



# POSTCOLONIALISM CROSS-EXAMINED

MULTIDIRECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON IMPERIAL  
AND COLONIAL PASTS AND THE NEOCOLONIAL  
PRESENT

Edited by  
Monika Albrecht



# Postcolonialism Cross-Examined

Taking a strikingly interdisciplinary and global approach, *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined* reflects on the current status of postcolonial studies and attempts to break through traditional boundaries, creating a truly comparative and genuinely global phenomenon. Drawing together the field of mainstream postcolonial studies with post-Soviet postcolonial studies and studies of the late Ottoman Empire, the contributors in this volume question many of the concepts and assumptions we have become accustomed to in postcolonial studies, creating a fresh new version of the field. The volume calls the merits of the field into question, investigating how postcolonial studies may have perpetuated and normalized colonialism as an issue exclusive to Western colonial and imperial powers. The volume is the first to open a dialogue between three different areas of postcolonial scholarship that previously developed independently from one another:

- the wide field of postcolonial studies working on European colonialism,
- the growing field of post-Soviet postcolonial/post-imperial studies,
- the still fledgling field of post-Ottoman postcolonial/post-imperial studies, supported by sideways glances at the multidirectional conditions of interaction in East Africa and the East and West Indies.

*Postcolonialism Cross-Examined* looks at topics such as humanism, nationalism, multiculturalism, nostalgia, and the Anthropocene in order to piece together a new, broader vision for postcolonial studies in the twenty-first century. By including territories other than those covered by the postcolonial mainstream, the book strives to reframe the “postcolonial” as a genuinely global phenomenon and develop *multidirectional* postcolonial perspectives.

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# 1 Introduction: Postcolonialism cross-examined

Multidirectional perspectives on  
imperial and colonial pasts and  
the neocolonial present

*Monika Albrecht*

Forty years after the rise of the postcolonial theories in the Anglophone academy and the subsequent transformation of scholarly discourses around the globe, the question arises of whether the postcolonial paradigm actually helps us understand the world, particularly the globalized world of the twenty-first century. The sheer number of monographs and anthologies that have appeared in the last decade<sup>1</sup> suggests a continued interest in (though not necessarily the continued relevance of) postcolonial scholarship. Moreover, as Arif Dirlik pointed out, the impact of postcolonial studies reaches far beyond the field as such—if something like “as such” exists—and “postcolonial criticism has infiltrated discourses that have origins quite independent of postcolonialism” (Dirlik 1999, 149). There is certainly no shortage of critique of “the postcolonial” and postcolonial studies either. Over the decades, the field has faced criticism from various quarters, with Neil Lazarus even accusing much of postcolonial scholarship of “culturalism” and of being “ungrounded” (Lazarus 2013, 324f.). In this spirit, critical of the growing provincialism of postcolonial studies, scholars have time and again called for a renewal of postcolonial studies and expressed a desire to push the field in different directions. While the “materialist-poststructuralist opposition” still persists (Bernard, Elmarsafy, and Murray 2015, 4), from around the turn of the century scholars began to consider the present—despite the unaltered “possibility of a return to colonialism in a new guise”—as already “post-postcolonial” (Dirlik 2003, 424; see also Koschorke 2017<sup>2</sup>). Critique has also centered around the obvious ideological and normative aspects of postcolonial approaches (Cooper 2005, 4; Divine 2008, 5; Albrecht 2012b), and a now oft-quoted PMLA roundtable discussion even posed the question of “The End of Postcolonial Theory” (Yaeger 2007, 633). However, despite this and other prophecies over the years predicting its demise, the field remains extremely prolific in terms of research output and exceptionally creative in its engagement with contemporary and historic manifestations of colonialism and imperialism. As Madina Tlostanova, one of the contributors to this volume (Chapter 9),



reasserted more than a decade after Dirlik: “Postcolonial theory has become in the last two decades a well-established and integral element of [...] thinking on otherness, ethnicity, race and gender, as well as queer and ecological projects both in the west and in the non-west” (Tlostanova 2012, 130).

Yet, one can also examine the success story and the infiltration of contemporary thought with postcolonial tenets and ideas from another angle. To begin with, from a reverse point of view, it actually seems odd that mainstream postcolonial studies have managed to *establish* and *normalize* colonialism as an issue exclusive to Western colonial and imperial powers and their non-Western victims. It would be worth investigating how and why this selective framework of exploration and explanation could become so successful in the first place. “Postcolonial theory” can be defined “as that branch of contemporary theory that investigates, and develops propositions about, the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonized societies, and the nature of those societies’ responses” (Ashcroft 2012b, xv). But how do we actually explain this strange consensus on the history of *European* or *Western* colonialism and why it is deemed to be the foundation of postcolonial critique? In the postcolonial “master narrative,” as the anthropologist Philip Carl Salzman dryly stated some time ago, “most of world history disappears” (Salzman 2008, 244). Indeed, a recent publication labels the “world” it allegedly deals with *The Postcolonial World* (Singh and Kim 2017). Ironically though, the cover picture, part of a world map designed by Indian visual artist Reena Saini Kallat (cf. Figure 2 in Lionnet, Chapter 3), shows areas of the world to which this book on *The Postcolonial World* does not even get close—such as the Soviet/Tsarist Empires and the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic empires. If one would draw an *actual* map of this kind of *Postcolonial World*, there would be large gaps. The postcolonial paradigm is at once all-encompassing and highly reductive. It is all-encompassing in the sense that postcolonial scholars share “a commitment to tell a more inclusive, more truly global story” (Brennan 2013, 143), and “promise [...] that the theoretical modes of postcolonial studies have the potential to chart the worldwide contemporary condition” (Parry 2012, 341). It is reductive in the sense that its key concepts, which are applied to this worldwide condition, came into being on the basis of this very restrictive framework of the West and the formerly colonized non-West.

The phrase “postcolonial mainstream” is not meant to lump together the wide and manifold field of postcolonial studies and wrongfully make it uniform. “Postcolonial mainstream” points to nothing other than the one feature that contributions to postcolonial scholarship have in common, namely that, diverse as they may otherwise be, the matrix on which they are mapped is the assumption that colonialism and post-colonialism<sup>3</sup> are tantamount to *Western* colonialism and post-colonialism. Postcolonial scholars define the characteristics of their field as “a common political and moral consensus towards the history and legacy of *western* colonialism” (Young 2016, 5; *my emphasis*). This self-confinement to an overall *unidirectional*

discursive framework results, amongst other things, in a stubborn *reverse* division of the world into West and non-West. A division that, within an unaltered binary framework, only reverses prestige and value. While post-colonial scholars, at least from the 1990s onwards, strived to soften the deep division “between colonizing perpetrators and colonized victims” so customary for earlier phases of postcolonial studies “by introducing concepts of ‘hybridity’ (Homi Bhabha) or intermediary ‘contact zones’ (Mary Louise Pratt),” they certainly did not question “the guiding fundamental oppositions between identity and alterity” (Osterhammel 2017, 64). The postcolonial *reverse* division and revaluation of the world—despite its complex deconstructive, poststructuralist, and/or culturalist guise—is therefore still in place. What’s more, “dichotomous models” such as the postcolonial self-confinement to a *unidirectional* West/non-West framework “in essence [...] presume a mono-motivational anthropology and in turn a mono-causal methodology” (Osterhammel 2017, 64). Against this backdrop, my own chapter in this volume (Chapter 10), which takes up questions posed by Sheldon Pollock and Katherine Fleming, develops the alternative concept of a *multidirectional* post-colonial framework. This critical endeavor should not be misunderstood as an attempt to trivialize or justify colonial enterprises and does not suggest that “this was and is the case everywhere in the world.” A *multidirectional* post-colonial framework is also not just a matter of methodological questions; it is not about a mere broadening of the geo-political and geo-historical realm of investigation. Instead, it aims at unthinking this division of the world, both *customary* and *reverse*, and all that this division entails. The critique of many of the contributors to this volume is likewise fundamentally different from previous interrogations of the postcolonial paradigm. Its difference lies in its targeting of key assumptions and categories of the field, beginning with the supposed normality of colonialism and post-colonialism as Western colonialism and post-colonialism.

There has been fundamental criticism of postcolonial studies before<sup>4</sup> but in a different way. Neil Lazarus—along with Benita Parry and a few others, one of postcolonialism’s toughest critics—dedicated much of his “work since the 1990s” to a “contestation of particular ideas and assumptions predominant in postcolonial studies.” In his seminal study *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, Lazarus would “call into question concepts and theories that have seemed to [him] to lack accountability to the realities of the contemporary world-system that constitutes their putative object” (Lazarus 2011a, 1). Moreover, in a subsequent essay, he likewise criticizes postcolonial scholars for their “tendency to cast colonialism as a political dispensation and to refer it, in civilizational terms, to ‘the west’ (or, in some versions, ‘the north’)” (Lazarus 2012, 120). In fact, “the postcolonialist idea of ‘the west’ as the super-agent of domination in the modern global order strikes [him] as being deeply misconceived” (117). However inspiring as his critique consistently is, as he does not call for a widening of the postcolonial horizon to the neglected areas of the globe, he goes in a different direction to that proposed

by this volume. Lazarus argues against the inclusion of post-Soviet nations (other areas of the world he does not discuss) in postcolonial scholarship on the basis of the assumption that “colonialism,” whatever else it may have included, “as an historical process involved the forced integration of hitherto uncivilized societies, or societies in which the capitalist mode of production was not hegemonic, into a capitalist world-system” (120). At the same time, though, by advocating a replacement of “the West” by the Western capitalist world-system, he confirms the idea of colonialism and post-colonialism as Western colonialism and post-colonialism.

To suggest, as I do, that other political and economic systems produced comparable conditions to those of Western colonialism does not imply a minimization of the capitalist world-system “as the pre-eminent force shaping social development over the course of modern history” (Lazarus 2012, 121). It does imply, though, that excluding other systems of colonialism or imperialism deprives post-colonial studies of the opportunity to compare, for instance, colonial practices, or forms of resistance to them, in a way that may considerably differ from comparisons *within* the familiar areas of the postcolonial map. As I will argue in the following text, it is not just a matter of a *conceptual* assignment of colonialism to the West (instead of to the Western economic system, as Lazarus suggests), but of an *actual* assignment of colonialism to the West that led to the “epistemological dead end” (Berman 2011, 173) of the postcolonial paradigm and the circular reasoning that emerges from its assumptions.

This does not relieve future analyses of colonial and post-colonial phenomena from the obligation to apply a solid economic framework to their arguments. By “solid economic framework,” I mean one which takes the material base of colonialism and its beneficiaries seriously, adequately gets to grips with the economic exploitation of one group by another, and avoids mystification of the materialist reality. A mystification which Lazarus rightly ascribes to large parts of postcolonial studies (Lazarus 2011a, 17). A starting point could be, for instance, the work of economic historians of the Ottoman Empire such as Şevket Pamuk, who analyzed the “penetration of capitalism into the Ottoman Empire” (Pamuk 1988, 127). As Selim Deringil argues, in the wake of the penetration of Western capitalism, the Ottomans clearly began to adopt an increasingly “colonial stance toward the peoples of the periphery of their empire” (Deringil 2003, 313).

While there has been fundamental criticism before, there is scattered evidence that in the present situation some of postcolonialism’s discontents tend to just leave the field behind, arguing for instance that “postcolonial studies stressed the importance of ‘othering’ and put the category of difference in the center of historical analysis. We believe that it is time to go a step further” (Rohland 2018). As I will show in the following introduction, the thought pattern of “going a step further,” which suggests a new approach but leaves untouched or even builds on previous achievements, may be problematic in the case of the postcolonial paradigm. Considering the fact

that “postcolonial criticism has infiltrated” many contemporary discourses and disciplines (Dirlik 1999, 149), the misguidance generated by the postcolonial paradigm should not be underestimated. As Robert Young put it, rejoicing what is in my view anything but a favorable outcome: “Postcolonial critique has been so successful that by the beginning of the twenty-first century the concepts and values of postcolonial thought have become established as one of the dominant ways in which Western and to some extent non-Western societies see and represent themselves” (Young 2016, ix). As indicated also by others,<sup>5</sup> the postcolonial mainstream has successfully ensured that its premises can now be considered more or less accepted far beyond the field of postcolonial studies. Indeed, the postcolonial paradigm is a prime example for Michel Foucault’s claim that “the discourse” not only “makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also *limits* the *other* ways in which the topic can be constructed” (Hall 1992, 201; *my emphasis*). The just quoted keywords “othering” and “difference” are fine examples of this idea. If not confronted and addressed properly as highly problematic, these concepts in all their ideological ramifications may very well reassert themselves, sneaking in via the backdoor. Before going *a step further*, it might therefore be appropriate to take a moment as I will in the section *Towards multidirectional perspectives* of this introductory chapter to *unthink* the theoretical assumptions underpinning the postcolonial field, particularly those that make an inadequate foundation to build on. I intend to illustrate, for instance, in sufficient detail, why the concept of “othering” in its present unilateral usage is misleading and why thinking in categories of “difference”—instead of “similarities” (Rohland 2018)—contributes to a *reverse* division of the world, rather than serving to improve our understanding of it.

While the influence of postcolonial studies on a wider public, academic and otherwise, would—and should, actually—be subject to further examination, in the volume at hand there can be no more than passing references to this important issue. However, Dirk Uffelmann’s contribution to this book (Chapter 7) introduces a case study from the field of post-Soviet postcolonialism that highlights how “postcolonial theory” can serve the political objectives of “some contenders in the debates” and “their overt or hidden nationalist agendas.” Against the backdrop of this observation, Uffelmann considers “postcolonial theory itself, or rather certain modes of appropriation of it, as either programmatic promotion or subcutaneous practice of postcolonial nationalism” (Uffelmann, Chapter 7). An approach so deeply rooted in political ideology, as the postcolonial paradigm is, can certainly be used in various ways. For instance, it has often been noted that Said’s *Orientalism* “does nothing to reshape Arab stereotypes of the West” but, on the contrary, feeds into a “politics of resentment against the West” (Makiya 1993, 319, 317). Moreover, in terms of *limiting* the *other* ways in which a particular issue can be constructed, scholars from various disciplines are beginning to remind us that significant authors have

been forgotten, as their work fell victim to the dominant position of the postcolonial discourse (Osterhammel 2017, 64), and that “the intellectual enthusiasm for difference [...] has eclipsed many of the questions dealing with relations of similarities” (Kirsch 2017, 274). But, the worst aspect of this trend and its wider impact is that many critical questions do not seem to arise anymore. As the historian Wolfgang Reinhard indicated a few years ago, what we mostly find in dealings with issues of colonialism and imperialism is “a particular way of thinking and writing about them which already produced both effective new bans of thinking and likewise effective new imperatives” (Reinhard 2010, 25). Essentially, this boils down to a major impediment to any serious research. One of the aims of this study is to counter this harmful trend and strive for multidirectional perspectives on the colonial past and the neocolonial present, without postcolonial blinkers.

### “an episteme centred on ‘western-ness’”

Unlike Lazarus, I believe that the confinement to *Western* or *European* colonialism and imperialism is at the root of many of the problems of the postcolonial mainstream. What sounds like an “Easy Think concept”<sup>6</sup> is, in fact, a hub from where the entire construct of postcolonial thought needs to be reconsidered, from scratch. The conceptual roadblocks which the field generates could hardly have come into being if it was not for the remarkably reductionist framework at its foundation. The same goes, incidentally, for the ostensible alternative approach of the “decolonial option,” which may claim “a different lineage to the postcolonial” (Howe 2013, 162) but quite conventionally relies on well-known postcolonial reference points such as “1492,” what is seen as the birth of modernity, and the concept of race. And, despite the “perceived difference and distance from postcolonialism” and its “strategic rejection” by scholars of decoloniality (Williams 2010, 88), the purported alternative suffers from the same conceptual roadblocks—and that applies, in particular, to the double standard prevailing in large parts of postcolonial critique (Albrecht 2012b),<sup>7</sup> for the “Big Bad West” (Narayan 1997a, 136) and for its perceived victims. This double standard is characterized by either a systematic avoidance or a whitewashing of any kind of potentially dubious issues. Critics of almost everything Western usually have no problem with phrasing in a neutral or even approving way when they talk, for instance, about Islamic empires. A typical phrasing would be: “Arab armies unified by an Islamic ideology [...] fashioned an empire that stretched from the Iberian Peninsula of contemporary Spain and Portugal to the Western edge of what is today Pakistan” (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008, 18). A cross-check that describes British, French, Dutch, Belgian, or German imperialism and colonialism with the euphemism “fashioning an empire” immediately reveals the double standard in this quote. When “colonialism” is framed

as “the logic and dynamics of *European* subjugation and exploitation of their overseas spheres of influence” (Krobb, Chapter 5; *my emphasis*), the danger of reverting to the pattern of the postcolonial double standard is always present. Due to the infiltration of contemporary thought by postcolonial tenets, this double standard seems to create a momentum of its own. As the example by Gottschalk and Greenberg shows, the mechanisms of this double standard are often evident in the choice of words: From Wikipedia to the *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, phrasings such as “the Ottoman Empire’s territorial possessions in the Balkans” (Robarts 2009, 499) are to be found. These word choices seem to indicate a basic acceptance of sorts, that grants the Ottoman Empire what it denies the Great European Powers: namely, an entitlement to these “European possessions” in the first place. Again, this is of course *not* to justify in retrospect Europe’s own overseas “possessions” but rather to point to the general double standard in postcolonial thought: We hesitate to speak of “colonial possessions” of the British, French, or Dutch, and rightly so, because the evocation today is “illegally obtained possessions.” We cannot speak of “German South-West Africa” anymore, as the name evokes the illegitimacy of German colonial rule. Scholars aware of the pitfalls of postcolonial thinking tend to avoid phrasings such as “the Ottoman possessions” and rather speak, for instance, of the “Ottoman Empire’s European presence” (Krobb, Chapter 5). Can we even innocently speak of the “Ottoman Middle East” (Krobb, Chapter 5) on the grounds that—once conquered—the Middle East became the Empire’s legitimate possession? Can we just ascribe, say, to the island of Crete the epithet “Ottoman Crete,” thereby contributing to the naturalizing of its conquest—and ignoring the frequent and numerous revolts, all fierce and bloody, of the indigenous people of the island throughout the centuries?<sup>8</sup>

The most obvious and widespread predicaments of the postcolonial paradigm are its double standards and the corresponding unbalance in reasoning. Another concern is the sweeping generalizations which occur frequently in the work of the postcolonial mainstream. From this perspective there seems to be, as Lazarus likewise criticizes, “only one kind of ‘western’ thought [...]: Eurocentric, colonising, logocentric, rationalist” (Lazarus 2011b, 15). Moreover, the majority of this field tends to assume that beneath the “many and manifest differences” in Western thought, the “thinkers are unified at the deepest levels by structuring assumptions deriving from an episteme centred on ‘western-ness’” (Lazarus 2011b, 15f.). Predominant in postcolonial studies is indeed a belief in this Foucauldian episteme centred on ‘western-ness’ while quite often its core idea is also psychologically framed as a seemingly unalterable social psychological potential of the West. And, as a result, literally *everything* the West brought forth, from colonial atrocities and racism to enlightenment and human rights, is considered to be inextricably linked to “western-ness,” to a “Western consciousness” (Said 1978, 8), a “colonialist mentality”

(Zantop 1997, 4, 14), or, as Lazarus put it elsewhere, an “untranscendable horizon governing thought—its forms, contents, modalities, and presuppositions so deeply and insidiously layered and patterned that they cannot be circumvented, only deconstructed” (Lazarus 2011a, 127). When Walter Mignolo equates “coloniality” with the “darker side of *Western* modernity” (Mignolo 2011; *my emphasis*), this sounds also suspiciously like something inextricably linked to “the West” and therefore impossible to cast off. A few years ago Russell Berman pointed out how mainstream postcolonial scholars jumped from a valid observation to a false inference: from the observation of a “hypocritical failure” by Western politicians to apply “their own stated ideals” to “colonial subjects” to the inference that “those very same categories of humanism, liberty, and democracy” were gravely problematic *in themselves*, that “these values were [...] carrying a specific internal logic that generated imperialist inflections” (Berman 2011, 168f.). The concept of humanism in the tradition of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment—John Noyes’ concern in the volume at hand (Chapter 2)—is certainly in this sense a victim of the postcolonial perspective in that it is likewise considered to be intrinsically linked to this “Western-ness.” This also signifies that it is not simply *ideologically* tainted—as such it could become subject to ideology critique (Lazarus 2011a, 126). When humanism is like any other creation of the West linked to “Western-ness,” there is no way to unearth something like an original idea of humanism, let alone its positive and utopian potential. Therefore, it is only logical that critics like Achille Mbembe want to do away with Western humanism altogether and create a completely new version. Despite the fact that a relationship between colonialism and such Western ideas “was never concretely shown” but “simply assumed or asserted” (Howe 2013, 164),<sup>9</sup> this general rejection is the fate of many other Western ideas. As Neil Lazarus suggests, what “has been fundamental to postcolonial studies” is “the suggestion that the ‘grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment’ [...] are not merely arguable or susceptible to criticism, but have become definitively *obsolete*” (Lazarus 2011a, 14; *emphasis in the original*). As Françoise Lionnet (Chapter 3) and Hala Halim (Chapter 4) remind us in the volume at hand, more stimulating than to follow postcolonial scholars could be to turn to the theorists and writers of the generation of decolonization—to those grounded in narratives of enlightenment and emancipation, since their “writing provides insights that allow us to capture the unstable, shaky quality of the ‘human’ across planet Earth” (Lionnet, Chapter 3).

What is more, one look over the fence that mainstream postcolonial studies erects so diligently around the West and its formerly colonized non-West could have shown innumerable manifestations of “colonial patterns of thought” or “colonialist mentalities” and other phenomena, allegedly unique to the West, that exist throughout “the rest” of the world. And interestingly, many writers seem to be largely unfazed by postcolonial restrictions when they create fictitious colonial settings and use them to negotiate

their own post-colonial worldview. In this respect, the novels Dirk Göttsche discusses in the volume at hand (Chapter 12) are certainly proof of the validity of Neil Lazarus' assertion "that the 'world' has to date typically been more adequately registered, and rendered, in 'postcolonial' *literature* than in postcolonial *criticism*" (Lazarus 2011a, 36; *emphasis in the original*). As Göttsche shows, Abdulrazak Gurnah juxtaposes "complaints about European imperialism" and "criticism of Arab hegemony" and thereby creates a more comprehensive picture of a complex colonial world. M.G. Vassanji's novel, likewise, presents as a matter of course an "Indian sense of cultural superiority that echoes European colonial attitude" (Göttsche, Chapter 12). Regarding the real world, in the volume at hand Benedikt Kalnačs discusses "the compatibility of Soviet and Western narratives" of colonialism in the aftermath of Soviet "occupation of the independent Baltic countries" (Kalnačs, Chapter 14). The wealth of examples in Epp Annus' recent book (2018) and chapter in this volume (Chapter 13) likewise reveals the similarity of "Soviet colonial discourses" and that of Western colonizing powers. A striking example is Joseph Stalin's "toast to the Russian people" as "the leading people" in which he "positioned all other nations within the Soviet bloc in a subordinate position" and codifies the Russians as "essentially more worthy" (Annus, Chapter 13). The same pattern of thought that Achille Mbembe calls in the African context "denial of humanity" via "attribution of inferiority" (Mbembe 2002, 253), Bruce Masters evinces in the context of the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic empires. He states that the more or less peacefully living together of Muslims, Christians, and Jews only worked out when the "social inferiority of non-Muslims" was not called into question. When it was questioned, this often put an end to the fragile peaceful coexistence (Masters 2001, 23). In fact, as the historian Norman Naimark put it, "Islamic ideology unambiguously proclaimed the inferiority of non-Muslim peoples" (Naimark 2002, 19). When the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century "abrogated the old laws governing Christian-Muslim relations at the expenses of Muslim privilege" (Masters 2001, 132), one outcome was riots and massacres of minorities in various regions of the Ottoman Empire (Sharkey 2017, 146–152; Masters 2001, 130–168). If one aims the spotlight merely at the West and its victims, it seems as if, in John Noyes' phrasing in this volume, an "exclusionary concept of the human" (Noyes, Chapter 2) is unique to this very West and its systems of thought. If one allows a comparative glance at the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic empires, it becomes obvious what a remarkably "exclusionary concept of the human" for instance the Islamic *dhimma* system was. The *dhimma* was the political system "which regulated the Muslim community's relations with religious minorities" both prior to and during the time of the Ottoman Empire (Soifer 2009, 24). Indeed, being a non-Muslim during Islamic imperialism or the Ottoman Empire, as Peter Mackridge put it, meant "living as second-class subjects of a Muslim-dominated empire" (Mackridge 2009, 44; see also Zelepos 2014, 18).



Against the backdrop of this wider post-colonial horizon, one cannot help but wonder how the idea of “Western-ness” as a kind of Foucauldian episteme that generates both colonial patterns of thought and the corresponding practices could become so convincing for many in the first place. Not only is this episteme considered to be the cause of all colonial and imperial wrongdoing but also as something that undermines still relevant concepts, like emancipation, enlightenment, or humanism, regardless of the dubious coalitions these concepts may have formed over the centuries. I deliberately use the term “coalitions” because if one thinks in terms of “inextricably” or “intrinsically linked” phenomena, the idea of “de-linking” does not seem to be an issue, and humanism becomes, like any other Western achievement, a part of the problem. Similarly, Russell Berman speaks of “complicity” of “reason and knowledge” “in structures of power” instead of inextricable links, emphasizing that “such complicity is not at all the whole story, nor perhaps even the most important part of it” (Berman 1998, 17). In this spirit, the chapter by John Noyes in this volume (Chapter 2) illustrates how one-sided the previously outlined aspects of predominant postcolonial thought are (see also Noyes 2015). However, as Noyes rightly points out, “the question of humanism will become more, not less urgent,” not least regarding globalization (Noyes, Chapter 2) and, as I will add in the final section of this introduction, climate change. The prevailing fields of postcolonial studies have inherently, as it were, no productive solution to offer. Except suggesting that the West should pass the baton on to formerly colonized people, as if this highly essentialist idea would automatically guarantee the occurrence of, say, a new concept of humanism that is completely untainted and free of dubious elements. However, once postcolonial roadblocks like the one above are cast off, colonial atrocities, injustice, and exclusion are (once again) open to genuine political critique. In particular, this critique may pose questions of socio-economic exploitation and deal with the beneficiaries and losers on all sides in the colonial and post-colonial world.

Unthinking of postcolonial core premises may, in this sense, entail a revival of the term “neocolonialism”—which incidentally has the advantage that it brings out the socio-economic hierarchies of the post-colonial world more effectively than the term “postcolonialism.” Because one thing should have become clear by now: My critique of the postcolonial mainstream is *not* meant as an attempt to relativize any kind of colonial wrongdoing. There is no doubt about the tremendous injustice of colonial endeavors and no possible justification for violence against any people, exploitation of their natural and cultural resources, or for the contemporary post-colonial asymmetries Reinhart Kößler discusses in this book (Chapter 6). However, it makes a difference whether one speaks of a “Western consciousness” (Said 1978, 8), which brought all these misdeeds about and continues to do so, or if a sociologist like Reinhart Kößler, trained to look at the bigger societal picture, speaks, for instance, of “social inequality in Namibia” as “*an outflow of a specific form of colonial rule* that was predicated on the results of the genocide

and enhanced further, after the termination of German control, under South African rule (1915–1990)” (Kößler, Chapter 6; *my emphasis*). It makes all the difference whether one assumes that *the* Germans suffer from an *a priori* “colonialist mentality” (Zantop 1997, 4) or, if one investigates, for instance, striking examples of “the German discourse on Ottoman space” cognizant that these examples are “one specific vector in a multi-directional constellation” (Krobb, Chapter 5). It makes a difference whether someone looks for continuities in the “political unconscious of a society” (Zantop 1997, 4) or if one speaks of continuities or colonial heritage in terms of “*persons* who played roles *both* in the genocide and in Nazi Germany” (Kößler, Chapter 6; *my emphasis*). The difference lies in the respective causality underlying the argument, one that is interested in political and social facts such as, in the example of Kößler, in double perpetrator roles, and another one that takes as its point of departure the darkness of a (socio)psychological premise. A premise which automatically, as it were, generated the colonial calamity and forever and a day will always do so. It is hard to say whether the postcolonial grounding in the assumption of a Foucauldian “episteme centred on ‘westernness’” or in its social psychological pendant is more counterproductive to dealing with colonial and neocolonial issues.

The latter seems all the more dispensable when it operates tacitly or expressly with the Freudian concept of the return of the repressed and transfers it to the “collective unconscious” of Western societies (Zantop 1997, 9). A metaphysics of sorts, which seems to assume that something is preserved in the unconscious of an entire people and will inevitably and incessantly reappear. In a somewhat different context, the historian Dominick LaCapra offered an unorthodox but more reasonable and interesting application of the Freudian concept to the social realm. LaCapra suggests that “any features of society deemed desirable must be recurrently rewon, and less desirable ones pose a continual threat that reappears in different guises over time” (LaCapra 1998, 3). LaCapra seems to have positive achievements, such as humanism, in mind, which those who consider them desirable need to wrest from those who are, say, perfectly comfortable with a *Profit over People* attitude (to quote the title of a 1999 study by Noam Chomsky). One can even go a step further in this line of thinking and assume that people with such an attitude, those motivated by profit, may not be driven by an innate or inherited “colonialist mentality” or “Western consciousness.” It should be bad enough to imagine that certain people just *prefer* to make a profit out of neocolonial structures and neocolonial exploitation of neo-subordinate people. Again, it makes all the difference whether such behavior and attitudes are framed as the result of a “collective unconscious” or as a conscious choice. What may, from a distant postcolonial point of observation, look like the result of a “Western consciousness” then turns out to be a deliberate choice of something that is simply deemed desirable by someone. The fact that it seemed less desirable by others is disregarded in the postcolonial paradigm.

However, there is another reason why speculation about a “political unconscious of a society” or a “colonialist mentality” may be considered to be dubious. Namely because, in effect, this leads to the very circular reasoning one finds in wide areas of the postcolonial mainstream: a mode of *quod erat demonstrandum* critique that takes for granted beforehand what it then claims to explore. Indeed, it is the goal of large parts of postcolonial studies, in particular literary studies, to “find” traces of the “colonialist mentality” that scholars assume to exist anyway. This kind of reasoning only confirms and reproduces premises on which the argument is based in the first place (Albrecht 2012b, 100f.; Albrecht 2013, 52; Albrecht 2014b, 443f.). With this in mind, it is not without irony that Edward Said claims: “Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient, we will encounter *few surprises*” (Said 1978, 95; *my emphasis*). Indeed, once one puts on the postcolonial-tinted spectacles, everything looks postcolonial-tinted.

### **“as if colonies and empires had existed nowhere else”(1)**

In contrast to the postcolonial confinement to the West and its formerly colonized non-West, like Philip Carl Salzman, who has noticed the absence of “most of world history” in the postcolonial “master narrative” (Salzman 2008, 244), a handful of scholars refused to yield to the alleged normality of the mainstream postcolonial perspective. Over the last few years, these scholars have pointed to this astonishing contradiction that is not recognized as contradictory by the dominant discourse. Russell Berman observed that “studies of colonialism and empire during recent decades have concerned nearly exclusively the non-European colonial territories of Western European powers [...], as if colonies and empires had existed nowhere else” (Berman 2011, 165; see also Albrecht 2014a, 55). What is more, scholars *outside* the field of postcolonial studies are increasingly inclined to disregard the normative postcolonial confinement to the West and are beginning to reject the notion of the West as the sole colonizing power, pointing to traces of similar phenomena in other areas of the globe. An almost random example is a recent observation in the field of archaeology: As Kostis Kourelis, an archaeologist of Byzantine settlements and rural landscapes, maintains, the “Greek countryside is speckled with grand monuments testifying to the robust activities of two colonizing forces emanating from Venice and Istanbul” (Kourelis 2014, 199). Other archeologists likewise began to call “for an approach that views Greek history as part of wider imperial histories” (Davis and Davies 2007, 8). In postcolonial studies, by contrast, there seems to be a tacit consensus that the inclusion of these and other empires, as colonizing powers, is not even up for debate. However, one can argue that tacit constraints like these generate academic and political practices, practices that help to produce and naturalize the foundations of mainstream postcolonial studies.

A single volume, like the one in hand, cannot cover all areas of the globe that could have been addressed. However, this book is unique in that it *envision*s the post-colonial world as all-inclusive. This volume is the first to open a dialogue between *three* different areas of scholarship, areas which previously developed in a way that was largely independently from one another: the wide field of postcolonial studies working on European colonialism, the growing field of post-Soviet postcolonial/post-imperial studies, and the still fledgling field of post-Ottoman postcolonial/post-imperial studies. The argument for this new way of studying empires is strongly supported by Dirk Göttsche's thorough examination of literary representations "of the long history and multi-layered conditions of interaction between (different groups of) Africans, Indians, Arabs and Europeans in East Africa and across the Indian Ocean" (Göttsche, Chapter 12), as well as by Françoise Lionnet's references to the same Indian Ocean universe (or East Indies) and the West Indies (Chapter 3), and Hala Halim's discussion of Afro-Asian solidarity in the writings of Egyptian poets and intellectuals (Chapter 4). At this point, a word on the issue of comparability. It is not just mainstream postcolonial studies that ignore "the Ottoman version of colonialism" (Kechriotis 2015, 70). Although there is a clear trend in recent years towards "comparative empires" (Mikhail and Philliou 2012, 722), some historians are—although for different reasons—still hesitant when it comes to thinking of this empire as a colonial power.<sup>10</sup> For one thing, it is undoubtedly necessary to take account of the differences "between village and town, between center and periphery, and between different periods of Ottoman rule" (Bryant 2016, 13). Beyond that, however, the volume at hand is not the place to address historiographical questions in the strict sense. Rather, it strives to open up new visions of the colonial past and the neocolonial present. In this volume, Gregory Jusdanis poses several of these very questions that get to the heart of the matter when mainstream postcolonialism is cross-examined against the backdrop of global imperial and colonial histories: "What do we gain by expanding the definition of postcolonialism to study a host of nations from Albania to Azerbaijan?" "Does it make sense to include Balkan, Baltic and Caucasian countries into the postcolonial fold?" "Can we consider Greece a postcolonial nation?" (Jusdanis, Chapter 11). At the starting point of these questions lies the observation that—at least as far as the experience of colonized people, occupied people, or people who perceived state power as foreign or occupant—the Ottoman Empire or the Soviet Empire shares certain characteristics with the simultaneously existing Western Empires. I quoted some of them above as manifestations of "colonialist mentalities" of non-Western rulers. This volume certainly provides many more examples of this phenomenon—a phenomenon which should not actually be so astonishing but is made so by decades of postcolonial politics. The result of which is a naturalization of a reductionist view on the colonial and post-colonial world. When Benedikts Kalnačs reports that the ideology of the Soviet occupiers would strive to implement the beginning of their rule in 1940 "as the beginning of

history for the Baltic nations” (Kalnačs, Chapter 14), this is reminiscent of a familiar mode of re-writing of history. In the case of Western imperialism and colonialism, the construction of the colonized as what the anthropologist Eric Wolf famously called the *People Without History* (Wolf 1982) is the result of such a re-writing. Likewise, instances in which the Soviet rulers showed “little appreciation of the uniqueness of the local environment” and drew up plans to restructure it in accordance with their own visions and needs (Kalnačs, Chapter 14) seem all too familiar. There are numerous other phenomena comparable to those in Western empires. For instance, in the area of the colonized or dominated population’s opposition against the foreign rule. These cases are particularly remarkable because people in the countries of East-Central and of South-Eastern Europe, unlike those in Western colonies, “rebelled against an empire that was neither Western nor capitalist” (Jusdanis 2011, 110). In the case of the Ottoman Empire, they are also remarkable because, as Vangelis Kechriotis put it, we have to ask questions about “the implications that Christian subordination to Muslim rule could have in terms of colonial mentality” (Kechriotis 2015, 71). At any rate, similarity or comparability of these and other phenomena in imperial and colonial situations challenges the master narratives of the postcolonial mainstream and “allows us [...] to see particular phenomena as part of larger historical processes” (Mikhail and Philliou 2012, 744).

The fields of post-Soviet and post-Ottoman postcolonial/post-imperial studies emerged only in recent years. Scholars, working on the so-called successor states to the Soviet Union, began to develop a new branch of postcolonial studies around the turn of the millennium (Moore 2001). And, while they rightly lament that their work is still largely “peripheral to the discipline” of mainstream postcolonial studies (Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2016, 1), the amount of work already undertaken in this field is quite impressive. As Violeta Kelertas pointed out more than 10 years ago, it was even then not a question of “*whether* postcolonialism fits [...], but *how* it applies in the wider context of post-Soviet nations” (Kelertas 2006, 2; *emphasis in the original*). However, when Benedikts Kalnačs situates this expansion in the sphere of European internal colonialism, it is important to note that he goes beyond previous discussions of intra-continental colonial enterprises—discussions, for instance, on the “Inclusion of ‘Poland’ in the Study of German Colonialism,” in terms of “Eastern European space that would involve the creation of German settlement colonies there” (Kopp 2011, 33). This earlier widening of the colonial and post-colonial map remained in the *unidirectional* pattern of the West (Germany in this case) against its colonized non-Western victims (Poland in this case). Kalnačs’ reference to “discussions of European internal colonialism” in the Baltics, conversely, keeps the overlapping layers of experience of the Baltic peoples and their “painful relations both with the East and the West” in mind, which is due to the “centuries-long presence of foreign rulers” (Kalnačs, Chapter 14)—from the “Crusaders from the German territories” in the Middle Ages and the eighteenth-century “westward expansion of the Russian empire”

(Kalnačs 2016, 23f., 28) to, more recently, “half a century of Soviet (and, for a short but significant period of time, also Nazi) rule.” He also looks at the time since 1990, considering the “re-establishment of the independence” the subsequent beginning of “Western neocolonialism [...] in the guise of global capitalism and neoliberal economics” (Kalnačs, Chapter 14). More general, as Dirk Göttsche points out, there seems to be “certain structural affinities between the multi-layered conditions of colonialism in East Africa resulting from its Indian Ocean connections and the super-imposed colonialisms of the Baltics, of regions of the former Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire” (Göttsche, Chapter 12). Like other scholars from East-Central Europe, Kalnačs is well aware that Soviet colonial and imperial rule in the Baltics may, in parts, differ from that of Western colonial rule in, say, India or Africa. However, his focus on the various layers of Baltic colonial and imperial experience brings out the similarities between these very different kinds of rules and opens mainstream postcolonial studies to larger historical processes and shifting colonial attitudes. Moreover, when Kalnačs suggests, with Bogdan Ștefănescu (and Epp Annus in this volume, Chapter 13), that it is more appropriate to “look for structural relationships between colonizer and colonized” (Kalnačs, Chapter 14), this widening in terms of comparability of colonial/imperial experiences goes a step further. It aims at assumptions about these very relationships, that are fundamentally different from those developed by the postcolonial mainstream.

