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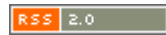
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### Travelling Identities: Paulo Nazareth's Works on the Migratory Routes

*Federica Stevanin*

#### Abstract

By employing an autobiographical form of narration in which self-representation is a way to explore his own roots and the diasporic identity of Latin Americans, the work of the Brazilian artist Paulo Nazareth (1977) addresses the issue of immigration and emigration in contemporary Latin America. In particular, the experience of travel to the United States at the core of the artistic project *News from the Americas* (2011-2012), in which Nazareth transformed himself into an emigrant, becomes a reflection on the issues faced by contemporary global migrants and emigrants. By following an uncertain path from Latin America to the United States, travelled before him by the member of his family and his fellow citizens, Nazareth uses performance, photography and video as a means to investigate both his ancestors' past and the historical, social, and racial constructs still present in Latin America and in the United States.

#### Keywords

Paulo Nazareth; contemporary art; media; emigration; Latin America

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# Travelling Identities: Paulo Nazareth's Works on the Migratory Routes

Federica Stevanin

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## Abstract

By employing an autobiographical form of narration in which self-representation is a way to explore his own roots and the diasporic identity of Latin Americans, the work of the Brazilian artist Paulo Nazareth (1977) addresses the issue of immigration and emigration in contemporary Latin America. In particular, the experience of travel to the United States at the core of the artistic project *News from the Americas* (2011-2012), in which Nazareth transformed himself into an emigrant, becomes a reflection on the issues faced by contemporary global migrants and emigrants. By following an uncertain path from Latin America to the United States, travelled before him by the members of his family and his fellow citizens, Nazareth uses performance, photography and video as a means to investigate both his ancestors' past and the historical, social, and racial constructs still present in Latin America and in the United States.

**Keywords:** Paulo Nazareth; contemporary art; media; emigration; Latin America.

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Since 2006 the work of Brazilian artist Paulo Nazareth (born 1977; given name Paulo Sérgio da Silva) has addressed the complex history and identity of Latin American people still facing not only racial, gender and social discrimination, but also experiencing, through migration, an unremitting condition of uprooting and loss. The long-term performance *News from the Americas* (2011-2012) is one of Nazareth's key projects in which, in order to increase his knowledge of his own roots, the artist literally put himself in the shoes of an emigrant and followed the migratory routes to the United States travelled by his people. By employing an autobiographical form of narration in which self-representation is used as a political means to explore the multifaceted identity of Latin Americans, *News from the Americas* becomes a reflection on the issues faced by contemporary emigrants all over the world.

## 1 The premises: the early performances *Important Public Notice* (2006), *One Rupee for my Country* (2006), and *Authentic Mixed Man* (2008)

The poetics of Paulo Nazareth is deeply rooted in the past and present of his own country, Brazil, a nation whose population “originated as migrants, arriving either involuntarily as slaves from Africa or voluntarily as free immigrants” (Lesser 2013: 6). Migratory streams have played such an important role in the history of the country that “Brazilian identity” can be considered “synonymous with the nation’s immigrants” (Lesser 2013: 1). Immigration of Portuguese colonists and African slaves to the Eastern part of Latin America, already inhabited by a great number of different indigenous groups simply labelled as ‘Indians’ by the newcomers, began in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Even after the abolition of slavery in 1888, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century many Europeans (Portuguese, Germans, Spanish, and Italians) and Middle-Easterners continued to be welcomed in Brazil as agricultural and industrial labourers in order to build the “land of the future” (Zweig 1941). Immigrants shaped the history of Brazil to the point that “Brazilians often treat ‘immigrant’ as a status that is ancestral or inherited, one that can remain even among those born in the country” (Lesser 2013: 2-3). As a consequence of immigration, Brazilian society has always been characterized by the presence and influence of different ethnic groups who have suffered containment, marginalization and discrimination. During the Estado Novo (1937-1945) led by Getúlio Vargas, whose aim was to guarantee a process of national homogenization of the population at the expense of diversity, the need to build a strong national identity resulted in a eugenic project of ‘whitening’ (*branqueamento*) the local population through the arrival of white European immigrants who, in turn, would have been made more ‘Brazilian’ by living with the locals; as a result, Brazilian society would have become a racial democracy. A side-effect of the contradictory theory of *branqueamento* was the paradoxical valorisation of “the figure of the *mestizo*, perceived as a transition element towards a white and civilized nation” (Ribeiro Corossacz 2005: 23; my translation). In this way, the theory of *branqueamento*, despite its claims to establish national unity through racial homogenization, actually maintained the pre-existent social and racial hierarchy inherited from colonialism, and the result was the reinforcement of social and racial differences inside Brazilian society. The failure of this policy, which attempted to obtain national unity at the expense of non-white Brazilians, was highlighted by Unesco in a series of research projects conducted between 1951 and 1952 with the aim of investigating racial issues inside the Brazilian population. The outcome of this project was in the first place the discovery of the presence of racial discriminations inside Brazil that discredited “the myth of racial democracy” (Bailey 2004). Secondly, it showed that Brazilians:

