, an Andean peasant from Arequipa (southern Peru), who received the 'divine mission' to announce a new salvation pact and a new 'Royal Law' to humanity. This process of reinstatement or rebooting, she argues, was effected simultaneously as a narrative for indigenous communities in Peru and elsewhere in South America, but also as a critical revision of Christian theology that, in turn, produced new topographical orderings, which included the reconversion of the Andean landscape and that of the contemporary Peruvian diaspora to Europe into an Israelite Atlantic space.

Territory also becomes a central element in the discussion set forth by Katerina Hatzikidi (Chapter 4) in her exploration of the intersection of

religious devotion and land occupation in a rural *quilombo* (maroon settlements) in the state of Maranhão in Brazil. She explains how the local participation in the local Catholic patron saint *feira* implies a public claim in terms of their legitimate occupation of communal lands, in particular vis-à-vis Pentecostal land antagonists. Thus, as she argues, religious activism becomes territorial activism.

Similarly, Diana Espírito Santo addresses a topographical problem in her description of the emergence of an Asian spiritual element (the *Chinos*) in the otherwise classical Afro-Atlantic cosmology of the *Espiritismo* landscape in Cuba. In this respect, she identifies the processes of 'imagining and imaging of *el Chino*' in the local spiritual-scape, and analyses how that process of spiritual 'ingestion' and 'regurgitation' of new *muertos* unveils a diverse Atlantic chronotopy, and at the same time a counter-official Cuban memory that acknowledges the history of Chinese presence on the island.

Such processes of mutual constitution appear in two more chapters. Bruno Reinhardt (Chapter 5) describes an emergent space of identification and a new moral geography in the Atlantic: that of the black evangelical movements in Salvador (Bahia). He addresses the apparent conundrum of *evangélico* movements that have historically been predominantly white – and often described as racist and intolerant, in a context of public confrontation between evangelical and Candomblé movements – but simultaneously incorporating a plasticity that allows for the emergence of alternative identifications that in turn stage new processes of articulation with black Atlantic history. One consequence identified by Reinhardt is the reflexive deconstruction of mainstream evangelical demonology, which has usually incorporated Afro-Brazilian deities.

Claudia Swatowski (Chapter 6) explores another dialectic: that of the concomitant and simultaneously diverging institutional strategies developed by the UCKG (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God) across Brazil and Portugal, which stemmed from a recognition of the diverse religious and political landscapes in each country. What she describes are the consequences of this acknowledgement in terms of aesthetics and visual statements of the church in the Portuguese public sphere, attempting a balance between its continuity with the hegemonic Brazilian version and the adaptation to local semiotics. Similarly, Clara Saraiva (Chapter 7) delves into the Brazil–Portugal connection to explore the symmetries and mirror-like effects of the ritual display of Afro-Brazilian spirituality between São Paulo (Brazil) and Braga (Portugal). Through her description of shrines and ritual work in the *terreiros* in both countries, Saraiva discovers a 'bridge' that creates a sort of 'Lusophone space' of Umbanda, which in turn exemplifies the plural and alternative *mestiçagens* observed

in this concept, thus complexifying classic narratives of authenticity, primordiality, race and identity in this particular context.

The Atlantic Gaze

The last examples of the previous section also exemplify how the complex processes of interlocution in the Atlantic space are mediated by a visual, aesthetic element – that which the eye sees, as Ramon Sarró notes in the conclusion to this volume. David Morgan (2005) argued that visual culture, upon which religious experience is often based, is an active engagement rather than an accumulation of passive contemplation. Because of that, he argued, the idea of ‘gaze’ is more encompassing than that of ‘image’: it constitutes the ‘social act of looking’ (ibid.: 3), thus highlighting the mutuality of the intersection between object, image, person and collective, in what comes to religious experience and ideology. Subsequently, Birgit Meyer (2011) has expanded this point of view into one of ‘aesthetic formations’, the articulation of religious experience through ever-evolving mediatized and sensorial processes, eventually becoming a matter of ‘sensation’ (both in the sense of sensoriality and spectacularity). She noted that, more than mere experience, such formations also act as forms of persuasion that enable ideological and political alignments (2010).