Neil Lazarus argues that “the assimilation of ‘post-Soviet’ criticism to ‘the postcolonial’ is [not] a good idea” because he perceives a “premature (if understandable) anti-Marxism” on the side of post-Soviet postcolonial scholars (Lazarus 2012, 117). While this may in parts very well be the case, it can equally be observed that many scholars from East-Central Europe are not so much against a Marxist or socialist worldview but rather critical of the colonialist attitudes of the Soviet occupiers towards the people in their occupied territories. However, critique that arose from this specific colonial/imperial experience generates invaluable insights which greatly help to lay bare errors in mainstream postcolonial reasoning. Again, there is a world of difference between the assumption of a “Western consciousness” (Said 1978, 8), or a “colonialist mentality” (Zantop 1997, 4, 14), or a colonial pattern of thought that, naturally, as it were, leads to colonialism and all that it entails (Zantop 1997, 9),<sup>11</sup> and the basic premise by Annus and Kalnačs that people can “fulfill the function of the colonizer” (Annus, Chapter 13). The latter avoids the inescapability that comes from the psychoanalytically inflected assumptions or their poststructuralist guises in mainstream postcolonial scholarship. This allows for critique of colonialism and neocolonialism, which no longer appear to be a kind of original sin of *the West* but, sincerely, as ideology and practice. Just like, say, settlers in the former colony German South-West Africa, or Ottoman-Turkish settlers in Anatolia after the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, “Russian settlers arrived at the Baltic shores for any number of reasons—many came in search of a better life [...]. Yet, *en masse*, Russian-speaking settlers functioned as colonizers in

the eyes of the locals” (Annus, Chapter 13). Without a doubt, as Reinhart Kößler states in this volume (Chapter 6), in the African case this very settler colonialism was “predicated on the wholesale expropriation of African land” and “the creation of a ‘society of privilege’.” In effect, this led to colonial and post-colonial asymmetries (Kößler, Chapter 6). Post-Soviet and post-Ottoman conditions may be partly similar and partly different from these African conditions. Nevertheless, on a conceptual level, it is of fundamental importance to distinguish between the mainstream postcolonial view on the colonizer/colonized relationship and the views of Benedikts Kalnačs and Epp Annus. They propose one should “understand ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ as structural positions that refer to the subject’s location within the colonial matrix of power” (Annus, Chapter 13). The latter allows for the assumption that “such positions get actualized in certain situations, but might be deactivated in some others” (Annus, Chapter 13). Florian Krobb, despite his focus on German colonial fantasies in the texts he investigates, seems to think in a similar direction. The basic prerequisite of his argument is that “Germans found themselves on all sides of constellations and arguments, [...] assuming a diversity of roles” (Krobb, Chapter 5).

It is in this line of thought that premises long-forgotten—or rather made forgotten by normalization strategies of the postcolonial mainstream—become thinkable again. Is it, for instance, *necessarily* the case, as Susanne Zantop and many others assume, that the historical contingency of living at the time of European colonialism as a citizen of a colonizing nation leads to something like a “colonialist mentality” (Zantop 1997, 4, 14)?<sup>12</sup> In my view, this must be answered in the negative (cf. Albrecht 2014b, 447–455). Or, regarding the issues John Noyes discusses in this volume (Chapter 2), one may take it even a step further and ask: Was it the same person who on one day conceptualized the idea of humanism and on the next day stepped on board of a vessel and set off on a colonizing enterprise? Following the above outlined postcolonial dead-end logic, it would actually make no difference. If colonizer and colonized are, by contrast, considered to be structural positions, this allows for a de-linking of humanism and colonial atrocities. This implies the assumption that colonial atrocities are not “built” on, but rather came into being, despite an existing idea of humanism. An idea which may or may not have been familiar to “the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant,” who, according to Aimé Césaire, made up “the decisive actors” of colonialism (Césaire 2000, 33). The “affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism” (Spivak 1996, 210) may not be near as close as Gayatri Spivak assumes. In this spirit, it is also quite unlikely that characters such as the British colonial soldier on the frontispiece of this volume plundering and carrying Indian treasures away in a big sack—the contribution of the German graphic artist and painter A. Paul Weber (1893–1980) to the issue of *The White Man’s Burden* (1939/1940)—gave much thought to intellectual currents such as humanism.

**“as if colonies and empires had existed nowhere else” (2)**

Another empire that disappeared from the global map at the same time as, say, imperial Germany, the Ottoman Empire, had attracted interest from a postcolonial perspective at about the time of the emergence of post-Soviet postcolonialism. As before, this interest was not amongst postcolonial scholars, but in this case, historians working on the nineteenth century. Özgür Türesay speaks of a “recent historiographical turn” when the Ottoman Empire, too, is “seen through the lens of postcolonial studies” (Türesay 2013, i). Some scholars feel that there are good reasons to refer to the Ottoman Empire as a colonizing power (Deringil 2003, 313), at least regarding parts of the time period that Edward Said so diligently shields (I shall return to this later in this section). However, the handful of scholars who currently make up this field<sup>13</sup> share the fate of post-Soviet postcolonial scholars, as they are being ignored by the postcolonial mainstream. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, although it was “a polity that existed for over six centuries and that ruled on three continents” (Mikhail and Philliou 2012, 475), and despite the fact that it “covered a huge geography until its last days” (Deringil 2003, 313), it is usually cast as the classical territory of “orientalism” (Adamson 2005, 362; Said 1978, 60 and *passim*): “the Orient that Orientalism proclaimed, the region par excellence of Orientalist interaction, desire, and meaning-making” (Krobb, Chapter 5). However, as the historian Selim Deringil pointed out 15 years ago, the study of the Ottoman Empire likewise “presents fruitful challenges to any student of colonialism and postcolonialism” (Deringil 2003, 313). Today it is most likely that historians will follow this path. Not too long ago, “the Ottoman Empire was still considered to be an incommensurable and incompatible empire—so different as to be a freak among history’s other states.” By now, there has been “an enormous historiographical pendulum swing” and “the name of the game” is now “comparative empires” (Mikhail and Philliou 2012, 742f., 722).

On the surface, it is not that clear why the postcolonial mainstream abstains from a critical analysis of Islamic imperialism. After all, as Gregory Jusdanis in this volume reminds us, the fall of Constantinople took place in 1453. In the same century, the postcolonial calendar starts with “the cataclysmic moment summoned up by the various ‘1492s’—that is, the conquest of the ‘new’ world, the expulsion of the Moors, and the Inquisition” (Stam and Shohat 2012, 373). The conquest of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, by the invading Ottoman army of Sultan Mehmed II on May 29, 1453 is one of the major events that disappears in the postcolonial version of world history: as does the subsequent domination over southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. What is more, the Ottoman Empire and the Western Empires co-existed from the fifteenth century to the heyday of Western colonialism in the nineteenth century and to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. These and other



Islamic empires have also been linked through movement of people and a network of trade relations (Masters 2001, 68–80, 116–121, 141–145). They are also linked in their involvement in slave trade. As the Senegalese anthropologist Tidiane N’Diaye points out in his study on *The Muslim Slave Trade in Africa*, another blind spot on the mainstream postcolonial map, the Arabic slave trade lasted three times as long as the transatlantic trade and claimed a multitude of victims (N’Diaye 2010, 12). After the end of Ottoman rule, in the various parts of its former territory, a process started which Eyal Ginio and Karl Kaser refer to as “de-Ottomanisation” (Ginio and Kaser 2013, 3 and *passim*). A process that reminds one of what (in the title of a 1994 essay collection) the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o famously called *Decolonising the Mind*. For the people in the Balkans, for instance, this process included “the attempt to disassociate themselves from what they regarded as an era characterized by Oriental backwardness and oppressive foreign rule.” People in “the Middle Eastern countries” likewise “perceived the Ottoman rule as a foreign domination that suppressed the Arab lands” and thus after the dissolution of the empire “underwent a troublesome process of being colonized, de-colonized and then having to define their positions in a post-colonial world” (Ginio and Kaser 2013, 3).

As implied above, one of the reasons, if not the primary reason for the remarkable neglect of the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic empires in the postcolonial mainstream, can be traced back to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. With this study, Said managed to turn the respective parts of the world, his “Orient,” into a protected and uncriticizable area (Albrecht 2019). If he mentions the existence of the Ottoman Empire at all, it does not appear as a *political* power. According to Said, it was “Islam” and not the Ottoman Empire which was “in many ways” for Europe “a real provocation” in the centuries leading up to the eighteenth century (Said 1978, 74). Like an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Ottoman chronicler who would record the victorious outcome of a battle in the manner of: “Then God gave victory to Islam,”<sup>14</sup> Edward Said does not speak of Ottoman rulers and their armies who conquered a huge territory in southeastern Europe and the Middle East. For Said, it was “Islam” that “could boast of unrivaled military and political successes” (Said 1978, 74). Even more important in regards to the necessary critique of *Orientalism* is Said’s consistent focus on a historical event which constitutes one of the cornerstones of his own period of investigation: Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt. First of all, in his view, the impact of the Empire on the European history—in his words the “trauma” of “Islam”—lasted only “until the end of the seventeenth century” (Said 1978, 59). Here he refers to the second—and like the first of 1529, unsuccessful—Siege of Vienna in 1683. According to *Orientalism*, from the end of the eighteenth century until its end in the early twentieth, the Ottoman Empire consistently holds the role of the victim of Western powers. In so doing, Said suggestively rewrites history and styles Napoleon’s short Egyptian campaign (1798–1801) as the beginning of the European colonization of the entire

“Orient.” Based on these historical distortions, there is no need to address the Ottoman Empire as a political power for his period of investigation.

Said’s idiosyncratic representations of history can be found in numerous vague allusions inside and outside the study. For instance, when Said indicates in an interview in 1996 that the “period of imperialism” in the Middle East begins “with the conquest of Egypt by Napoleon” (Said 2004, 268), or when he suggests in the afterword of the German translation of *Orientalism* that “modern imperialism in the Orient since Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign two hundred years ago continues to the present day” (Said 2009, 411). Most historians see things differently, specifically that the Ottoman Empire was “in the unique position of being both a member of the Concert of Europe and the object of European imperial designs” (Minawi 2016, 9). As Efraim and Inari Karsh point out: “Even at the weakest point in their modern history, during the First World War and in its immediate wake, Middle Eastern actors were not hapless victims of predatory imperial powers but active participants in the restructuring of their region” (Karsh and Karsh 1999, 2). Moreover, “in the century or so between Napoleon’s conquest in the Middle East and World War I, the Ottomans embarked in an orgy of bloodletting in response to the nationalist aspirations of their European subjects”; and “such violence” was not “confined to Ottoman Europe” (Karsh 2008, 125). More recent research even unveiled the involvement of the Ottoman Empire “in the late nineteenth-century colonial expansion in Africa”—the *Ottoman Scramble for Africa* is what the historian Mostafa Minawi calls it—which challenges “the perception of the European powers as the sole agents of change on the global stage” (Minawi 2016, xiv). Indeed, representatives of the Ottoman Empire joined those of the European countries and the USA when Chancellor Otto von Bismarck invited the players in the power struggle of the time to the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–1885 (Albrecht 2012a, 365).<sup>15</sup> Although, as Minawi suggests, this was a “daring move for the empire,” “Istanbul used the Act of Berlin as a tool to assert itself as also legally entitled to colonies in Africa well beyond Libya” (Minawi 2016, 9). These examples show how distorted the picture of the Ottoman Empire is in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. Nevertheless, this study decisively contributed to the fact that, from a postcolonial perspective, this empire is not being perceived as an imperial or colonial power. And four decades of postcolonial studies after *Orientalism* has effectively protected the “Orient” from a critical analysis of its imperial or colonial history.

Illuminated in this way, the example of the Ottoman Empire given above shows another way in which the normalization of the postcolonial view and its confinement to Western or European colonialism and imperialism came into being. Specifically, this came about by *actively* excluding large territories, like post-imperial Greece, “the first independent successor-state to the Ottoman Empire” (Philliou 2008, 670; see also Osterhammel 2009, 587). However, in Greece, for a long time the most commonly used term of periodization for the five centuries of Ottoman presence was *τουρκοκρατία*

(Turkish domination). Moreover, for the Greek terms *τουρκικός ζυγός* or *τουρκική δουλεία* (Turkish yoke or slavery), “incidentally, analog terms are to be found in all other languages of southeastern Europe” (Helmedach et al. 2014, 15f.; see also Milosević 2011, 73). This is certainly not to suggest that Ottoman rule in Southeastern Europe must be seen as one long history of continuous tyranny (Lauer and Majer 2014, 1). Moreover, terms like “Turkish yoke” are nowadays often dismissed as outdated, merely associated with “conventionalist historiography” (Şenişik 2011, 5). The “Turkish yoke” is considered to be a product of nineteenth-century nationalism and, by extension, is considered by many as “responsible for the most odious crimes” (Jusdanis 2011, 3).<sup>16</sup> But whatever may hold true of these assumptions, as a general attitude they seem to bring about shortsighted questions. Pinar Şenişik, in her discussion of Cretan revolts, for instance, wonders “what made the Cretan Christians decide to sacrifice their lives or ‘willingly to die’ in the so-called ‘nationalist liberation struggle’ for an abstract entity, or an ‘imagined community’” (Şenişik 2011, 9). The focus on the nation—with or without Benedict Anderson’s renowned trope—as the alleged single goal, desire, and pursuit makes one forget that these struggles were not only *for* something, and maybe not even primarily. Quite clearly, the strugglers also strived to free themselves *from* something—from state power perceived as foreign, as occupant, or for some as a “yoke.” In discussions on decolonization or struggles against European colonizers, this *from* is taken very seriously. No one would assume that, say, African resistance fighters caught nationalism like a disease. Rather, post-colonial independent nation-states in the literature often appear to be a by-product, produced by the fight for freedom from a colonial yoke. It is only fair to assume that Ottoman subjects, likewise, may have had an interest in freeing themselves *from* something—for instance, from “the subordinate political and social position” they were facing as “non-Muslims within the Ottoman reality” (Shirinian 2017, 12). The classic novel by Níkos Kazantzákis about the 1889 upheaval on the island of Crete against Ottoman rule is, after all, not entitled “Nation or Death.” It instead follows a *leitmotif* of the novel and in the reality of the revolts, *Freedom or Death*.<sup>17</sup>

### **A difficult relationship: Postcolonial studies and Islamic empires**

In decades of mainstream postcolonial studies, it did not seem logical to anyone to analyze Kazantzákis’ post-Ottoman novel *Freedom or Death* from a postcolonial perspective. It was, rather, necessary to cast off much of the unnecessary postcolonial baggage in order to make a fresh start in this direction (cf. Albrecht 2019). As for the postcolonial mainstream, however, it is striking that—if the issue of the Ottoman or other Islamic Empires is touched upon at all—the kind of criticism that postcolonial studies otherwise considers its task is conspicuously absent. Robert Young revives

old myths that contemporary historiography has long abandoned, namely the myth “of equitable relations between different communities, different people living in the same place, tolerating each other’s differences” (Young 2012, 32). As pointed out above, most historians draw quite a different picture of the reality of non-Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire. While from today’s perspective some hope to find tolerance in the Ottoman and other Islamic rule, historians emphasize that those who were dominated by the Islamic conquerors had to pay a high price for the putative “living peaceably together” (Young 2012, 32). Historians therefore warn against a perpetuation of the myth of the relatively harmonious coexistence of different ethnic groups during the Ottoman empire (Reinkowski 2011, 29ff; Sharkey 2017, 39). In contrast, the anthropologist Robert Hayden and the historian Timothy Walker have developed a more suitable term for the phenomenon in question, which they call “antagonistic tolerance.” This concept implies that “there is ‘tolerance’ in the Lockean sense, of enduring the presence of the other but not embracing it, so long as one group is clearly dominant over others” (Hayden and Walker 2013, 399, 402). And, such tolerance *only* “perdures as long as one group has clear dominance over another” (Bryant 2016, 5).

Before I further discuss the difficult relationship between the postcolonial mainstream and Islamic empires, a more general note on criticism directed against such empires. For reasons which may very well have to do with the infiltration of public and academic discourses with postcolonial thought, it appears to be often problematic in this day and age to even touch upon issues concerning the Muslim world. And, the number of contemporaries who strive to ensure that it also remains this way is considerable. When the editor of the reputable *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* generously allows a contributor to equate a transfer of “critique of imperialism onto imperial Islam” (that is, what the chapter in hand advocates) with “neoconservative discourse” (Sayyid 2013, 130f.), it would seem appropriate to make clear, first of all, that there are well-founded and different opinions in this regard. To begin with, this equation seems to be an all too transparent strategy: Place oneself on the prevailing side of the interpretation monopoly by denoting the mere posing of undesirable questions as a dubious endeavor. This is not only mere political rhetoric, far removed from evidence-based scholarship; it also reveals a kind of imagination in which there is no room for *both* a critique of the Ottoman or Islamic empires *and* of the Western empires alike. The same lack of imagination is demonstrated by the vague indication that any discussion of Islamic imperialism inevitably joins “the contemporary polemics of the place of Islam and Muslims in the world” (Sayyid 2013, 136f.). When the historian Wolfgang Reinhard observed that “both effective new taboos of thought and likewise effective new imperatives” are nowadays at work (Reinhard 2010, 25), one can’t help but think of this article. In a recent interview, the Algerian writer Boualem Sansal speaks of a kind of internalized censorship: “Even in

Europe, freedom of speech is not worth much when it comes to Islam. The mere mention of the term stifles any discussion from the outset, or heads in the direction of phrases and platitudes of the politically correct” (quoted in Radisch 2016). The historian of religion Kristin Skottki called attention to the fact that these taboos and imperatives are not only an obstacle to a lively culture of disputes necessary for any society but also detrimental to academic research. She pointed out that on the one hand, “few topics of historical research are as important and topical as the relationship [...] between the so-called West and the so-called Islamic world,” but on the other hand, that those who want to conduct research on this issue experience great difficulty these days due to “emotional responses” to their work and the “contemporary political climate” (Skottki 2015, 11). Against this backdrop, I would like to underline that the aim of the chapter in hand, as well as my chapter in this volume (Chapter 10), is not meant as a one-sided approval to populist critique of Islam or Muslims. It is intended as a critical academic discussion, of both Ottoman or Islamic empires *and* of the Western empires. As postcolonial mainstream scholars do not seem to feel responsible for it, this discussion is all the more necessary.

Apart from Robert Young’s revival of the myth of equitable relations and tolerance, two other ventures into Ottoman or Islamic imperialism from inside of the postcolonial and decolonial mainstream, respectively, have been produced. Both are in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, and both ensure that the *reverse* division of the world is being restored, even by way of discussing Islamic imperialism. Walter Mignolo adds another proposition to the existing explanations for the decline of the Ottoman Empire and implicitly blames the Western logic of coloniality for its “downturn” (Mignolo 2013, 115). The partisanship and double standard also in his approach becomes quite clear when he states that “the colonial matrix of power” turned the “most refined of people” into “the ‘characterless’ European Turks” (Mignolo 2013, 114f). Salman Sayyid strongly discourages his readers, on shaky grounds, from dealing with Islamic imperialism in the first place.<sup>18</sup> One of the main arguments of the latter is that Islamic empires and Western empires are simply not comparable, “that empires founded in the wake of Europe’s appropriation of the Americas were organized by different logics than *previous* empires” (Sayyid 2013, 136; *my emphasis*). Strictly speaking, this argument would keep the option open to make at least Islamic empires subject to the comparative critique which existed *parallel* to European imperialism since Columbus and the fall of Constantinople. However, it is obvious that the author intends to blur the role of Islamic imperialism, questioning whether it was a serious agent, as Edward Said did before. According to Sayyid, the crucial difference is that European empires were built on a “logic of racism” (Sayyid 2013, 136), while the Islamic empires were *not*—they “were not structured around a logic of racialization” (Sayyid 2013, 135). He even goes a step further and boldly claims that the “articulation of Islam and empire was a

historical relationship, not an essential or necessary one” (Sayyid 2013, 136). Therefore, overtly implying that a racist “core” may be assumed to be inherent to European empires. Even if we let this slide, the argument is based on an idea of “race” and “racism” as exclusively modern European concepts, and as such, they are not to be confused with any other forms of racism present in other parts of the world. This modern conceptualization of racism should also not be confused with that of premodern times—no matter how similar the respective phenomena may look.

This understanding of racism seems to be the dominant one. Many scholars still tend to regard it as “anachronistic to identify racism in the premodern European world” (Loomba 2009, 502). However, Ania Loomba alerted us to how “narrow” this “understanding of race” actually is, and although this conceptualization of race has certainly been successful, it has also shut down important discussions. For example, for most of the time scholars considered it out of the question to address “caste exploitation in India” “as a form of racism” (Loomba 2009, 502). This “denial of comparison between race and caste” (Loomba 2009, 511), not only in mainstream postcolonial scholarship but also in adjacent disciplines, is only one clear illustration of a restricted view of racism. A view that is not able to see the overlaps between “racial ideologies across temporal and spatial boundaries” as well as “between the discourse of faith and that of the body” (Loomba 2009, 501, 507). I cannot go into detail on this highly illuminating paper, which strives to “retheorize the idea of racial difference in a much more radical way” than other approaches before (Loomba 2009, 508); it may suffice to join Loomba’s warning against “the intellectual and political pitfalls of a mechanical insistence on the uniqueness of different racial formations” (Loomba 2009, 510). Interestingly, Anil Bhatti—in his promotion of the concept of “similarity” as an alternative to thinking in the category of “difference” (I shall return to this in the following section)—likewise discerns such overlaps between “racial ideologies across temporal and spatial boundaries” (Loomba 2009, 501). Bhatti does so when he refers to *both* racism *and* the “brutal form of systematic exclusion of the dalits (the so-called ‘untouchables’) in the Hindu caste system” as a result of a “denial of similarity” (Bhatti 2017, 10). The ascription in Sayyid’s paper of “racism” solely to *the* West, in contrast, once again fits the binary postcolonial logic of colonizer versus colonized and confirms a unidirectional concept that neither provides for reverse “othering” nor reverse racism. In the real world, past and present, there is no shortage of evidence for reverse racisms of various kinds. In this respect, writers tend to be largely unimpressed by the peculiar postcolonial line of thought<sup>19</sup> when they create characters in a complex colonial setting. As Dirk Göttsche observes in M.G. Vassanji’s novel, “racism is not restricted to the attitude of the Germans and British towards their colonial subjects”; rather, “European racism in the perception of the colonized is” for instance “replicated in the Indians’ racist perceptions of black Africans” (Göttsche, Chapter 12). As a more general note

to Salman Sayyid's weird insistence on racism as an exclusively Western trait, it seems also adequate to remember that—regardless which logic may be behind “humiliation or violation of the subject people” (Sayyid 2013, 135)—the *effects* of imperial or colonial rule may feel the same in the first place. It is irrelevant to the outcome whether subject people were humiliated or massacred because of a “logic of racism” or for some other reason.

For those who look at the Ottoman Empire or other Islamic empires in the hope to find models of peaceful coexistence for contemporary multicultural societies, it may be disappointing to realize that they have fallen into a trap of wishful thinking. Regarding the popular Córdoba myth, for instance, the historian David Nirenberg pointed out: “Though there is no reason why *convivencia* need designate only harmonious coexistence, it has in fact acquired this meaning among certain historians who have romanticized the concept” (Nirenberg 1996, 8). Indeed, there is a “growing unease among historians” about this concept of *convivencia* (Soifer 2009, 20) and, in general, as Ato Quayson pointed out, there are really no grounds anymore for suggesting “that Islamic societies both now and in the past have developed highly sophisticated models of tolerance” (Quayson 2012, 367). Similarly disappointing in the context of the “current popular nostalgia for a multicultural past” (Bryant 2016, 6) may be the observation that at closer look, this tolerance, in fact, resembles indifference. That the “far-reaching and well-attested autonomy of the Christian and Jewish communities within the Muslim state had as its main reason the simple fact that the Muslim subjects, too, were mainly left to their own devices” (Goitein 1970, 105). Postcolonial scholars who strive to “draw moral and political lessons” for instance “from the Medieval Spanish experience” (Soifer 2009, 20) are running late. Moreover, the misconception of an inherent Islamic tolerance can “easily be refuted, not just by pointing out egregious examples of intolerance” but also by emphasizing a fact that, following Quayson, is simultaneously highly interesting for a comparative glance at the experience of colonized or otherwise subordinated people: “All religions of the Book (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) [...] instill a sense of privilege that depends simultaneously on a process of the othering of nonbelievers. [...] This infernal dialectical carousel of religious Self and unbelieving Other is [...] further complicated when the unbeliever also happens to be culturally or racially different from the believer” (Quayson 2012, 367). The role of Christianity as a source of the justification of the European colonizers' alleged superiority is already well-researched and recognized in this sense. It is important to note, however, that Quayson does not suggest that religion as such is the source of all possible tensions and conflicts. Rather, he suggests that “religions of the Book [...] instill a sense of privilege” in their followers (Quayson 2012, 367; *my emphasis*). A sense of privilege that is also characteristic for the followers of certain world views such as the Nazi ideology. And, quite obviously, even the socialist worldview—despite its commitment to fundamental values such as equality, social justice, and

solidarity—likewise did not prevent Soviet colonizers from developing a similar sense of privilege, a privilege that erroneously lead them to assumptions such as “the Russian people” should be “the leading people” (Annus, Chapter 13). There is ample evidence that these patterns are to be found also in the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic empires. And, in this spirit, Bruce Masters can compare what seems to be, in one case, an outbreak of religious separatism and, in the other, a racial conflict: There were nineteenth-century riots and violence against Christians and Jews in Aleppo and Damascus in the wake of the Tanzimat reforms, and there were riots in New York at about the same time against just “freed” African Americans. However, both groups were struggling over privileges: “Both groups had historically been viewed as subordinate in terms of the politically dominant group and both were now enjoying, or about to enjoy, emancipation of sorts” (Masters 2001, 165f.).

Scholars working on subject areas beyond the familiar postcolonial territory could or, rather, should have yielded valuable knowledge to contribute to the development of a post-colonial paradigm. Their work can help to envision new perspectives on the colonial past, the neocolonial present, and a post-postcolonial future. In recent historiography on the Ottoman Empire, for instance, there seems to be a trend to no longer conceal the very features of relations between Islamic rulers and their respective subject people that make them comparable to relations of Western colonizers and non-Western colonized. In her study on *Muslims, Christians, and Jews* in the Ottoman Empire, Heather Sharkey cites an abundance of revelatory and enlightening examples of social and political practices and conditions that are likewise conceivable in classic European colonial situations. To begin with and on the macro level, “the Ottoman state was *unexceptional* in its use of violence for asserting and preserving the empire” (Sharkey 2017, 65; *emphasis in the original*). On the meso and micro level of institutions and social action, examples which allow for comparisons are numerous. If, for instance, “many Muslim jurists assessed the compensatory price for a killed Christian or Jew at two thirds or half of the price of a Muslim” (Sharkey 2017, 43), this is hardly evidence of “equitable relations” (Young 2012, 32). Rather, this example evokes the manner Western colonizers treated colonized people, as a less valued group or as subhumans. And, not just Germans would cringe to learn that, in various instances over the centuries, distinctive marks were required by the Ottomans, to create “tangible or visible differences” between Muslims and non-Muslims—such as “colored buttons for Christians (blue) and Jews (yellow)” (Sharkey 2017, 49, 56). Dress codes in the Ottoman Empire were modes of maintaining the social hierarchies: “Up to the reforms of Sultan Mahmut II (ruled 1808–1839), non-Muslims were required to dress differently from Muslims, to make their inferior status instantly recognizable. [...] In the Ottoman concept of the social and political order, the non-Muslim subjects had their assigned place” (Shirinian 2017, 20f.). Reading these and other studies on the Ottoman Empire and



other Islamic empires against the backdrop of “key themes and concepts” of postcolonial studies, such as “structures of exclusion/inclusion” or “structures of othering and representations of difference” (Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2016, 1), one cannot help but see the same patterns that likewise structure the societies colonized by Western powers.

At least for “the period prior to the modern one (roughly the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries),” by most historical accounts, “difference was a given and accepted as such” in the Ottoman Empire. What we find in this period is “the near lack of any political will to transform the ‘difference’ into ‘sameness’” (Rodrigue 1996). If this conjures up associations of pre-Enlightenment Europe, observations like these and their potential consequences for thinking about colonial and imperial differences do not seem to play a role in mainstream postcolonial studies. Moreover, as the cultural anthropologist Rebecca Bryant indicated, “we still lack sufficient means to understand how those who lived at the time perceived these differences” (Bryant 2016, 14). And, this is not the only difficulty scholars face when dealing with past societies. Another issue is “our own contemporary inability to conceptualize difference beyond ‘identity’” (Bryant 2016, 6). But, do we actually know how differences were perceived, say, in everyday life in a British or French colony? Again, this is not to deny any kind of cruelty present in what has been called colonial difference. This is just to underline that mainstream postcolonial studies seems to place itself outside such considerations—or at least according to Homi Bhabha, the field quite simply “insists that cultural and political identity are constructed through a process of alterity” (Bhabha 1994, 175). This is a generalization that Neil Lazarus already dismissed as one of postcolonial studies’ “presumptive universalism[s] without empirical warrant” (Lazarus 2011a, 32f.). Postcolonial scholars take *the* colonial difference for granted and gloss over what they refuse to acknowledge. As the examples of mainstream postcolonial approaches to the Ottoman and other Islamic Empires presented in this section show, these contributions seem to be too occupied with protecting the “Orient” from criticism to be of use for a comparative discussion of colonial or imperial differences and similarities.

### **Towards multidirectional perspectives**

The potential of generating new knowledge and multidirectional postcolonial perspectives, by including territories other than those covered by the postcolonial mainstream, seems to be obvious. Both the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Union—although different from the Western empires and colonies with different economic, political, and social ways of organizing populations and thus bringing about different experiences of subalternity—are in other ways absolutely comparable to Western empires. However, the customary colonial opposition is between a “civilized metropolis and barbaric or primitive periphery” (Račevskis 2006, 166). By contrast, people for instance in the Baltic countries considered themselves European and their

Soviet occupiers “barbaric,” echoing the widespread stereotype of “Russian cultural inferiority” (Uffelman 2013, 112). We find a similarly *reverse* pattern in the European Ottoman territories, where people likewise fought (and still do so) internal struggles of European vs. non-European identity constructions. In Ottoman-occupied Greece, “Greek intellectuals, poets, and merchants thought of themselves as culturally superior to their imperial masters” (Jusdanis 2011, 110f.). This feeling, as the chapter by Yannis Papadopoulos (Chapter 8) in the volume at hand shows, after the expulsion and population exchange of the early twentieth century, increased. Greek refugees transferred their feeling of superiority to their compatriots and felt that they should “inoculate mainland Greece with their superior European values” (Papadopoulos, Chapter 8). In Turkey, at the same time, after the ethnic cleansing, as the historian Matthias Bjørnlund reminds us, the Young Turk’s nation-building “was through [...] a process that required the rewriting of history and the definition of non-Turks [Ottoman minorities] as the Other” (Bjørnlund 2008, 45). What stands out, then, is the role reversal of “Europeans” vs. “Orientals.” The crucial difference between the mainstream postcolonial view, with its focus on the Western colonial and imperial powers and a framework extended to other parts of the world, is that the latter brings out conditions which are reverse to those assumed in the postcolonial view. Taken seriously and thought through, these phenomena deprive postcolonial scholarship of one of its main premises from its formative decades: What is considered to be the epitome of coloniality, also known as “the moral economy of the Occident” (Chambers 2017, 1), can likewise be found elsewhere, outside of the usual postcolonial map. The just outlined *reverse* “othering” of the colonizers, by the colonized, is certainly not envisaged in the postcolonial mainstream. The idea and notion of “othering” “was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its ‘others’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013, 188; cf. Spivak 1985, 252 and *passim*). It detailed processes of differentiation by which the presumed superior culture of the colonizer experiences a clear upward revaluation and the culture of the colonized is marked as inferior and uncivilized. In light of the innumerable cases of *reverse* “othering” that can be found in a wider colonial and imperial horizon, this concept of “othering” of Spivakian provenance actually collapses. Apparently, postcolonial theory, while generating this central concept of othering,” came across a well-known “general principle on the construction of cultural identity” (Polaschegg 2005, 38). Yet, as it consistently ignores non-Western colonial and imperial situations, it took it mistakenly for a “specific of *the West*” (Polaschegg 2005, 38; *my emphasis*). As it seems, this central concept of mainstream postcolonial thought is based on a misconception. For some peculiar reason, though, this idea of “othering” was particularly successful: This “dichotomous thought has become an incredible powerful and orthodoxy-forming standard description of *othering*” (Osterhammel 2017, 64). Therefore, it has helped “to displace questions of inequality, class, and class conflict” (Parry 2012, 348).

Interestingly, there are postcolonial critics who actually do *not* seem to have any problem with the idea of *reverse* “othering.” Although, this aspect of their work is virtually unknown. The philosopher Uma Narayan, for instance, not only stands in the shadow of central stars such as Gayatri Spivak or Homi Bhabha,<sup>20</sup> but is also usually being allocated in a field more convenient to the postcolonial mainstream. She is labeled as an Indian scholar, in the familiar group of those who criticize white feminists for universalizing their issues as “women’s issues.” However, Narayan clearly saw that, in the context of British colonialism in India, this revaluation of one’s own and the related devaluation of the other culture and society was not confined to one side of the colonial divide. Those colonized by the British—hardly surprisingly, if it was not for the successful infiltration of logical reasoning with reductionist postcolonial tenets—likewise insisted on difference and being different. And, in turn, also revalued their own culture and insisted on their superior otherness. While on a political and economic level, the colonial situation was an unequal power relation between colonizer and colonized, what could simultaneously be found on an interpersonal level was a “shared insistence on the ‘Otherness’ of the other culture” (Narayan 1997b, 402). Cultural difference was, on both sides, considered to be tantamount to cultural superiority. It would be interesting to learn how scholars of the “decolonial option,” who insist that it is “the logic of coloniality” which translates “differences into values” (Mignolo 2011, xxvii) would explain that the “logic” of the colonized brings out basically the same pattern. Reverse “othering” helped colonized Indians, amongst other things, to cope with the strains and mental stress of colonial rule—by differentiating and distancing themselves from the culture and society of the colonizer, or, as Narayan puts it, what happened was an “inverting [of] the colonialist contempt for indigenous cultures into a contempt for the culture of the colonizers” (Narayan 1997b, 402). This observation of reverse “othering” flips the concept and reveals—just like the examples of reverse “othering” by subject people of the Soviet and Ottoman Empires—its one-sidedness. This brings to light how misleading this concept of “othering” is in its present unilateral usage.

What is more, as Albrecht Koschorke recently put it: “The high regard for heterogeneity, difference and hybridity is plagued by the decisive weakness that it only seeks to invert the importance of powerful dichotomies, while leaving the dichotomous pattern as such untouched” (Koschorke 2017, 25). A “weakness,” though, which due to widespread acceptance allows postcolonial critics to turn the tables and confidently operate with the double standard described above. One could, however, assess this “high regard for heterogeneity, difference and hybridity” at its roots as an “othering” of sorts. Specifically in that, in order to acknowledge and appreciate the other, the other “must first be declared to be an other; she/he must to a certain extent be *made different*.” However, in order to achieve and maintain this positive othering and revaluation, a “significant cultural effort” is necessary.

And, according to Koschorke, the “postcolonial discourse has tended to *dramatize* the experience of being other” (Koschorke 2017, 25f.; *emphases in the original*). Against this background,<sup>21</sup> Anil Bhatti and others emphasize the need to turn to an alternative category or concept of thinking in terms of similarities. This is a concept that Koschorke aptly designates as a “*category of de-dramatization*” (Koschorke 2017, 26; *emphasis in the original*).

While preference of thinking in categories of differences supports the postcolonial *reverse* division of the world into West and non-West, “thinking about similarity opens different possibilities for dealing with the problems of complex societies than do methodologies focused on differences” (Bhatti 2017, 7). As outlined above, like the postcolonial mainstream, Uma Narayan traces the phenomenon of “othering” in the Spivakian sense to colonial times. However, unlike the majority of postcolonial scholars, she underlines first the “shared insistence on the ‘Otherness’” by *both* colonizers *and* colonized and, second, also its problematic result: “This insistence on ‘Otherness,’ on the differences between the cultures that confronted each other in the colonial encounter, while not entirely false or fabricated, was often exaggerated in that it over-played differences while ignoring both similarities and assimilations” (Narayan 1997b, 402). In this spirit, thinking in terms of *similarities* as emphasized by Bhatti and others, we can be alert to the pitfalls of postcolonial thinking since—and this is crucial—the “considerations of similarity contain a subversive potential to expose the claimed antagonisms and radical incompatibilities of opposition, differences and so-called ‘clashes’ as nothing more than ideology” (Bhatti 2017, 7). This is also valid for the field of mainstream postcolonial studies, where the concept of difference is indeed highly ideological and normative in that it simultaneously *confirms* the “different other” as such and radically *upgrades* his or her difference. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, “fetishizing difference under the rubric of incommensurability” (Lazarus 2004, 10), throughout her career, made no secret of her intentions to devalue basically anything Western and upgrade the previously—presumably or actually—devalued non-Western (Albrecht 2013, 48, 50). In postcolonial discourse, difference became a kind of value in itself, which has necessarily, as it were, to be emphasized and safeguarded. The “war for recognition” of “difference,” as Zygmunt Bauman likewise rightly observed, is not a struggle for equality but is concerned with pushing through a recognition of the “superior” value of “difference” (Bauman 2001, 145). Indeed, whenever people insist on difference—be it colonizers claiming superiority over colonized people or postcolonial “different others” and their advocates—the suspicion persists that it is basically a matter of preserving or gaining privileges for one’s own people. Just like in colonial times, “different” never really means “different but equal” but ultimately “superior.” The price of this is the questionable *reverse* division of the world into West and non-West. However, when equality and comparability are brought into play, this puts a stop to

the secret ambition of “superior difference” (Albrecht 2008, 270). In this sense, concepts of similarity and comparability, as I have outlined here, are a major and fundamental challenge to mainstream postcolonialism.