used many different words to express colour, and that the same word could be intended in different ways depending on who used it and in which context it was used. One was faced with a system in which the attribution criteria for colour was openly relational and situational, therefore not univocal (Ribeiro Corossacz 2005: 73; my translation).

This multifaceted interpretation of skin colour is the Brazilian way to express and at the same time soften racial classification. This theory finds support in DaMatta’s analysis, which uses the expression “the fable of the three races” (DaMatta 1987; my translation) in order to acknowledge the fact that every Brazilian sees him/her-self as a result of the miscegenation of three founding racial groups so that in Brazil “everyone can boast indigenous, Portuguese or African ascenders, because each one is part of this vast *miscegenação* process that formed Brazil” (Ribeiro Corossacz 2005: 76; my translation).

This premise was necessary in order to consider the context of Brazilian society to which Paulo Nazareth



belongs. After signing a decree in 2006 in which he proclaimed himself 'eternal defender of Brazil and of Brazilian art', Nazareth decided to use his own body and personal history as a way to explore his roots, his ethnic and cultural background, the past losses and present discrimination he shares with many other Latin Americans. Born in Governador Valadares, in the state of Minas Gerais, in Eastern Brazil, Paulo Nazareth lives in Palmital, Santa Luzia, a slum in the periphery of Minas Gerais. The name Minas Gerais derives from the presence of mines exploited by industry, while the artist has defined the state as "the mestizo Brazilian centre where blacks, indigenous, and white people meet" (Nazareth, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012; my translation). Nazareth represents the typical Brazilian mestizo, the 'mixed man' in whose veins flows the blood of indigenous, African and European ancestors. A quick look at his physical appearance (Afro hairdo often piled in a half-turban, dark-complexion, wide nose and mouth, a slender body) makes it hard to guess his country of provenance. Nazareth's desire to research his family tree has developed into a project which has progressively expanded and connected to the history of Brazil and of Latin America. The artist's decision to retrace his lines of ancestry (Indian, African, and European) and to follow the migration routes travelled by other members of his family to America has prompted him to reflect on what it means to be Latin American in the contemporary world. Issues such as race, criticism of dictatorships, the struggle against inequality and oppression, and the repercussions of colonialism shape at various levels the poetics of many Central and Latin American artists. Some of these artists are the Chilean Alfredo Jaar, the Brazilians Cildo Meireles and Maria Thereza Alves, as well as the Guatemalan Regina José Galindo. In addition to a shared interest in the issues mentioned above, the investigation of his own personal identity, more specifically his Afro-Brazilian Indigenous origins, as a means to retrace the history of his country and of his people, associates Nazareth's to that of both Jaime Lauriano and Rosana Paulino. These artists' works deal with the past and present of African-Brazilian people, facing issues like migration, violence, and the racial stereotypes associated to being black. As Nazareth has stated:

My intention is to talk about my place, my social place, my racial place; where I am coming from [...] I'm from a city of immigrants, and so I need talk about it. I need to talk about it with my work, my body, and anything else that I can (Nazareth, in Tan 2016).