In a similar fashion, one can think of the history of a very Atlantic object – the fetish – as the perfect illustration of this intersection. Roger Sansi’s description of Afro-Brazilian art (2007) unearths such processes as being ones of objectification and ‘culturification’, as it were. As he points out, the creative dynamics of representation and ideological projection enable the shifting meanings of objects, places, landscapes and memories. Thus, one identifies logics of ‘production’ that assemble those elements into social and political formations, and make them collectively meaningful. This, for instance, is what Stephan Palmié (2014) identified in his reflection on the epistemology of Afro-Cuban religion.

In his highly visual and experimental contribution to this volume, written as a companion of a documentary entitled *The Possibility of Spirits* (2017), Mattijs van de Port (Chapter 8) creatively delves into an idea of ‘cornucopia aesthetics’ in order to grasp what he suggests can be creatively thought of as the ‘Baroque Atlantic’ – a theatrical, open-ended, perhaps even confusing space of consciousness, statement and expression. In a similar logic, many of the other contributions to this volume also highlight another dimension of Atlantic perspectives: how worldviews are informed by material, aesthetic, bodily and sensorial processes that shape the plural experience of the Atlantic space. Thus, Roos Dorsman

(Chapter 9) observes how musical and dance practices in New Orleans' famous Congo Square become part of what she describes as 'healing through commemoration'. In her approach to the highly mediatized – and very often negativized or at least exoticized – concept of 'voodoo', she understands that it signifies something 'beyond the actual word', exposing its relevance in multiple layers of topography and historicity, as well as industry (touristic and heritagizing). While she attempts to grasp what voodoo does to local practitioners and believers, she identifies the overarching 'voodoscape' that configures their experience.

Continuing along the lines of materiality, the body and the senses, Markus Balkenhol (Chapter 10) looks at the role of images in the 'imaging' of a diasporic community. Much in line with David Morgan's notion of the gaze, he understands images as being inextricably linked with their material forms and the perceiving bodies. Abstract notions of diaspora, ancestry and history become palpable through the material images – in this case, a newly created ancestor mask in the Afro-Surinamese Winti religion. This mask becomes particularly persuasive because it exists at the intersection of artistic, heritage and religious discourses, thus tapping into and amplifying the authority of all of them.

Ruy Llera Blanes' chapter on 'places of no history' in Angola also looks into the intersection of overarching and underlying experiences and narratives of memory and belonging in the Atlantic. He conducts an alternative, counter-official journey through notorious heritagized sites of Angola, uncovering the alternative histories that the 'victorious history' of the Angolan regime effects upon its topography. In doing so, he identifies heterogeneous Atlantic connections that address and complement the more obvious directionalities of Angolan Atlantic history.

Landscapes, scenarios and their heritagization also appear as central aspects in two other contexts debated in this volume. For instance, Laurence Douny explores alternative historiographies and memories of transatlantic slavery in the hinterland of western Burkina-Faso, describing how people engage materially with history, and how historical knowledge is reproduced by acts of recounting, performing, displaying and curating that produce what she calls 'indigenous heritage landscapes'. Subsequently, she suggests that local definitions of heritage emphasize the ubiquitous and at the same time ambiguous role played by ancestry in the collective and embodied recognition of that history.

Likewise, the contribution by Ramon Sarró and Marina Temudo approaches heritage and landscape, in and around one of the most recent UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the city of Mbanza Kongo in northern Angola, whose inhabitants, the Kongo kings, were once one of the major agents in the making of the Atlantic. Their description of the local

landscape, however, unearths a more diverse and complexified heritagescape, of which the UNESCO route is but one layer (on this, see Berliner and Bortolotto 2013). We learn how mountains, rivers, forests and ruins are not only inserted within memory narratives on behalf of local officials and church leaders, but are inherently embedded in local oral history, and determine the form of local rural livelihoods. This is something that Sarró and Temudo identify as 'inscriptions' that produce a topography that is divergent from the official historical narrative, exposing a certain resentment and enclaving in the process.

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