Anil Bhatti’s simple conclusion is that “[w]e can assume that many things are similar in this complex world” and “that it is more important to get along with one another than it is to understand one another” (Bhatti 2017, 15). This is close to Richard Rorty’s plea, to return to the old and likewise simple idea “that we all share a common humanity” and that the goal should be a society in which all human beings are regarded as “full-fledged member[s] of both the species and the local community” (Rorty 2008, 70, 71). Neither Rorty nor Bhatti have a “harmonization or the levelling of differences” in mind (Bhatti 2017, 7) when they emphasize “commonality rather than difference” (Rorty 2008, 72). They only suggest, to take as a starting point of any conceptual endeavor, the fact that “different others”—both those marked as inferior and uncivilized by the colonizers and those evaluated by postcolonial scholars—have “the same tendency to bleed when pricked” as every human being does; “they too worry about their children and parents,” and so forth (Rorty 2008, 72). Or, as John Noyes reads Fanon’s idea of the human, the starting point of any conceptual endeavor may be “the experience of biological life” (Noyes, Chapter 2). Françoise Lionnet, in the volume at hand (Chapter 3), quotes the Mauritian poet Édouard Maunick who speaks of “red blood of the Occident / red blood of the Orient” and Édouard Glissant from Martinique, who in his poetry “indexes the universal condition of birth” and death (Lionnet, Chapter 3). Uma Narayan, on another level, points to the far-reaching similarities between Western and non-Western societies, such as social hierarchies, huge economic differences between members of society, and structural inequality between men and women (Narayan 1998, 89f.). By privileging difference over similarities, such comparable and similar phenomena have been systematically ignored by the postcolonial mainstream. And, although there are theoretical perspectives which take account of both “the universality and variety of human ways of life” that have, of course, never been really forgotten (Sturma 2005, 15), these perspectives were not successful in many areas due to the supremacy of the postcolonial paradigm. The initiative to revive the concept of similarity, as compiled in the volume *Similarity: A Paradigm for Culture Theory* (Bhatti and Kimmich 2017), by contrast, shows that this theoretical perspective belongs amongst the “features of society deemed desirable” which “must be recurrently rewon” (LaCapra 1998, 3). A first step in this direction is, as the historian Jürgen Osterhammel pointed out, “an overcoming of Said’s paradigm” (Osterhammel 2017, 72). If scholars deem “indifference to difference” desirable (Bhatti 2012), this will not only contribute to diminishing the current “obsession with ‘difference’” (Smulewicz-Zucker and Thompson 2015) but may also revive the idea that difference can, actually, be framed in the sense of “different but equal.”

Analyses such as the work in this book of Götsche's and Jusdanis' et al. can help understand the importance of an alternative concept of similarity becoming part of a multidirectional post-colonial framework. For this reason, it is time to remove the postcolonial shield from the carefully guarded areas outside the familiar map of imperial and colonial space and to arrive, as Russell Berman suggested, at a "genuinely comparative and global discussion of colonialism and empire that would draw on a wide diversity of cases" (Berman 2011, 172). Gregory Jusdanis' comparison of "a chronicle of Cuzco's destruction [...] alongside descriptions of the fall of Constantinople" (Jusdanis, Chapter 11) should be seen as an early case study and implementation of such a "genuinely comparative and global discussion of colonialism and empire." As should Dirk Götsche's contribution that, by opening the door of the entangled German and Arab imperial histories for post-colonial literary studies, strives to contribute to a genuinely comparative discussion in the context of a multidirectional post-colonial framework. And so does my investigation of Níkos Kazantzákis' 1953 novel *Freedom or Death* juxtaposed with a reading of Chinua Achebe's seminal postcolonial novel *Things Fall Apart* of 1958 (Albrecht 2019). Jusdanis not only draws attention to another part of the globe, a part which has remained a blank spot on the mainstream postcolonial map, but also shows that there is much to be gained from "unorthodox comparisons" (Jusdanis, Chapter 11) of the writings of imperial subjects who could not be any more diverse. To begin with, scholars of imperialism and colonialism may develop a feel for a wide range of positionalities possible in different imperial and colonial settings. In this spirit, juxtaposing accounts of an Amerindian author in the early seventeenth century (needing to legitimate himself before his Spanish colonizers) and of fifteenth-century Greek historians (self-consciously writing against the backdrop of a tradition perceived to be superior to that of their Ottoman conquerors) greatly helps to understand "colonizer" and "colonized" as *structural positions*, varying, as Epp Annus (Chapter 13) and Benedikts Kalnačs (Chapter 14) suggest in this book, in various historical situations. The "unorthodox comparison" brings out surprising similarities, even beyond the obvious sacking and looting of the cities and violence against the population, by both the Ottoman and Spanish conquerors. While the history of the Greeks under Ottoman rule may in strictly historians' terms differ from that of the Incas under the Spaniards, both conquered societies seemingly shared the need to come to terms with the experience of conquest and imperial domination.

Discussion of the far-reaching consequences grounded in a properly comparative postcolonial perspective is only just starting. But, as Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Şandru pointed out for the post-Soviet context: "A more wide-ranging dialogue can emerge as a result, in which recurring political, intellectual and cultural practices can be analyzed at the level of cognate ideological constructions and similar functioning mechanisms" (Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2016, 2). If one strives to reframe the

“post-colonial” as a genuinely global phenomenon, postcolonial studies will never be the same again. On the table then is the need to develop alternative ways of thinking about the colonial and imperial past and the post-colonial and post-imperial present. This volume responds to a serious desideratum in that it pioneers challenges to the alleged normality of the mainstream post-colonial perspective. As this chapter has shown, mainstream postcolonial studies is not in a position to keep the “promise” to “chart the worldwide contemporary condition” (Parry 2012, 341). Unfortunately, though, “the power of the postcolonial perspective has” not only “spread across almost all the disciplines in the humanities and social sciences” but is also “reaching into almost every domain of contemporary thought” (Young 2012, 22). By now it should have become clear that there is, in fact, no reason to celebrate this quite worrying phenomenon—neither in terms of the spreading of reductionist premises by the postcolonial mainstream, nor in terms of how its lack of “accountability to the realities of the contemporary world-system” is concerned (Lazarus 2011a, 1). The outlook on the relation of postcolonial studies and climate change in the next section will demonstrate this from yet another angle.

### **Climate change: Outlook on the future of postcolonial studies from yet another angle**

While the postcolonial mainstream tends to mistake the grand narratives of the West—if not for the source of all evil but at least—as a considerable part of “the problem,” a few scholars grounded in postcolonial criticism began to reconsider and reassess these very grand narratives, and apparently rediscover their merit. Ian Baucom, a scholar of English and postcolonial studies, in discussing recent works by historian Dipesh Chakrabarty and philosopher Catherine Malabou, predicts that “the more fully postcolonial studies, globalization critique (or any other critical humanities practice), engages the life sciences, the more fully we enter [...] the era of a new humanism. That humanism may be quite unlike the older humanisms [...] but it is a humanism nevertheless” (Baucom 2012, 9). Chakrabarty himself, “one of the leading postcolonial theorists of his generation” and certainly a critic of the grand narratives of the West throughout his career (Baucom 2012, 1), surprised his readers in a much-noticed article in *Critical Inquiry* with assertions such as “in the era of the Anthropocene, we need the Enlightenment (that is, reason) even more than in the past” (Chakrabarty 2009, 211). What is more, while the greatest sin of humanism in the tradition of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment was and is from a mainstream postcolonial view its universalism, what we find in Chakrabarty’s essay is no longer the familiar “postcolonial suspicion of the universal” (Chakrabarty 2009, 220). Instead we find a “reliance on a new universalism: the universalism of species thinking” (Baucom 2012, 9). Indeed, the big issue of climate change and recent debates on the new concept of the

Anthropocene,<sup>22</sup> Gabriele Dürbeck's concern in this volume (Chapter 15), entail a challenge for which the postcolonial paradigm may or may not be equipped. The initial question posed in this introductory chapter, of whether the postcolonial paradigm actually helps us understand our world, therefore arises from yet another angle. Chakrabarty frankly admits that all his "readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years [...] had not really prepared [him] for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today" (Chakrabarty 2009, 199). Both Chakrabarty and Baucom agree that "what scientists have said about climate change challenges [...] the analytic strategies that postcolonial and postimperial historians have deployed in the last two decades in response to the postwar scenario of decolonization and globalization" (Chakrabarty 2009, 198). Baucom suggest that "[i]t is to speak [...] of a moment in which we are compelled to ask whether the governing interpretive protocols of postcolonial studies [...] are indeed adequate to the planetary conjuncture we inhabit" (Baucom 2012, 5).

While in recent years postcolonial ecocriticism has become a prolific field (see for instance Huggan and Tiffin 2015), the postcolonial mainstream largely avoids dealing with the inescapable fact of climate change and the idea of the Anthropocene, which conceptualizes humanity as a whole as a planetary geophysical force. Scholars working with the concept of the Anthropocene, like atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, use the word "species" to designate life in human and other living forms. However, the very idea of a species, or humanity as a whole, is alien to postcolonial lines of thought. As for the new universalism of species thinking, it may not only be alien to but also irreconcilable with major postcolonial premises—even if scholars like Ian Baucom concede that a new universalism can no longer be "a Hegelian universalism" and that by no means does it "imply an essentialism" but rather might be understood in terms of an "epistemologically blended (or hybrid) universalism" (Baucom 2012, 3, 9). In particular, the postcolonial insisting on and celebrating of cultural and anthropological differences between humans of this species is hardly compatible with the very questions of "human collectivity" that "climate change poses for us" (Chakrabarty 2009, 222). On the contrary, this very "species thinking sets aside those codes of singularity, incommensurability, and alterity [...] through which postcolonial history and anthropology, postcolonial literary, cultural and political theory have made sense of the world" (Baucom 2012, 3). It is also not surprising that postcolonial scholars seem to turn a blind eye to the mere possibility that their approaches may, in one way or another, be part of the problem when it concerns the occurrence of alarming aspects of the present world situation. Chakrabarty may admit that postcolonial theories have "not really prepared [him] for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today" (Chakrabarty 2009, 199). What he does *not* admit is what a powerful counterproductive force



the postcolonial mainstream already is in this respect. To begin with, it helped on a large scale to debase the very grand narratives of the West, towards which some postcolonial scholars of the climate change now (re) turn and desperately seek help from. Moreover, issues arise also in climate change debate, from the postcolonial assumptions which I have already discussed and criticized in other contexts in this introduction. Three examples may illustrate how postcolonial core tenets collide with what is—not least on a social political level—necessary to responsibly handle the challenge of the climate change: first, the postcolonial preference of issues that concern former colonized people over issues that concern all of humanity; second, its politics of confinement to the West and its formerly colonized non-West and exclusion of other territories; and third, its restricted view on intra-species inequalities.

Decades of postcolonial theorizing and politics of empowerment were successful in supporting formerly colonized people and their struggle for rights and participation in political decision-making. Given the neocolonial endeavors, ranging from exploiting of natural resources to dumping contaminated waste on indigenous lands, this support was and is absolutely necessary and justified. However, there are also problematic cases which provide evidence that the postcolonial politics of empowerment entails a potentially dangerous element. This element may at any time turn into an impediment for the search for solutions to global conditions, conditions that affect all of humanity. When postcolonial scholars discovered ecocriticism, it became quickly apparent that even “simple” ecological issues (as opposed to the global threat of climate change) are often in conflict with postcolonial core assumptions: “Ecocriticism has tended as a whole to prioritize extra-human concerns over interests of disadvantaged human groups, while postcolonialism has been routinely, and at times unthinkingly, anthropocentric” (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 17). The example of the role of endangered species in cultural practices of indigenous groups is one of many where ecological goals and postcolonial goals seem to be irreconcilable. Caskey Russell, in his discussion of the “Makah Whale Hunt,” points to the danger of protecting dubious traditions and justifying “destructive environmental practices by American Indians” and other disadvantaged groups (Russell 2010, 172). The Makah people are located in the Northwest of Washington State, and their culture is “based upon the hunting and harvesting of whales” (Russell 2010, 163), upon the killing of the gray whales of the Pacific Northwest. As in several other cases, such as the Bald and Golden Eagle in the American Southwest, the question arises as to who is entitled to decide what over endangered species or anything else that, according to environmentalists, belongs to the entire human race. A similar question is, who is entitled to decide over necessary measures to prevent or slow down the climate change which is a hazard for the whole of mankind? Russell underlines in the case of the struggle over the interests of the Makah people: “As with non-Indians, not all Indians are interested in conservation, recycling, or Green

politics” (Russell 2010, 172). In many cases, however, they are interested in their agency and in what they perceive as a right to maintain their traditions. On a more general level, postcolonial scholars are most likely to insist on redistribution of political decision-making and to join those who charge “the West” of political and academic neocolonialism: “The Western Scientist continues to speak for the Earth” (Escobar 2012, 194).

The second example that illustrates how postcolonial core tenets collide with the challenges arising from climate change is the postcolonial politics of excluding on a conceptual and factual level other territories than the West and its formerly colonized non-West. The protective screen over the “Orient” generated by Edward Said and strongly strengthened by generations of postcolonial scholars not only shields the “Orient” from dissident scholars but also detracts attention from the fact that many countries of the “Orient” today would be more adequately designated as petro-states. These countries are providers and producers of fossil fuel and play a crucial role as effective agents, on a large scale, in the production chain of climate change. Interestingly, the exclusion of the “Orient” as a target of critique in postcolonial scholarship seems to already have an impact on the cultural studies debates on climate change and the idea of global anthropogenic agency. Particularly in regards to petro-states, which tend to be likewise excluded, in the above-outlined sense, from an interrogation from environmental point of view. The translation of Said’s “Orient” into the oil-producing and exporting countries of the Middle East, would be a first step to *unthink* postcolonial tenets in this regard. However, it is not too difficult to predict that a postcolonial mainstream in search of causes of climatic change will join the critics of the industrial West—and rightly so—while continuing to protect the non-West. The “Orient,” when it comes to serious debates on causes and necessary measures, is ignored by the postcolonial climate change critic. Postcolonial scholars are, therefore, in the search of solutions for global conditions that affect all of humanity, likely to put their foot on the brake.

The third example, the postcolonial *reverse* division of the world into West and non-West and the problems related to this “untouched” “dichotomous pattern” (Koschorke 2017, 25)—in particular the sweeping generalization that treats “the West” as a single block—is conducive to perspectival distortion, also in regards to the issue discussed here. Without a doubt, that which postcolonial scholars call the countries of “the West” (or “the North”) “composed 18.8% of the world population, but were responsible for 72.7 of the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted since 1850.” However, as Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg underline, in such figures, “subnational inequalities” and “national class divisions” are usually “disregarded” (Malm and Hornborg 2014, 64). Looking at intra-species inequalities draws attention to the conceptual flaws of the postcolonial division of the world from yet another angle. “According to the standard Anthropocene narrative, the Industrial Revolution marks the onset of large-scale human modification of the Earth

System” (Malm and Hornborg 2014, 63). However, it is important to realize that it was not the human species as a whole which brought the Industrial Revolution into the world but “capitalists in a small corner of the Western world invested in steam, laying the foundation stone for the fossil economy: At no moment did the species vote for it either with feet or ballots, or march in mechanical unison, or exercise any sort of shared authority over its own destiny and that of the Earth System” (Malm and Hornborg 2014, 64). Kathleen McAfee, discussing “under what circumstances, and at whose hands, did fossil-fuel technologies acquire their epoch-creating power” (McAfee 2016, 69), likewise underlines that it was time and again the decision-making of a small group of “people in positions of power” who “have made the human species into a ‘geological force’” (McAfee 2016, 69f.). And, what is more, “the same protagonists, as a class, are the greatest beneficiaries and promoters of today’s fossil-fuel-based world economy” (McAfee 2016, 70). Incidentally, there is reason to believe that the overlap is considerable between those in positions of power then and now, and those who made decisions in and profit out of colonialism and neocolonial exploitation. It is to be feared, though, that in postcolonial debates over climate change and its originators, intra-species inequalities will be translated once again along the lines of the familiar postcolonial division of the world.

Postcolonial criticism has no explanation for “this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today” (Chakrabarty 2009, 199). However, when Chakrabarty now speaks of “the necessity of thinking disjunctively about the human,” the need “to think the human on multiple scales and registers” and the “challenge of having to think of human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once” (Chakrabarty 2012, 2, 14, 1), this seems to be an all too simple evasion of the fact that for decades postcolonial scholars would theorize and conceptualize while ignoring “the realities of the contemporary world-system that constitutes their putative object” (Lazarus 2011a, 1). In light of the dimension of the challenge, it is actually more than an evasion. Neil Lazarus could not have known Chakrabarty’s essay when he accused the majority of postcolonial scholars of a lack of accountability to the real world (Lazarus 2011a, 1). To shift questions of survival of the species to the abstract level of conceptual thinking on “multiple scales and registers,” instead of raising the subject of the social and political consequences of these “multiple and incommensurable scales” in clear terms, seems to be the epitome of this lack of accountability. In light of the climate change, it is much more appropriate to ask, as Kathleen McAfee does, if this is “not the worst time to abandon the lessons of history, the insights of the humanities, and the tools of social science that can help to identify the commonalities within diversity upon which politics for radical social transformation can be built” (McAfee 2016, 71).

This book is the outcome of a three-day international and interdisciplinary conference funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, which took place in the magnificent Herrenhausen Palace in Hanover, Germany, on September

27–29, 2017. For me and for several of the participants, it was not a single event but rather embedded in the larger project of an informal European research group on comparative postcolonial studies. Dirk Göttsche is to be credited with taking the initiative to create this research group, with the goal to move beyond established concepts as developed in postcolonial studies and, as he put it in an internal document, to take “postcolonial inquiry across Europe to a new comparative and transnational level.” The first conference, entitled *(Post)Colonialism across Europe: Transcultural History and National Memory*, in the fall of 2012, generated a volume with the same title (Göttsche and Dunker 2014). Florian Krobb edited the papers of a second conference, *European Postcolonialisms: Temporalities and Theories*, that took place in the fall of 2014 at the “Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences” in Wassenaar. This conference was organized by Isabel Hoving, Sarah De Mul, and Liesbeth Minnaard (Krobb 2017). After a conference in the spring of 2015 in Riga, Lettland, on *Colonial Encounters in Europe: New Approaches to the Internal European Colonial Experience*, organized by Benedikts Kalnačs, and another one in Nottingham, in the summer of 2016, again organized by Göttsche, *Memory and Postcolonial Studies: Synergies and New Directions* (Göttsche 2019), I felt it was my turn to take the research group a step further and apply for conference funding. The general drive in this research network is to sound out geographical locations and historical formations which used to be blank areas on the global postcolonial map. This concern drew my attention to Southeastern Europe and the European successor states of the Ottoman Empire—only to find that it seems to be the right time for this still somewhat unorthodox undertaking.

## Notes

- 1 Such as Wilson, Şandru, and Welsh 2010; Lazarus 2011a; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013; Dwivedi and Kich 2013; Huggan 2013; Chambers et al. 2014; Bernard, Elmarsafy, and Murray 2015; Huggan and Tiffin 2015; Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2016; Young 2016; Chambers 2017; Krobb 2017; Singh and Kim 2017; Watson and Wilder 2018.
- 2 The English translation (2017) of the original 2015 essay by Koschorke (“Ähnlichkeit. Valenzen eines post-postkolonialen Konzepts.” In *Ähnlichkeit: Ein kulturtheoretisches Paradigma*, edited by Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich [Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2015], 35–45) omits the “post-” in “post-postkolonialen.”
- 3 The term “postcolonial” refers to the postcolonial perspective criticized in this introduction, while I use “post-colonial” as the most common neutral reference to historical chronology. However, there are no generally binding rules for the spelling and use of the word.
- 4 The misjudgment in a German reference book on postcolonial theory that, while there is still “criticism” of the postcolonial paradigm, we find hardly any “fundamental challenge” anymore (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015, 7) seems to be due to the fact that fundamental critique is not taken seriously as such but rather downplayed as a mere “raising of objections” (for instance 296).

- 5 Such as Dirlík 1999, 149; Divine 2008, 1; Tlostanova 2012, 130; Bernard, Elmarsafy, and Murray 2015, 7.
- 6 I borrow this term from Timothy Morton (*Dark Ecology. For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 66).
- 7 For a general critique of the double standard as applied in postcolonial studies and other fields see Boghossian 2006, 130 and *passim*; see also Salzman 2008, 242, 245.
- 8 Pinar Şenişik discusses six major rebellions, 1827, 1841, 1866, 1889, 1896, and 1897, for the nineteenth century alone (Şenişik 2011, 73–82, 101–196, and *passim*).
- 9 For a critique of the alleged collaboration between *Enlightenment* and *Empire*, see for instance Berman 1998; for the more complex relations between them, see for instance also Stoler 2013.
- 10 In my own chapter in the volume at hand (Chapter 10), I discuss this issue in more detail.
- 11 For a critique of the causality in this vein in Susanne Zantop’s approach, see also Berman 2000.
- 12 Edward Said laid the foundations of this *reverse essentialism*, as it were, in his “generalizable theory of the occident’s ineluctable, power-based blindness” (Osterhammel 2017, 72), and in particular in his often quoted explanation why, in his view, “any European” (Said 1978, 203), “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was [...] a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” (Said 1978, 204).
- 13 Such as Makdisi 2002a and 2002b, Deringil 2003, Kühn 2007, Mikhail and Philliou 2012, Türesay 2013, Kechriotis 2015, and maybe a few more who escaped my notice.
- 14 Quotes in Bruce Masters, 2001, 157.
- 15 See the documents on the Congo question (“Aktenstücke betreffend die Kongo-Frage, Reichstag. Aktenstück Nr. 290 [Kongo-Frage]” on the website *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags und seiner Vorläufer* supported by the German Research Council (DFG) ([http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3\\_k6\\_bsb00018455\\_00309.html](http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3_k6_bsb00018455_00309.html), in particular [https://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3\\_k6\\_bsb00018455\\_00332.html](https://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3_k6_bsb00018455_00332.html); accessed 02 August 2018).
- 16 For a well-balanced discussion of “nationalism’s dualistic nature, its capacity to confer benefits to humanity as well as wreak havoc,” see Jusdanis 2001 (quote on p. 13).
- 17 The original Greek title is *Ἡ Καπετᾶν Μιχάλης* (1953); both the American and British translations refer to this slogan of the Crete resistance: the American (1955) is entitled *Freedom or Death*, the British (1956) *Freedom and Death*.
- 18 For a detailed critique of this article see Albrecht 2019.
- 19 There are those who deny the existence of reverse racism on the grounds that “if black people mark white people as such and ascribe certain attributes to them,” this is supposedly not the same as the other way round, but in the case of black people, rather a “strategy of differentiation or resistance” (Arndt 2011, 42). According to this peculiar logic, racism can be naturally designated as an exclusively “European tradition of thought and ideology” (Arndt 2011, 43).
- 20 This is also valid for Germany where a reference book and critical introduction of postcolonial theory lists in its bibliography 39 titles by Spivak, 21 by Bhabha, not a single one by Narayan (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015). A similar picture can be found in the indices of the collection of *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013) and *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (Huggan 2013).
- 21 This is, incidentally, the same background that helped identity politics to become so powerful and “culture” to push “economics aside” (Rorty 2008, 74).

- 22 The International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS), “the largest and oldest constituent scientific body in the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS),” recently suggested that the planet should still be considered to be in the epoch of the Holocene, which began after the last major ice age 11,700 years ago (decision announced on June 19, 2018 on <http://www.stratigraphy.org/index.php/ics-news-and-meetings/125-formal-subdivision-of-the-holocene-series-epoch>). Nevertheless, the debate on the concept of the “Anthropocene” took on a life of its own in many disciplines beyond the sciences and is not very likely to disappear.

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Part I

# Post-colonial complexities





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## 2 Humanism, embodied knowledge, and postcolonial theory

*John K. Noyes*

In the introduction to this volume, Monika Albrecht acutely points out the importance of responding to what she calls a “growing provincialism of postcolonial studies.” Postcolonial studies stand under a complex threat which is linked to the marginalization of the humanities. While university administrators might like the popularity of the topic, there is a sense in the wider scientific community that its objects are either past, fleeting, or relatively insignificant; that its concepts are both excessively vague and overly sophisticated; and that its methods are obscure at best, faulty at worst. Added to this is the intervention provided by decolonial critique, which as Walter Dignolo has emphasized, accuses postcolonial scholars of repeating the experiential discrepancy between first-world intellectuals and those outside this world who are the object of their theoretical musings (see Dignolo 2011a; Tlostanova in this volume). Much like Arif Dirlik’s early discontent with the experiential dimension of postcolonial theory (Dirlik 1994), to which I will return presently, the idea of decoloniality queries the experiential field of intellectuals engaging in postcolonial theory. Dignolo observes that it is “easier for European intellectuals to endorse postcolonialism (as it is happening in Germany) than decolonial thinking” since:

Decolonial thinking is more akin to the skin and the geo-historical locations of migrants from the Third World, than to the skin of ‘native Europeans’ in the First World. Nothing prevents a white body in Western Europe from sensing how coloniality works in non-European bodies. That understanding would be rational and intellectual, not experiential.

(Dignolo 2011b)

As postcolonial theory moves into its fifth decade (if we take Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as the—albeit highly arbitrary—moment of inauguration), this complex threat will have to be taken seriously. Are the objects of postcolonial studies or postcolonial theory obscure or outdated, is the evidence it draws on convincing, is the experience of marginalized peoples eclipsed in its practices? This chapter argues that the experiential discontent raised

in the face of postcolonialism's successes is simply the continuation (and political intensification) of a long-standing debate within the European philosophical tradition. This should show that the challenges raised by the decolonial position are not quite as far from the political questions raised by postcolonial theory as they might at first appear. What is more, if we take the experiential discontent with theory's claim to universality back to its roots in the Enlightenment rebellion against rationalism (see Noyes 2015, 119f), we can start to think about how Mignolo's implicit question, *who theorizes?* (if I may adopt the title of Sisi Maqagi's short essay of 1990), had a political urgency that from the outset complicated the concept of skin (in Maqagi's case by introducing gender inequality). In the African context, this urgency has its own genealogy, which, upon closer inspection, allows a different perspective on the intellectual streams that run in and out of the North American academies (see Noyes 2000, 49–60). What we find by looking at the experientialism vs. rationalism debate in its African form is a long-standing attempt to think the experiential both in its embodied specificity and in its claims to what might be called an alternative universality (and I am fully aware of how this term hovers on the verge of nonsense). More specifically, the African engagement with humanism provides valuable insights into the problem of how experiential politics relates to its theoretical generalization. What is more, discourses of humanism in European and North American academies have much to learn about the concept from these African iterations.

The object for investigation in this chapter is what I consider to be a decolonized archive of humanism, which has moved through complicated channels of transmission from Europe to Africa and back. Consider, for example, Frantz Fanon's complicated relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre, or the educational paths of Senghor, Césaire, and so many others. This more immediate dialogue is complicated by Ez'kai Mphahlele's insistence on African humanism as a dialogue between the Western tradition and a widespread African tradition whose commitment to humanism is more firmly rooted in social practices.<sup>1</sup> Or the lesser known work of the institute *African Americans for Humanism*, which in the 1980s made repeated attempts to set up dialogue with colleagues in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, also Zimbabwe and South Africa (see Ongere 2014). These channels of transmission caught my interest as I began to understand how the struggles for an adequate conception of humanity in South Africa today both mirror and diverge from similar struggles in German philosophy of the late Enlightenment. This struggle originally unfolded alongside the intellectual opposition among European intellectuals to the cultural and philosophical framework of European imperialism and colonialism (see Noyes 2015). These European intellectuals were a long way away from entertaining mechanisms for allowing the experiential dimension of colonized peoples to enter the discourses of their academies. Nonetheless, drawing on a long discussion of embodiment and cognition (reaching back at least to Lucretius's *De rerum natura*),

they sketched the outlines of a theory that would allow the diversity of bodily experience to be thought alongside the universality of human life, while taking account of the danger of equating universality with European experience.<sup>2</sup>

The underlying assumptions of this project are the following: Late Enlightenment philosophy understood well that one important obstacle to the implementation of human rights was a conceptual problem within the idea of the human—its inclusive universality is at odds with the recognition of cultural difference. This is a *fundamental* conceptual problem, and I call it the antinomy of universal reason (Noyes 2014). Reason is a universal human potential which is actualized differently in different cultures, resulting in disqualification or at least a destabilization of universal contents of reason, perhaps even of the reasoning method itself. And more importantly, as Geoffrey Bennington has shown, the solutions to the antinomies have political consequences (Bennington 2017). When it comes to humanism and the concept of the human, one such consequence concerns racial difference and the practical accession to human rights; another concerns religion; yet another concerns how gender is mapped onto bodies; and there are others still. In South Africa today, the question of humanism provides the grounds on which these consequences are largely set out and contested. This is why humanism has to be investigated as one of the discontents of postcolonialism—in the hopes perhaps that postcolonialism might be another word for critical philosophy, or at least for one particular way of doing critical philosophy, or that it might in some way begin to speak with critical theory (see Mills 2017).

The experiences of African liberation struggles underlined this point. The Cameroonian-South African philosopher Achille Mbembe spoke in 2002 of the dilemma of African humanism:

This denial of humanity (or attribution of inferiority) has forced African responses into contradictory positions that are, however, often concurrently espoused. There is a universalistic position: “We are human beings like any others.” And there is a particularistic position: “We have a glorious past that testifies to our humanity.” Discourse on African identity has been caught in a dilemma from which it is struggling to free itself: Does African identity partake in the generic human identity? Or should one insist, in the name of difference and uniqueness, on the possibility of diverse cultural forms within a single humanity—but cultural forms whose purpose is not to be self-sufficient, whose ultimate signification is universal?

(Mbembe 2002, 253)

The question of humanism and embodied knowledge occurred to me in March 2016 when I was working as a fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies. Reading this and similar statements, I was surprised to

see the resurgence of African humanism among South African scholars. At the time, South African universities were in turmoil, challenged by the student movements of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, the movements to decolonize the universities while at the same time making education accessible to all. In these two struggles, I saw the political force of the antinomy of universal reason today. In “fees must fall,” all humans are equal, all entitled to an education, not impeded by the disadvantages of race or class. “Rhodes must fall” formed the most serious challenge to the humanist idea, the awareness that race was and continues to be the defining factor in determining the status of humanity in South Africa today. Political outcomes would be quite different depending on whether one pursued the universalist or the particularist political project. Students in South Africa wanted both, and, so I thought, they were right to want both. But how was this to happen? This question is what makes the contemporary South African challenge to the humanist idea so theoretically compelling, so politically urgent. And in putting this in the context of postcolonial theory, this is where, perhaps, theory becomes mainstream, perhaps in damaging ways, perhaps not.

Postcolonial criticism has, from the outset, been troubled by the humanist idea. The reasons for this are quite clear, and they are important for an understanding of the current interest in African humanism. In many humanities fields, the generation of scholars born around the end of the Second World War reached maturity in an academic environment that concentrated on the timeless conditions of human nature, and this was the same environment whose Eurocentrism was so strongly contested by the generation of African humanists who lived through the first wave of African independence. This same encounter with the political underbelly of humanism made the French post-structuralists, the British New Left, and the German ideology critics militate against the apolitical tendencies they found in many of their teachers. And in its peculiar manifestation as Area Studies in the USA, the political potential for what had previously counted as humanist social inquiry began to take on what looked like quite a sinister bent (see Wallerstein 1997). The critical theorists in Germany and the post-structuralists in France were seeking to reverse the direction of inquiry which read the specificity of narration as a key to the timelessness and placelessness of human nature. Timeless and placeless, at least in the sense that everything narratologically unfolding in time and space pointed beyond its own specificity to the unchanging and universally shared aspects of human nature.

The political ambivalence of the humanist idea persists as a rift through the center of postcolonial theory. Edward Said provides an instructive example of its importance, as well as the necessity of a critical examination of its history. In an essay of 1996, he criticizes a concept of the human rooted in European culture. This founded a humanism where, “when most European thinkers celebrated humanity or culture, they were principally celebrating ideas and values they ascribed to their own national culture, or to Europe as distinct from the Orient, Africa, and even the Americas” (Said 2006, 22).

In the same essay, Said appeals to another concept of the human and another humanism characterized by “overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history” (Said 2006, 38f.).

Gayatri Spivak goes one step further, querying the methodological problems of a critical humanism when she links the crisis in postcolonial anti-humanism with that of structuralism. Structuralists like “Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and a certain Lévi-Strauss [...] question humanism by exposing its hero—the sovereign subject as author, the subject of authority, legitimacy, and power. There is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism.” At the same time, anti-humanism remains a negative methodology, since what Spivak calls the “cognitive failures” of anti-humanism do not lead directly to “correct cognitive moves” (Spivak 1996, 210f). Spivak is instructive in her critique of humanism in that she repeatedly takes pains to draw methodological consequences in the humanities from what she calls the “double-bind” of humanist arrogance, that is “the arrogance of the radical European humanist conscience, which will consolidate *itself* by imagining the other” (Spivak 1999, 171). If, in Spivak’s words, “humanism names man (at best the human being) as the master of an unexamined subjective agency” (Spivak 1999, 322n15), the question remains how one might methodologically activate Said’s more positive vision of the human.

This question is intensified by two further factors: globalization and identity discourse. Regarding globalization, the underlying assumption of my inquiry is that the question of humanism will become more, not less urgent given the fact that, in Pheng Cheah’s words, “discourses about globalization almost always pre-comprehend a certain understanding of the human that is continuous with the canonical idea of humanity with which it shares cognate terms such as freedom and dignity” (Cheah 2006, 1f.). And second, for the most part, the idea of postcolonial humanity comes with the authority of proponents who have a biographical foothold in post-independence colonies. We know from the various critiques of postcolonial theory and theorists just how fragile this authority is. Spivak herself cautions against a simplistic identity politics that grounds theoretical propositions in biography, stating in a speech “On Revolution” that “identity politics lays waste the democratic possibility of achieving flexibility of the imagination toward others” (Spivak 2017). Arif Dirlik’s early critique of the biographical authority of postcolonial theorists is interesting since it links my two concerns. Dirlik was expressing a discontent over the fact that the emergence of postcolonial theory is enabled by global capital in the way it provided pathways to Western education for privileged sectors of the postcolonial population while extending these pathways for the even more privileged few out of the postcolony and into the metropole, where they could make use of

anachronistic institutional mechanisms to criticize the history that brought them there (Dirlik 1994).

I'm not sure I want to follow Dirlik very far in this argument. The biographical critique of postcolonial theory carries the same flaws as its biographical authorization. What is needed if the theory is to stand as a theory is a critique of its conceptual architecture. Such a critique can learn a lot by doing just what Said and Spivak point to in their critique of humanism—subjecting the struggle of *a priori* humanism with human diversity to historical scrutiny. To do this would take us back to a founding moment of anti-imperialism, Herder's critique of Kant, which went as far as postcolonial theory has gone in the twenty-first century when he showed how the fact of diverse world views stands opposite an ideology of unified reason and morality in the same way the exploited world stands opposite practices of imperialism.<sup>3</sup> The resultant critique of the humanist idea was to have far-reaching consequences. This can be seen for example in Althusser's essay "Marxism and Humanism" (written in 1965), where he writes:

Marx's theoretical anti-humanism, by relating it to its conditions of existence, recognizes a necessity for humanism as an *ideology*, a conditional necessity. The recognition of this necessity is not purely speculative. On it alone can Marxism base a policy in relation to the existing ideological forms, of every kind: religion, ethics, art, philosophy, law—and in the very front rank, humanism.

(Althusser 1977, 231, *emphasis in the original*)

This is the core of the paradox of humanism in postcolonialism: In order to relate politically to the functionalization of humanism in society as it exists in the present moment, it is necessary to develop a discourse of anti-humanism, which can of course only be possible as a critique of humanism. This necessitates the negative methodology to which Spivak alludes. What Althusser calls "Marx's theoretical anti-humanism" is the acknowledgment that a just society of humans is only possible as the negative of the humanism upon which present injustice has been built. Here's Althusser again:

There you are face to face with your real object, obliged to forge the requisite and adequate concepts, to think it, obliged to accept the fact that the old concepts and in particular the concept of real-man or real-humanism will not allow you to *think the reality of man*, that to reach this immediacy, which is precisely not an immediacy, it is necessary, as always where knowledge is concerned, to make a long detour.

(Althusser 1977, 245, *emphasis in the original*)

The nature of this long detour is the methodological challenge faced by postcolonial theory wherever humanism is the topic. Increasingly, there seems to be agreement that what is needed is—in Paul Gilroy's words—a

“historical ontology of races,” which “could be especially useful in illuminating all the manifest contradictions—legal, ethical, military—of a civilizing mission that had to conceal its own systematic brutality in order to be effective and attractive.” What a historical ontology of races would take account of is the fact that “the entities we know as races derived from the very racial discourse that appeared to be their scientific product” (Gilroy 2005, 7, 8). This would be a first step. However, as Gilroy himself demonstrates, the next step is to attempt what Rahel Jaeggi calls the critique of forms of living, in this case those forms of living sustained by the dual history of race and humanity, the everyday choices that are not reflected as choices (Jaeggi 2018). But it remains to determine just what exactly these non-choice choices might look like in this context. It also remains to determine how to approach the key moment in her analysis, the failure of these forms and choices. What does that mean and how are we to recognize them?

This is where it begins to make sense to approach the authority of the critic in biographical terms, since it is much easier (and much less ideologically charged) to identify the failing forms of living on the interface of race and humanity if you are the one who occupies that interface. This is why it is instructive to turn now to the African humanists of the generation who witnessed the independence struggles of the decades after 1950. Frantz Fanon is exemplary in his understanding of the problem with humanism, anti-humanism, and the idea of humanity. His point of departure is the same one repeated later by Said. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (written in 1961), he repeatedly condemned the European discourses of humanism that were used to prop up imperialism. For example:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe [...]. The European game has finally ended.

(Fanon 1963, 251)

If we turn to South Africa under apartheid, we find that the same anti-humanist position provided a powerful starting point for denouncing apartheid’s hypocrisies. In the climate of apartheid, anti-humanism seemed to make sense. In this spirit, Rory Ryan vehemently denounced intellectual humanism in an article written in 1988 as a perpetuation of apartheid, claiming that “humanism dovetails with the ideals of a civilizing colonialist patriarchy” (Ryan 1996). In opposition to a hegemonic discourse that shamelessly committed gross human rights violations in the name of an exclusionary concept of the human, critical debates evoked the specter of humanism’s barbarism, that image which the Frankfurt School had raised to the status of an icon of late capitalist culture.

On the other hand, the entire self-conception of the South African liberation struggle, from the Freedom Charter to the New Constitution, has



been decidedly humanist. Steve Biko sounded remarkably like Frantz Fanon when he stated in 1973 that his vision of the confrontation of the races leads to “a true humanity where power politics will have no place” (Biko 1996, 90). Biko speaks of “a quest for a true humanity” which will “bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible—a more human face” (Biko 1996, 98). And the importance of ideas of shared humanity in everyday discourses of healing and reparation in South Africa today can scarcely be overestimated. One of the dominant rhetorical moments in the truth and reconciliation commission is Desmond Tutu’s theological discourse of common humanity, which Antje Krog describes as an Africanized Western Christian humanism that states, “you can only be human in a humane society” (Krog 1998, 110). Or, according to the much-discussed philosophy of Ubuntu, which states that “I am what I am because of who we all are,” humanity is a collectively defined regime of rights (Gaylard 2004). Almost everywhere in the national liberation struggles, the old humanism met with calls for a new humanism. But what is this new humanism? How is it to be distinguished from the old? And what are the paths from the old to the new humanism?