This explains why Nazareth's autobiographical approach finds performance art to be the ideal medium of expression, and more specifically the majority of his artistic projects stem from experiences made while travelling inside and outside his country. But before discussing the aforementioned *News from the Americas*, it is important to consider some of the artist's early works as fundamental steps leading towards a gradual clarification of his artistic path and his *modus operandi*. In fact, in these early works Nazareth employed "some of the procedures and aesthetic values of conceptual experimentalism from the 1970s in a perceptive and humorous way" (Mazzucchelli, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012), which also included some references to the so-called 'relational art' of the 1990s. Indeed, his performances have included some "'relational' procedures" like games, meetings, or invitations intended as "vehicles through which particular lines of thought and personal relationships with the world are developed" (Bourriaud 2008: 46). Therefore, from the outset, Nazareth used his own body in a series of performances (many of them recorded with amateurish video cameras and photography) created during his travels around the countries from which many of his ancestors came as a way to test the elastic and all-encompassing notion of national identity in Brazil.

Paulo Nazareth's imprecise family history, passed down through generations, begins with his grandmother, Nazareth Cassiano de Jesus, "a Krenak-Indian, brought up in the tribe" (Melendi, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012). The Krenaks are an indigenous group who originally settled on the left bank of the Rio Doce in the state of Minas Gerais, and who experienced colonization and genocide from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. In fact, with the construction of the Vitória-Minas railroad (completed in 1904) and the imminent opening of new mining sites and settlements in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Krenaks were dispossessed of their lands and forced to move to remote reservations; those who dared to protest were imprisoned or in other ways confined. This process of annihilation reached a climax during the military dictatorship (1964-1984) with the institution of the Reformatório Krénak (1969-1972) founded "to correct Indian misfits" (Mariz, 2016; my translation). The artist's grandmother, a staunch defender of her people's rights, was forced into a mental asylum from which she never returned.

Since India is the homeland of many Asian people who immigrated to Brazil, it was a likely choice for Paulo Nazareth's first destination aimed at the discovery of his roots. India, which currently maintains considerable

economic relations with Brazil, was the first foreign country that Nazareth had ever visited. There he produced some early relational works thanks to which he was able to use art as a meeting point with others and, at the same time, as a way to question both his and their identities.

The performance *Important Public Notice* (2006), carried out in March 2006 in old New Delhi and captured with an amateurish video camera, is one of these works. The first part of the video documenting the performance shows the artist walking on the city streets. His presence is immediately noticed by all the local passers-by who swarm around him and are especially intrigued by him, in particular by his strange hairdo. Soon after we see Nazareth entering an office (probably a copy shop) where he receives a package containing a large stack of leaflets. The pamphlets were obviously conceived and ordered by him and bear the title 'Important Public Notice'. The leaflet contains a text written in English, Portuguese, and Hindi by Nazareth in which he describes the history of his family and his country, accompanied by three photographs: one of him, and two colonial pictures. The autobiography printed on the leaflets (an artistic giveaway, according to the artist) is meant to be handed out to the Indians he encounters during his walk, in order to explain his presence in India and to introduce himself to his 'brothers'. In fact, the leaflet is framed by a strip of words that make up the question 'Who is my brother?', signalling that the scope of Nazareth's walk is to find the lost members of his family in India. This task is obviously impossible, if not ridiculous. Nazareth's performances often have a humorous side, since jokes facilitate his contacts with strangers and allow him to use art as a channel for deeper reflection. In this case, the aim of the artist was to point out to those he encountered a long forgotten truth: the fact that Asians and Brazilians are close relatives as claimed also by the Pan-Indian Movement. By combining personal memories with history, Nazareth uses the leaflet as a way to communicate with others, and possibly involve them in an unlikely search for his lost brother. Moreover, the relationship he is able to establish with the passers-by is twofold: on the one hand the act of offering his autobiography helps people overcome their fear of the stranger, while on the other hand, the truly important public notice he wishes to communicate is that he is their brother.