It is in this context that I read Achille Mbembe’s *Critique of Black Reason* (2013). From Fanon, Mbembe derives the idea that a universalism of human experience is to be built on black reason, not the reason of the oppressor (Mbembe 2017, 162). Seen this way, black reason is universal reason distorted by being housed in a racially coded body. At this point, the question arises how the universal principles of reason are to be derived from acts of reason related to the racially coded body. The problem Mbembe confronts in unmasking as false the universality claims of Europe’s false humanism would have required the critical move Adorno and Horkheimer make in their discussion of determinate negation—the dialectic which “discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth” (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 18). What exactly remains of the grounds of the specific once it has been negated in the universal? Or, as Adorno puts it in *Negative Dialectics*: “The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility—the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one” (Adorno 1973, 52). This would be the key to finding universality in embodied or experiential knowledge. Mbembe’s rhetorical strategies belie his belief in embodied knowledge, primarily with his continual recourse to a disembodied and unspecified “we.” How did Mbembe move from the reason of black resistance to this disembodied voice, and what exactly makes it more credible than Kant’s categorical imperative? Related to this, Mbembe prefers grammatical constructions that obliterate the subject, since this avoids a closer analysis of what exactly the subject of race looks like. Repeatedly, I found myself asking of his general observations about Western thought: Who thought this? In whose eyes did this appear true? In which discourse?

Contrast this with Fanon's fascinating images of the new humanism in the closing pages of *Wretched of the Earth*:

Today we are present at the stasis of Europe. Comrades, let us flee from this motionless movement where gradually dialectic is changing into the logic of equilibrium. Let us reconsider the question of mankind. Let us reconsider the question of cerebral reality and of the cerebral mass of all humanity, whose connections must be increased, whose channels must be diversified and whose messages must be re-humanized.

(Fanon 1963, 314)

This enigmatic statement is of great importance. Fanon opposes the abstract idea of humankind with the cerebral mass of all humanity. And opposed to the abstract idea of humankind, he asks for practices of reconnecting and diversifying this cerebral mass, of re-humanizing its messages, the practice of reconnecting the cerebral mass of all humanity. What can this mean? If the unity of humanity is biologically—indeed neurologically—founded (in the cerebral mass of humanity), and if there is a way to speak of this mass as a collective substance, the challenge facing humanity is to develop communicative practices of the human that do justice to this unity—that are anchored in the experience of biological life and not in the cynical discourses of humanist exploitation.

Here, too, Fanon is instructive. The key to his argument lies in the distinction between the motionless movement of Europe and a dialectic identified with the oppressed. The stasis of thought is an intellectual activity that generalizes without regard to difference, and Fanon opposes it with one that anchors experiences of racial oppression dialectically in the knowledge of neurological sameness. To take this approach is to acknowledge that difference, race, is a fictional construct with real effects, but it is also to ask that one of these effects be a dialectical establishment of common grounds starting not with the normative subjectivity of whiteness but the non-normative experience of living with the forced negation of whiteness. This dialectical project cuts to the core of any theory of subjectivity.

This claim to a privileged critical perspective enabled by racial oppression is complicated by Nancy Fraser's insight that, because capitalism needs zones and practices outside its logic in order to function, it creates situations that enable the critique of capitalism from within (Fraser 2017, 155). It is worth asking if and how race defines zones of practice outside the logic of global capitalism that are nevertheless integral to its smooth functioning. It is also worth investigating the way an alternative or subversive logic of race can undermine its integration into the global economy. Finally, the question becomes how to link a humanism based on racially orchestrated suffering to the various other sufferings of late capitalism. The rise of the far right gives this problem political urgency.

The African humanists provide several pointers toward a solution. For example, Fanon's linking of humanity with race begins not with a historical *a priori* of human equality, nor with a vague appeal to the universality of the human condition, but with the fact of suffering. Suffering is a symptom of the lack of justice, and its clinical analysis follows the specific forms of suffering at hand.

These insights necessitate methods that negate racial representations without essentializing them and that seek universals without proposing utopian models of humanity. The methodological consequences were nicely stated by Marx in 1843, when he wrote:

Not only has a state of general anarchy set in among the reformers, but everyone will have to admit to himself that he has no exact idea what the future ought to be. On the other hand, it is precisely the advantage of the new trend that we do not dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through criticism of the old one. Hitherto philosophers have had the solution of all riddles lying in their writing-desks, and the stupid, exoteric world had only to open its mouth for the roast pigeons of absolute knowledge to fly into it. Now philosophy has become mundane, and the most striking proof of this is that philosophical consciousness itself has been drawn into the torment of the struggle, not only externally but also internally. But, if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to ruthless criticism of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.

(Marx 1843)

In the present context, the object of Marx's ruthless critique and Adorno's determinate negation is first and foremost race and racism. But I believe it should also be extended to the human, humanity, even there where the concept of the human has come to stand in for a utopian vision of South African society. Lacking a unitary vision of what humanity looks like beyond race-based injustice, could there be a methodology for linking race-based injustice to the idea of humanity? The key to this lies in the philosophical debates around negation that were emerging in the Enlightenment and that eventually led to what is called critical theory. Its key moment is the determinate negation of manifestations of injustice. What this means is that everything hinges on the question of negation and the central place it has to have in the humanist project. If we don't know what the fulfillment of human life is, then the only way to discover it is through the determinate negation of whatever we can agree on as inhuman or non-human.

In Mbembe's conception, black reason becomes an originary experience of self-interrogation aimed at liberation from the condition of exploitation.

Blackness names the refashioning of humans into raw material for exploitation (Mbembe 2017, 39–40), but it also names the consciousness of this process. Clearly, this is a problematic foundation for critique—first, does being black automatically enable critique? If not, why not? What about the problematic blurring of boundaries which fictions of race strive so violently to uphold, such as described by Jacob Dlamini in *Askari* (2014), the study of how black men and women crossed the line from fighting apartheid to fighting to uphold apartheid? Second, if the embodied reason of blackness is a path to universality, isn't this simply a repetition of Kant's attempts to describe what it means to write outside the body? That is, once the purported universality of Europe's false humanism has been unmasked as false, since it is tainted with power, how is it possible to argue for a universalism based on blackness that is somehow different in its claims to universalism? What exactly remains of the grounds of the specific once it has been negated in the universal? Mbembe's rhetorical strategies belie his belief in embodied knowledge, primarily with his continual recourse to a disembodied and unspecified "we." How did Mbembe move from the reason of black resistance to this disembodied voice, and what exactly makes it more credible than Kant's categorical imperative? Related to this, Mbembe prefers grammatical constructions that obliterate the subject, since this avoids a closer analysis of what exactly the subject of race looks like. Repeatedly, I found myself asking of his general observations about Western thought: Who thought this? In whose eyes did this appear true? In which discourse? His claims constantly hang in the air, undocumented, vaguely documented, or falsely documented (the most telling example is his supporting a claim that genetics is rediscovering race with an article that goes to great lengths to explain how genetics has dismissed race).<sup>4</sup> Finally, the book's continual homogenization of blackness as resistance is matched by an equal homogenization of Western forms of knowledge. The gross generalizations about perception and thought work against the thesis of embodied knowledge. Here Mbembe misses what is probably his most important theoretical and methodological opportunity: What methods are open to generalizing experiences of blackness without negating the idea of embodied knowledge? And how can embodied knowledge best undermine universality's ruse? This was the project of the first-generation Frankfurt School, whose importance for postcolonial theory Amy Allen has recently highlighted. As she states in the introduction to her book, the critical theory of the first-generation Frankfurt School can counter the relativism and normativity of postcolonial theory through their critique of progress (Allen 2016, 6). Paradoxically, given the title, there is in Mbembe's story of Western knowledge as good as no critical tradition. Granted, critical theory has yet to engage seriously with postcolonial positions, as Allen makes clear. But to obliterate the history of critique which accompanied the history of exploitation and racism in the West is to fetishize the universal voice Mbembe criticizes as the voice of exploitation.

In spite of these flaws, Mbembe's project remains valuable, since it opens the doors to a critical examination of African humanism. Such an examination would explore how the concept of the human relates to capitalism's production of the non-human, as what Nancy Fraser calls "production's condition of possibility," Marx's hidden abode of production (Fraser 2017, 143). Fraser mentions as examples the reliance of production on social arrangements outside the market economy (Fraser 2017, 147), the creation of a realm of nature open to exploitation (Fraser 2017, 149), and the creation of nations and territories where politics is separated from global economies (Fraser 2017, 151). This is where Mbembe's discussion of the slave and unfree black labor needs to be brought into dialogue with critical theory, enabling an investigation of the naturalization of dehumanized humans.

As postcolonial theory is increasingly challenged by theories of embodied knowledge and a renewed interest in critical theory, African humanism deserves the more careful attention it is currently receiving. By bringing ideas of shared humanity into dialogue with narrated experiences of human difference, it might be possible to begin to understand how capitalism produces the ideal of the human as a by-product of the dehumanization of labor, just as it produces abject humans through the global homogenization of experience.

## Notes

- 1 "As a humanist myself, I endorse most of what [Aldous] Huxley, [Harold John] Blackham and [Jacques] Maritain say, but insist further that I am an African humanist" (Mphahlele 1986, 7).
- 2 See the examples I review in Noyes 2015, 9–14.
- 3 We see this for example when Paul Gilroy identifies Kant's racism as a founding moment for a discourse of race in opposition to humanism: "The moment in which Kant compromised himself by associating the figure of the 'Negro' with stupidity and connecting differences in color to differences in mental capacity provides a useful symbolic marker. From that point on, race has been a cipher for the debasement of humanism and democracy" (Gilroy 2005, 9). The reference is to the 1764 essay *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. It is worth noting that Herder was at this time a student of Kant, and was beginning to think about the implications of cultural difference for philosophy, taking as his explicit point of departure Kant's pre-critical philosophy.
- 4 Referring to an article that appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2003, Mbembe states: "Genomics, rather than marking the end of racism, has instead authorized a new deployment of race" (Mbembe 2017, 21). The article is explicit that "there is no evidence that the units of interest for medical genetics correspond to what we call races" (Cooper, Kaufman, and Ward 2003, 1168).

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### 3 Postcolonial studies, creolizations, and migrations<sup>1</sup>

*Françoise Lionnet*

#### Prologue

In his 2001 book, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English*, Jahan Ramazani eloquently argues that postcolonial literary criticism tends to neglect poetry because it is

a less transparent medium by which to recuperate the history, politics, and sociology of postcolonial societies; it is less favorable than other genres for curricular expeditions into the social history of the Third World; and, consequently, it is harder to annex as textual synecdoche for the social world.

(Ramazani 2001, 4)

He goes on to suggest that critics need to be more aware of the “specifically literary modes of response and recognition” (Ramazani 2001, 4) characteristic of poetic expression. His argument is equally valid for poetry as for other forms of artistic expression rooted in aesthetic experiences that blur boundaries, subvert categories, and thus force us to appreciate the value of either incommensurable opacities or recognizable commonalities, beyond the particularisms of cultural difference. This is indeed what poetry does best—put certainties into question rather than encouraging the merely oppositional practices, counter-discursive rhetoric, or knee-jerk political reactions that are sometimes seen as part and parcel of an all-too-predictable set of anglophone postcolonial theoretical approaches.

I begin with Ramazani because, like him, I want to foreground practices of reading and interpretation that prioritize formal engagement with art and literature. Unlike him, however, I consider context an *intrinsic* category of text by virtue of the historical specificity of the generic medium that characterizes either the poetic text or the art object. That medium—the written word, the canvas, or the camera, for example—is a concrete material condition of production. Access to it varies according to numerous social and cultural factors. It thus provides an unavoidable point of entry into history.



Even when disavowed, these social conditions of possibility of writing or art-making will always haunt the embodied reader's or viewer's reception of the product and the process that brought the object into being. The challenge when dealing with the new discontents of postcolonial studies is to take into account both the particularities of context and the way a text might transcend that context and point to something beyond its ostensible material realities, toward forms of universalism that may nonetheless be elusive, forever receding like the horizon.

One of the signal differences between anglophone postcolonial studies and the field of francophone studies is that for the latter, questions of universalism and humanism are always on the horizon of expectation, even when the author or artist is developing an oppositional approach to the dominant cultural paradigm. Art and literature are seen as crucial means of creating community and recognizing what the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire calls

de la fraternité qui ne saurait manquer de venir  
quoique malhabile  
[of the fraternity that cannot but come  
however unsteady].

(Césaire 1983, 292, 293)

The poet of negritude who before Fanon pioneered the recognition of “the lived experience of blackness”<sup>2</sup> did not seek to carve out a separatist view of community, contrary to what some interpreters of negritude argued. His praise for an “unsteady” fraternity is part of an approach to humanism rooted in the conviction that it can only be valued as a concept when inclusive of all concrete particularisms, and not as a search for disembodied or unmarked generalized humanity.<sup>3</sup> Such an approach presupposes rejection of simplistic oppositions, including that between pure formal analysis and contextually inflected readings. The second stanza of the poem “Vampire liminaire” (“Liminal Vampire”), published in 1960, from which the above lines are taken, reads as follows:

mais sous la marche de ronce du venin  
ils ont prévalu leurs yeux intacts au plus fragile  
de l'image impardonnable  
de la vision mémorable du monde à bâtir  
de la fraternité qui ne saurait manquer de venir  
quoique malhabile  
[but under the brambly advance of the venom<sup>4</sup>  
they prevailed, their eyes intact, at the most fragile point  
of the unpardonable image  
of the memorable vision of a world to be built  
of the fraternity that cannot but come,  
however unsteady].

(Césaire 1983, 292, 293; *transl. modified*)

The contours of this fraternity in a world still to come, “to be built,” remained an important horizon for Césaire, part of a visionary understanding of community that rejects simplistic identitarian exclusions, a fact underscored by the *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, with its lyrical embrace of subalternity everywhere:

Comme il y a des hommes-hyènes et des hommes-panthères,  
je serais un homme-juif  
un homme-cafre  
un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta  
un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas.  
[As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I would be a jewman  
a kaffir-man  
a hindu-man-from-Calcutta  
a man-from-Harlem-who-doesn’t-vote]

(Césaire 1983, 42, 43)

This sentiment is echoed by Édouard Maunick, the Mauritian poet whose radiant and still untranslated collections *Ensoleillé vif* and *Paroles pour solder la mer* contain homages to Césaire and to Maunick’s own mixed-race background, proclaiming

[...] j’ai autant de vivre dans ma mort  
que j’ai de jardins dans les veines  
sang rouge d’Occident  
sang rouge d’Orient  
sang rouge d’Afrique  
sang rouge du Sang  
[I have as much living in my death  
as I have gardens in my veins  
red blood of the Occident  
red blood of the Orient  
red blood of Africa  
red blood of Blood] (*Sunburnt alive*).

(Maunick 1976, 111)

Like Césaire, Maunick knows that his desire to overcome simplistic dualities “par delà nos contraires” [“beyond our differences”] is hampered by forces he cannot control, which often keep him on the border of a struggle between “mon urgence de conter” [“my urgent need to tell”] and “votre oubli d’écouter” [“your forgetting to listen”] (Maunick 1976, 28).

Césaire’s erstwhile Lycée pupil in Martinique, Édouard Glissant, developed a poetics of relationality that he hoped would articulate an ethics beyond negritude, although he too roots his approach in a basic physical experience: that of transport in the hold of a slave ship under conditions of torture. The image of the boat as matrix recurs in his work; it stands out

as a gendered metaphor that conjures the ship's hold as a womb associated with death rather than life:

Cette barque est ta matrice, un moule, qui t'expulse pourtant. Enceinte d'autant de morts que de vivants en sursis.

[This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death].

(Glissant 1997, 18/6)

While Glissant indexes the universal condition of birth, and indeed the fact that for any human, to be born is to be “under sentence of death,” he does not pause to reflect on the condition of the maternal or on biological reproduction generally. I shall come back to this later since it is an issue shared by both postcolonial and creolization theories.

Together, these three poets serve as my point of departure for thinking about colonial history, postcolonial theory, migrations, gender, and creolization. I am not however using their words as synecdoches for the social world (pace Ramazani). Rather, these words illuminate a pathway across the uneven terrain of colonialism and postcolonial theory. The often-hermetic quality of their writing precludes its easy instrumentalization; yet the writing provides insights that allow us to capture the unstable, shaky quality of the “human” across planet earth, and to put into question the mere dualities of counter-discursive practices articulated by first-wave postcolonial theorists and their successful formula about “writing back.”

### Mapping and its discontents

A fundamental goal of the social sciences in their role as enablers of colonial expansion and administration has been the mapping of planet Earth and its inhabitants. Postcolonial scholars have critiqued the forms of control presupposed by the mapping impulse, and they have in turn sought to re-imagine representations of the globe. Glissant famously mentions the “face cachée de la terre” [“the hidden face of the earth”] in his *Discours antillais* (Glissant 1981, 191), the hidden or invisible peoples of the earth whose native places are often left out or marginalized by common mapping practices. Mumbai artist Reena Saini Kallat offers a brilliant critique of colonial mapping in her spectacular and conceptually challenging installation featured on the cover of the massive *Postcolonial World* edited by Jyotsna Singh and David Kim.

In a recording of a talk she gave at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2016, Kallat explains that the installation was specifically conceived for the 2011 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art in Sweden, the theme of which was “Pandemonium: Art in a Time of Creativity Fever.” For the curator, Sarat Maharaj, the 2011 biennial was “an occasion to mull over the turbulence and turmoil that is today's world” (press release).

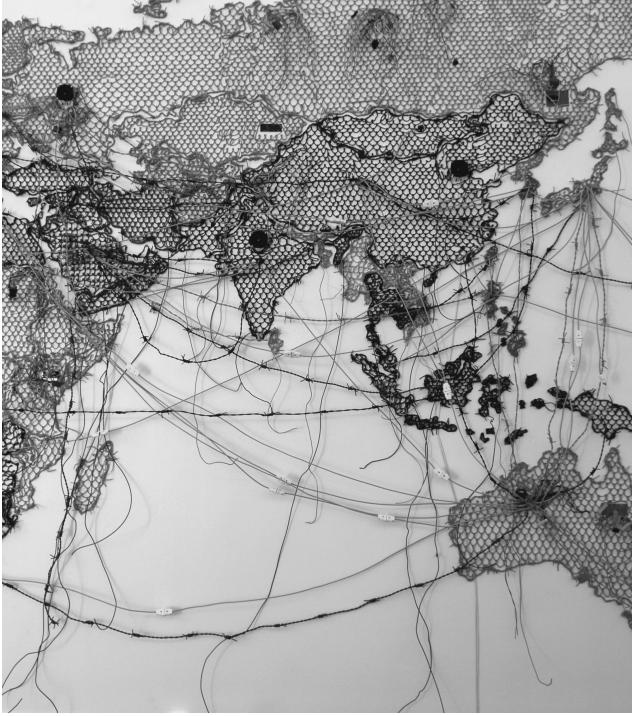


Figure 3.1 Reena Saini Kallat: Untitled Map Installation, 2011.

Reena Saini Kallat, Mumbai, by permission.

Kallat uses linear but knotted electrical wires to convey dynamic migratory flows of energy across the globe and the simultaneous multiplication of real and symbolic borders that thwart contact and interrupt transmission. Her installation attempts to enact the contradictions inherent in the idea of a contemporary borderless world that actually stifles human potential locally and causes millions of deaths on clandestine migratory routes, on land and at sea. She demonstrates connections and makes their interruptions eloquently visible.

Yet, for me, a scholar born in an island and invested in the study of insular or archipelagic spaces, Kallat's map broadcasts a glaring omission, one that is quite common in postcolonial studies: it blithely negates the *in-between*, the islands in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans that link continents and were the actual stepping stones of colonial expansion. Islands often provided European conquerors with solid ground from which to launch their continental penetration; in fact, the name *Antilles* (*Antillas*, *Antillen*: ant-îles/ante insulae/ante-ilha/fore-islands) or "islands that come before the continent" concretizes this role since these were the first colonial

sites of the “New World” post-1492. By omitting them from the installation, Kallat (unwittingly?) reveals the deficiencies associated with a vision that treats continents as the primary ground for colonial and postcolonial studies. By adopting a perspective that is congruent with the oppositional “writing back” approach of first-wave postcolonial theorists and pedagogues, Kallat ignores the contradictions integral to the Early Modern history of mapmaking. She falls into the postcolonial trap of what I would call hypercontinentalism: East vs. West, North vs. South.

A brief look at a 1689 map by the influential Dutch cartographer Johannes van Keulen will clarify my point. His map gives importance to landmasses that seldom figure in the anglophone postcolonial imagination: the numerous small islands that dot the Indian Ocean between the east coast of Africa and the continent of Asia. Here the islands appear much bigger in relation to those continents than their actual physical size. This suggests how important they were for navigators who used them as refueling stops on their journeys across the ocean’s vast expanse.

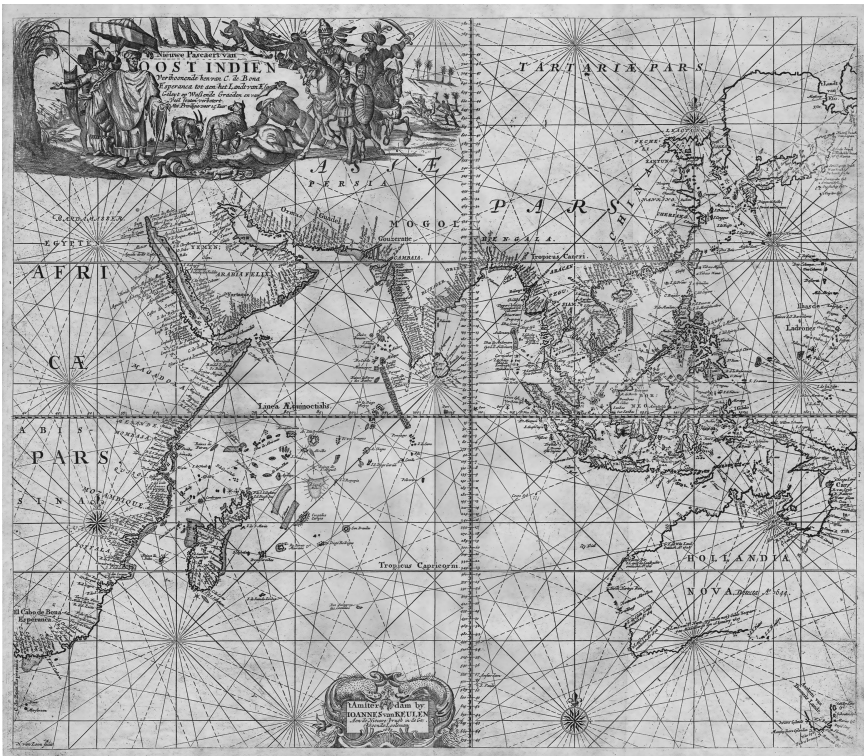


Figure 3.2 Oost Indien (East Indies), 1689.

Johannes van Keulen, Amsterdam.

By comparing the two maps and reading the absence of islands in Kallat against their exaggerated importance in Van Keulen, we can interrogate their use as ancillary bodies that play the role of Trojan horses in the outward expansion of continental peoples, and conversely, as invisible entities for postcolonial scholars. This glaring lacuna is a symptom of a long-standing problem. I bring this up not to detract from the obvious quality of Kallat's work and from the appropriateness of that image for the cover of the volume *The Postcolonial World*. Both her installation and the volume crystallize what is central to a field that has been most concerned, since its pedagogical origins in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's 1989 *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, with the oppositional relationship between Britain and its (former) colonial subjects and with the counter-discursive strategies of appropriation and subversion that are central to these literatures.

In Van Keulen's 1689 map, Indian Ocean islands are meticulously drawn and named. Their importance to navigators and other imperial agents is thus made tangible beyond the centuries. To ignore that past is to fall into the "presentism" that has sometimes been decried as one of the major shortcomings of a form of postcolonial theorizing that, while insisting on conceptualizing hybridity and the "third space," actually disregards the originary "third space" of the first global colonial expansions of the early Modern period, the inaugural *vieilles colonies* of the French Empire in the Caribbean and the Mascarene archipelagos.

In the Antilles or West Indies, as in the Mascarenes of the East Indies, France exploited a number of insular sites that included Saint Domingue (Haiti), Martinique, and Guadeloupe in the West, and Isle de France (Mauritius) and Bourbon (Reunion) in the East. These, like similar sites in Spanish America and Portuguese Asia, were historical zones of contact and creolization that produced cultures of resistance and appropriation, each with its unique creolized, insular dynamics. What did creolization entail then and why would a better, historically grounded understanding of this phenomenon add to postcolonial studies? Understood as an unstable, open-ended practice of adaptation that generates unpredictable syncretisms rather than mere homogeneity, creolization indexes both fantasies of intimacy and oppositional encounters, hierarchical exchanges as well as transversal ones. Creolization in the strict sense is specific to discrete colonial sites, plantation economies, and their histories of violent encounters. It is a constructive, if controversial, concept for understanding broad-ranging asymmetrical as well as reciprocal exchanges, contaminations, and linguistic variations mediated by (neo)colonial power differentials and the circulation of global media.

When following Homi Bhabha in the anglophone context or using the vocabulary of entanglement and hybridity that francophone studies learns from Glissant, postcolonial theory is actually indexing concepts that emerged first in the field of Creolistics or Creole Linguistics. But while doing so, it

tends to ignore the epistemological entanglements and the creolized ways of being and knowing that predate the “post-” colonial moment and continue to influence, in the present, identity-formation in many insular sites in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Canaries, and the Mascarenes (to name only those regions).

It is thus crucial to think through the shortcomings of postcolonialism in relation to traditional “Creole” spaces as well as newer continental sites of creolized globalization that exhibit similar patterns of creole cosmopolitanism. Creolization, like cosmopolitanism, presupposes patterns of movement and mixing that trouble narratives of homogeneous national identity. In my work, I have theorized creolization as the cosmopolitanism of the subaltern, and cosmopolitanism as the creolization of the elites (Lionnet 2012). Comparative approaches to processes of Creole transculturation will continue to open avenues for fertile research, whereas inquiry into the divergences and convergences among such concepts as creolization, bricolage, métissage, mestizaje, hybridity, diaspora, and cosmopolitanism can help refine the specificities of each.

Epistemological entanglements among colonial and native knowledge systems have also produced ways of being and knowing that are themselves creolized. Their elucidation demands the use of comparative and flexible analytical tools that do not disavow the racial and gendered construction of the interconnected public, private, and subaltern spheres of modern societies. The method best suited to the examination of these realities is a practice of theorizing that dynamically revises itself as it interacts with its creolized objects and weaves vital new meanings out of ossified scholarly paradigms. The disciplinary and ethical consequences of such re-articulations of knowledge in and out of the academy are far-reaching. They have the potential of radically transforming relations of power across a range of intellectual formations, lived realities, and structures of global experience (Lionnet and Shih 2011).

### **Creolization and the representation of disaster**

Now let me turn to concrete and contemporary case studies of creolized environments emerging out of the violence of ocean migratory routes. Glissant’s quote from *Poétique de la Relation*, used above, indexes the Middle Passage and the history of slavery, but it is uncannily appropriate for dangerous ocean crossings in our own time. Each small boat that washes ashore on the Mediterranean littoral is, like his “barque,” “a womb, [...] pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death” (Glissant 1997, 18/6).

The award-winning collaborative art installation titled “Immigrants” created in 2015 by a group of eight high school students from the Apostolos Loucas lyceum (or St. Luke High School) at Kolossi, an ancient neighborhood of Limassol, the second largest city in the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, echo Glissant’s vision.<sup>5</sup> Guided by their art teacher, painter Popi

Nicolaou, the students were inspired by the twenty-first-century refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, a crisis that speaks directly to their experiences as children of the displaced Greek Cypriot families forced to settle in Limassol, in Southern Cyprus, subsequent to the partition of the island nation after the 1974 Greek Junta-sponsored coup that led to Turkish invasion and a bloody civil conflict. In 2015, the Syrian conflict triggered the departure of thousands of refugees in small fishing boats. The plight of this wave of arrivals on Cyprus's shores resonated with a population deeply familiar with traumatic histories. Many boats were just empty shells washing ashore, some mere capsized wombs, others containing dead bodies. Yet others filled with the lucky ones: migrants seeking help, adults with children and babies. Some of these refugees found asylum. But the Municipal Council of Limassol did not know what to do with the wrecked boats. Budding young artists in the community saw the opportunity to use these found objects to address a humanitarian crisis that affects so many islands in the Mediterranean. They obtained authorization to transform one of the wrecks for their 2015 annual art project. They arranged life-size figures of adults and children in the boat. Bodies were shaped from expanding spray foam. Plaster casts of the artists' own heads served to create the human faces of these "alien" migrants, underscoring the shared humanity and geographic proximity of all in this ancient *mare nostrum*, the Mediterranean basin.

This stunning creation raised awareness of the plight of refugees, leading to several awards, culminating with the March 2016 prestigious Saatchi Gallery/Deutsche Bank Art Prize meant to be used for the winning public school's art budget and to encourage artistic vocations. But above all, the award affords international attention and a cultural platform from which these insular young artists can share their message of solidarity with their continental neighbors, victims like their own families of a bloody and decades-long fraternal war.

Open boats, with their cargo of bare life and dead souls, communicate the affective as much as the political dimensions of tragedies on the high seas of those who are no longer protected by custom or law, and whose maritime experience corresponds to painful loss and impossible homecoming.

The first image, of the mother and suckling child, boldly signifying on the traditional image of the sexualized and proud female form used as protective nautical figurehead, crystallizes the ongoing scandal of mass drowning in the Mediterranean. Here, the mother's arms are only powerless to save the children. Her obvious fertility is a tragic counterpart to the overall fate of the migrants. To "read" this installation is to grasp the implicit small narratives and explicit significant details of what it means to be a migrant, a refugee, crushed under the wheels of history, and stranded on unfamiliar shores.

A similar macabre harvest of boats is also found across the Mediterranean, especially to the west of Cyprus, between Tunisia and Sicily. There, small boats have sadly become part of the southern littoral landscape of the Italian



island of Lampedusa, inspiring the work of British Afro-Caribbean artist Isaac Julien. His 2007 installation called “Western Union: Small Boats” transmutes pain and loss into colorful video images that are as aesthetically pleasing as they are ethically powerful.<sup>6</sup>

The beauty of Julien’s installation has, understandably, raised questions about the aesthetic representation and visual exploitation of disaster—a question that I have addressed elsewhere in relation to the work of Algerian writer Assia Djebar, and that I need not dwell on here (“*Le Blanc*”). Suffice it to say, as African American art historian Sarah Lewis has argued in the introduction, titled “Vision and Justice,” to her remarkable 2016 collection of photographs for the journal *Aperture*, that to be “an engaged citizen requires grappling with pictures and knowing their historical contexts” (Lewis 2016, 11). The Kolossi students’ installation exemplifies this engagement and puts into practice a philosophy of relationality that speaks directly to Glissant’s work. Looking with attention and bearing witness to what we grasp of our world’s problem should be our main civic work, argues Lewis, since it is an activity that can enable us to cross the gulf of indifference and ignorance that separates us (Lewis 2016, 12). For Lewis, artists know intuitively “what images need to be seen to affect change and alter history” (Lewis 2016, 11). The Cypriot teenagers’ installation provides a haunting and respectful visual testimony of the historical entanglements that align Cyprus’s fate with that of twenty-first-century Syria.

If art can be the way of measuring and taking into account the full potential of human life in all its diversity, then these works bear witness to our collective responsibility toward those whose status as full citizens continues to be in jeopardy due to continued religious, racial, or ethnic prejudice against refugees. These small boats have become, in the words of the art historian Jennifer González, “an iconic sign and key metaphor for African migration” (González 2011, 119).

What critical vocabulary can best allow us to do justice to these artistic creations and performances without reducing them to mere political metaphors for our era? I think the language of postcolonial studies falls short here, whereas that of creolization studies, developed by the same francophone thinkers who have had an undeniable influence on postcolonial theory, can enable a much more nuanced approach to the multiple dimensions of this global crisis.

### **Poetry: In praise of an “unsteady” humanism**

The field of francophone studies, grounded today in works by Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon (among others), has helped shape postcolonial studies; but francophone studies remains a distinct discipline with roots beyond mere oppositional practices. It is marked primarily by a complex engagement with universalism(s) and the question of rights. Césaire has often been invoked to shore up many political projects due to his championing of the ideology

of negritude perceived as identitarian resistance against European colonial power and discourse; but the poet's overall oeuvre is a profound lesson in dialectical thinking that allows no space for such oversimplification. His political legacy, his support of the system of "departmentalization" in the French National Assembly in 1946, similarly coincides with the unconditional desire for the formal and fundamental Republican principle of indiscriminate equality. This principle, however, did not translate into fact on the ground. Césaire eventually acknowledged that the goal of bringing the *vieilles colonies* within the purview of a universal (as opposed to ethnically or racially particular) rule of law were never met. Faced with these contradictions between the theoretical and the real—since the Domiens or citizens of the DOMs, the départements d'outre-mer of France, remained de facto unequal, economically and culturally—Césaire nonetheless remained true to his 1935 declaration in his essay "Nègreries" that the solution was not to retreat into interiority and oppositional localism, but to further develop Antillean *singularity*:

La jeunesse Noire veut agir et créer. Elle veut avoir ses poètes, ses romanciers, qui lui diront à elle, ses malheurs à elle, et ses grandeurs à elle: elle veut contribuer à la vie universelle, à l'humanisation de l'humanité; et pour cela, encore une fois, il faut se conserver ou se retrouver: c'est le primat du soi.

[Black youth want to act and create. They want their own poets and novelists who can speak to their own misfortunes as much as to their accomplishments: they want to contribute to universal life, to the humanization of humanity; to that end, they need once again to huddle and rediscover themselves. That is the fundamental element of identity].  
(Césaire 2013, 248)

Emblematic of these visionary ideals of global solidarity, the lines from "Liminal Vampire" sum up the core values of an intellectual project that simultaneously resists and transcends (as does Frantz Fanon's) lazy nationalism and cultural essentialisms, offering "the memorable vision of a world to be built / of the fraternity that cannot but come, / however unsteady." Césaire's oeuvre, like that of his more radical Caribbean colleague, the Guyanese Léon-Gontran Damas, is the defense of an "unsteady" humanism by means of a poetic rhetoric that will only lend itself to political appropriation if one ignores its dialectical thrust. Due to such constitutive complexities, Césaire has both been embraced by Black nationalists and pointedly critiqued by, among others, Wole Soyinka, for an unnecessary essentialism that only reinforces binary colonial discourses instead of creating revolutionary edge and confident strength (although Soyinka recently revised his assessment and delivered an appreciative speech on Césaire<sup>7</sup>). Critiqued by subsequent generations of Caribbean intellectuals, such as the *créoliste* Raphaël Confiant and the feminist Maryse Condé, Césaire became an

occasional and convenient straw man. But to return to his poetry now is to take the full measure of a thinker who did not subscribe to the binary categories of postcolonial counter-discourse or contrapuntal analyses. Although he never valued his native Creole language as a usable mode of artistic or abstract expression, and saw the Créolité movement as a regrettable retreat into localism and isolationism that he had denounced in 1935, his practice is very much in tune with the forms of creolization born in the New World that underwrite the creation of the “new” as well as the revolutionary deformations and transformations of European idioms that are the hallmark of his oeuvre. It is only by attending to the “specifically literary [read: aesthetic] modes of response and recognition” (Ramazani 2001, 4) characteristic of poetic and artistic expression, to use Ramazani’s terms quoted above, that one can grasp the nature of the expansive, inclusive ideology that actually subtends Caribbean Negritude conceived as a *singularity* rather than a *particularity* that takes its proper place in a universal dialogue of hybridizing cultures that cannot be reduced to the bland amalgam implied by the idea of the American melting pot, that is, of a hybridity in which constitutive elements have become indistinct.

In my own work on the concept of *métissage*, developed in my first book (1989)—which was the first comparative study of its kind—I worked on the European canon (Augustine, Nietzsche), as well as on African American, Caribbean, and Indian Ocean writers. My focus was the genre of self-portraiture and its rhetoric of identity, race, gender, and class. It allowed me to think about writing and agency: What does it mean to question one’s understanding of the self in relation to a dominant discourse of race, gender, sexuality, and class, and to do so in an imperial language? The operative concept was the idea of *mé-tissage*, initially spelled with a hyphen, which differentiates it from the ubiquitous “hybridity” of postcolonial studies. Rooted in a gendered approach to the idea of cultural and textual *tissage* (from the Latin *textus*), it is a metaphor for a form of mixing that results in the creation of the “new”—of a third entity that does not annul the ones that came together to produce it. It indexes miscegenation but never the bland blending of separate elements. Rather, it is akin to thinking of the new in terms of biological reproduction: as a generative force of differentiation that drives life itself. My philosophical grounding in the works of Nietzsche and Deleuze was important to my articulation of this concept, although I preferred to think of the “new” in more gendered ways than Deleuze and in terms of the obvious but strangely silenced discourse of biological reproduction which is the degree zero of the creation of the new as a “third” term. To me, this is just another instance of the blindness that accompanies the penchant for “disembodied” categories in Western scholarship, and for the insufficient attention to gender that still affects a great deal of postcolonial theorizing, from Edward Said on (see Lionnet 2011a).

*Métissage* is a methodological principle grounded in the idea of intersectionality (as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw at the level of identity) applied to analytical practice. It relates text and context, literature, history, and

geography, autobiography and fiction in order to expose the fundamental hybridity of subjects and spaces. It requires in turn a hybrid or multi-scaler approach to the micro and macro structures that are constitutive of our disciplinary arrangements.

*Métissage* and creolization are concepts that best help me work on authors and artists who engage with what it means to live in a world that has undergone sudden, radical, and sometimes violent transformations which produced in turn changes in the relationship between individuals and communities, the present and the past, the here and the there. Out of such transformations, authors *create*, with words and images, *new* worlds of meaning. How we approach the *deliberate* aesthetic dimension of their texts while doing full justice to their socio-cultural and political contexts is a measure of the respect we give to their labor as writers and artists who keep both the aesthetic and the ethical alive in their works.

## Notes

- 1 All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. I have used published translations whenever possible, but modified them when necessary to underscore the meaning I foreground in my interpretation. Translations of Édouard Maunick's poems are by Betty Wilson, as yet unpublished.
- 2 To echo the influential title of chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks*.
- 3 For a useful overview of these questions in relation to Césaire, see Hiddleston.
- 4 "Venom" refers to the racism Césaire is intent on denouncing.
- 5 As reported in the news vehicle *Cyprus Mail Online*: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2016/03/04/poignant-school-art-project-on-refugees-wins-coveted-saatchi-prize/>. See also Nikolaidou. The photos are from this public blog.
- 6 After the Arab Spring of 2011, the Italian island of Lampedusa received more migrants (>5,500) fleeing Tunisia and Libya than it had local residents (<5,300; see <https://www.zamyn.org/current/isaac-julien2.html>; accessed 07 May 2019).
- 7 In his keynote address at the African Literatures Conference at SOAS University of London, 28th October 2017.