*One Rupee for my Country* (2006) was another performance piece documented by a video, in which Nazareth turned his mixed origins into a game. Sitting on the stairs of a central square in New Delhi with his covered passport hanging from his neck, the artist promised to reward a rupee to anyone who was able to guess his country of origin. Since hearing his voice would have influenced his audience, the artist began his performance by simply displaying four sheets of paper in English and Hindi, which allowed him to open interaction with possible participants. Within minutes, a noisy crowd of men had gathered around him, and everyone was busy shouting out the names of different countries in order to win the reward. Nazareth's appearance, so similar to theirs, but at the same time so different, made the game quite challenging. In fact, it took almost twenty minutes for one of the participants to finally deduce the artist's country of origin. By employing a relational procedure, i.e. a game, Nazareth was able to engage the public in an "arena of exchange" in which art became "a state of encounter" (Bourriaud 2008: 18) with 'the Other'.

After his trip to India, in 2008 Nazareth visited Indonesia, a country characterized, like Brazil, by a past of colonization and by the coexistence of different ethnic or 'exotic' groups. In Jakarta, Nazareth performed a piece entitled *Authentic Mixed Man* (2008), this time placing himself in a spot visited by tourists (in front of the National Monument that celebrates the independence of Indonesia) with a cardboard sign hanging from his neck. The sign read: 'Authentic mixed ancestrally. Am I an exotic man in your eyes? Take me a photo – 100 rupee'. Once again, the artist posed a question to the passers-by, and this question regarded race. Nazareth's performance may have seem to be a joke at first sight, but a more careful analysis demonstrates that this performance was in fact quite serious. Nazareth was inviting us to reflect on the stereotypes and preconceptions at stake when judging the physical appearance of those we label as 'the Other'. Moreover, if we decide to consider him as authentically 'exotic' – that is, we recognize his *miscegenação* – we are obliged to compensate him with 100 rupee for a picture. On the one hand, the small amount of money we give him is an act of symbolic repayment for all the 'exotic' people who have been exploited and then cast aside by "the coloniality of power" (Quijano 2000); on the other hand, paying him reiterates that process of exploitation and highlights the fact that "authenticity is the currency at play in the marketplace of cultural difference" (Root 1996: 78).

In these early works Paulo Nazareth found in travel and in the connection with the other a fundamental means

to gain self-knowledge. All these elements would soon be developed more profoundly in his next project, *News from the Americas*, in which the artist, instead of retracing his ancestors' steps back, chose to become an inside witness to the contemporary mass migration of Latin Americans to the United States.

## 2 The artist as a migrant: *News from the Americas* (2011-2012)

*News from the Americas* is an artistic project and a long-term performance executed by Paulo Nazareth from March to October 2011, and lasting to his final return at the beginning of 2012 after having participated to Miami Art Basel in November 2011. To this day, this work is one of his most significant achievements in the exploration of issues like racial stereotypes, emigration, colonialism, social and political exclusion, and identity.

A review of the facts surrounding this epic journeys follows. In 2010 Nazareth was invited to participate in an art residency program in New York City, but instead of flying to the USA he decided to transform the trip into "a mobile residency project or a type of field research" (Mazzucchelli, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012). The voluntary prolongation of a journey that modern progress has shortened is a conscious choice made by the artist in order to investigate another aspect of his origins, i.e. the Latin American migrations to the United States. In fact, one of the largest emigrations of Brazilians took place during the 1980s, when "more than 1 million Brazilians left Brazil without returning" (Marcus 2009: 481), and many of these emigrants, as well as their descendants, continued to live – often illegally – abroad, mostly in America. This mass emigration was due in part to the harshness of the Brazilian economic crisis, and in part to the desire of many Brazilians to chase the American dream (nourished by what Alan Marcus defined "the geographical imagination") by settling in the land where anything is possible. This trend has continued to grow over time until the present day. In particular, Nazareth's hometown was among the Brazilian cities with "high rates of emigration, especially to the USA" (Goza 1992: 69; my translation). The desire to follow the path made by several members of his family, friends, and fellow citizens, inspired him to conceive the project *News from the Americas*.