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## 4 The pre-postcolonial and its enduring relevance

### Afro-Asian variations in Edward al-Kharrat's texts

*Hala Halim*

Arguably the product of comparative literature, Euro-American postcolonial theory is largely in the process of being superseded by Global South studies in the same discipline. Thus far, Global South studies, for the purposes of comparatists, remains undefined, beyond gesturing towards the task of South-South comparatism, a gesture in and of itself premised on postcolonial theory's critique of Eurocentrism. "I think *global South* is a reverse racist term, one that ignores the daunting diversity outside Europe and the United States," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has recently written. "We decide to define what we are not by a bit of academic tourism," she continues, "choosing academics to represent the global South at conferences and in journals from countries elsewhere who have class continuity with us and thus resolving our own sense of ourselves as democratic subjects resisting definition by race and gender" (Spivak 2018, 166). While the charge of "tokenization" (Spivak 2018, 167) has been leveled likewise against Euro-American postcolonial theory, my wager is two-fold: Global South comparatism can and should find some of its conceptual bearings in postcolonial theory; and the postcolonial here is to be epistemologically and temporally extended to embrace its prehistory in the liberation moment and thus recoup its emphasis on social justice for the purposes of the "New International" (Derrida 1994). I demonstrate this wager through the writings of Edward al-Kharrat about the Afro-Asian movement.

It is of no small significance that the first of two explicit mentions of the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Indonesia, or Bandung, as it came to be known, in Edward Said's *Orientalism* occurs in the context of a citation from Anouar Abdel-Malek's 1963 article "Orientalism in Crisis." Abdel-Malek, the Egyptian Leftist intellectual and political scientist, had argued that "the resurgence of the nations and the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, in the last two generations" was what it took to "provoke a *prise de conscience*, tardy and frequently reticent, of an exigency of principle become an unavoidable practical necessity, precisely due to the decisive influence of the political factor, i.e., the victories achieved by the various movements of

national liberation on a world scale.” Granted, Abdel-Malek underscores other epistemological reasons for the crisis; but what is signal is that he largely ascribes that crisis as it plays out in both the Western European and the socialist sectors to the agency of the Third World. “But the rebirth of the nations and peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, since the end of the nineteenth century, and the very rapid acceleration of this process due to the victory of the national liberation movements in the ex-colonial world,” together with “the appearance of the group of socialist states and the subsequent differentiation between the ‘two Europes,’ has shaken the edifice of traditional orientalism to its foundations” (Abdel-Malek 1963, 103–104, 111–112).

Writing in 1963, Abdel-Malek has no doubt about the epistemological “time-lag” in Orientalism’s concepts and methodology borne upon it by “the revolutions on the three ‘forgotten continents’” and Bandung—his article appeared two years after the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade and three years before the 1966 Tricontinental Conference of African, Asian and Latin American Peoples in Havana, Cuba (Abdel-Malek 112; see also Young 2001). Some 15 years later, Said would cite Abdel-Malek under the rubric of “crisis” in the course of surveying Western Orientalist responses in the post-Bandung era. More germane, Said’s 1994 “Afterword” to *Orientalism* explicitly states that, “the earliest studies of the post-colonial were by such distinguished thinkers as Anwar Abdel Malek, Samir Amin, and C. L. R. James, almost all based on studies of domination and control done from the standpoint of either a completed political independence or an incomplete liberationist project” (Said 1994, 349). Far from nominating himself the fountainhead of postcolonial critique, as he is often seen in the Euro-American academy, Said harkens back to an inaugural generation, whose members are all inscribed in various overlapping internationalisms. By contrast, the benchmark 1989 volume *The Empire Writes Back* obscures this prehistory: The authors cursorily dispense with a perceived “limited and pejorative term ‘Third World Literatures,’” in favor of the postcolonial defined as “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present.” Despite attending to “[l]arger geographical models that cross [...] boundaries” and “comparisons between two or more regions,” the volume overlooks the Afro-Asian and Tricontinental frameworks of solidarity which “contested” the centrality of the Metropole (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 23, 2, 17, 18; see Halim 2012, 571).

The “pre-” of the postcolonial in my title gestures not towards the prefix “post,” sometimes misconstrued as that which comes after colonialism, but rather towards an *avant la lettre* postcolonialism. The intellectual output of “the three ‘forgotten continents,’” I posit, constitutes the *prehistory* of what goes in the Western academy by the label “postcolonial.” Granted, the Euro-American postcolonial covers a *plurality* of widely differentiated theoretical orientations and has not been spared scathing criticism, including

by Leftists. Despite this, addressing the Afro-Asian cultural output as an outgrowth of Bandung, I had argued in 2012 that:

One would do well to excavate antecedent archives of postcolonial criticism that evince “in-betweenness” among nonmetropolitan intellectuals [...]. It is important to uncover such overlooked genealogies first, to refute the allegations of the “complicity” [...] of postcolonial criticism as practiced in the US academy, which is not self-generating but built on earlier anticolonial, Third Worldist, internationalist trends; and second, to safeguard against a dismissal of concepts it deploys that have their viability as tools for a critique of current realities of globalization and neocolonialism.

(Halim 2012, 565)

At the close of the decade, I cannot but insist on the abiding relevance of that argument for both geopolitical and intellectual reasons.

In contradistinction to the view in some quarters that the postcolonial is passé, I continue to press for recouping it, and doing so with the *longue durée* of its prehistory, for the concerns of our times. Current synergies of geopolitical phenomena across the globe that spell its relevance barely need to be identified: the rise of the Right, environmental degradation impacting the subaltern foremost, the refugee crisis, the return of a barely repressed racism, and Islamophobia, among others. Appealing to the internationalist *pre*-postcolonial is imperative to address “the vital question of social justice” in the configurations of our day, particularly in the domain of comparatism (Halim 2017a, 426). As a promoter of the salutary, anti-Eurocentric turn in comparative literature to Global South studies, I reiterate some caveats. The project of South-South comparatism would err to overlook the South’s overdetermined imbrication with the North in view of the structuring effects of global capital, and in the process also lose sight of commonalities, if not yet full-fledged solidarities, between the South and oppressed groups in the North. The initial articulations of the terms Third World and Global South are ideologically diametrical opposites. The term the Third World was proposed in 1952 by the French intellectual Alfred Sauvy along the lines of the Third Estate: “This ignored, exploited, scorned Third World, like the Third Estate, likewise demands to become something” (Sauvy 1952, 14; see Prashad 2007, 11). The Global South began to acquire currency through the Brandt Commission—called for in 1977 by the president of the World Bank—and its report *North-South: A Programme for Survival* (1980). The report voiced some criticism of the North and used the vocabulary of “solidarity” and “disarmament”; but it “advocated large infusions of capital from the North to the South to enable” its “modernization” so that “the ‘South’ had turned from a possible savior of the world to an object of compassion that must be saved in order for the world to save itself” (Dirlik 2007, 13, 14; see also Brandt 1980, esp. 7–48, and Prashad 2007, 235).



In the process of scholarly reappropriations of the Global South for more progressive ends, its geographic and economic coordinates vis-à-vis the North have been subject to debate. “If ‘South,’ unmoored from strict geographic associations, becomes a marker for power comprised by political and economic disenfranchisement,” it is also important “not to diminish the usefulness of ‘Global South’/‘Global North’” (Trefzer et al. 2014, 2). For my purposes of an anti-Eurocentric comparatism, the analeptic recouping of a Third Worldist archive needs to avoid nostalgia and a separatist ethnocentrism while simultaneously training its proleptic attention on today’s Global South in its multiple relations to the Global North.

Particularly pertinent are the texts of Edwar al-Kharrat (1926–2015), the Egyptian experimental writer and critic, because they serve as a reminder of various divergent discourses of internationalism which they bring into play and modulate the twists and turns of “commitment” so central to Third Worldism and to Arabic literature of the immediate post-independence decades. The present chapter is a companion piece to a 2017 article in which, building on a long engagement with al-Kharrat’s corpus, I had argued for reading the continuity of anti-colonial nationalism with internationalism in relation to Surrealism in his texts. There, I tackled his 2002 monumental semi-autobiographical novel *Tariq al-Nisr* (*The Way of an Eagle*)—devoted to the narrator’s experience in the Trotskyist Left in the 1940s and its aftermath in the early ’50s, with some prolepses—as well as his two semi-autobiographical novels, the 1986 *Turabuha Za’faran* (*City of Saffron*) and its 1990 sequel, *Ya Banat Iskindiriyya* (*Girls of Alexandria*). A member of what I designate as “the generation of the interregnum”—the heightened anti-colonial struggle of the 1930s and ’40s, into decolonization in the 1950s—al-Kharrat was part of a Trotskyist-oriented group in 1940s Alexandria, less well-known than the largely Trotskyist, predominantly surrealist *Art et liberté* Cairo-based group of the ’40s (Halim 2017b, 289; see also idem. 2017a). The Cairene intellectuals derived their name from the 1938 manifesto by André Breton and Leon Trotsky “Towards a Free Revolutionary Art” against the rise of European fascism, and the groups in the two cities were opposed to the totalitarianism of the USSR. The Alexandrian group mostly subscribed to Trotsky’s concept of “Permanent Revolution”—which, versus the Stalinist concept of “socialism in one country” advocated a “socialist revolution [that] begins on the national arena, [...] unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena”—and al-Kharrat himself was detained for two years at the end of the ’40s (Trotsky 2010, 313). Here, I take up the thematics of internationalism in relation to Third Worldism and Afro-Asian solidarity in al-Kharrat’s texts, primarily his 1998 *Tabarih al-Waqa’i’ wa-l-Junun* (*Agonies of Events and Madness*), a series of interconnected vignettes largely about the novelist’s years in the Afro-Asian movement.

From the late 1950s, al-Kharrat worked at the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization and later the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association

(AAWA), in which latter context he served as one of the editors of the trilingual journal *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings*. Within the Afro-Asian forums in which he worked and was promoted assistant secretary-general, until his retirement in 1983, commitment in a variety of registers, not least Soviet, found favor. It is fortuitous, of course, that al-Kharrat's lifespan and career allow us to underscore the historical variety of internationalisms of the period, in his case the Trotskyist and the Afro-Asian. But it is not my intention to reduce this discussion to an autobiographical ambit, although delving into autobiographical materials does have its validity. Rather, I argue for attending to the un-registered minutiae of the Afro-Asian—the marginalia of actors, such as letters, “grey literature,” accounts of hushed debates in the corridors of conferences, obscure memoirs, little-read spin-off texts relating to the period, published either concurrently in forums that received no sponsorship from AAWA or in texts issued after the movement had virtually petered out. Recapturing something of the quotidian agency of the Afro-Asian affords angles on that movement which qualify official narratives (Halim 2017c and 2017d).<sup>1</sup> Here, we may also locate dissonances and assonances of different internationalist discourses beneath the principal Third Worldist Afro-Asian one, and, with an eye towards a more expansive Global South comparatism, guard against reifying that moment and foreclosing more inclusive potentialities. The more pronounced articulations of both Trotskyism and things Afro-Asian in al-Kharrat's texts date to the 1990s and early 2000s, after the fact of a severe undermining of the latter movement, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the unipolar system. I venture that these later texts retain an imprint of old ideological conflicts while, in view of the undermining of the socialist project in the time of their writing, also striving to salvage something of a broader internationalism beyond ideological differences. The tension between these two trends suspends dogmatism and, as also spelled out in al-Kharrat's critical texts, in view of his expansive dedication to social justice, makes for one version of the abiding relevance of the *longue durée* of the postcolonial.

The dissonances of two versions of internationalism—the Trotskyist one of al-Kharrat's 1940s militancy and the Afro-Asian one that gathered Leftists of various trends committed to Third-Worldist solidarity which received some patronage from a USSR that muffled Trotskyism—materialize in *The Way of an Eagle* and *Agonies of Events and Madness*, precisely in the marginalia they recollect. An anecdote that appears in both volumes depicts the narrator's encounter with a member of the Soviet delegation to the Emergency International Solidarity Conference with the People of Angola, held in Luanda from February 2 to 4, 1976. The man, white-haired and emaciated, is unnamed. The narrator remarks that he had met a White Russian, Alexi, in detention in Alexandria in the 1940s who uncannily resembles him “as to be almost his twin.” When the narrator's comments are relayed via a translator, the elderly man replies that he is a veteran of the October Revolution, that as a boy he had fought in the Red Army

under the leadership of Leon Trotsky. “He said it,” the narrator observes, “in a raucous, nonchalant voice tinged with the death-defying daring of the elderly who no longer have anything to fear.” The translator is called Enver Valibekov, the narrator wryly informing the reader that the name, if returned to its Arabic original, would be Anwar Wali Bey. Valibekov relays the words “in a whisper: Trotsky’s name, the mere name, was still off-limits across the board of the Party’s cadres, and the general populace all the more. But,” the narrator continues, “Valibekov was from the elite, and I would sometimes debate with him—in Arabic—when we were alone, with no witnesses around, democracy and centralism, and the Trotskyist splintering which I held to be the original with Stalin as the dissident” (al-Kharrat 1998, 216–217; see also *idem.* 2002, 303).

In shining a light on the heavy-handed censorship and brutality in the later permutations of the Bolshevik revolution, the episode strips sepia tints off the Afro-Asian movement by foregrounding limitations inflicted by Soviet presence, while reminding the reader of conflicting versions of internationalism. Granted, the narrator places markers on his ambivalence towards the Afro-Asian version of internationalism: “Did we [Alexandrian Trotskyists of the 1940s] sell out?” (218). And yet the text constantly appeals to “the days of ardor, belief and dedication for the sake of what we saw as Africa and Asia’s freedom, for the dignity and prosperity of their peoples. Have these dreams been lost, are they truly irrevocable?” (128). The rhetorical question is performative in countering neoliberal amnesia with a retrieval of Third Worldism even as the uncharacteristic directness of the *cri de cœur* points to the shifts of commitment in al-Kharrat’s corpus in relation to unfinished progressive aspirations.

Briefly, for lack of space, commitment is used capaciously in Arab intellectual circles to cover sometimes divergent trends, attendant on decolonization and postcolonial thought. The Arab line of descent of *iltizam* (commitment) and *al-adab al-multazim* (*littérature engagée*) from Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism, starting 1947, which construed the “ontological basis of Sartre’s theses [...] superfluous,” acquired different nuances in Egypt and the Arab East (Klemm 2000, 55). That line was undermined in the wake of Sartre’s prevarication during his visit to Egypt and Israel some three months before the June 1967 War and then of his outright pro-Zionist statements in the aftermath of that war (Di-Capua 2018). Another strand of commitment was socialist realism promoted primarily by Mahmud Amin al-‘Alim and ‘Abd al-‘Azim Anis in their 1955 book, *Fi al-Thaqafa al-Misriyya*. This “made a deliberate attempt to appropriate Sartrean *iltizam* and submerge it in the Marxist-Leninist schema,” and had a wide resonance in the Arab world. Starting in the mid-1960s, as spearheaded by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, a new term, *adab al-muqawama* (resistance literature), emerging from the Palestinian situation and conjoining with other struggles, would rise to the fore in Arab literary debate. To claim, however, that “resistance literature” supplanted the “defeated concept of *iltizam*” post-1967 is

to oversimplify (Di-Capua 2018, 85, 257). While the Six-Day War dealt a blow to the notion of commitment, particularly given its association with an establishment now viewed as bankrupt, commitment did survive in diffuse ways, in conjunction with resistance literature. Among the earliest forums to host Kanafani's resistance literature was an AAWA conference in Beirut in 1967 and the 1968 second issue of *Lotus* (Halim 2012, 572).

Al-Kharrat was in a curious position in the late 1960s, serving on the editorial board of two signal journals almost diametrically opposed, not least when it came to commitment. A few months after the publication of *Afro-Asian Writings* (the title under which *Lotus* was first published) in Cairo, the Egyptian capital would witness the launching of *Gallery 68*, an independent journal issued by a collective, in contrast to *Lotus*' pyramidal structure in which al-Kharrat was assistant editor-in-chief but in effect ran the show per AAWA's guidelines. *Gallery 68* was published in response to the defeat in the June 1967 War, and, though short-lived, had a far-reaching impact on Arab letters. Experimental and avant-garde, it debated socialist realism in polemic after the other—with titles such as “We Have Bid [Andrei] Zhdanov a Final Adieu”—while including literary translations of Afro-Asian, as well as European and American, writers (see Shukri 1969). To draw out al-Kharrat's editorial doubling in the two journals is not to suggest duplicity (even though the narrator in *Agonies* registers and ripostes to such a charge regarding his doubling role [see al-Kharrat 1998, 177–180]); there were overlaps in personnel and texts between the two journals, al-Kharrat's own presence in AAWA having secured some funding for *Gallery 68* (Halim 2017b 305, and idem. 2018). Rather, my intention is to trace the variations of commitment at the end of the twentieth century, when the “Third World as an idea” appeared roundly defeated (Prashad 2007, 13).

In implementing *Lotus*' editorial policy, al-Kharrat seems to have been keen on retaining, at least within his own pronouncements, a carefully negotiated position regarding commitment, if with a brief moment of ambivalence in which he was also critical of commitment, writ large. That moment comes into view in his editorial to what turned out to be the final issue of *Gallery*:

This generation—the '68 generation—refuses to set foot on trodden paths [...]. '68 is not surrealist, not existentialist, nor Marxist, though some of us might incline to any one of these in art or criticism, to varying degrees, and divergent, sometimes discrepant interpretations, but all these are well-trodden beliefs and means that may have become dead-end roads [...]. I wish for *Gallery* to be an open forum, expansive and [welcoming of] clashing debate, and that it should hold aloof from a stern “*iltizam*” [commitment] to beliefs and ideologies, other than its *iltizam* to the ethic of searching for some beauty, “the horrifying beauty of truth,” and to sincerity in the search.

(al-Kharrat 1971a, 3, 4–5)

The prescriptive commentary may have come with the territory of a mission statement specific to *Gallery 68*, which contributed to a post-1967 War Arab Zeitgeist of “self-criticism” (al-‘Azm 1969); this even if the novelist was perhaps also overstating his own position, in a compensatory move, in view of his editorial role in that other journal in which commitment was par for the course.

Turning to a preface al-Kharrat published in the same year (1971) as co-editor of the trilingual *Afro-Asian Poetry: Anthology*, culled from the pages of *Lotus*, we encounter this:

It would have been both unnatural and unexpected for the works of these authors, whose countries have just come out of a relentless struggle in which often the poets themselves have taken part, not to reflect this often still raging struggle against colonialist and imperialist oppression [...]. We must not forget that some of the greatest of artistic works that have entered world heritage were initially militant and at times blatantly propagandist, though time may have given them a classical halo. *Artistic value, when present in a work, is increased, and not diminished by the revolutionary content of a work of art.*

(al-Kharrat 1971b XVIII; trans. mod. per al-Kharrat n.d. 14; *emphasis added*)

Within this Afro-Asian framework, al-Kharrat maintained an orientation towards the progressive that, I argue, was silently qualified by his 1940s Trotskyist militancy and subtly confronted the task of bracketing the pitfalls of a “propagandistic” socialist realism (Halim 2018). I detect here echoes, for example, from “Towards a Free Revolutionary Art”: “True art, which is not content to play variations on ready-made models [...] is unable *not* to be revolutionary”; or such statements by Trotsky as “[t]he struggle for revolutionary ideas in art must begin once again with the struggle for artistic *truth*, not in terms of any single school, but in terms of the *immutable faith of the artist in his own inner self*” (Trotsky 1992, 117, 124). While the rejection of socialist realism was a fixture throughout al-Kharrat’s corpus, commitment would be rearticulated within his upholding of experimentation. His texts thus subvert that chestnut Cold War binary of abstract art/modernism art versus committed art/*littérature engagée* (Halim 2017c).

As novelist, poet, and critic, al-Kharrat’s texts have striven for articulations of experimentation and avant-gardism that oppose Eurocentrism, authoritarianism, and establishment aesthetics. Noting that the Arabic word *hadatha* does double duty, signifying both modernity and modernism, I underscore that al-Kharrat—who uses it, in the sense of literary modernity, to designate “a value [inherent] in the artistic work; the value of perpetual questioning”—harks back for its lineage to Arab heritage, folklore,

sagas, *The Thousand and One Nights*, and Sufism (al-Kharrat 1993a, 21; see Halim 2017a, 441–442). He would locate similar indigenous antecedents for Egyptian Surrealism, including Ancient Egyptian architecture—as opposed to viewing it as an offshoot of international Surrealism—which he conjoins with “the new sensibility.” A product of President Anwar Sadat’s economic liberalization, the dissolution of quasi-socialist policies, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the new sensibility—which covers various trends including avant-gardist and surrealist—is defined by al-Kharrat in contradistinction to a “traditional sensibility” aligned with realism and mimetic assumptions. Al-Kharrat’s espousal of Surrealism and the new sensibility, in my view, serves a dual purpose: to riposte to realism, “particularly the socialist realism” promoted by al-‘Alim and Anis, albeit far from in service of a reactionary agenda; and to lend “credence to an experimentalism that he conceives of as seeking [in his words] ‘a value system that is more just, more broadly emancipatory, and more profound in its belief in fundamental human dignity’” (Halim 2017a, 446; citing al-Kharrat 1993a, 33, emphasis added; see also al-Kharrat 2003).

The manifestations of this radical aesthetic in al-Kharrat’s creative texts enhance the thematics of solidarity, Afro-Asian or otherwise. His narratives, “non-linear,” linguistically heteroglot, and omnivorously intertextual, experimentally push against genre codes (Halim 2017a, 447). Indices of generic indeterminacy are often given in titles: The subtitle of *City of Saffron* in Arabic is *Nusus Iskandaraniyya*, or Alexandrian texts; *Iskandariyyati Madinati al-Qudsiyya al-Hushiyya* (*My Alexandria, My City Sacred and Untamed*) is subtitled *Kulaj Riwa’i* (*A Novelistic Collage*); and *Tabarih al-Waq’i wa-l-Junun* (*Agonies of Events and Madness*) is subtitled *Tanwi’at Riwa’iyya*, meaning “novelistic variations.” Indeed, in contrast to postmodernism’s use of the technique, “pastiche [is] vested in his texts [...] with an oppositional vitality” which works in synergy with collage and montage (Halim 2004, 335; see also Halim 2017a, 447, 456). The two techniques are sometimes distilled into story-poem passages embedded in al-Kharrat’s narratives, to adapt his coinage of the term “transgeneric writing” (*al-kitaba ‘abr al-naw’iyya*) (al-Kharrat 1994). In such story-poem passages, “something in the order of stream-of-consciousness automatic writing unfolds,” with a surrealist tenor, often articulating a powerful solidarity with “the wretched of the earth” in the heterogeneous overdeterminations of their wretchedness (Halim 2017a, 447).

Paeans, visions, nightmares, or daydreams, story-poem passages that project a radical solidarity usually erupt epiphany-like, only seemingly unconnected to what precedes or succeeds them, into the narrative. Composed of run-on sentences that can go on for over a page, their syntactical fluidity mirrors and compounds their emancipatory impetus. Elsewhere I analyzed long examples of such passages (Halim 2004, 344–356, esp. 351;

Halim 2017a, 448–452, and 454–457); here, for lack of space, I extract the core of a story-poem from *Agonies* translated as literally as possible:

The Prophet Ezekiel had said, an age ago, and perhaps he still says: “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out [...] and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones [...] and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.”

The very many bones very dry under time’s footsteps from Caracalla and Diocletian to Sabra and Shatila from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Johannesburg from the Amazon forests to the cotton plantations of Tennessee, mounds of them in the Khmer Rouge’s archive in Cambodia numbered labelled dated with scientific accuracy and rigor Asian alike.  
(al-Kharrat 1998, 191)<sup>2</sup>

The quotation is followed by another citation from the Book of Ezekiel, then free association about weapons of oppression in all their historical variety and a meditation on religious persecution. The narrator’s own vision of bones sweeps across time and space, interconnecting victims of brutality affected by a range of orders: monarchical tyranny, religious fanaticism, ethnic cleansing, racist regimes, slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and the totalitarian Left. The absence of punctuation, except for a single comma, elicits a comparatist reading practice that exercises its agency in furnishing connections and is adept at attending to oppression in its myriad forms and all-embracing in its identification with the pursuit of justice.

Juxtaposition—through pastiche, collage, montage, and so on—operates at different levels in *Agonies*. Collage, in the immediate, is performed by the narrator as he places side-by-side reminiscences of the Afro-Asian movement’s élan and press cuttings from the 1990s. The closing lines of the volume both cue us to the central theme of the vignettes even as they clinch the significance of the title, *Agonies of Events and Madness*:

On the earth of this good land, its fertility buried, I sit. Wide awake not reeling with pain, I write on scattered sheets of paper and collate on them press clippings that bear on me the agonies of events—and I resist the bouts of madness.

(al-Kharrat 1998, 222)

The “events” that cause the narrator such “agonies” are the depredations visited not only on Egypt but on the Global South broadly, after the high hopes of the liberation period. *Agonies* blends and underscores the resemblance of cityscapes from different regions to construct a pan-city of the Global South, as in this instance, taking off from Luanda:

On the corniche, a few cars sped soundlessly [...] while the fronds of the imperial palm trees swayed—Luanda, [Alexandrian] Ansushi, Havana?

The large, silent houses with high walls and wide windows give onto boats, fishermen's nets spread on them, lying on the crest of the water, and the low parapet muffles the din of the world behind it [...].

On the 2nd of February, 1997—twenty years and two days after the Angola conference—Dr Sha‘ban ‘Abd al-‘Aziz [...] wrote: “I read an ad in the *Ahram* about a restaurant that offers Ramadan breakfast [...] meals that consist of [list of foodstuffs and expensive prices].”

And what of the hungry in Angola and Mozambique, in Somalia and Ethiopia, in Burundi and Rwanda, and in Egypt's villages and alleys where they make do with old cheese and *ga‘did* leaves to this day, or a good onion, two falafels and bread?

Africa, Africa—what have we done with independence? What have we done to ourselves after independence?

(al-Kharrat 1998, 218–220)

The solidarity labor performed by juxtaposition is paralleled by reflections on Third Worldist intercultural dialogue.

The vignette “The Hippopotamus and the Glass of Campari” provides metafictional commentary on modern Indian-Egyptian literary interrelations. While the main emphasis is on an India known through the Afro-Asian movement, the narrator, significantly, traces literary interrelations that pre-date it, in which words from the Indian canon haunt him. In 1940s Alexandria, the narrator encounters Rabindranath Tagore's “*Gitanjali* [Song Offerings]. After all these years, the word continues to enchant and move me with its rhythmic melodiousness, charged as it has always been for me with yearning and passion” (al-Kharrat 1998, 90). Significantly, the other Indian writer whom the narrator cites as an influence on him is Mulk Raj Anand. Although the narrator was to meet him personally later when Anand was active in the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, his first encounter with the writer was in the 1940s through his novel “with a strange title,” *Coolie*:

Once again, I became enchanted, though the magic was of another order.

Those were the years of the nationalist revolutionary movement in all its intensity, when the horizon loomed vast and radiant and promised the youth we were no end of high hopes. And it is likely that Mulk Raj Anand's novel, alongside much else, contributed to reinforcing my inclination to revolt against oppression, injustice, poverty and the obscurantism of traditions and ossified age-old customs. The lives of the poor, the untouchables and oppressed in distant Calcutta were very close to the lives of the indigent peasants among whom I lived in my mother's village, Tarrana, the setting of *Stones of Bobello* [al-Kharrat's novel *Hijarat Bubillu*].

(al-Kharrat 1998, 91–92)



The text adumbrates a form of anti-colonial internationalism, even a nascent Third-Worldism, outside of and predating the Afro-Asian movement, tracing back to the narrator's Trotskyist militancy and reinforcing his awareness of issues of social justice through parallels between the Indian and Egyptian situations, particularly the subaltern's.<sup>3</sup> Recollecting meeting Anand at the Fourth Afro-Asian Writers' Association Conference in New Delhi in 1970, the narrator depicts an Afro-Asian poetry reading that adapts a local tradition of orality and dwells on the shared etymological root of its name:

In that unforgettable November, I witnessed a *Mushaira* performance—this is the word for it in both Urdu and Hindi—at which I heard poems in Indian languages and English translations of Arabic poems [...]. It's as if poetry and India are two intertwined events in my life.

(al-Kharrat 1998, 90)

The narrator's imaginative solidarity with India elicits its stark contrasts between the grandeur of ancient monuments and the wretched indigence of the modern population. Whereas such a move verges on an Orientalist gaze, this is then empathically subverted: "It would be as if I am comparing the edifices of the Karnak Temple to the alleyways of the informal settlements in our country" (96). Another moment of self-reflexivity centers on the juxtaposition between elite Indian acquaintances from the Afro-Asian movement and the populace at large:

The strange thing is that those [Indians] I got to know amid work in the Afro-Asian [Peoples'] Solidarity [Organization]—Indira Gandhi with her calm, dignified beauty, modesty and wisdom as she ruled a continent-empire, and the venerable lady Rameshwari Nehru, a colleague of Mahatma Gandhi's in the epic of Indian national independence [...], all of them seem to me closer to the Bombay families strewn on the pavements resisting extinction and confronting the overwhelming violence of internal storms with the gentleness of a hidden, deep-rooted strength: akin to these families, they seem removed from the mighty warriors we encounter in legends and myths. But then I now wonder: were they really removed from the noble battles that alone are worth fighting: the battles for dignity, freedom, the joy of life, the beauty of poetry and the dream of justice that can never recede?

(al-Kharrat 1998, 98)

Comparable reflections on the icons of the liberation movements and the quotidian struggles of unnamed subalterns preoccupy the narrator in a story titled "A Man Without a Shadow," centering on Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

“A Man Without a Shadow” opens with the narrator coming across an invitation to a cocktail party from the Cuban Embassy in Algeria in the name of Che in February 1965. He retains no details about the cocktail party, which has melded into similar ritualized receptions through his work at AAPSO in world capitals that he rattles off—officialdom’s flipside of the pan-Global South cityscape of commonality—all “carefully polished artificiality and falseness,” hallways sporting “grandiose portraits of the president of the state” on the way to banquets on tablecloths embroidered by “toiling female hands in the dark backstreets” (al-Kharrat 1998, 112). But he does recall that Guevara boarded the same flight taking the Egyptian delegation back to the Cairo of the “waxing revolutionary tide and the ‘socialist’ achievements parachuted from above [...] a guest of Nasserite Egypt” (114). A foil to Che, the presidential portraits and parachuted socialism are a built-in safeguard against a suspicion of hero-worship of that figure in the text’s parsing of him as an emancipatory legacy on the depredations of which it muses. Nor is it unreasonable to detect a drift towards idolatry of Che—“the dreaming revolutionary prophet,” his martyrdom compared to Christ’s, and his fascination with Don Quixote adduced (117).<sup>4</sup> At the airport in Algeria where the members of the Afro-Asian delegation huddle together indoors, the narrator spies Che, pacing slowly all alone outside under the open sky: “The man cast no shadow. A lofty stature as if a hewn statue, as if not of this earth” (114).

The casting of no shadow condenses differentiated levels of spectrality. It may be interpreted as an intertextual subversion of Mahmoud Darwish’s elegy for President Gamal Abdel Nasser, “The Man with the Green Shadow,” which allusively counterpoints the Qur’anic prophetic figure al-Khidr and signifies the dead leader’s promise of prosperity and rebirth (Darwish 1977, 574–580). More significantly, the story modulates Che Guevara as a specter of “a specter” that once “haunt[ed] Europe” (Marx and Engels 2006, 8). There are two intertwined strands: reflections on Che’s public legacy in Egypt and internationally, and a quasi-fictional sub-narrative line that juxtaposes that afterlife against ordinary lives. Registering the mobilizing force of Che’s legacy among Egyptian radicals of the 1960s and ’70s in iconography and underground political lyrics, the narrator traces its transformations with the attrition of a socialist orientation. There are the posters that were *de rigueur* in the rooms of 1970s Egyptian Leftist students likely ending up with “*bouquinistes*” when they sold out; and Mikhail Ruman’s play *Laylat Masra’ Jivara al-‘Azim* (*The Night Guevara the Great Was Killed*) in its 1997 performance “‘purged’ of enthusiasms, allusions, and socialist certitudes now considered—in many dominant milieus—in bad taste, or at least a thing of the past” (al-Kharrat 1998, 116). The text dwells on a simulacral depletion of Che’s emancipatory afterlife, his spectrality as a commodity—an Italian wine that bears his name, lapel buttons sporting his image, and

expensive Bolivian guided tours to Guevara sites. The narrator reflects, “Is it not quite likely that the overwhelmingly powerful advertisement and media apparatus works concertedly to ‘revive’ the myth of Che after stripping it of all meaning?” (118).

In a radical “counter-conjuration” of that depleted, commodified iconicity, the Kharratian text presides over Che’s return as a specter the unfinished promise of whom looms on the horizon (Derrida 1994, 86). The narrator observes the transformations of a working-class girl employed in an Alexandrian shop named “Guevara Tailor,” with the signifier traveling further from the signified when Che is forgotten and the shop sign is painted over with “Gavara Tailor.” The narrator invokes the presence of

Guevara whose picture has now been removed from the shop.

The man who lived his entire life without a shadow, lightly, who left no trace on terra firma, as if walking on water, with certitude and thirst, or on clouds—here he is, at the end of time, acquiring density and casting behind him on the sand a long long shadow, as always happens at sunset when he walks towards the silvery slate of a still sea the tranquil waves of which wait, patiently await, from before time.

(al-Kharrat 1998, 120)

The Kharratian text—published just four years after *Specters of Marx* (1994), and responding likewise to the “new world order”—has more than an affinity with Jacques Derrida’s statement that “[a]t bottom the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself as that which could come or come back” (Derrida 1994, 39).

By conjoining reflections on the abiding legacy of the iconic figures of liberation movements and also of the unnamed “saints,” the text brackets the suspicion of idolatry and shifts attention instead to the *transhistorical* value of revolt against oppression:

I believe that what has remained of Che is what remains of Lumumba, Amílcar Cabral and Agostinho Neto, of thousands, nay throngs of nameless “saints” throughout time.

What remains of them, as I see it, is the secret [*sirr*: also sacrament] of revolt against oppression and the yearning for justice and fraternity. Are these mere threadbare words?

Do such citations and reflections contravene the assumptions of the art of the “novel” and the creativity of “narrative”?

So let it be.

Yet again, I claim they do not.

(al-Kharrat 1998, 117)

The reverse side of the passage about bones, al-Kharrat's meditation dovetails figures of a specific historical period with myriads who revolted without a trace "*throughout time*." It is thus in tune with Jacques Rancière's reflections that

[t]here is history insofar as men do not 'resemble' their time, insofar as they act in breach of 'their' time, in breach of the line of temporality that puts them in their place by obliging them to 'use' their time in some way or other [...] it is because of these points of orientation, these jumps and those connections that there exists a power to 'make' history.

(Rancière 2015, 46, 47)

The ever-lengthening shadow of Che and al-Kharrat's statement of a commitment that does not "contravene the assumptions of [...] art," reaffirmed amid celebrations of a triumphant capitalism and "globalization" towards the end of the 1990s, also speak to Derrida's contemporaneous conception of "The 'New International.'" This is "a link of affinity, suffering, and hope, a still discreet, almost secret link, as it was around 1848, but more and more visible." The New International designates "what calls to the friendship of an alliance without institutions among those who, even if they no longer believe or believed in the socialist-Marxist International [...] continue to be inspired by at least some of the spirits of Marx or Marxism [...] in order to ally themselves, in a new, concrete, and real way" (Derrida 1994, 85, 86).

At the close of the second decade of the new millennium, heeding resonances between protests in the Arab world and in the Global North, the longer *durée* of the postcolonial continues to hold potential for the project of Global South comparatism. It allows comparatists to historicize the relationship between the Third World and the Global South even while the postcolonial affords them conceptual frameworks that have an enduring relevance. The pre-postcolonial retains the emphasis on the economic and on class in intersection with other no less vital overdeterminations such as race, gender, and religion. As such, the pre-postcolonial enables an anti-Eurocentric engagement with the conjunctions of South and North more robustly attuned to what al-Kharrat would call "the dream of justice that can never recede."

## Notes

- 1 I draw here on points I made in a presentation I gave at the 2017 American Comparative Literature Association meeting in a seminar organized by Monica Popescu (McGill University) and Kerry Bystrom (Bard College Berlin). I thank Jennifer Wenzel (Columbia University) for asking me to elaborate on this. See Halim 2017c.
- 2 The Coptic calendar begins with the first year of the Roman Emperor Diocletian's reign on account of his mass persecution of Egyptian Christians. See the chapter

titled “Diocletian’s Column” in al-Kharrat’s *Rama wa-l-Tinnin (Rama and the Dragon)*, likewise punctuated with similar internationalist story-poem passages. Al-Kharrat 1993b, 251–274, and idem. 2002b, 233–256.

- 3 This is part of an ongoing project in which I explore Indian thematics in Egyptian literature, which cannot be abridged here.
- 4 For lack of space I cannot elaborate on the Christian resonances in al-Kharrat’s radical thematics, on which see Halim 2017a, 456–457.

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Part II

# Case studies in light of unchanged asymmetries





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## 5 Accommodating “Syrien im Krieg” Matrices of colonialism 1914–1917

*Florian Krobb*

The current geo-political order in the Middle East, the fragility of the political institutions of the states, and the paltry status of international borders in the region that was once known as the Fertile Crescent must emphatically be regarded as a postcolonial scenario, and a post-imperial one at that. The artificial international borders that separate communities and simultaneously force others—groupings of considerable cultural and religious diversity—into unloved shared statehood were to a large extent imposed by the victorious powers upon the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of Sèvres, one of the Banlieue treaties that created the new world order after the end of World War I (cf. Gencer 2006, 2).<sup>1</sup> With respect to the Middle Eastern scenario, World War I itself can be regarded as an eruption of conflicts between multiple forces from inside and outside the Ottoman Empire, which ruled over much of the area in question. These conflicts and constellations can well be located in the context of a colonialism that manifested itself in the form of imperialist competition for dominance over the world’s territory outside the Great Powers’ own mainland and their attempt to manage in reality and accommodate in discourse the frictions that the diversity of cultures in the desired regions posed. If this analysis is accepted, then it is incumbent on practitioners of postcolonial studies to examine the pre-history of the current region through the lens of their discipline.<sup>2</sup> This, after all, was the Orient that Orientalism proclaimed, the region par excellence of Orientalist interaction, desire, and meaning-making. And the era in question, the years immediately prior to and leading into World War I, is, after all, the time when colonialism, and its political extension imperialism, manifested themselves in the most strident way.

Relationships between diverse cultures and populations, and between the various political players in the region, are so multi-layered and complex that virtually any detail lends itself to postcolonial investigation on several levels and may be framed in concomitant terms. In a process of modernization according to European ideals, and in a bid to adopt European standards so as to avoid surrender to the dictates of the Great Powers, traditional mechanisms and attributes of Ottoman interaction with its diverse populations were superseded by European concepts of efficacy, homogeneity, and organization that bear the hallmarks of modern colonial reasoning and

practice. The phenomena that form the subject of the following investigation represent but one aspect, and highlight one moment in time, in the complex dynamics of the Turko-German relationship and their positioning vis-à-vis their colonial “other,” and they focus on but one of many discursive strategies of framing this relationship and these aspirations. Germans found themselves on all sides of constellations and arguments and expressed themselves in a variety of media, assuming a diversity of roles and espousing a multitude of interests. This is illustrated by the debate surrounding one of the most sensitive yet highly emblematic issues in this context, namely the Ottoman campaign against the Armenian population, rightly recognized as genocide. Identifying the German position as either complicit or resistant to this (cf. Hasfeld and Pschischholz 2017) is highly reductive, as it ignores how implicated even the alleged advocates of suppressed communities, such as missionaries, were in colonialist practices—by virtue of assuming the right to impose their own moral standards and criteria, and by virtue of silencing the voices of the victims by assuming the right to speak on their behalf. The following investigation is cognizant that it focuses on one specific vector in a multi-directional constellation. It does not claim that the discursive mechanisms identified were dominant in projecting aspirations onto a field of activity and thereby designating it as colonial—yet applying the concept of proxy (surrogate) colonialism to the scenario might help to identify one of the elements that indeed constituted the complexity.