The artist chose to make the journey from his hometown to New York alone, on foot, which is the typical means of travel of the Krenaks, without disdaining the common means of transportation utilised by Latin Americans migrants (trains, boats, cars, buses, or hitch-hiking). Walking and travelling on foot has already been employed by other contemporary artists such as the British Land artist Richard Long or his fellow countryman Hamish Fulton, also known as the 'walking artist'. However, for Long and Fulton walking was a way to merge with nature and the landscape, while Nazareth's wanderings have nothing to do with Land Art. Crossing borders and territories is instead a way to explore the multifaceted and ever-changing notion of identity inside Latin America, to analyse the stereotypes commonly associated with migrants, and to give visibility to a contemporary diaspora of marginalised people. In addition to this, we must not forget that walking was an ability painstakingly achieved by the artist over time, after having solved an orthopaedic problem during his childhood.

The idea of walking to establish a "relation between personal memory and official memory" (Nazareth, in Caporali 2011: 262) came to the artist in 2010 when he walked from Belo Horizonte to Liberdade/Mantiqueira Hills on a quest for news on his uncle, who had long before disappeared in that area while heading to Rondônia. Even though Nazareth was unable to locate his missing relative, he understood that the walk had functioned "as a memory builder" (Nazareth, in Caporali 2011: 262), in which his own personal history had merged with other stories. The *News from the Americas* project also stems from the artist's urgency to learn more about himself, his family, and the history of contemporary Latin America.

In his travel to the USA Nazareth carried with him as little as possible, like a man on the run. As a way to figuratively connect, through his own body, all the lands that he walked on, he decided to wear flip-flops. The dust accumulated on his feet throughout the entire journey was finally – and, once again, symbolically – washed off in the Hudson River once he had reached his final destination, New York City. The act represented reconciliation between Latin America and the United States, one continent divided only by political borders.

Thanks to communications received by the art critic Janaina Melo, we have some information as to the route followed by the artist. Between March and August 2011 Nazareth was in constant movement (and doing odd jobs for a living) through many Latin American countries like Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua,

Ecuador and Guatemala, until he reached the U.S.-Mexico border in September 2011. During these months, Nazareth also started a blog dedicated to his journey, and used photography and video to give life to a series of performances and artworks that connected him to the people he encountered on his path. These contacts began “a vertiginous and endless process of deconstructing himself and reconfiguring himself in others” (Trielli Ribeiro 2016: 454). This process was expressed in the photographic series entitled *Indigenous Face* (2011-2012) in which the artist tested how his own identity was continuously reconfigured in the eyes of ‘the others’. In each one of these images we see the artist posing beside one or more city-dwellers in order to compare their respective facial and body features. In my opinion, the frontal pose is not used in these photos as a reference to the “objectivity” of “the photographic language of Walker Evans” (da Costa 2015: 66; my translation). In my view, Nazareth is referring to the photographic cataloguing of Indigenous people created during colonialism as a means of control and comparison between different racial types. *Indigenous Face* intends to overturn this perspective in order to show not only how in contemporary Latin America similarities still emerge despite the differences, but also how elusive the concept of racial identity can be in this continent. Nazareth’s shifting black, white or mestizo appearance are subjective interpretations depending on the social and local context in which the artist finds himself and this awareness led him to learn more about his ancestry. As he said about his work: “I have transformed myself... by being the same” (Nazareth, in Melo, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012).