### **Ottoman space as colonial space**

At any given moment in time, in any given location, a plethora of factors overlap, collide, and fuse. The early years of the First World War were a period when German colonialist and imperialist designs and desires vis-à-vis the Near and Middle East revealed themselves in a salient way. The ‘oriental question’ engaged the German public like no other question of the age, and in political theory as well as practical agitation (Klosterhuis 1994; Rühle 2009), activities aimed at incorporating the Middle East into the German view of the world and theater of activity were plentiful and varied. While literary engagement with oriental themes continues to spawn probing critical engagement (Kontje 2004; Polaschegg 2005), the complex interdependency between the psychological mechanisms, individual and collective, that produce “Orientalism,” the political and economic interests that sustain hierarchies and stereotyping, the medial presentation and its capacity to generate knowledge and attitude, and the cultural significance and global consequences of the evocative framing of an entire region, its populations and cultures, including religions, remain largely unexplored—as for example evidenced by a recent purely phenomenological survey of Orientalist image production from antiquity to contemporary computer games (Kramer 2009). The currents that create such images, it might be argued, are the result of two dominant complimentary trends—imperialist politicizing and Orientalist fantasizing. In framing the region’s precarious status at the most

pivotal of historical moments in colonialist terms, these two principles collaborated and collided. The resultant concepts and images are then concurrently stable/intransigent and fluid/precarious. Tropes adapted to changing historical circumstances, but, in turn, the understanding of historical constellations could also be determined by applying criteria derived from solidified views. German Orientalism—neglected by Said—developed in parallel to French and British Orientalisms, yet concurrently exhibited distinctive traits due to Germany's specific standpoint and outlook. Any investigation of German colonial discourse requires an identification of constants and of specifics, as well as demanding a contextualization of factors in a complex temporal, spatial, and discursive grid. The discourse in the vicinity of World War I, and a concentration on Syria as a particularly contested region, provides a nodal point to which a multitude of discursive threads flow and which, in turn, might possess distinct exemplary quality.

The Ottoman Empire occupies a special place in the annals of German imperialism. The European interest manifested itself in fields such as economic and infrastructural projects, monopolizing the excavation and interpretation of the region's ancient heritage, as well as territorial acquisitions in all corners of the Ottoman world between the Caucasus and the Sudan. Once chunks had been cut out of the vast area ruled by the Sublime Porte (Algeria in 1832, Tunisia in 1881, Egypt in 1882, Libya in 1912), once nationalist movements in the Balkans had diminished the Ottoman Empire's European presence, a complete division of Ottoman territory amongst the Great Powers, or the conversion of parts of it into satellite states, remained a distinct possibility for decades. German ambitions stopped short of conquest; yet while alternative avenues of incorporating the Ottoman Middle East into its own orbit dominated German thinking, strategic considerations did include the possibility of seizure (Fieldhouse 2006, 45). German policies were based on the geostrategic objective of creating an overland connection across the Balkans and Anatolia to outflank British maritime superiority. This corridor was intended as the spatial axis for the expansion of, for example, agricultural and infrastructural activities. Since the territory in question marks an extension of lands already in the purview of German strategists as an area of expansion, the German approach bears the hallmarks of adjacent or border colonialism in distinction to the creation of an overseas empire.<sup>3</sup> Yet, since the shaping of thinking towards the Middle East and the acquisition of African and Pacific possessions unfolded in parallel, German engagement with the Middle East is inextricably linked to the overall culture and discourse of coloniality—arguments, approaches, aims, and attitudes towards the distant and towards the adjacent colonial space stand in a relationship of mutual production, confirmation, and acceleration. The Ottoman scenario, and subsets within it, is but one constituent of a global colonialist and imperialist nexus.

Syria, incorporating in the usage of the time upper Mesopotamia, Lebanon, and Palestine, attracted particular interest and desire in Germany since it was here, on the margins of the remaining Ottoman sphere of influence, that the

Baghdad railway galvanized attention and propelled a sense of opportunity and departure. Parts of Syria were viewed as the periphery of a periphery, i.e. the ultimate border in this theater of expansion, a laboratory for adjacent colonialism in the second degree. From a German perspective at the height of Imperialism, the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire were culturally, economically, and politically the most desired and contested areas, since strategically they occupied the in-between position between France's, Britain's, and Germany's spheres of influence, politically between surrogate colonialism (German dominance executed through the Ottoman intermediary) and direct rule (as practiced by German military commanders seconded to assist the Turkish army and often acting as if in charge of their turf),<sup>4</sup> economically between a (presumed) richness of resources and an (alleged) potential for the "cultivation" of barren lands, and geographically because the Levantine coast formed the bridge to Africa, and Mesopotamia the bridge to India, i.e. the link between the adjacent and the overseas.

Imperialism erupted during World War I. Since the antagonistic positioning of the Great European Powers was a global, geo-political act, involving the colonial world and the strategic deployment of colonial resources, this conflict was also the event when colonialism, the logic and dynamics of European subjugation, and exploitation of their overseas spheres of influence reached new dimensions both in material and ideological respects. German pamphletism during the first three years of the war—until changing fortunes transformed the discursive landscape—bespeaks enthusiasm and optimism, unbridled celebration of achievement and aspiration. In many respects, the pronouncements read like colonialist-imperialist fantasies. As sources, they illustrate strategies to engage the German public in the project of commitment beyond the Bosphorus and to channel interest and energy into a worthy object which could replace *overseas* colonial aspirations with more plausible and realizable options. Furthermore, they illustrate strategies to prepare discursively the terrain for German impregnation and to accommodate the obstacles that the actual reality presented. For this very purpose, they draw on colonialist arguments and employ strategies that were familiar from overseas colonial contexts—well-rehearsed tropes of justifying German interest and intervention. Publications devoted to explaining the war to the German public, such as those in the new propagandist series *Der Deutsche Krieg* [*The German War*], and in more established instructive series such as the *Deutsche Orient-Bücherei*, *Der Orient*, and *Der Neue Orient* [*German Orient Library*, *The Orient*, *The New Orient*], propagated German engagement and defended its rationale. *Der Deutsche Krieg*, for example, edited by the Orientalist Ernst Jäckh, devoted about a quarter of its almost one hundred volumes to the Middle East. Publications comprised interventions by academics, pronouncements by representatives of interest groups such as the German Oriental Mission, contributions by military and political strategists, as well as commentary by economists and politicians. Increasingly, eyewitness accounts appeared, authored both by military personnel who shared their impressions of exotic

locations with the German public after returning from their tours of duty, and by journalists embedded in German armies or shown around different parts of the Ottoman Empire with the aim of impressing on them the economic and infrastructural advances Turkey had made under German tutelage. The *Deutsche Orient-Bücherei*, also edited by Ernst Jäckh, issued 25 volumes between 1915 and 1917 of a less rousing nature than *Der Deutsche Krieg*; these covered topics as diverse as geology and Islamism, and stretched geographically from Jewish settlements in Palestine to the ethnography of the Caucasus. All of these publications map Ottoman space as the object of a kind of German engagement that shows distinct hallmarks of colonialism. The years after Turkey's declaration for the Central Powers in November 1914 witnessed the culmination of the German–Ottoman discourse; the war was heralded as an opportunity to bring all kinds of aspirations to fruition and to pave the way for the implementation of the most ambitious plans.

German interest in Turkey, Ottoman space, indeed in the Middle East in general, had entered a new phase after the foundation of the German Empire; now, a literary or archaeological "Orientalism"<sup>5</sup> became subsumed into grander designs about Germany's position in the world. Publications imagined Asia Minor as "a field for German colonialization" and a "colonial Empire of the future, both materially and ideally" (Kaerger 1892; Springmann 1915). The arguments that directed German attention towards this region are the same that determined the debate with regard to other overseas and adjacent expansion spaces, for example as areas to absorb German population surplus (Schuchardt 1909). Concrete plans for German settlement colonialism concentrated on a corridor on either side of the Baghdad railway and on model colonies, including Jewish ones, in Palestine—both of course within the legal framework of the Ottoman state, yet inspired by the explicit objective to subject the area in question to German modes of land use and to institute German commercial structures.

In many respects, Syria during the early years of the war provides a multi-layered scenario for the investigation of concerns guided by postcolonial perspectives. Syria is a region within Ottoman reach that represents, like few others, a quintessential site of colonialist expansion: a frontier between an inner and an outer circle, between inside and outside, a region where cultural imbalance exerts both demand and opportunity of equalization.<sup>6</sup> It is perceived as an in-between space where civilization overlaps with migratory cultures berated as unstable, even barbaric. It is an area where the colonial conflict of cultures that was deemed to justify, even demand, European intervention appears strikingly manifest, particularly against the background of the cultural significance of the region known as the Fertile Crescent as the alleged birthplace of Western civilization and monotheistic religion. Hugo Grothe invokes the constant ebb and flow of the "struggle between [sedentary] agriculture and nomadism" and deduces from former glory the measure of future magnificence of this "dormant world." In his view, Germans are called upon to awaken the culture of ancient Babylon

and the richness of the lands between the “paradisiacal rivers” Euphrates and Tigris (Grothe 1908, 18–19). Historical greatness bestows a particular responsibility on Germans who, in their self-stylization as a *Kulturnation*, must possess the desire to “assist in the development of this historical land” which, after all, had eventually “brought forth our European culture,” the culture of “Prophets and Thinkers” (Zabel 1916, 20). At present, though, the area marks the border between a heartland of sorts and a rather non-descript beyond: Here, “the province of Kurdish and Arab nomads and semi-nomads begins” (Grothe 1908, 31). Historical imperatives attach to the prospective development an inevitability that permits Germans to fancy themselves as servants of destiny. The tasks assigned to the self-appointed fulfillers of history are, then, the pacification of the unruly and the cultural homogenization of the diverse—a colonialist program indeed.

The Fertile Crescent that describes both the outlines of ancient civilizations and the border with the savage world as the “stamping ground of Arab hordes” is also delineated by the actual and projected routes of the various railway lines that form the centerpiece of German investment, as for example the fold-out map in Hugo Grothe’s brochure of 1913 illustrates (Grothe 1913, 26; map after 64).

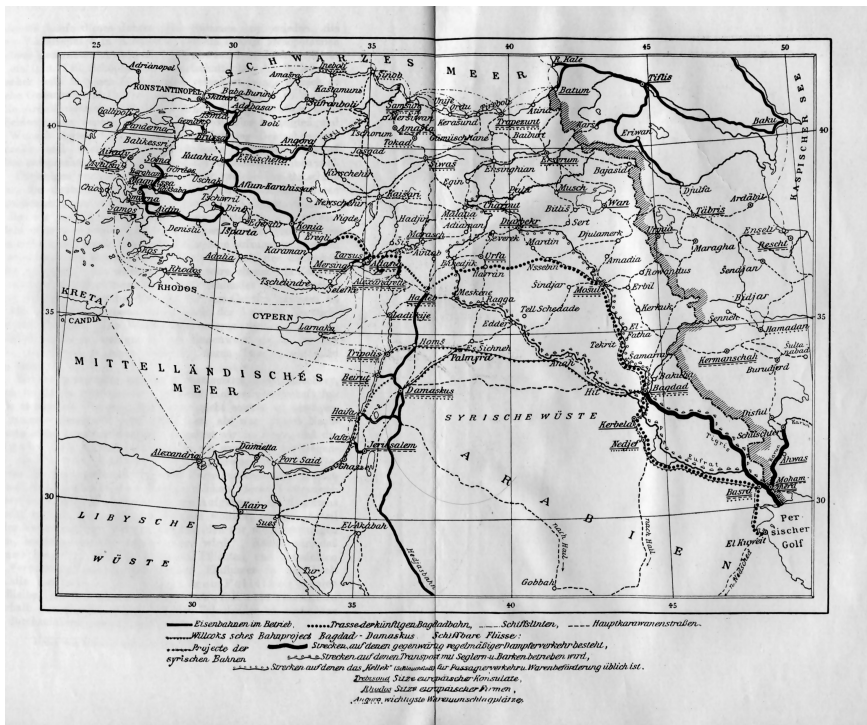


Figure 5.1 Map 1913.

This semi-circle between Baghdad and Medina demarcates a frontier similar to that in Southern Africa and the North American West—a frontier that exudes the same imperative of breaching, pushing back, and thereby driving anachronistic lifestyles out of the world of modernity. Not only do the routes of the existing and projected railway lines, first among them the Baghdad and Hejaz railways, trace the semi-circle of the Fertile Crescent; as extensions of a mainline artery from Vienna to Istanbul and from there across Anatolia and the Taurus mountains to Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Arabia, they furthermore connect the peripheries to the various centers and thus bring the frontier into the orbit of the German vision of continental connectivity. They are, in a narrow sense of colonization, also envisaged as the axis of settlement activities, the vectors of expansion and, in an imperialist gesture, the nodes of military activity.

### **Professing community of interest**

On a historiographically most obvious level, the German discourse on Turkey is integrated into a geo-political imperialist matrix which is defined by the Reich's positioning in a global arena vis-à-vis its main rivals on the world stage, by carving out its own niche and forging calculated alliances, and by discrediting and outmaneuvering competitors. The Ottoman discourse is not only distinguished by the fact that the object is a sovereign empire, quite different in character from even the most stable polities in Germany's African sphere of interest, but also by the position of Turkey at a crossroads of the geo-political ambitions of all the European Great Powers. The pursuit of German desires and designs necessitated a self-stylization as friend and partner predestined to forge a special relationship distinct from that of rivals in colonial space, France and Britain, who had carved chunks for themselves out of Ottoman territory over the decades. When Turkey joined the Central Powers, this stance took on a crucial significance in diplomacy and propaganda. The colonialist desires needed to be explained as consensual and mutually beneficial: "The German Reich is the only state amongst the Great Powers that has not enriched itself at the expense of Turkey" (Schäfer 1915, 17). Similar sentiments are expressed in many publications devoted to affirming a strategic alliance: "It has no desire whatsoever to annex any part of Turkey" (Mittwoch [1914], 12). Instead, the writers profess that Germans had become the Ottomans' "most reliable and selfless friend" (Schäfer 1915, 18). The argument continues that Germany was "the only major colonial power not to have conquered any area with a consolidated ["geschlossene"] Muslim population" (Grothe 1914, 40). The protestations of respect for the majority religion in Ottoman space of course suppress the vehement agitation and violent campaign against Arab slave traders in East Africa that was very much based on a defamation of Islam as promoting and practicing slavery. This notion integrates itself into a line of argumentation by which



Germany convinced herself of being the colonial world's truest friend and most understanding mentor.

The belated ascension of Germany to the concert of Grand Powers is exploited here in a bid to claim a moral high ground based on the argument that Germany entered the colonial arena without a history of self-interest and that her approach would be just, "scientific," humane, progressive, and beneficial to the recipients of German tutelage. In pursuit of this argument, the protestations of equality as comrades-in-arms and as communal agents of progress, and the colonialist attitude that casts the Turks as in need of guidance and domination, i.e. as an inferior partner, had to be reconciled as compatible. Just as in overseas colonial scenarios, the German Middle-Eastern imagination could build on a powerful tradition of collective convictions, first and foremost amongst them the doctrine that Germany would be the predestined, most congenial, most attentive, most altruistic partner and mentor of all ostensibly inferior cultures.<sup>7</sup>

While much of German writing on Turkey at the beginning of World War I advocated the *Waffenbrüderschaft* [brotherhood-in-arms] between the German and Ottoman Empires and explained the strategic concept of unleashing a Jihad against all enemies of the Central Powers, the arguments and the geo-political considerations are couched in colonialist language and sentiment, and imperialist goals are only too obvious beneath the protestations of altruism that permeate the publications. The Ottoman Empire lies at the heart of geo-political fantasies with "incredibly appealing magnificence" (Grothe 1914, 38) that rival the fantasies of a German *Mittelafrika* to incorporate the area of the former Boer republics and parts of the Portuguese and Belgian African possessions, thus achieving a connection between German South-West's Caprivi strip, Cameroon, and East Africa (cf. Wedi-Pascha 1992; Tschapek 2000). Wedged, as it were, between the British sphere of influence in Egypt and India, and the Russian expansion space of "Transkaukasien," Ottoman space is constructed as a site of imperialist possibility in the German imagination, for example by incorporating Turkestan and India in geo-political schemes and by "shaking hands with the Emir of Afghanistan" (Grothe 1914, 37–38), to create a continental counterweight to Britain's mastery of the Indian Ocean and Russia's continent-straddling hinterland. The extension of the Hejaz railway through Sinai to Egypt and from there to East Africa was contrived to rival even the most ambitious British Cape-to-Cairo fantasies.

While such fantasies connected the area in question to actual colonial possessions, the vision could only be implemented through colonialism by proxy: "The German enterprise could only flourish if protected by a strong Turkish ally. Strengthening Turkey's military and administration prepared the ground for her economic interests," most notably the exploitation of "raw materials and agricultural products ["Bodenprodukte und Rohstoffe"]"—as Eugen Mittwoch explains with impeccable colonialist logic (Mittwoch [1914], 12–13). It is in pursuit of such goals that the

Ottoman world requires modernization, for which the slogan "transformation into a cultured nation ["*Umwandlung in einen Kulturstaat*"]" provides an elated code. The "natural communality of interest ["*natürliche Interessengemeinschaft*"]" is thereby revealed as a euphemism for German self-interest (Grothe 1913, 25); the civilizing mission is a tool, an instrument in the service of colonialist goals.

This situation explains the rhetoric and the instructions for interaction. Turkey was to be granted "residual independence [a "*Rest von Selbständigkeit*"]" (Mittwoch [1914], 4). At the same time, though, the advice to German actors was to display respect for their collaborators. While clearly indebted to the self-image of the benign enabler, the advice also serves as a manual for effective operation in colonial space: "In pursuit of a peaceful conquest of the oriental market, and in our role as military advisors, we have to be mindful not to act as bossy chaperones ["*herrischer Vormund*"]" (Blanckenhorn 1916, 9). What is propagated instead could be defined as surrogate rule, a kind of leadership or tutelage that might not even be perceptible as such because it is exerted by domestic agents: "Only leaders ["*Bildner*"] from their own midst will achieve the desired profound and lasting impact" (Grothe 1913, 40–41). This surrogate colonialism, imagined and designed in Germany's image to suit Germany's aims, must prove itself in a scenario where the requirement for intervention and for consolidation is at its acutest—on the border, during conflict.

Inside Ottoman space, the region of Syria, extending from northern Mesopotamia to modern-day Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine, epitomizes colonial challenge. The discourse reveals the strategies employed to master the complexities that characterize this specific colonial situation. First and foremost among the Syrian characteristics were the cultural diversity between ancient, partly Europeanized Levantine cities, the nomadism and tribalism of the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts and the Arabian peninsula, the fledgling modernization of the proto-Zionist Jewish settlement, and the technological modernity associated with ambitious infrastructural projects accelerated by the war economy. These conditions determined concrete German initiatives and the attendant rhetoric. The sources reveal a strategic acknowledgment of heterogeneity, diversity, and unruliness; they bespeak the desire to control this situation so as to render it suitable for integration into the orbit of Germanic globality. The discourse aims at "accommodating" Syria, at subsuming its complexities. According to the German discourse, what Syria requires, apart from general modernization, is stabilization and harmonization that makes it fit into the unified whole of a Turkish Empire which functions as an extended nation-state. In this respect, too, the ideal resembled that of German colonialism where the overseas possessions were visualized as extensions of the motherland, or even heightened forms of it since the new territory is not lumbered by the inevitable complications created by historically rooted conditions.

**“Kulturarbeit” and other strategies of accommodation**

Amongst the last writings to appear during the war to celebrate the Turko-German *Waffenbrüderschaft* were two reports about a trip through Syria undertaken by two German journalists in late 1916 on the invitation of the military governor of the region, Djemal Pasha. One of the authors, Wilhelm Feldmann, was the Istanbul correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt* at the time. The other, Max Uebelhör, was editor-in-chief of the German-language daily newspaper *Osmanischer Lloyd*, an organ established in 1908 to ensure German media presence at the Bosphorus. His previous career has a distinctly colonial tilt.<sup>8</sup> This connection might well explain the appointment of a complete journalistic novice to a politically important position in the German Reich’s global strategy in 1916. By highlighting achievements which testify to the strength of the Turko-German position close to frontlines, both reports advertise themselves as part of the war effort. By praising the realization of many of the aspirations that guided German plans for this particular colonial scenario over the last decade or more, they reveal their indebtedness to a wider agenda. The reports came at a time when the military advance on Sinai had become stuck and the British campaign to capture the Levantine parts of Syria had already gathered momentum. The reports thus represent a snapshot of a minute moment in time, a historical crest.

Both books possess an obtrusively panegyric character, praising the military commander of the region, Djemal Pasha—the ostensibly least German-friendly of the Young Turkish leaders—for having transformed the region under his command into exactly what the German commentators propagated, the central element of which was deemed to be the “intellectual education [“geistige Erziehung”] of large proportions of the Ottoman population to adhere to a European work ethic [“Arbeitsleistung im europäischen Sinne”]” (Grothe 1914, 17). There is no doubt as to what German commentators expect of their Turkish mentees, the coveted implementers of their own ideals. The list is long and the fields of application are many, yet at the core is efficient governance to accomplish “utilization [“Nutzbarmachung”]” of the available resources and to propel the prescribed modernization:

an administration that, from the top right down to the smallest local branches, is solid, decisive, and at the same time reasonable and just; the suppression and punishment of all favoritism within the administration [“Beamtenwillkür”], in particular amongst police and tax collectors; reliable remuneration of all civil servants; orderly generation of revenue; reasonable laws commensurate with regional conditions regarding property and tariffs; the creation of infrastructure, railways, secure roads, reliable postal services; irrigation and drainage; hygienic measures etc.

(Blanckenhorn 1916, 61–62)

In other words, the frontier is to be turned into a mirror image of what defines those who prescribe their metropolitan blueprint of order to the peripheral chaos. The Ottomans are chosen to be molded into beacons ("Träger") of a decidedly German concept of statehood, an "enlightened," benevolent, and progressive authoritarianism where the leadership determines what befits the welfare of their subjects. This includes minority rights, enclaves of semi-autonomy, political structures that take account of cultural diversity under the umbrella of a centralist rule—a replicated Reich in accordance with the federalist fabric of the homeland and based on research that informs those responsible about the needs of their wards.

The key to the success of the envisaged *Kulturarbeit* is the creation of an elite that embraces the ideals specified by Hugo Grothe: "A class of productive ["arbeitsfähig"] individuals needs to be educated," leaders to safeguard the unity of the Empire ["Reichseinheit"] by "respecting the desires for local self-determination and by allowing for the specific civilizational requirements of the various populations ["Zivilisationsbedürfnisse der einzelnen Völker]" (Grothe 1913, 19–20, 5, and 40–41). The aim of strengthening individual parts of the territory and educating an elite of experts and administrators in the German image informs proposals such as the establishment of institutes of higher learning in Beirut, Damascus, and Haifa, since in "that way every one of the three major parts of Syria will receive its own center of European higher education ["dann bekäme jeder größere Landesteil, jedes Drittel Syriens seinen Sammel- und Ausgangspunkt westeuropäischer Hochschulbildung]" (Blanckenhorn 1916, 21). These are to serve as the outposts of the outpost; from here the transformation of the actual border will emanate, for example "the education of desert dwellers in the ways of modern agriculture." This is recognized as "one of Djemal Pasha's favourite projects, who has realized that, in order to ensure the successful requisition ["Gewinnung"] of the area for Turkey, the native population ["eingeborene Bevölkerung]" needs to be mobilized to partake in the project of colonization" (Feldmann 1917, 43). If Djemal is cast as proxy, then his regional experts become proxies of the second degree, the prospective colonists—or be they former nomads—proxies of the third degree.

The war effort facilitates the realization of such plans by accelerating the conducive measures. The reports of 1917 praise the results achieved in the briefest period of time. They relate to their German readers that the recipe, as proposed by Grothe just before the war, "to transfer German military discipline ["Drill]" from the Turkish army into the schools" (Grothe 1913, 5), has been implemented somewhat by default through the necessities of martial conditions and has generated unforeseeable successes. According to the two reporters charged with communicating "Syrien im Krieg" to German audiences, the region is already saturated with reminders of German influence and intervention, as is evidenced by the names of experts credited with the notable achievements of Djemal Pasha's reign. His advisor in matters concerning the transformation of urban space is Professor Max Züricher,

“director of the Prussian academy in Rome, an artist much appreciated by Djemal”; Heinrich August Meißner from Leipzig is chief engineer of the Hejaz railway with its sidetrack towards the Sinai intended as launchpad for the projected attack on British Egypt; an agricultural “model institution [“Musteranstalt”]” is run by a “Dr. König from Württemberg”—and so the list continues (Uebelhör 1917, 12–13, 27, and 8–9). The transformation has thus already begun and been accelerated by the war effort, and it will eventually achieve pacification of the (potentially) unruly element and stabilization of volatile (liminal) conditions. As envisioned, it is along the railway lines and under German tutelage that progress spreads:

The revitalization of the ‘desert’ depends on making the Bedouins sedentary. The first step towards this difficult task has been undertaken near our large base camp [“Etappenstation”]. A settlement for colonists [“Kolonistendorf”] is being built here according to German plans, roughly half an hour away from the actual military base. The prevalent style of housing will be a single-family home, or farm, just like at home, but adapted to local conditions [“In der Kolonie selbst wird das Einfamilienheim oder der Einfamilienhof vorherrschen, wie auch bei uns, hier allerdings den anderen Verhältnissen entsprechend”].

(Uebelhör 1917, 17–18)

Here, too, *bellum omnium pater est*: Feldmann mentions an experiment whereby German soldiers are charged with teaching Bedouins “how to live in permanent homes” (Feldmann 1917, 42).

The educational institutions and model projects are hailed not only as the foundations of modernization but also as the nucleus of community building, which in turn facilitates nation-building; their policies are described as integrative, conciliatory, and entirely “modern,” as they supersede divisions of gender and culture. The industrial school under German leadership is attended “by young Turks from all classes and provenances” (Turks here includes members of other ethnicities); an ethos reminiscent of *Reformpädagogik* informs the operation of a girls’ school in Beirut where “young girls of all creeds [“Glaubensbekenntnisse”]” are taught in an atmosphere of “light, air, and plenty of healthy exercise.” Other institutions mentioned include one where “the neglected art of carpet weaving is being revived” and a “soup kitchen [“Volksküche”] to benefit Lebanon’s poor”—revival of tradition and social inclusion are pillars of community-building (Uebelhör 1917, 8–10). Revival thus unfolds on a plethora of levels—it includes community-building through welfare, old trades, and making the desert fertile, and thereby re-creating a culture reminiscent of ancient cultures, just designed and implemented under decidedly modern auspices.

All of these measures are components in a wider campaign to achieve cohesion, to convert the anarchy characteristic of “barbaric” or “transitory” civilizatory attainment and integrate it into a political superstructure.

The Holy War declared by the Sultan is another element meant to serve this overriding purpose of unification: “Jihad traditionally served to rally all available forces [“alle verfügbaren Kräfte heranzuziehen”] and to unite Turkey’s diverse peoples and tribes through the common bond of Islam.” While obviously a strategic move to gain allies behind enemy lines, the pamphlet’s rhetoric betrays a transplantation of concepts central to German ideals of statehood and community to the periphery. Mittwoch’s slogan “Religion und Vaterland” [Religion and Fatherland] clearly echoes the motto “Mit Gott für König / Kaiser und Vaterland” [With God for King and Country], which, printed on medals and adopted as the maxim for organizations, encapsulated official patriotic mentality like few other formulas. Similarly, the expression “die türkischen Völker” [the peoples of Turkey] is used in analogy to “die deutschen Stämme” [German tribes]—expressing the sentiment that internal diversity and overall unity are compatible concepts (Mittwoch [1914], 5, 22, and 7). The war is praised as a decisive formative event not only as regards infrastructural and economic development, as well as social and political cohesion, but also with respect to the community-building capacity. The German axiom of *Burgfrieden* out-of-area (internal truce between rivaling political parties and interest groups) is credited with bringing about the very internal pacification that much of the pre-war rhetoric had conjured up: “All internal strife, all differences between Turks and Arabs, between rebellious Bedouin tribes and central government, between Sunni and Shiites are obsolete” (Mittwoch [1914], 29). Again, the chief representative of the German ethos is credited as the protagonist of this very ideal: “The blending [“Mischung”] of religions is one of Djemal Pasha’s favorite notions”—ostensibly extending to the Christian, Jewish, Druze, and other denominations and religions (Feldmann 1917, 27). The ubiquitousness of this narrative, its neat fit into German fantasies of ordering the world in their image, created a dynamic that left little room for dissenting voices such as that of Johannes Lepsius, director of the German Orient Mission, who alerted the German public to the fate of the Armenian people including deportations to camps in the Syrian desert—the very location that was concurrently being framed as the heroic border of German imperialist desire and civilizatory achievement in the dominant discourse (Lepsius 1916).<sup>9</sup>

For the literary expressions of German solidarity with the South-African Boers’ struggle against the British Empire, the term has been coined of a *Heimatliteratur* “out-of-area” (Parr 2014)—with the Boers serving as the collective targets for the projection of the German self-identification in colonial space. Here, in the Ottoman-Syrian scenario, one can witness a similar projection at work, manifest in the ideal of surrogacy, realized through the transplantation of metropolitan ideals to colonial space and the participation of proxies in the construction of ideality out-of-area. The pinnacle of what is good and right in colonial space is a replica of idealized metropolitanism: “With its meticulous cleanliness, its comfort, and its quiet,

competent leadership, the Empress Augusta Viktoria Hospice [in Jerusalem] appeared to us Germans and to the Turks as a beacon of the orderly and organized [“wohlgeordnet”] solid German Empire” (Uebelhör 1917, 21). Not only is the replication of ingenuity, expertise, humanitarianism, and of a German ethos hailed as a driving force in the process of creating a surrogate in colonial space, the act of impregnating the terrain is also given a spiritual, quasi-religious dimension that is intimately married to the colonial ethos. Commenting on the graves of a German soldier who was a member of the motorized corps [“Kraftfahrerstaffel”] and thus an embodiment of technological modernization, and a nurse, an embodiment of the *Kulturarbeit* of caring and nurturing, Feldmann remarks: “These two graves are well cared for, a place of veneration for Germans and Turks. One has mighty views across the wonderful land that our allies are about to breathe new life into [“in dem unsere Bundesgenossen jetzt neues Leben wecken wollen”]” (Feldmann 1917, 37). Even after death, the site asserts its mastery over all that is surveyed from its vantage point. In the land that is surveyed, contradictions are reconciled and the colonialist aporia is resolved between the strangeness of the colonial “other” and the impetus to remedy the foreign terrain’s deficiencies by transplanting the familiar onto the strange.

### Encounter with an icon: Embodying German coloniality

Wilhelm Feldmann reports a curious meeting that took place just after crossing the Taurus range and entering the pivotal, ambivalent, and desired Syrian threshold space. This encounter epitomizes German identity formation out-of-area by staking claims and demonstrating entitlement. His guide identifies a “slim sheikh” as “a German who is known as Abdullah Naufel Effendi” (Feldmann 1917, 21. Subsequent quotations *ibid.*). The description of this German with the Arab name and appearance—obviously an instance of hybridization (or camouflage)—is reminiscent of Karl May’s figurations of colonial actors whose temporary, strategic mimicry is intended to epitomize a uniquely German ability to master colonial conditions by way of partial nativization, i.e. by strategic immersive competence (cf. Krobb 2017b). The person in question is one of Germany’s colonial icons, the hero of one of the most significant historical episodes for the formation of a German colonialist conscience: Karl Neufeld, “famous ‘Prisoner of the Mahdi’.”<sup>10</sup> At the time, he was on his return journey from the Gulf of Aden, where, as part of the so-called (Othmar von) Stotzingen mission, he had (unsuccessfully) attempted to stir Jihadist revolt against the British at a point of utmost strategic importance for their maritime supremacy (Strohmeier 2016). Through this iconic figure and his itinerary, the subsequent brief remark connects colonial space to its center, the metropolis that attributes meaning and guides its agents; it positions Neufeld at the heart of the present endeavor and evokes a proud and heroic German tradition of colonial adventure and engagement: “He was just returning

from the Hejaz and continued on to Berlin—presumably a short, rather comfortable journey for this curious man, who had been through so much. Several of our Turkish travel companions renewed [!] their old acquaintance with Neufeld here in Mamureh" (Feldmann 1917, 21). Neufeld epitomizes German engagement with colonial space—its strategies (the intimacy and authoritative knowledge that temporal immersion generates) and ethos (the resilience and confidence displayed during his 15-year ordeal). The mere evocation of his name has a glorifying, stabilizing, and consolidating effect. This seemingly casual encounter integrates the current propaganda narrative into a well-established story of colonial attainment that orders the world according to domestic needs. The designation of Neufeld's journey as "comfortable," and the appellation of his acquaintance with the journalist's Turkish travel companions (the surrogates) as long-standing, integrates the area traversed between the Gulf of Aden and Berlin into a unified terrain of tiered concentric circles (an empire based on the logic of layered adjacent colonialism). It also integrates the present moment into a historical continuum of colonialism. The icon of Germany's colonial aspirations and myths embodies a (imaginary, symbolical, invoked) coalescence of the realms of the Central Powers, Turkey, its fringes, and German colonial space in its entirety, including those regions where projections reigned in the absence of legal possession.

The German world order is imposed on this region and upheld by loyal and congenial representatives. This narrative of projection and surrogacy is so persuasive because the specific and the general overlap and intersect consistently; their linkage complements and sustains the colonial matrices that structure the German discourse on Ottoman space, and in particular the Syrian arena: Axes and horizons on either side of the tracks, centers and margins, models and followers, order and anarchy, progress and anachronism (the "barbaric" lifestyle of nomads), direction and disorientation, Germans and their allies against the adversary that any colonial situation depends on for justification and momentum—all of these elements are fused in the narrative devoted to accommodating Syria. The colonialist narrative claims that contradictions can be surmounted, that Syria fits neatly into the fantasy of a global Germany. In a novel that bears the geographic designation of the area at stake here in its title, *Von Bagdad nach Stambul* ["From Baghdad to Istanbul," 1882/1892], Karl May—the author who did more than anyone else to anchor the Middle East in the German colonialist imagination—lets one of his characters assert that "the Turk has as much entitlement to defend his dominions as the Prussian has to hold on to Saxony, Hanover, and Silesia" (May 1992, 387). This statement asserts the analogy between the homeland and its imagined replica in removed-adjacent space. He also suggests a lineal development between acquisition, be it through dynastical inheritance, conquest, or treaty settlement, and an integrative process of nation-building, of forming stable and successful large political entities. The Pax Turcica of old was thus to be revived, in the image of an imagined, idealized Pax Germanica.



## Notes

- 1 Cf. from oppositional viewpoints and with hardly any mention of German involvement even before the war: Fieldhouse (2006); Salt (2008).
- 2 Fruitful contributions to mapping the field are, e.g., MagShamhráin (2009); Marchand (2009); Dunker (2011).
- 3 German colonialism extending into adjacent territory is mostly studied with respect to regions bordering the Prussian heartland, such as Silesia, the Baltics, and, importantly, Poland (cf. Kopp 2012). Habsburg's continental dominions and protectorates, as well as their literature, have also been configured in post-colonial parameters (most recently Ruthner 2018).
- 4 Criticism of German heavy-handedness for example concerned the former Chief of Staff of the German army, Erich von Falkenhayn, since 1917 commander of Turkish forces in Palestine. Guhr (1937) recalls his opinion that it is the most urgent task "to educate the Turkish with firmness to follow orders and instructions as is the case in the German forces" (183–184). Another German officer recalls the reaction of local Turkish commander Halil to the suggestion to give Herzog Adolf Friedrich zu Mecklenburg a command over Turkish troops on the Persian border: He displayed a "distinct aversion against the Prince and could not be talked out of his suspicion that the duke, formerly gouvernor of Togo, aimed at acquiring a new colony for himself in Persia" (Gleich 1921, 126).
- 5 As for example discussed by Todd Kontje in the chapter "Romantic Orientalism and the Absence of Empire" (Kontje 2004, 61–132).
- 6 On the significance of the notion of frontier for nineteenth-century thinking cf. Osterhammel (2009), Chapter VII: Frontiers, 465–564, esp. 514–521.
- 7 Thus it outlines the self-image of armchair colonialists before the German acquisition of her own overseas empire. Cf. Zantop 1997; cf. also Krobb 2014.
- 8 For a time, he had worked as a private tutor to the Silesian Princes of Pless who counted one of the pioneers of African exploration, Carl Claus von der Decken, amongst their ranks. Between 1914 and 1917, the Pless family seat in Silesia served as headquarters for the German High Command.
- 9 German indifference, or even collusion in the Armenian genocide, is explored by Dadrian (1996).
- 10 The quotation references Neufeld's report about his time held captive by the Mahdi and his successor, the Khalifa Abdullahi (*A Prisoner of the Khaleefa. Twelve Years Captivity in Omdurman*, 1899). On the centrality of the events in the Sudan from the 1870s to the 1890s for the German colonial outlook cf. Krobb (2017a), esp. 427–437.

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## 6 Postcolonial asymmetry

### Coping with the consequences of genocide between Namibia and Germany

*Reinhard Kößler*

On June 15, 2017, Christian-Matthias Schlaga, the German Ambassador to Namibia, addressed the annual meeting of the German School Society in Windhoek. In his speech, the Ambassador deemed it appropriate to deal with the ongoing negotiations between the Namibian and the German government. The negotiations concerned the genocide that had been perpetrated by German colonial troops from 1904 to 1908, in what was then German Southwest Africa. At the incongruous venue of a private school society meeting, clearly addressing an audience that represented German speakers—today less than one percent of the Namibian population of some 2.3 million people—Schlaga told his listeners that from the point of view of German diplomacy, the negotiations hinged on three main points:

- (1) to find a common language to address the events of 1904–1907.<sup>1</sup> This will center around the way the concept of ‘genocide’ will be used;
- (2) Germany is prepared to apologize for the crimes perpetrated in the German name during this period of time. In this, it remains important for Germany that this apology will be accepted by Namibia as the final point of the political-moral discussion. We shall therefore talk about the requisite details of an apology;
- (3) construction of a joint memorial culture and financial support for the development in particular of those regions in Namibia in which the communities affected at the time live today.

Furthermore, Schlaga stressed that “the Federal Government sees no legal basis for the demand for reparations” and insisted that legal action “will not lead to pacification. On the opposite—it leads astray.”<sup>2</sup>

Both in form and content, the Ambassador’s speech can be considered a template of what I address here as postcolonial asymmetry. By this term, I wish to address a central feature in a postcolonial and transnational relationship that plays out in an exemplary way around the conflict over the memorialization of the colonial genocide in former German Southwest Africa (1904–1908). This issue exposes Germany as a postcolonial society, while at the same time the entangled history between both countries addresses unfinished business in the Namibian postcolony.

To make this case, a short look at some structural features of the postcolonial relationship is in order. After a very brief recap of the historical facts, I will trace the issue of dealing with the genocide and its consequences, both on the Namibian and German sides, with special emphasis on recent developments and on the official German approach as exemplified by Schlaga's intervention.

### Outlines of asymmetry

Relations between Namibia and Germany are asymmetrical for a number of reasons. These do not all dovetail immediately with the issues raised by the debate on postcolonialism. Issues include the enormous difference that exists between the population of Namibia and Germany, Namibia with just over two million and Germany with more than 80 million. The even greater gap in the size of the economy presents another asymmetry—Namibia's Gross National Income was around €11 billion in 2016 (see Trading Economics 2017), which contrasts Germany's 3.1 trillion (see Statista 2017). Namibia's annual per capita income was €5092.03, Germany's was €37,997. This places Namibia among the upper-middle-income countries. However, this favorable position conceals one of the most unequal societies worldwide. It would probably be rash to attribute these conditions directly or wholesale to the consequences of colonialism. Again, such figures may be interpreted, for present purposes, on two levels: Whereas to Germany, simply by size and economic clout, Namibia is of marginal importance, the opposite is true for Namibia's relationship to Germany, which is enhanced by the country's much commented-on position as the largest per capita recipient of German Overseas Development Assistance. Again, this relatively large commitment is attributed, on the official German side, to a hazily motivated "special responsibility" (cf. Kössler 2015, 74–78; Kössler and Melber 2017, 45–48; see *infra*).

The resulting differences are eye-catching. Whereas German events of medium importance, more in regard to the mutual relations of the two countries on official and sometimes also on non-official levels, receive lively interest in Namibian media, this is hardly reflected in German news. Banner headlines in Namibia are matched by silence or curt notes in the back pages of German newspapers and websites. To many Namibians, it is hard to realize or countenance the fact that their lives are of very little relevance to most Germans or even barely noticed by them.

In terms of postcolonial asymmetry, inequality in Namibia also features when it comes to the heritage of settler colonialism. The extent of inequality may be gauged from the fact that, in terms of human development as compared to its ranking by Gross National Income (UNDP 2016), Namibia loses a dramatic 18 ranks globally. Again, this extremely skewed social structure is exacerbated further when we look at language groups. According to available data, the small group of Namibian German speakers appears extremely

privileged. They enjoy a Human Development Index which is comparable to that of Canada or Sweden, whereas the country at large would resemble India, South Africa, or Morocco; for the northern regions of the country, as well as Khoekhoegowab speakers,<sup>3</sup> the Human Development Index equals Papua New Guinea, Sudan, or Congo (cf. Kössler 2015, 42–43). Furthermore, gross inequality is prevalent in the central and southern regions, precisely those that have undergone a history of settler colonialism, in contradistinction to the northern regions where colonialism took the form of indirect rule. In the south and center, settler colonialism was predicated on the wholesale expropriation of African land as an integral aspect of the genocide, and generally by the creation of a “society of privilege” in the wake of this cataclysm (Zimmerer 2001, 94). In this way, the prevalent pattern of social inequality in Namibia is an outflow of a specific form of colonial rule, one that was predicated on the results of the genocide and enhanced further, after the termination of German control, under South African rule (1915–1990).

These structural features mean that the consequences of the genocide form a daily presence in the lives of Namibians hailing from the south and center of the country. Land takes on special importance in this, less for its limited economic value than its symbolic meaning. The wholesale restructuring of the landscape after the expropriation of Africans reduced them to the status of chattel labor, with a marginal existence at best on the land. In addition, this dispensation excluded Africans from places of ritual importance such as ancestral graves or communal centers which even today remain vital for asserting and reproducing traditional communities.

While Namibians from the center and the south will find it hard to evade the consequences of genocide in their everyday lives, Germans are generally not even aware of this crime that has been perpetrated in the German name; frequently people in Germany are not even aware that Germany once was a colonial power. More recently this colonial amnesia has been punctured by postcolonial initiatives. In recent years, these initiatives have linked up with representatives of affected communities that have campaigned for many years for an official recognition of German responsibility for the genocide, along with an adequate apology and consequent reparations (cf. Kössler 2015, ch. 10).

The following overview of the events will also show that the genocide affected Germany much more deeply than is generally acknowledged. This was genuinely entangled history, in the sense that what happened in the colony deeply affected also the metropole—and of course, *vice versa* (cf. Conrad and Randeria 2013, 39–48). Therefore, prevalent ignorance on the German side also means that Germans ignore a vital part of their own history.

### The genocide in its time ...

It is now widely understood that in 1904–1908, the German colonial army (*Schutztruppe*) and the German authorities perpetrated the first genocide of

the twentieth century. The genocide was the decisive aspect of the Namibian War (Wallace 2011, ch. 6), a complex series of events centered around the anti-colonial resistance by Ovaherero and Nama. In August 1904, the attempt to crush resistance of Ovaherero in a decisive battle at Ohamakari (*Waterberg*) resulted in a mass flight of the latter into the waterless Omaheke steppe, which was sealed off by German troops. Tens of thousands died of hunger and thirst. In his infamous proclamation of October 2, 1904, the commanding general Lothar von Trotha openly asserted his determination to eliminate all Ovaherero from the colony. Even though this proclamation was rescinded, after heated discussion in Berlin some six weeks later, Trotha reaffirmed his intention, in a further proclamation on April 22, 1905, this time directed against Nama. In a second phase of genocide, survivors were herded into concentration camps, where they died in droves. Genocide is not simply mass killing. In terms of the UN convention of 1948 (cf. Gellately and Kiernan 2003, 381–384), this crime also includes the destruction of a group's means of continuing their life. Therefore, a further dimension of genocide concerns the Native Ordinances of 1907, which provided above all for the wholesale expropriation of “insurgent” groups of their lands (Zimmerer 2001, 68–94). These measures created serious impediments to reconstructing their communal nexuses for the survivors of the genocide and laid the basis for the large-scale white settlement. The white settlement occurred both during German rule and after 1915, under the South African dispensation. Eventually, this led to Apartheid.

The colonial war and genocide were followed closely by the German public. In contradistinction to other cases of genocide during the twentieth century, it can be considered a public genocide (cf. Kössler 2015, 59–61, 88–96). Atrocities were communicated freely on picture postcards, novelists found divine justification for the killing off of Africans, and the official account by the Great General Staff extolled the “annihilation” of the Ovaherero in the Omaheke (*Kriegesgeschichtliche Abteilung* 1906, 207). The Namibian War, at an important juncture in German history, intervened directly in German politics. When in late 1906 the majority in the Reichstag appeared reluctant to vote for another loan for the war effort, Chancellor Bülow used this opportunity to call the snap elections of January 1907, and in doing so, engineered a thorough realignment of political parties (Bülow Bloc). These elections are known, referencing a derogatory term for Nama, as “Hottentot Elections”—the campaign focused on the war effort and its supposedly patriotic challenges. A broad bourgeois coalition advanced anti-socialist, chauvinist, and colonialist agendas, and years later, in 1916, Rosa Luxemburg recalled a “pogrom atmosphere” (1916, 83; see Sobich 2006). Regardless of countervailing voices from the left, which also denounced what was happening in the colonies, the campaign marked a coalescence of a range of colonialist, extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, and pan-German currents. Eminent historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler identified that “fatal lines of continuity run further into German history right to 1945” (Wehler 1995, 1079).

This fateful tendency was underwritten by a host of organizations, including those dedicated to imperial expansion, amongst them the German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*). All of these formed elements of a burgeoning radical, right-wing nationalism (cf. Nipperdey 1998, 600–609). Lines of continuity include, besides a few persons who played roles both in the genocide and in Nazi Germany, the pursuit of broad settlement projects pursued by Germany during both World Wars. Scholarly endeavors like “race science,” without yet presaging the horrific forms this branch of “scholarship” was to take some three decades later, clearly saw a boost during the Namibian War, as did geography and its preoccupation with space (see Zimmerer 2005, 2011).

In this way, “properly intelligible colonial history in the stricter sense (direct territorial annexation) needs to be resituated in a much wider context of expansionism” (Eley 2010, 71). Thus, it has been argued that “between the founding of the Empire in 1871 and the outbreak of war in 1914, no single event has changed the political complexion of the Empire more than the acquisition of colonies,” as this initiated Germany’s fateful “quest for expansion” (Pogge von Strandmann 2009, 28). Therefore, it is hard to overestimate the impact both of incisive events in the colonial sphere, like the Namibian War, and of the colonial strategy at large, for the course of German history—regardless of persistent endeavors to depict German colonialism as a mere “short-lived adventure” (Gründer and Hiery 2017, 24).

### ... and how it is remembered in the present

German history during the first half of the twentieth century, with all its aspects of extreme violence and barbarism, has been shaped decisively by the colonial dimension. It is not by accident, therefore, that the cataclysm of 1945 signaled not only the end of old-style expansionism, laying colonial dreams to rest, but also occasioned an epistemic break: Effective colonial amnesia did not mean a cognitive lack of knowledge. Rather, Germany’s colonial past was hardly in the public mind and was not engaged with in a proactive way.

Such amnesia<sup>4</sup> is closely related to the fact that, seemingly, the life-world of people living in Germany is largely severed from visible (post)colonial contexts and references: They can afford to be non-cognizant and unaware (cf. van Laak 2005, 9). In contrast, Namibians, certainly from the south and center, hardly can evade the presence of a colonial past. However, some change in German memorial practices in relation to colonialism, and in particular to Namibia, has occurred in the wake of the 2004 centenary of the battle of Ohamakarri, the emblematic event marking the genocide in Namibia. That year was marked by activities relating to the centenary that, in number and intensity, came as a surprise for many (cf. Zeller 2005). Significantly, at that time an Internet search for topics on German colonialism would lead mainly to right-wing websites run by small groups of



colonial traditionalists (Geyer 2006).<sup>5</sup> This virtual hegemony was broken by small non-profit organizations and often also individuals volunteering their unpaid labor. One further component in the ensuing small-scale campaign was the presence of the Left party in parliament. Here, individual deputies have consistently pushed the issue of an apology for the genocide and of appropriate redress, which were increasingly being brought up by representatives of affected communities in Namibia.

The asymmetry addressed above may explain why much of the initiative emanates from Namibia. Here, communities affected by the genocide have re-assembled and re-organized under difficult circumstances. Memory of the genocide remains a vital dimension in their lives (see Biwa 2012; Kössler 2015, Chs. 7 and 8). However, only after independence was it possible for these groups to come forward with demands about what should be done concerning the pain and injustice suffered by their forebears and trauma and disruption they still experience today. The gruff rebuffs experienced from the first attempts by Ovaherero to engage Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Roman Herzog on the occasion of their respective visits to Namibia during the 1990s prompted the filing of a lawsuit in the USA in quest for compensation for the losses sustained through the genocide. In 2004, Ovaherero were at the forefront of activities, exercising and in parts also claiming what could be perceived as a “monopolisation of the victim status” (Melber 2005, 141). Victim competition (c. Chaumont 1997) appeared as a real and potentially alarming prospect.

### **Civil society bonds**

Over the following years, the situation changed mainly in two ways. (1) There was considerable realignment in Namibia. An alliance was forged between the section of Ovaherero who showed allegiance to the late Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako, for long a leading campaigner of the genocide issue, and the great majority of Nama groups whose traditional leaders now organized in a formal way. Riruako succeeded in seeing a motion through the National Assembly which mandated that the Namibian government, jointly with the affected communities, engage Germany in negotiations about the consequences of the genocide. (2) After several years of complicated negotiations, the first group of 20 skulls was repatriated to Namibia in 2011 (cf. Biwa 2012, ch. 5; Kössler 2015, ch. 12). This initiated much closer links between Namibian activists who formed part of the massive delegation of some 70 people to accompany the skulls and various groups of activists based in Germany. Delegates saw themselves ignored, hurt, and dishonored by the approach taken by the German government in its efforts to deny the event official recognition. This culminated in a diplomatic *éclat* when the representative of the German Foreign Office walked out of the official handing over ceremony. Many delegates felt that under such serious stress, they had been sustained particularly by

the solidarity of German civil society. Subsequently, quite stable links have developed that have made for the relatively regular presence of Namibian activists in Berlin. These activists have made public appearances and participated in forms of protests, such as vigils and demonstrations. This brought the issue of colonial heritage visibly into the center of the former colonial metropole.

These activities remain strictly separate from the two governments. On the Namibian side, the alliance between Ovaherero and Nama groups mentioned before has moved to a very critical attitude towards the Namibian government. A rift emerged when they saw themselves excluded on the occasion of the second repatriation of human remains in February 2014. The repatriation occurred at very short notice, apparently to avoid the publicity that had been created in 2011. These tactics prompted harsh protests under the slogan of “Not about us without us” (cf. Kössler 2015, 308–313), which since has become a watchword in relevant activities. At the same time, a long-standing split among Ovaherero, between adherents to the Paramount Chief on the one side and of the Royal Houses on the other, has become increasingly pronounced in the stances taken towards the government’s approach and activities, as will be seen in connection with the current negotiation process.

### **Playing on postcolonial asymmetry: The official German approach**

Until July 10, 2015, consecutive German governments of various political hues were consistently at pains to avoid terming what had happened in Namibia during 1904–1908 as genocide. On that day, a spokesperson of the Foreign Office let it be known in a seemingly informal fashion that henceforth, this would change. However, at the time of writing this chapter, this shift has not been reflected in any written statement (Kössler and Melber 2017, ch. 3). Once it became known that formal negotiations between the two governments over the consequences of the genocide would be initiated, it also emerged that the German government intended to make the terms of the incumbent apology for the genocide one of the central objects of negotiation. This approach is also reflected in the speech by Ambassador Schlaga quoted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter.

In responding to Schlaga’s statement and similar earlier pronouncements by German diplomats, Dr. Zedekia Ngavirue, the Namibian Special Envoy leading negotiations with the German government, pinpointed one basic problem in this approach. He took note of official German reference to the healing of wounds which was linked to the refusal to talk about reparation. Ngavirue concluded that the German side believed “that this could happen through a prescription by a doctor from Berlin.” However, Ngavirue suggested the contrary, that “we feel that the issue of reparations cannot be resolved by a prescription of a doctor in Berlin” (Pelz 2017).

This quip summed up the gist of some one-and-a-half year's negotiations in a polite and succinct manner. The German approach is based on the idea that an apology for the genocide, which is universally considered to be prerequisite for reconciliation as a step towards a constructive engagement of the past, should itself be an object of negotiation. This proposition needs to be analyzed on two levels, concerning (1) the normative issues implied in an apology and (2) the way in which this approach harks back to the overall structural situation of postcolonial asymmetry.

On the normative level, the idea of a negotiated apology as pursued by the German Foreign Office runs counter to established concepts of transitional justice, in particular, deep apology. According to Bentley (2016, 27), after serious transgression, such an apology, "if accepted is a useful tool by which one can be embraced back into the fold." As a "classic example," he cites "post-war West German contrition facilitating the state's normalisation into the 'international community'." Obviously, here as in everyday life, the risk of refusal is attendant on rendering such an apology. A catalog of conditions on which deep apology is widely considered to hinge may put the issue into perspective (for the following, see Kössler 2015, 257–259; Bentley 2016, 22–33). The speaker should

- represent the state (President, Chancellor, *Bundestag*);
- identify with the collective represented;
- address in the first instance the victim group;
- articulate the (counterfactual) wish to undo the transgression and its consequences (which implies reparation, or in German terms, *Wiedergutmachung*), and consequently not to repeat such action;
- finally, forgiveness should be asked.

Such verbal action is entirely possible without prior negotiation. If genuine, it flows out of an understanding of a fundamental injustice and of the suffering wrought by the atrocity of genocide. As one emblematic instance of such an apology, even though performed, not spoken, one may cite Chancellor Willy Brandt's gesture in front of the memorial of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when he spontaneously fell on his knees (cf. Teitel 2006, 105). From such vantage points, it is hard to understand negotiating about the wording of an apology for genocide. The present impasse can be considered, at least in part, as a result of the insistence of German diplomacy on doing just that. As has emerged in responses from various Namibian sides, an outright German apology would have set a different tone and prevented misgivings about the circumstance. More than three years after the verbal acknowledgment of genocide, and many months into the negotiation process, such an apology has still not been made.

If respect is "an underestimated factor in international relations" (Wolf 2008, 2017) and indeed vital in conflict mediation (cf. Solarin 2017),

withholding an apology is clearly not conducive towards achieving a solution to what remains an acute conflict, at least with respect to Namibia. Additionally, concrete actions by German diplomats have demonstrated a less than thorough knowledge of the field they engage in, and thereby also a lack of respect. One instance where this has led to open conflict may suffice.

On the occasion of his visit to Namibia in pursuit of the negotiations in November, German Special Envoy Ruprecht Polenz met a delegation of the affected communities of the genocide in the German Embassy. When Polenz responded to claims by delegates for descendants of survivors of the Namibian genocide to be treated the same way as had been done with survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants, the situation exploded. By this, they motivated their claim for reparation and also for being part of the negotiations in their own right. As reported by the Embassy,

the German Special Envoy expressed his deeply felt conviction that every human life is of equal value, and every loss is, thus, equally deplorable. Out of respect for all victims, the German Special Envoy rejected the notion to compare one genocide—like what happened in Namibia—with other crimes against humanity. This, the Special Envoy stressed, does apply in particular to any comparison with the Holocaust because of substantially different motives driving the German Nazi leadership when persecuting all Jews all over Europe and implementing the industrialized mass killing of human beings to annihilate Jews only because they were Jews.

(German Embassy 2016)

Thus, Polenz first rejected drawing any comparison, only to do just that and assert the singularity of the Holocaust and to use this singularity to counter the claims of the Namibian delegates. Regardless of the questionable merits of such reasoning (cf. Kössler and Melber 2017, 88–90), this response by the Special Envoy betrayed an astonishing lack of awareness about the discourse of his counterparts. For a long time, Namibians have articulated concern about a differential treatment precisely regarding the German approach to the Holocaust. As the long-serving Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab once stated: “We are blacks and if there should be a problem ... on this account, this would amount to racism” (qu. Veit 2001). The response of the delegates to Polenz’s statement was therefore not altogether surprising: They tried to march out of the meeting room but, on account of security regulations, were hindered in doing so by the Ambassador. In the heated atmosphere, delegates felt they were being physically threatened (*New Era*, Windhoek, 25 November 2016)—a response that may be linked to pervasive feelings of fear reported when black Namibians enter “German” territory.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, this also applies to the Embassy, which is guarded by a tight security checkpoint.

The decisive point, however, was made by Ida Hoffmann. Speaking for the Nama Genocide Technical Committee after the incident, Hoffman stated: “In our view and knowledge, death, suffering and destruction in one place and against one group is just as painful and destructive as the suffering of the next group.”<sup>7</sup>

The pronouncements and actions of the German diplomats betrayed disconcerting ignorance of the terrain they were dealing with. Respect, as mentioned before, would also require making an effort to be informed about the attitudes and sensitivities of one’s counterparts. Thus, the late Hans-Dietrich Genscher (2014, 58) stressed the need “to take your contracting partner ... seriously” and “to get a picture of the situation and of what moves this man or this woman?” Furthermore, Genscher’s counsel was not to be “selective” in terms of values and principles. Within the given context, Genscher occupies a special place on account of his role in the Namibian independence process.

### **Exclusion and legitimacy**

Genscher’s admonishments may sound slightly banal but the negotiation process about the Namibian genocide has been marked largely by the non-observance of such principles. Pitfalls are aggravated by the intricate constellation of participants, particularly in Namibia, which have led to serious conflicts between the Namibian government and decisive parts of the affected communities. Issues revolve around the claim of the government to be the democratically legitimated sole representative of the Namibian people and the counter-claim that the government is not in a position to adequately represent the affected communities. Because of these perceived defects of the Namibian government’s representation of the affected groups, important sections of these groups call for equal representation at the negotiating table in the sense of a “trialogue” instead of a mere “dialogue.”

This demand is motivated by a range of arguments that can be summarized as follows: The National Assembly motion carried in October 2006 saw the Namibian government in a mediating role, while the main negotiating party would be the affected communities. Furthermore, Ovaherero and Nama are claimed, in terms of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007, to be indigenous peoples—they form a minority today in Namibia, at least partly because of the population losses sustained through the genocide (United Nations 2008). In the Class Action Complaint filed with a US District Court in January (2017), specific mention is made of the Declaration’s Article 18, which gives indigenous peoples the explicit right “to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves.” A further argument for separate representation of affected communities at the negotiating table concerns a direct consequence of the colonial drawing of boundaries as well as of the genocide—the presence in neighboring Botswana and South Africa

of Ovaherero and Nama, whose ancestors hailed from Namibia, among whom many were refugees from the colonial war and genocide.

Leaving aside the details of the conflict between relevant affected communities and the Namibian Government, it is still clear that the issue of the participants in the negotiations points directly to at least two important dimensions of Namibia's postcolonial situation: The construction of the independent nation-state, and indeed, the national liberation movement that preceded it, was predicated on the territorial context created by German colonial conquest and delimitation with adjacent powers Great Britain and Portugal; this has bound together diverse groups who have undergone quite divergent experiences under colonialism. This divergence concerns the genocide itself and the expropriation of land, both of which were limited to the center and south (cf. Kössler 2007). Whereas the Namibian government of late has stressed a purported national unity in anti-colonial resistance from the very beginning (cf. Kössler 2015, 315, 325), Ovaherero and Nama spokespersons have insisted on regionally divergent experiences and on the fact that an explicit intention to annihilate was directed by the German Imperial Government through General von Trotha, specifically at Ovaherero and Nama. According to this reasoning, they then form the primary victim (survivor) groups, while it is not denied that others, such as Damara and San, have suffered as well. One further argument supporting the demand for an autonomous role for affected communities has recently been voiced, pointing to the original process of colonization (e.g. Hoffmann 2017). At that time, it is pointed out, the state or territory of Namibia did not exist, and the colonizers dealt with the individual African polities. The chiefs of those polities were the signatories of Protection Treaties. Therefore, where the consequences of German colonial rule are concerned, these polities should also be respected as subjects in their own right (cf. Jaguttis 2005, 2010).

All these considerations go to the root of the postcolonial state as a continuation of the colonial state. This is true of the issue of territory and the principle of territoriality. It also applies to the pervasive concern with sovereignty and national unity. While not denying the importance of these principles, for which many of those now involved in campaigning for a just dispensation in the genocide issue have struggled themselves, the counter-argument insists that denial of actual difference amounts to discrimination, which, by implication, might actually jeopardize the goal of unity.

While the insistence of the Namibian government on its right as the sole representation of Namibians seemingly speaks to basic tenets of democracy, the arguments for indigenous rights still need to be considered. A standard argument put forth by African governments denies the problems which are addressed by the relevant international conventions to which these governments themselves are party. In this vein, the relevance of the concept of indigenous people to the African continent is contested. The notion is considered a construct, largely due to external intervention by Non-Governmental

Organizations (cf. Pelican 2015, 136–138). However, as the Namibian case among others can demonstrate, serious issues are couched in terms of indigenous rights which otherwise tend to be marginalized.

Again, German representatives took a rather low-key approach to the issue, pointing to the legal situation which in their view precludes anything outside government-to-government negotiations (Polenz 2017). The counter-argument, that during the negotiations about the compensation of Holocaust survivors, non-governmental entities such as the Jewish Claims Conference had been involved, had in part triggered the confrontation between Polenz and the delegation of affected communities in November 2016 mentioned previously (Hockerts 2001). Closer inspection of the evidence yields indications that German diplomacy has been more active in this regard than appears at first sight. Thus, Ambassador Schlaga came out quite clearly on several occasions in Windhoek, while negotiations were still not taken up, with statements that repudiated any idea of a direct involvement of the affected communities.<sup>8</sup> When conflict between the Namibian government and the affected communities demanding direct representation at the negotiating table had reached a heating point in mid-2016, Special Envoy Ngavirue summed up the situation in an interview with a local newspaper: “The position is not that the government doesn’t want [the affected communities], but it is that they want to negotiate directly with the Germans, which the Germans have declined and deemed impossible” (*Windhoek Observer*, 16.7.2016).

In the same interview, the issue of the legitimacy of the final outcome of the negotiations remained inconclusive. That is, it is still unclear how a very relevant group among the affected communities, very likely their majority, who still clamor for an autonomous role in the negotiations, will relate to an outcome of negotiations from which, according to their reading, at least, they have been excluded.

The other central issue that has been debated publicly, as well as obviously during the negotiations so far, is the demand for reparations. Remarkably, for all their arguments about representation and exclusions, the Namibian participants are of one mind in this regard.

### **The quest for reparation**

As has been mentioned, “reparation” is germane to the concept of deep apology. There is little doubt that an apology for mass murder, or genocide, necessarily entails material redress. At first sight, there is little disagreement between the negotiating governments, or indeed in Namibia about this. However, considerable divergences exist when it comes to the reasons on which these expectations are founded, and especially to the forms that such compensation will take. Some point to specifically (southern) African concepts of justice, which involve the transfer of property, such as cattle, to indemnify victims and their families (cf. Hinz and Patemann 2006). Again,

this dovetails with the idea of just compensation, which is inherent in the concept of deep apology.

Official German responses to the demand for reparation have been consistently negative. In some cases, such as in speeches by conservative MPs in the Bundestag, this refusal has been garnished with references to the elevated level of German ODA Namibia has enjoyed since independence. As representatives of affected communities have argued for a long time, such assistance has not reached the areas in southern and central Namibia where most descendants of genocide victims and survivors reside; they see further discrimination in privileging the northern region with development projects. A more systematic argument concerns the fundamental difference that exists between development cooperation and reparation, or compensation for damages that have been caused by unjust action. Whereas the former is based on a voluntary act and regularly is subject to government negotiations where both sides agree on priorities, concrete projects, and concomitant monitoring, this does not apply to reparations. These stem from a legitimate claim, made on account of past gross injustice. For this reason, the German side in the negotiations has consistently stressed the “politico-moral” dimension, as opposed to the legal one where they claim no provisions apply to Namibia.

Given pending legal proceedings, this may still be a moot point. As indicated, some lawyers also ground a Namibian claim for reparations in the protection treaties upon which German colonial rule had been founded, and in which, according to this view, Namibian polities had been recognized, explicitly and implicitly, as subjects of international law (cf. Jaguttis 2005, 2010). In this case, the Geneva and Hague Conventions, which at the time formed part of existing *ius in bello*, might actually apply to the Namibian War and make it possible to adjudicate transgressions and their consequences. Interestingly, General von Trotha had explicitly noted that in his view, “it goes without saying that war in Africa cannot be waged according to the Geneva Convention” (Pool 1991, 274).<sup>9</sup> It should also be noted that throughout the nineteenth century, the process of colonization was paralleled by an exclusion of “uncivilized” polities from the realm of international law to which they had formerly been considered parties (see Kleinschmidt 2013). With such considerations, the denial of a legal stance to the posterity of genocide victims and survivors forms part of the discriminatory structure of international law, which is more deeply marked by colonialism than is generally noted (cf. Dhawan 2010).

It may be argued, therefore, that the refusal by German authorities to even consider the merits of Namibian claims is steeped in colonial attitudes or otherwise takes advantage of structural realities that have roots in colonialism. In the case given, such an approach is also suggested by the way German officialdom dealt with the Collective Claim brought to the District Court in New York. It took almost a year and the pending threat of a default judgment for Germany to be represented when a preliminary



hearing had been set for the third time on January 25, 2018 (*The Namibian*, Windhoek, 25 January 2018). While this case remains *sub iudice*, it has transpired that German diplomacy has retracted once again from naming the genocide as such and shifted to the designation of what happened as “atrocities” (Kössler and Melber 2018a). Responses to a leaked German concept for infrastructural improvements in Namibia in the context of the government negotiations pointed to continued unilateralism in the German approach (*New Era*, Windhoek, 02 February 2018).

## Conclusion

Recent developments around the issue of the Namibian genocide have particularly shown the consequences of what has here been called postcolonial asymmetry. While there is a distinct urgency in Namibia about this issue, it remains marginalized in Germany. Accordingly, the German government, through its Foreign Office, can continue with its long-term strategy of avoiding historical responsibility and pursuing a policy marked by a narrow understanding of national interest (see also Roos and Seidl 2015). This is the case even after the taboo on naming the genocide has been overcome. The casual way this happened made it possible for the Foreign Office to pursue tactics that have contributed greatly to the present impasse of the negotiations. These tactics revolve around what have become the twin issues, the formula of an apology and the demand for reparations.

During the final days of August 2018, the third repatriation of human remains from Germany to Namibia once again threw into relief the problems dealt with in this chapter (see also Kössler and Melber 2018b). While officials from both sides were at pains to underline good relationships, the unsettled questions were clear: the unanswered demand for reparation, the carefully treading language of German officials when it came to mentioning the genocide, and above all their reluctance to offer a clear apology by a sovereign instance of the state, which would go beyond individual statements of remorse.

## Notes

- 1 There are divergences in dating the end of the Namibian War and the genocide; 1907 is officially declared as the end of the war by the Imperial Government, whereas 1908—the date used by most of the affected communities in Namibia—refers to the closing of the concentration camps on May 28, 1908.
- 2 *Ansprache des Deutschen Botschafters in Namibia Christian-Matthias Schlaga: Jahreshauptversammlung Deutscher Schulverein*, 15 June 2017; translation R.K.
- 3 These include Nama as well as Damara.
- 4 The finding of colonial amnesia has been challenged recently (cf. Schilling 2014; Bürger 2017), but I see only reason to re-assert the concept of a punctured amnesia.
- 5 See also the statement on the website “Freiburg postcolonial” (<http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/einleitung.htm>; accessed 14 September 2018).

- 6 Personal observations, informal talks, especially after the experience of the delegation to Berlin in 2011 (Windhoek, February/March 2012).
- 7 Media Conference Statement by Hon. Ida Hoffmann Chairperson: Nama Genocide Technical Committee (01 December 2016); Also. *The Namibian*, *Windhoek*. *Namibian Sun*. *Windhoek*, 02 December 2016.
- 8 See: OvaHerero & Nama Resistance Order against German Arrogance and Neo-Imperialist Tendencies Towards the Namibian Government and Its People. Issued by: Adv. Vekuii Rukoro. *OvaHerero Paramount Chief; Chief Dawid Frederick, Chairman: Association of Nama Traditional Leaders. Place: Otjinene, Omaheke Region, Namibia. Date*, 3 October 2015; <http://genocidenameibia.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Statement-delivered-to-the-Press-by-Paramount-Chief-Adv-Rukoro.pdf>. *Die republikein (Windhoek)* 21, no. 10, 19.8.2017: 2015.
- 9 Note that Lothar von Trotha's diary is still kept out of the public domain by the von Trotha Family Foundation, who admit researchers at their own discretion.

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## 7 Postcolonial theory as post-colonial nationalism

*Dirk Uffelmann*

### Post-communist and post-colonial nationalism<sup>1</sup>

While tendencies of re-nationalization have been prominently discussed in research devoted to the postcommunist “nationalizing states” (Brubaker 1996), political scientists (apart from Beissinger and Young 2002, and Morozov 2015) have not proposed many convincing postcolonial approaches to post-communism. This applies even more to anti- and post-colonial nationalism, as diagnosed by Frantz Fanon (1991, 292) and described for “classical” post-colonial countries by Joshua Forrest (2006); in the study of the former Second World, this sort of explanatory model for nationalism is not only hardly an object of exploration (exception: Şandru 2012, 39–42), but nationalism itself is being promoted by scholars applying postcolonial categories. Among the varieties of post-communist nationalisms (Müller and Pickel n.d., 2), this sort of postcolonialist nationalism—the nationalist use of postcolonial theory in a post-colonial situation—is insufficiently researched.

In my chapter, I do not aim to refute Müller and Pickel’s optimistic picture, according to which re-nationalization in East-Central Europe is mitigated by Europeanization (Müller and Pickel n.d., 11–12), although the political development in Poland since autumn 2015 might well serve as counter-proof. The focus of my chapter is not socio-economic. What I propose here is the investigation of *rhetorical claims and argumentative practices* of “re-nationalization”—in postcolonially informed debates. In short, I endeavor to conceptualize postcolonial theory itself, or rather certain modes of appropriation of it, as programmatic promotion or subcutaneous practice of exclusive ethno-cultural nationalism. I argue that ethno-cultural nationalist trends, as they were falsely identified by Hans Kohn (1944) as essentially linked with the East (cf. Dungaciu 1999; Götz 2017, 9), have recently *happened to re-emerge* in post-communist Eastern and East Central Europe (and by far, not exclusively there); more specifically, in Polish and Russian postcolonially inspired debates. In this way, I plan to detect a peculiar sort of simultaneously *post-colonial and postcolonialist nationalism*—encapsulated in nationalist appropriations of postcolonial theory.<sup>2</sup>

Such discursive implementation of nationalist tropes of argumentation can, on the one hand, be semantically explicit or programmatic. The confinement of the scope of research to one nation must, however, not necessarily be programmatic; it can happen performatively, out of lack of attention or mono-national academic specialization, “the reduction of the analytical focus to the boundaries of the nation state,” i.e. methodological nationalism in the sense of Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, 307). I will therefore distinguish between explicit and thus *programmatic promotion of national exclusivity or exceptionality*—nationalism in the proper sense of the word—and *performative or methodological accomplishment of a mononational focus or monolingual practice*.

My own research focus will be comparative, bringing together the Russian and the Polish appropriation of postcolonial studies. Thus I go against the predominant national and/or linguistic isolation of East European postcolonial theory (counterexamples: Bakula 2011; Sproede and Lecke 2011; Zarycki 2014; Smola and Uffelmann 2016), which performatively accomplishes a methodologically nationalist episteme itself.<sup>3</sup> This goes along with Bogusław Bakula’s postulate of “comparative studies of postcolonial discourses” and “postcolonial polycentrism” (Bakula 2011, 141). Instead of any mononational focalization, I propose a parallel reading of Polish and Russian postcolonial discourses which will reveal considerable similarities and analogous problems, taking into consideration their interaction and including also occasionally Ukrainian interventions. Since I have written about Russia’s internal colonization from another point of view before (Uffelmann 2012), and since speaking *pro domo sua* is never free of ambivalence despite all postcolonial justification of positionality,<sup>4</sup> I remain brief with respect to this particularly Russian(ist) discussion. The same goes for my earlier research in nationalism inherent in Polish postcolonial studies as a memory practice (cf. Uffelmann 2013). The discourse to which I pay most attention here is the least described trend of Polish post-dependence studies. The latter forms an interesting test case because of its explicitly anti-nationalist program but broadly mononational performances. I attempt to demonstrate that here we deal with a peculiar desire for intellectual autonomy that lies on the border between explicit and methodological nationalism.

Methodologically speaking, my reading of theory does not aim at writing a (segment of) conceptual history, but at approaching theory as an arena for intellectual exchange, dialogical interaction, and agonality. For this purpose, I structure my argumentation in several thematic steps, but within each step follow the same agonal mechanism, starting each time with external criticism and then proceeding to an inspection of the proponents’ defensive arguments. This will lead me to general conclusions about the *usability of postcolonial theory* for appropriations that apply anti-colonial strivings for the sake of national self-defense.

### Internalization as a nationalist gesture?

I start with an external critique of the concept of Russia's internal colonization as being in itself colonialist and partially or implicitly even nationalist, more precisely, with Robert Geraci's 2015 review of Alexander Etkind's *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (2011), a book which draws on a series of Etkind's earlier articles claiming the existence of an internal vector in Russian colonialism.<sup>5</sup> Geraci accuses the Florence-based Russianist of applying "another nationalist myth" while deconstructing imperial nationalism:

*Internal Colonization* is no doubt inspired by a justifiable desire to show that not all empires share identical dynamics, and to explode the nationalist myth that empires empower and elevate their titular, core populations and exploit and harm only peripheral, minority peoples. But by purporting to counterbalance a perceived overemphasis on the plight of ethnic minorities in recent historiography, and insisting on the quantitative comparison of oppressions, the author seems to be feeding another, albeit reverse, nationalist myth.

(Geraci 2015, 357)

Practically, this is not an allegation of nationalism in the programmatic sense, but of a methodologically mononational confinement. In the very last sentence of his book review, Geraci argues in a way that comes close to the manner in which my chapter pays to interchanges between performative mononational confinement and programmatic nationalism, maintaining that Etkind's book might be "exploited apologetically," i.e. by explicit nationalists: "The book, which has also appeared in Russian, may be ripe for exploitation by apologists for the imperial past in today's Russian Federation and other post-Soviet countries" (Geraci 2015, 357).

In his book review, Geraci does not quote but is likely to be aware of earlier critical attacks on Etkind's ideas as conducted by Ukrainianists such as Vitaly Chernetsky or Tamara Hundorova (cf. Morozov 2015, 35). In 2007, Chernetsky wrote:

Paradoxically [...] in his argument about Russia's *internal* colonization, [...] Etkind's frame of references is constituted by the events that took place and the phenomena that existed in Ukrainian and Belarusian territory. Thereby Etkind perpetuates the aspects of Russian colonialist ideology that he apparently internalized to an extent that makes them invisible to him.

(Chernetsky 2007, 43, *emphasis in the original*)

Echoing Chernetsky's point, Tamara Hundorova argued that Etkind "*minimalizes* the role of Russia's external colonization" (Hundorova 2013, 34,



*emphasis in the original*). Andrzej Nowak, a historian from Cracow, voiced the same suspicion as early as in 2003 (see Zarycki 2014, 101). And Madina Tlostanova, in her 2014 book review, criticized Etkind's "willingness to take out one small aspect—the internal colonization—and present it as the defining one" (Tlostanova 2014). The literary scholar of Polish origin Ewa Thompson reacted in a similar vein in 2009 when I, also in the name of Alexander Etkind, invited her to participate in the conference *Vnutrenniaia kolonizatsiia Rossii [Russia's Internal Colonization]*, which was to take place in Passau, Germany, in March 2010. Thompson replied (in an email to the author) that in her view, the investigation of internal colonial processes serves as a "replacement topic" concealing Russia's role as a perpetrator in terms of external colonization. With her refusal to participate, the accusations switch from methodological mononationality to the deliberate neglecting of other victims.

While disagreeing with the aforementioned critiques of Etkind's theory, especially with Thompson's stronger claim (for the defensive arguments which I co-authored with Etkind, see below), I find Geraci's suggestions about possible "exploitation" worth empirical exploration.