The trip to America also represented an occasion to experience how the colour of his skin could shift depending on his position on one side or the other of the U.S.-Mexico border. As the artist noticed:

Being mixed-race and traveling through the Americas, my skin color changes every day... at home the labels are not so well defined, but on heading further north everything is very orderly, there are different neighborhoods for black people, Arabs, chicanos and the rest of them. There are days when I’m a nigger/colored/black, but I cannot open my mouth because then my skin color changes, there are days when I am an arab, pakistani, indigenous and other adjectives which may change according to other peoples’ gazes and the words to come out of my mouth (Nazareth, in Melendi, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012).

In another series of performances created along the trip and documented through photography, the artist is shown standing in the streets holding a cardboard sign bearing a message. Some of them, like *Llevo recados a los EUA* (l.t.: *I carry messages to the USA*), simply announce his task to those he encounters, while in other cases the messages change meaning according to the place in which they are read, i.e. Latin America or United States. For example, the phrase *My image of exotic man for sale* (which recalls the performance he did in Jakarta) in Latin America is pure nonsense since it is already an ‘exotic’ place, while in America it becomes a comment upon the exploitability of the resources of Latin America (Latin American people included) by the USA. In the photographs the artist often poses with this message beside ‘Se vende’ or ‘No se vende’ signs (l.t.: *On sale/Not on sale*), in this way criticizing capitalistic society, as well. Other times the words written on the cardboard signs concern social stereotypes or racial prejudices towards Latin Americans. For example, the sign *I clean your bathroom for a fair price* (which is also one of the odd jobs done by the artist along his journey), is charged with the stereotype of the Latin American worker in America, underpaid and accustomed to doing humble jobs to make a living. However, this sign also pinpoints the sense of disillusionment experienced by many Latin Americans for the broken promises of a better future abroad. In other cases the message claims a right, for example the sign *We have right at this landscape*, shown at the entrance to the state of Arizona, is a clear reference to the Pan-Americanism Movements. As Nazareth put into words:

Every day my concept of homeland enlarges... Born in Brazil, I am Latin American, and being Latin American I’m also Mexican... I am part of every land my feet stepped on... There is no way to divide these lands with an imaginary line called border... Maybe it is for this reason that they built the wall in the North: a way to prevent Mexico from continuing to be Mexico inside the United States (Nazareth, in Diegues and Sardenberg 2012; my translation).

Nazareth’s concept of an America undivided by geopolitical borders finds a precedent in the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar’s *A logo for America*, a public intervention held in New York City’s Times Square from April 19<sup>th</sup> to May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1987. This work consisted of a light board that was programmed to transmit messages that interrupted the flow of advertising for less than one minute. Superimposed on a glowing map of the outline of the United States, one of these messages stated ‘This is not America’, pointing out the fact that “the word

'America' actually comprises the entire continent of North, Central and Latin America, and not the United States alone" (Grynsztejn 1990: 18).

During his journey to the USA Nazareth gave life to another series of untitled performances, documented through photographs, in which he conveyed the harsh reality of the life of an emigrant, who runs the constant risk of losing his life along the path. In particular, these are performances in which the artist is photographed while lying on beaches, streets, fields, courtyards, or dumps, with his head buried under natural or man-made elements. In one of these photographs the artist's head is crushed under a boat, a moving reference to all the missing, anonymous people who have lost their lives in their perilous emigration to the United States. The feeling of displacement and the condition of exile experienced by many emigrants is also expressed by the artist in the performance *Para cuando ellos me busquen en el desierto* (l.t.: *When they'll look for me in the desert*, 2012), shot as usual with an amateurish video camera. This action took place in the Sonora Desert, located on the U.S.-Mexico border, a land traversed everyday by emigrants in their attempt to illegally enter the U.S., escaping the control of the border police. In the video we see Nazareth stop to take off his shoes (no flip-flops this time), and prepare himself for a different type of walk. Wearing his shoes with the toes facing backwards, the artist sets off for the desert, walking around in circles, hoping to confuse his trail and not be followed. At the end of the video, after having discarded his video camera, we see the artist walking through the desert until his figure disappears among the dunes. Through this performance, Nazareth brings back to our conscience the fact that every day in this part of the world an unknown number of Latin American emigrants, after having paid from two to five thousand dollars to human traffickers to be transported to the edge of the U.S.-Mexico border, fail to cross the Sonora Desert and die while trying to reach the United States. We should not forget that a good percentage of these migrants belongs to Central America. As an attempt to defend her people from the risks associated with perilous and illegal travel to the U.S., in 2007 Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo gave life to a *Survival Course for Men and Women Who Will Journey Illegally to the U.S.* (2007) in which she offered free survival training to a group of ten Guatemalan migrants journeying North. Even though the fate of the participants is still unknown, Galindo's work brought the conditions of vulnerability faced by Central American migrants to public attention.

Returning to Nazareth, he was among the lucky ones who were able to survive the journey, reach the American border (which he could legally cross thanks to a visa), and then he returned home. What remains after the completion of the project (photographs, videos, drawings, giveaways, cardboards, and items collected along the journey) is a meagre attempt to communicate the artist's experience in its entirety, but nevertheless it is a strategic expression of the precariousness that characterizes not only Latin American society, still in search of its own identity, but also North American society. In fact, even in the United States "almost every American can trace her or his ancestry to people who came to the United States from some other place" (Spickard 2007: 464).

### 3 The travel continues

After having visited India and 'the Americas', Paulo Nazareth's next aspiration was to travel to Europe to continue the exploration of his ancestry lines. The opportunity was provided by an invitation to the 12<sup>th</sup> Biennale de Lyon in France, scheduled between September 2013 and January 2014, but some time before that Nazareth had begun to investigate the legacy that connects Latin America to Africa, "the original homeland that provides the roots of the sameness of all African peoples" (Lao-Montes, 2007: 311). In fact, in the leaflet *Important Public Notice* the artist admitted that his parents "forgot who the completely black man of the family was" (Nazareth 2006); but it was during the realization of *News from the Americas* that Nazareth came in contact with many African descendants who, like the artist, did not know from which part of Africa their ancestors had come. This is why Nazareth, when he accepted the invitation of the Biennale de Lyon, decided to discover Africa before going to Europe, and to begin his travel on the so-called 'Slave coast', in southwestern Africa, where many Africans were sold in the slave trade and embarked to the Americas.

During the first stages of his journey in Africa, Nazareth planned to reach Ouidah, in Benin, one of the most active slave trading ports. Standing in the place of the former slave market was a tree — in French called *l'arbre de l'oubli* (l.t.: the tree of oblivion) — which the African slaves had to walk around (the men 9 times, the

women 7 times) in order to forget their past before embarking. As an act of reparation as well as connection with his ancestors, the artist created a performance shot with a video camera, *L'arbre d'Oublier* (2013), in which he repeated the action. This time, however, he walked backwards four hundred times around the tree to "ritualistically" commemorate "four centuries of slavery in Brazil" (Tompkins Rivas, 2017). This performance was then repeated by the artist in Brazil under the title *Ipê Amarelo* (l.t.: Brazil's national flower, the *Golden Trumpet Tree*, 2012-2013), as a way to connect his country with the one from which many of his ancestors had come. From this experience Nazareth initiated another field research, the investigation of the "Afro-Latinidad" (Lao-Montes, 2007: 320-321) though intertwined relationships with the African Diaspora and the so-called "Black Atlantic" (Gilroy 1993).

Being at the same time a migrant and an emigrant, Paulo Nazareth continues to this day to explore his roots. By connecting his autobiography to the past and contemporary history of Latin America the artist expresses an inconvenient truth for the current global political situation on the topic of emigration, that is that most likely we have all arrived where we are from some other place; therefore what unites us is, in the end, stronger than what is trying to divide us.

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