What do the advocates for exploring the vector of Russia's internal colonization have to say in their defense against accusations of colonialist apologetics and implicit nationalism? In our joint preface to the metatheoretical volume *Tam, vnutri*, Aleksandr Etkind, Il'ia Kukulin, and I reacted to the accusation of "replacing" external colonization and its victims with its internal equivalent by referring to the Russian historical power strategy of "indefiniteness of the borders" (Etkind, Uffelmann, and Kukulin 2012, 9) and the colonialist device of "non-distinction ["nerazgranichenie"] between the external and the internal" (Etkind, Uffelmann, and Kukulin 2012, 25). Even more explicitly, Stefan Rohdewald in his contribution to the same volume spoke of a strategic blurring in Russia's "*internal colonization of the external*" (Rohdewald 2012, 527, *emphasis in the original*). The two vectors of colonial violence are not mutually exclusive but offer "space both for the victims and perpetrators of both external and internal colonialism" (Etkind, Uffelmann, and Kukulin 2012, 24).

Another defensive gesture in our preface concerned the parallel use of postcolonial rhetoric by radical nationalists such as Konstantin Krylov in his afterword to A.V. Govorunov's Russian translation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*: "Today Russian radical nationalists also use postcolonial rhetoric (cf. e.g. Krylov 2006), often—however not always—interpreting the imperialist discourse as a defensive strategy of the 'oppressed Russian nation'" (Etkind, Uffelmann, and Kukulin 2012, 22).<sup>6</sup>

This delineation, however, did not preclude renewed nationalist appropriations as suggested by Robert Geraci: as soon as in one of the first book reviews of *Tam, vnutri*, Aleksandr Khramov stated: "It is not the first century when state power is perceived as foreign, alien, and occupant ["inorodnaia, chuzhaia i okupatsionnaia"] in Russia, and all of its endeavors as

colonial enterprises” (Khramov 2012). Toward the end, Khramov quotes Vladimir Pastukhov: “The conflict between the ‘*occupants*’ and the ‘*population*’ is the concealed main social conflict within the contemporary Russian society. Today the primary goal is not democratization, but decolonization, a national-liberating movement” (Khramov 2012, *emphasis in the original*). Khramov’s final pathetic desideratum goes: “The ‘people [“*narod*”] enter the revolution”” (Khramov 2012). The nationalist tendency inherent in this pathos is commented upon by Aleksei Savol’skii who, in the discussion thread to the online publication of Khramov’s book review, detects in his words an appeal to a national revolution: “By thus trying to activate in the people what the author falsely called resentment, we will detect a new Horde [“*novaia Orda*”] of a different social and national character at the same place in the future” (Aleksei Savol’skii, in Khramov 2012).

Another nationalist reviewer of *Tam, vnutri*, Iaroslav Shimov (cf. Shimov 2012), connects the Russian “colonial case” with the Polish postcolonial discourse by translating an article by Maciej Ruczaj, a Polish political scientist working in the Czech Republic (Ruczaj 2016), from Polish into Russian. In this essay, Ruczaj refers to the political split in Polish society and to Thompson’s conservative use of postcolonial language as an appropriate description. Ruczaj’s essay culminates in the nationalist vote for a future “non-acceptance of the chronic disregard toward one’s own society (Ruczaj 2016). This is echoed by Shimov in his “translator’s note”: Shimov finds the Russian “disregard to one’s own society” even worse and places his hope in those “who are able to view their country as a part of Europe, but a *self-valuable* part which deserves ‘clear-sighted,’ critical, but unconditional [“*zriachaia,*’ *kritichnaia,* no *bezuslovnaia*”] love” (Ruczaj 2016, *emphasis in the original*).

### The advantage of the disadvantage

Can “unconditional love” for one’s nation really be “critical”? Should such inimical appropriation not discourage those students of forms of colonial oppression who try hard not to fall into nationalist traps? Is a “national revolution” not a sort of “agency” that calls into question the critical potential traditionally ascribed to postcolonial theory (Quayson 2000, 9)? Does not such an appropriation also refute my earlier argument that, in comparison to teleological macro-theories such as modernization or differentiation, the notion of colonialism possesses the advantage of describing disadvantages—colonial violence, cultural oppression, and deprivation of agency (Uffelmann 2012, 54)—something one cannot so seamlessly take pride in? I venture today that my claim for the advantage of the disadvantage was shortsighted, at least if taken exclusively; there is a flip side to this coin: The advantage of the disadvantage (the fatal consequences of colonialism for the exploited and oppressed) cannot only be converted into a critical practice but also into the idealization of the victim. If I claim that a social group with which I

identify was “solely a victim” of colonization, without any complicity, I can remain on the positive side; by accusing somebody else of having colonized me or us, I praise myself and my group; if I identify the colonizer with the “other” or “alien” (which need not necessarily be external, as we can see from the nationalist appropriations of the theory of internal colonization), the “self” of my chosen group appears as purified or even sanctified. The claim that such a sanctification of the victim is an anthropological basic and global twist would fall into the trap of European colonial thought—it is a genuinely Christian idea—but one might argue that due to the export of the European model of civilization to other continents, the Christological sanctification of the victim became widespread; secular transpositions of Christological and hagiographic reevaluations of a victim’s suffering into his sanctification have entered the imaginaries of many cultures.

In the case of Polish and Russian postcolonial studies, the discursive availability of this (post-)Christological reflex can be taken for granted. This can be especially seen from Dariusz Skórczewski’s integration of postcolonial theory into Catholic metaphysics (Skórczewski 2013, 26; cf. Uffelmann 2014, 407). When it comes to accusations of the “other” as colonizer, another Polish declared Catholic, Ewa Thompson, used this trope in her influential 2000 book *Imperial Knowledge*; in this book, she blamed Russian authors for being apologists for Russian colonial rule.<sup>7</sup> Among the victims is the national group with which Thompson, the Polish emigrant in Houston, Texas, identifies. In her more essayistic articles, Thompson exposes Soviet communism as a variety of Russian colonialism and thus conceptualizes Polish post-communism as post-coloniality. According to the German geographer Ulrich Best, Skórczewski proceeds in Thompson’s footsteps; if we are to believe Best, the goal of Skórczewski’s use of postcolonial theory (he refers to Skórczewski 2006, 108) is conquering a place for Poland in postcolonial discourse which Best understands as a nationalist gesture: “Skórczewski sees himself at the forefront of a struggle for the nation, against the disregard and discrimination of the (Polish) nation in the international field” (Best 2007, 67).

Apart from “communist occupation,” Thompson also detects another negative factor influencing the Polish post-colonial mentality: a subservient attitude toward other cultures. Here, the other cultures, however, are not the former colonial power Russia anymore but Western consumerist cultures that did not contribute to Poland’s colonial exploitation. For Thompson, post-colonial Poles are in jeopardy of colonizing themselves via appropriating Western ideals, which would lead to a new dependence. To avoid a similar denationalizing identification with “the West,” Thompson recommends getting in touch with “the masses in Polish trams”: “I regard the identification with the intellectual classes of the West, at the cost of losing identification with the masses in Polish trams, as a classical expression of the colonization of Polish minds” (Thompson 2005, 12).

Thompson’s negative description of pathos for intercultural openness and globalization as a symptom of a post-colonial mentality implies an

anti-Western resentment that in turn betrays a form of post-colonial nationalism. Skórczewski subscribes to Thompson's assumption of the West as a "substitute hegemon" for the Polish post-colonial mind (2010, 315), while others, such as Tomasz Zarycki, locate this position on the right of the political spectrum (Zarycki 2008, 43–45; Zarycki 2014, 93).

Before, Zarycki Ulrich Best (2007) and Michalina Golinczak (2008) already offered initial interpretations of some of the nationalist tendencies in the debate (cf. Uffelmann 2013). Best comes close to my assumption of post-colonial nationalism when he links together a "post-colonial elite" and the "defenders of the nation": "In the field of politics, the outlined Polish discourse is characterized by the classical discourse of a postcolonial elite which sees itself as defenders of the nation against colonial threats" (Best 2007, 68). While Best's clear-sighted early diagnosis was not received in Poland at all due to the methodological nationalism inherent to the Polish-language navel-gazing of Polish postcolonial theory, the second critical reading, by Golinczak, even if articulated in Polish, also passed largely without notice. In her intervention, we see another defensive gesture comparable to the defense in Etkind's, Kukulin's, and my editors' preface to *Tam, wnutri* against Ukrainian accusations and nationalist appropriations. Golinczak felt threatened by Thompson's nationalist "monopoly": "Ewa Thompson accomplishes what Slavoj Žižek calls the 'pseudo-psychoanalytical theater of the subject which cannot come to terms with his own traumas [...]' If it is true, as the scholar [Thompson] holds, that 'Poland is haunted by the specter of permanent colonization,' it is also true that Polish 'postcolonial criticism' is haunted by the specter of 'Thompsonism' ["widmo 'thompsonizmu'"]. Thompson successfully monopolized the Polish postcolonial discourse. By basing her conceptions on Said and Bhabha, she propagates her own nationalist views" (Golinczak 2008, 111).<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Best was less pessimistic, detecting two competing discourses: "A hybrid postcolonial literary discourse which criticizes nationalism is joined by a national postcolonial ["national-postkolonialistischer"] one that emphasizes the nation" (Best 2007, 69).

### Thesis I: Nationalist usability

With his alternative of two competing discourses, one critical of nationalism and one applying postcolonial criticism for the sake of nationalism, Best opens the field for a necessary distinction. While postcolonial criticism necessarily contains a critical dimension, it is of key importance to which objects this critique is applied. Among the earliest accusations of postcolonial theory was the assumption that postcolonialists work with a clear-cut binary of perpetrator and victim. In Polish postcolonial theory, scholars such as Aleksander Fiut and Bogusław Bakula voted for seeing Poland in its imperial history also as a perpetrator but met resistance by those who, like Skórczewski, stressed Poland's role predominantly as a victim (cf. Uffelmann 2013, 118). I thus propose bivectoriality as a litmus test

for distinguishing modes of appropriation of postcolonial theory: If a victim (be this Poland in the case of Thompson or the Russian “ordinary people” in Khramov) is kept clear of any role as perpetrator or accomplice, the critical potential provided by postcolonialism is reduced to monovectoriality. A second cue is the use of the concept of the “alien”: Is the “foreignness” of a colonizer essentialized or viewed as a construct produced in a colonial setting? Whenever the “alien” (be this the “Russian regime,” “communist occupants,” or “the West”) appears as given, this hints at an underlying nationalist binary. A third piece of evidence of nationalist appropriations is normative claims such as “unconditional love” (Shimov) or “contact with the people in the tram” (Thompson). Here the criticism inherent in postcolonial studies stops at a certain point and falls short of what Theodor W. Adorno posited as “negative dialectics” (Adorno 1970).

Adorno’s discursive strategy of constantly remaining on the critical side without switching to any positive counterweight should also make us cautious when evaluating the aforementioned alternatives. It is a matter of choice whether one opts for bivectorial or monovectorial criticism. There is no Archimedean point from which one could judge one approach as intrinsically, theoretically correct. Since there is no essence of postcolonialism as being emancipatory, anti-authoritarian, and liberal, not even as “more mainstream ways of carrying out postcolonial critique,” as Snochowska-Gonzalez posits in her article “Post-Colonial Poland—On an Unavoidable Misuse” (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012, 711), it is unsubstantiated to denounce a certain use as a “gross misuse” and “hostile takeover” (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012, 711, 720). More convincingly and openly, Zarycki contrasts the use of postcolonial theory “on the conservative side” and “on the liberal side” (Zarycki 2014, 111). Thus the “liberal” Dorota Kołodziejczyk (2010, 34) is wrong if she ascribes Thompson’s use of postcolonial categories as being “in total opposition” to an allegedly “proper” model of postcolonial studies (Kołodziejczyk 2014, 137, see also below). Even if I side with Kołodziejczyk and her anti-nationalist and thus practically non-monovectorial ethos, and though my personal preference is a kind of negative dialectics of postcolonial critique, I do not claim the right to denounce an alternative, affirmative, and particularistic instrumentalization of postcolonial studies as “misuse.”

In my view, more productive than gestures of denouncing the “other” is the question to what degree anti-nationalist uses of postcolonial theory are also structurally infected by nationalist schemes. Since Kołodziejczyk is one of the contributors to a Polish anti-nationalist approach called post-dependence studies,<sup>9</sup> I redirect this critical question to her criticism of nationalism.

### **Post-dependence studies**

Again, I begin with allegations, here by Ewa Thompson, whom we got to know as a representative of programmatic nationalism earlier. And indeed, Thompson is far from accusing the representatives of post-dependence

theory, for whom she coins the neologism “dependencists,”<sup>10</sup> of a nationalist approach; rather the opposite: In her view, “dependence” is a notion too weak and harmless for describing the sort of oppression from which Poland had to suffer under the Soviet yoke (Thompson 2011, 294; Thompson 2014, 72–73). For her, “it is colonialism after all,” which she regards as the appropriate term. She adds the compelling observation that the “dependencists” refusal to find the Polish situation strictly post-colonial amounts to an essentialization of a certain British model of “colonialism” as the “proper” one (Thompson 2011, 292; Thompson 2014, 70–71). While Thompson’s allegation of missing fantasy and her plea for acknowledging the all-encompassing metaphoricality of the terms used in the humanities is worth reflecting, Thompson commits an act of essentialization herself, too—of the nation: “Proponents of dependency theory do not take nationality issues into consideration [...]. Nationality played a key role in the efforts of the colonizers on Polish lands and it can simply not be ignored. Between 1945 and 1989, Polish intellectual discourse was a discourse of a colonized nation [“skolonizowany naród”]” (Thompson 2014, 74, *emphasis in the Polish original*). Hand in hand with this programmatic nationalist argument, Thompson also accuses the “dependencists” [“zależnościowcy”] of “full dependence [...] on what happens and what is thought in ‘Anglophone research institutions’” (Thompson 2014, 77).

A contrary critique is uttered by Emilia Kledzik, who speaks of the “obtrusive nativism” of “postdependency research” (2015, 99). In the same direction goes the diagnosis made by the German Slavicist Mirja Lecke. Cautious of a too-metaphorical use of the notion of colonialism herself, she points rather to an anxiety of foreign influence inherent in the term *post-dependence*: “Yet as conceptually prudent as this choice may be, the term ‘post-dependence’ still implies the existence of a hegemon that deprived the country of its sovereignty, and it stresses the cultural effects of relations with this hegemon, mitigating the issue of foreignness” (Lecke 2016, 380). Incomparably stronger than Kledzik’s and Lecke’s critique is the allegation raised by Mieczysław Dąbrowski; in 2014 Dąbrowski accused post-dependence studies of dehybridization and essentialization of distinct national cultures (Dąbrowski 2014, 107) in the spirit of post- or neo-Romanticism. According to the Warsaw-based scholar, post-dependence studies is a “discourse imitative in relation to the Polish Romantic discourse whose main feature is a national martyrology combined with a peculiarly comprehended heroism” (Dąbrowski 2014, 106). Dąbrowski also detects a mechanism of re-evaluating (one’s own) suffering in the post-dependence talk comparable to Romanticism: “As is well known, the motif of undeserved suffering, oppression, and injustice which are usually adorned with an accent of moral victory, dominates in it [Romantic discourse]” (Dąbrowski 2014, 106). In 2017, he added the malicious comparison with the nationalist Law and Justice government ruling in Poland since 2015 (Dąbrowski 2017, 14). Thus, in the case of post-dependence studies, the criticism ranges from accusations of insufficient acknowledgment of the nation to post-Romantic neonationalism.

Which of them can be substantiated by statements of the advocates of “post-dependence”?

Both, to various degrees; my thesis is that there are two contradictory tendencies in the Polish post-dependence paradigm, one striving toward openness (A), the other one toward exceptionality (B). The first is most tangibly reflected in the anti-nationalist claims made by Kołodziejczyk, who—with Hanna Gosk—is one of the two most outspoken backers of this approach. Kołodziejczyk laments with implicit reference to the appropriation of postcolonial theory by Ewa Thompson: “In too many cases, the postcolonial perspective applied this way only helps intensify national historicism [“historyzm narodowy”] of a vividly conservative ideological program” (Kołodziejczyk 2014, 139). More explicitly so, Kołodziejczyk distinguishes between a correct and a false mode of application (as referred to earlier): “In a certain, very fundamental aspect, the author [Thompson] applies post-colonial categories in total opposition to the model elaborated in the post-colonial studies. According to her, post-colonialism serves—being an institutionalized anti-imperial discourse—as a tool for re-vindication of the nation which, historically and literally, is still oppressed and colonized [“rewindykacja narodu jako wciąż ciemżonego skolonizowanego”]” (Kołodziejczyk 2014, 137).

Put in more positive terms, tendency A, leading toward pluralization and openness, finds one of its expressions in terminological liberalism. It is again Kołodziejczyk who inserts the term *post-dependence* in what reads like an enumeration of synonyms: “post-communism, post-socialism and post-dependence” (Kołodziejczyk 2010, 132). In Gosk we can also see an almost synonymic use of *postdependence* alongside *postcolonial*, held apart only by a slash when she speaks of “the postcolonial/postdependence discourse” (Gosk 2010, 85). The latter appears to be no more than a mere Polonization of the postcolonial paradigm for her: “postcolonial studies which I call post-dependence studies for the Polish use” (Gosk 2010, 84). In line with this terminological vagueness is the even broader inclusion of other theoretical inspirations and thematic scopes, such as studies of sexual minorities, migration, multiculturalism, and many other issues in the mission statement of the website of the Centre for Post-Dependence Studies (Centre 2009; Centrum 2009). A third vector of terminological liberalism applies to temporality—the periods in Polish history after which a certain “post-condition” is to be detected. In only a few statements is *post-dependence* confined to contemporary, post-1989 issues; striving for flexibility and a wider range, Gosk distinguishes between different varieties of post, “post-partition” and “post-dependent” (Gosk 2008, 75). The website of the Centre broadens the historical terms even further, enumerating various historically distinct composites with post-, such as “post-partition, post-occupation, post-socialist social mentality” (Centre 2009; Centrum 2009). Klemens Kaps and Jan Surman acknowledge that Gosk “suggests changing the timeframes to strengthen their historical independence” (Kaps and Surman 2012, 21).

While, as part of tendency A, Gosk freely “Polonized” the Anglo-American or international *postcolonial* into *postdependence*, she also applied a tendency B when arguing that Polish realities “were neither strictly colonizing nor colonial in the understanding characteristic for at least the reality of the former British Empire” (Gosk 2008, 75). Appropriation turns into dissociation here. However, as Wojciech Małecki notes, the attempt at methodological “Polonization” remains if not an impossible, then an unfinishable project. According to the Polish literary theorist who contributed to the first “Post-dependence” volume, *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy—konteksty i perspektywy badawcze* [*Culture after Transitions, People with a Past: Polish Post-Dependence Discourse—Contexts and Research Perspectives*], from 2011, the obsessive methodological concern with “dependence on the Anglo-American hegemon” (Małecki 2011, 67) that Gosk detects in the humanities leads to a dead end; there is no alternative other than to deal with this current state of affairs.

Something different from this global landscape of theory in the humanities is the “dependencists”’ emphases of a certain “exceptionality of the Polish situation” (Gosk 2010, 13). The Centre defines its mission on its English website: “The rationale behind the network is to investigate the condition of post-dependence underlying the contemporary Polish society and culture specifically, and, in a broader perspective, defining the difference of Central-Eastern Europe from its Western counterpart” (Centre 2009). In the brief introduction to the group’s first volume by Ryszard Nycz, who serves as the project group’s senior mentor, we find an even more defensive attempt at re-nationalization, armed with a protective belt: According to Nycz, “without resigning either the universal and comparative dimension or the theoretical and methodological inspirations,” the study group’s activity “will above all lead to: / a. the identification of the symptomatic answers to the key oppressive experiences of *Polish* history, social life, and culture [...]” (Nycz 2011, 7–8, *emphasis added*). Przemysław Czapliński goes so far as to envisage the task of writing a “phenomenology of the Polish spirit” (Czapliński 2011, 44).

Who strives for re-nationalization and national-cultural exceptionality obviously suffers from the same anxiety of “dependence” that s/he just attempts to describe on a meta-level. In Gosk’s view, there is a double deplorable dependence: “The unwanted world defined by dependence on Russia/the Soviet Union, now a relic of the past, and, to some degree, the increased fascination with the West that it drove, are the Other that constitute a part of the collective identity of Poles—ex-subjects of a peculiar type of Eastern-Western domination” (Gosk 2014, 245). One cannot but find this turn from past Eastern dependence to actual Western dependence similar to what Thompson deplored in her journalistic essays.

Again, the historical dimension is doubled by the methodological one: A structurally analogous anxiety of something “other” or foreign leads Kołodziejczyk to strive for methodological “autonomy” of Polish studies:



“The category of post-dependence provides us with a certain level of theoretical autonomy” (Kołodziejczyk 2010, 38). Even if she hastens to open this Polish specificity for a comparative context, a movement away from mere supply of historical data to a pre-defined theoretical framework remains palpable. What, according to the Wrocław-based Anglicist, seems achievable is “an autonomy which will allow accessing the comparative, intersubjective territory of translation as an open, multidirectional space or dialogue with the postcolonial studies, but not supply studies on the margins of a theory defined somewhere else in the metropolises” (Kołodziejczyk 2010, 38).

Thus, despite their explicit anti-nationalist statements, the advocates of post-dependence studies share with their adversary Ewa Thompson a desire for national specificity, both an “originality of Polish culture [“oryginalność polskiej kultury”]” (Thompson 2014, 81; Thompson 2011, 301) and of Polish research in the humanities (cf. Gosk 2010, 13, footnote 11). The “dependencists” own claims of “autonomy” from external theory cannot be excused with inattentive mononationality because they confess some sort of explicit, programmatic will for a certain nationally confined academic performance. This, however, should not lead to the misconception that in the case of post-dependence studies we are dealing with programmatic exceptionalism. This is made clear by the representatives of post-dependence studies in stark anti-nationalist declarations.

### Is metamartyrology still martyrology?

With *colonialism*, the choice of the term *dependence* shares the advantage of the disadvantage. Being a negative notion, it prevents direct positive affirmation of something valuable and national. But the negativist talk of *post-dependence*, which (in contrast to *post-independence*) acknowledges inevitable repercussions of dependence even after formal independence (Nycz 2011, 8), is not automatically free from positive re-evaluation of the disadvantage, from the sanctification of the victim. Hence it comes as no surprise that many contributors of the first post-dependence volume produced by the Centre for Post-Dependence Studies in 2011 struggled with the mechanism of ennobling the victim (Małecki 2011; Czermińska 2011). Hanna Gosk made a negative evaluation of Polish auto-martyrology, which sounds almost identical to what her former friend Mieczysław Dąbrowski accused her of (Gosk 2010, 19). Gosk, however, detected automartyrology, not in the post-dependence method she proposed herself but in a post-dependent mentality left by various periods of “long-term dependence/non-sovereignty” (Gosk 2014, 246). She regretfully diagnosed the “heroization of [...] defeats” (Gosk 2014, 246), which:

ennobles the vanquished, limits the possibility of criticizing their actions, and concentrates social efforts on commemorating martyrology, instead

of revising attitudes and actions that might have led to defeat. On the other hand, it redefines the status of the victim, transforming it almost imperceptibly into the hegemon of the dominant narrative, someone who imposes the terms, dictates the value, decides what is good, honorable, proper, and what's not. In this narrative, being the victim is a value in itself.

(Gosk 2014, 246)

It remains—and this is my final thesis—problematic when somebody conceptualizes her-/himself or her/his culture as a victim of—former or continuous—dependence because this twist is prone to methodological nationalist implications. Clearly, we must differentiate whether a postcolonially inspired argumentation falls into programmatic nationalism, is adjusted for the sake of “local autonomy,” or just performs methodological mononationality. While the latter can in a certain sense be correct for all-too narrowly confined focalizations of Russia's internal colonization as well as for Poland's post-dependent situation with its continued navel-gazing, the meta-theory of Polish post-dependence studies suffers from anxiety of influence. Both traps, however, must be clearly distinguished from conservative and anti-Western appropriations of postcolonial theory such as Thompson's, or nationalist-revolutionary appropriations such as Khramov's, which must both be called programmatic nationalism.

To conclude with a minimal normative note for postcolonial hermeneutics, I see two challenges: (1) to again and again confine postcolonially inspired research to heuristic and negative dialectical use, which (2) allows preventing necessary local adoptions from falling into structural epistemic nationalism or methodological “autonomism.” When it comes to the recent resurrection of outmoded programmatic nationalism, I have no hermeneutic remedy to offer, alas.

## Notes

- 1 I thank the Hanover panel's discussant Maija Burima for her helpful remarks.
- 2 My distinction of (hyphenated) *post-colonial nationalism* in a temporal sense of nationalist movements occurring after a (quasi-)colonial situation and (hyphenless) *postcolonial theory* developed for describing the cultural repercussions of colonialism irrespective of the temporal or spatial position of the theorist resonates more with Kaps and Surman (2012, 7) than with Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2000, 186–187).
- 3 This isolation is further enhanced by the non-reception of postcolonially inspired research in other languages than that of the country in question. This problem was addressed by Ryszard Nycz in his introduction to the English special issue of *teksty drugie*, “Postcolonial or Postdependence Studies,” where the Polonist calls for “tak[ing] over the external point of view and confront[ing] it with our cultivated internal image of ourselves” (Nycz 2014, 9). What Nycz does not recognize is the performative contradiction inherent in the fact that he is just introducing a volume containing texts by “leading Polish researchers” only (Nycz 2014, 11). I quote English translations from the special issue of *teksty drugie* irrespective of

- their idiomatic quality without altering them. All other translations are mine if not stated otherwise.
- 4 Cf. Serge Elie's self-reflection on his positionality, which "entails the adoption of an agonistic relationship with one's milieu, which is similar to a permanent host-guest relationship vis-à-vis one's permanent or momentary place of dwelling" (Elie 2006, 68).
  - 5 Cf. Etkind's often-quoted formulation: "The main trajectories of Russian colonization were not directed away from, but inside the metropolis ["ne vovne, no vnutr' metropolii"]: not toward Poland or Bashkiria, but in the villages of the Tula, Pomorskie or Orenburg regions" (Etkind 2001, 65).
  - 6 For more on Krylov's use of Said's theses for the sake of justifying Russian national self-defense, see Sproede and Lecke 2011, 59–60.
  - 7 Snochowska-Gonzalez comprehends this as an Orientalizing gesture by Thompson herself: "For Thompson, Russia is the Orient exactly in the meaning [...] described by Said" (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012, 712).
  - 8 It should be argued against Golinczak's conflation of Saidian and Bhabhian thoughts in Thompson's reception, that it is much more Said—both in Thompson and in Krylov—who inspired Polish and Russian nationalist appropriations of postcolonial theory.
  - 9 "studia post-zależnościowe." In English this notion is rendered most often as "post-dependence," but one finds also the unhyphenated "postdependency" (Gosk 2014, 245, footnote 15).
  - 10 "zależnościowy" (Thompson 2011, 292; the English translator opted for "dependence crowd" [Thompson 2014, 70], which appears to be quantitatively misleading).

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## 8 Colonial lifestyle and nostalgia

### The Ottoman Belle Époque and the project of modernization in Greek literature and heritage TV series

*Yannis G.S. Papadopoulos*

The second half of the nineteenth century has passed into the collective memory as a period of relative freedom and of economic and social development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, more than one million Greek Orthodox lived in the Ottoman Empire. This “golden era” ended in 1913 after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan Wars, when the Young Turks started to apply exclusion policies that culminated in the ethnic cleansing of the Greek Orthodox in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace during the following years. This process was halted in Western Anatolia and Eastern Thrace during the Greek occupation of these regions. The 1919–1922 Greco-Turkish war saw a series of atrocities by both sides, and the defeat of the Greek Army led to a huge refugee wave to Greece (see Llewelyn-Smith 1998). The burning of the city of Smyrna (Izmir), which was inhabited by a Greek majority, marked symbolically the end of the Greek presence in Anatolia (Asia Minor). The Treaty for the Exchange of Populations between Greece and Turkey sanctioned the mutual ethnic cleansing of minorities in the two countries. These events, which resulted in the uprooting of about 1.5 million people, are referred to in Greece as the “Asia Minor Disaster.”

During the 1960s, Greek films started to deal with the trauma of Anatolian refugees, and after 1974 several television series, based mainly on novels written by refugee authors, introduced to the broader Greek public the life of Greek Orthodox populations during the last years of the Ottoman Empire, including the atrocities they endured and their difficult period of resettlement in Greece (Papadopoulos 2013; Kaloudi 2001). If we consider from a distance the subject of the Ottoman Empire in Greek cinema and television, we can distinguish three phases: In the 1960s, film directors were dealing with the Anatolian Greeks as a previously subaltern group trying to get over its collective trauma and celebrate its newly acquired higher social and economic status. During the period after the Junta and the restoration of democracy, through television, the broader Greek public incorporated the suffering of Anatolian Greeks and acknowledged the importance of the “lost homelands” for Greek culture. These series reflected the tense relations between Greece and Turkey after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, which indicated for many the perennial expansionist plans of Turkey. At the



beginning of the twenty-first century, the dominant element in the cultural products dealing with this subject was a nostalgia for the “Ottoman Belle Époque” and an effort to accommodate the traumatic experiences of the past with the *détente* between Greece and Turkey. The humanitarian aid and the rescue crews sent to Turkey by Greece after the 1999 earthquake created a propitious climate for the improvement of relations between the two countries. One of the by-products of this “earthquake diplomacy” was the emergence of a vivid interest in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Gradually the collective image of Turkey started to shift from the “eternal enemy” to the closest representative of the exotic “Orient.” This does not mean that suddenly the problems between the two countries ceased to exist, but the new climate permitted a more nuanced view of the neighboring country and a re-evaluation of the shared past.

Kostas Koutsomytis was a prolific director of popular TV series who showed a keen interest in period dramas, trying to popularize history for the broader public. His long filmography, spanning almost four decades, illustrates the development of perceptions on the past. During his long career, he directed TV series that reflected opposing ideological perspectives on the past. A watershed separates *The Unknown War*, a series praising the Armed Forces that he directed during the colonels’ dictatorship, from *Bloody Lands*, aired in 2008. Between 2004 and 2008 he adapted three novels dealing with life in Anatolia during the early twentieth century that cast a nostalgic gaze on an era of harmonious ethnic cohabitation that was shattered by nationalism and foreign intervention. These TV series, aired during the first decade of the twenty-first century, reflect the Greco-Turkish rapprochement but also an idealization of the Ottoman “Belle Époque” era.

In the early 2000s, Koutsomytis’ series might be considered an offspring of the “heritage films” genre. These films are characterized by:

the nostalgic view of the past, putting an emphasis on the authentic representation, the transnational or transcultural character, the effort to create popular products of good quality that are often based in well-known novels, portray famous personalities of the past, use rich settings and opulent costumes and adopt narratives accessible to the public or base the plot on romantic idylls.

(Chalkou 2017, 266–267)

Koutsomytis’ series show most of these characteristics and reflect the tendency of “heritage films” to portray an idealized view of life in the past or in the European colonies of Asia and Africa. Since Greece was not a colonial power, the “lost homelands” of Asia Minor and the diaspora Greek community of Alexandria in Egypt constitute the point of reference for the nostalgic gaze. This led to a commodification of the Ottoman past and the memory of the Asia Minor catastrophe by publishers, restaurants, tourist agencies, and TV stations (Özyürek 2007, 10). Svetlana Boym speaks about

the “‘inculcation of nostalgia’ into merchandise as a marketing strategy that tricks consumers into missing what they haven’t lost” (Boym 2001, 38).

The lifestyle of the upper and middle classes in these regions, as it is illustrated in these series, reflects that of Western Europe, thus incorporating these affluent Greeks into a pan-European upper class (Chalkou 2017, 278).<sup>1</sup> But there was also a political undertone. During the period of prosperity in the closing years of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first, Greek elites looked back on this period as a point of reference for their identity discourse. As Fred Davis has pointed out, “simple nostalgia” is “a positively toned evocation of a lived past” that implies a negative attitude toward the present or future revealed by a “belief that things were better [...] than than now” (Davis 1979, 18). Contrary to the perceived decadence of Greece marked by the hegemony of the ideas of the left, the Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt provide conservatives with an utopian vision of a stratified society where the lower classes were under the protection of the economic aristocracy but had limited influence in the affairs of their communities.

*Niobe’s Children*, adapted by Koutsomytis for Greek Public Television in 2004, follows this motif and is loosely based on Tasos Athanasiadis’ semi-autobiographical book. The author, the son of a banker, belongs to the minority of Anatolian Greeks who managed to come to Greece almost unscathed, carrying a part of their fortune. Thus his perception of events is totally different from those of other authors of his generation, who focus on the trauma of the Disaster and uprooting. And contrary to other Anatolian Greek authors, he dealt with his family’s experiences only in his last novel, *Niobe’s Children*, published in 1984. This distance from the events, along with his familiarity with recent scholarship on the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the Greco-Turkish War, permitted him to draw a multifaceted depiction of events.

The novel spans more than a decade and includes all the elements of most novels that deal with Asia Minor: the description of the blissful life in Anatolia, the rupture of the 1922 disaster, the integration of refugees in Greece. The novel focuses on a well-off family of Anatolian Greeks in the small city of Salihli to the east of Izmir between 1917 and 1922 and then in Athens until 1928. Although personalities such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the King Constantine are present in the plot, the main protagonists of the novel are the common people of Salihli, where local relations often prevail over national or religious affiliation. The town thus, in a way, showcases the conditions that led to the destruction of the shared Anatolian world. In order to combine personal experience with a description of Anatolian Greeks’ collective fate before and after the “Disaster,” Athanasiadis includes in the narration the diary notes of his younger self and those of the merchant Tryfon Ioannidis. Thus, according to Panagiotis Mastrodimitris, Ioannidis’ notes “express the sentimental reaction of a mature man who in a systematic and logical way tries to understand the

new reality and find a position in it, while the monologue of Athanasiadis' younger self's reflects the unconscious reactions of the whole society around him" (Mastrodimitris 2003, 408–411 and *passim*). Moreover, Vangelis Athanasopoulos compares the three-voice narration to a musical composition in which motifs are mentioned by one of the narrators and developed by another, a sort of "theme and variations" contributing to a prismatic reconstruction of events (Athanasopoulos 1996, 10).

The book's dominant motif is not suffering but the successful transplanting of the refugees in Greece and their contribution in enriching Greek culture with their "cultural and psychological qualities" (Stavropoulou 2004, 429). At the same time, for Athanasiadis, the experience of Anatolian Greeks acquires a broader humanistic content, representing the collective drama of people looking for roots and continuity (Mastrodimitris 1991, 197). Paschalis Kitromilides refers to this concept as "refugeeism," underlining that this narrative is one-sided and emphasizes the success story of a minority while many refugees languished for decades in shantytowns. Athanasiadis, by contrast, presents the Greek community of Salihli in both Anatolia and Greece as a corporatist utopia where the patricians are in charge and take care of the lower classes' needs. The poorer members of the community are represented mostly as uneducated, base, and often lacking in moral character. For this reason, they should accept the guidance of the entrepreneurial middle class without challenging its authority. He is unequivocally critical towards the Communist Party, which managed to gain the support of many refugees in Greece, but also towards the social establishment and royalists in Greece, whose claim to social status rests on heritage, not merit.

Following the pattern of the other Anatolian Greek authors, his attitude towards the Turks is rather positive, emphasizing the multi-religious mosaic of an Anatolian city and describing how the cohabitation mechanism collapsed as a result of nationalism. Interreligious solidarity on the local level is as important as national affiliation. The plot starts in 1917 during World War I, a period of intense Ottoman propaganda against the Greek Orthodox. This does not seem to have an impact on local interethnic relations since, in the first chapter, a Muslim landlord notifies his friend Michalakis Sarris that the police will raid Christian houses looking for deserters. For people of the upper classes, the Others are not necessarily those belonging to a different ethnic or religious group but people of the lower classes. Even religious affiliation appears negotiable for some. The famous social bandit Çakıcı Efe (Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe) (Yeşilgöz and Bovenkerk 2004, 221), equally venerated by Muslims and Christians as a protector of the poor, is shown as being baptized and choosing as a godfather the merchant Michalakis Sarris. Nationalist-minded Greeks are juxtaposed to people who believe that the Greek occupation is temporary. While not hiding the atrocities that took place during the war, the author manages to present various positions towards the Other within each community. Unlike

other authors, Athanasiadis tried to avoid excessive representation of violence (Stavropoulou, *Νέα Εστία* 2004, 427). On the contrary, in his description of the approach of the Greek Occupation Army to Salihli, many Greek Orthodox seek refuge in the houses of Muslim or Jewish friends. These Greeks reciprocate by guaranteeing the safety of non-Greeks during the Greek administration. When the Turkish nationalist forces retake the city, the Muslim judge interferes to save from summary executions people who did not collaborate actively with the Greek forces. In the farewell discussion between the merchant Hadji-Leontis and the judge, the war is presented as a product of lust for power, and the role of Europeans in instigating ethnic strife is also underlined. On the other hand, Athanasiadis did not shrink from portraying Anatolian Greeks' feelings of superiority towards the Muslim lower classes, which he summarized with the saying, "the Greek was the saddle and the Turk was the mule." In the Anatolian Greek perception of the Late Ottoman social order, although the Ottomans retained the political and military power, it was the Greek Orthodox who constituted the most productive element of the Empire's population (Athanasiadis 1999).

This viewpoint permeates the adaptation of *Niobe's Children* for television (2004). Ethnic conflict is also presented as a result of foreign powers' interference. But contrary to the book, the script authored by the director and Vasilis Mavropoulos overemphasized the nationalistic mobilization of the two communities and the confrontation between Greeks and Turks. The series often used simplifications and distortions that perpetuated negative sentiments towards the Turks. But this simplification can be also attributed to the effort of heritage series to offer a plot accessible to the broader public, with simple characters and a clear distinction between "good" and "evil." The dominant idea in the series is that ethnic violence was caused by the insinuation of external forces.

Moreover, the series makes a distinction between socially advanced, educated Greeks and backward Turks. Anatolia thus is presented as a land whose development is due to the entrepreneurial Christians, its rightful owners. The archaeologist Gaston Deschamps, in his travelogue about Asia Minor, praised the Greek Orthodox for taking back their ancestral heritage through their skills and wit (Deschamps 1894, 257). In an echo of colonial discourse, Anatolia is represented as a land that should be "redeemed" from the stage of abandonment.

The Disaster of 1922 puts an end to this effort, but the self-perception of upper- and middle-class Anatolian Greeks as a productive force continues to permeate the second part of the series, which takes place in Greece. The refugees were called upon to inoculate mainland Greece with their superior European values. The new refugee settlements and the industries founded by refugees reflect this vision of modernization. The local peasants play the role of backward indigenous inhabitants who are unable to exploit the land fully.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, the relationship among the Anatolian Greek entrepreneur Manthos Keramidas, the banker Thanopoulos, and the local peasant

Mitrogrivas is evocative of the series' ideological focus.<sup>3</sup> Mitrogrivas gained ownership of his lands not by merit but through his patronage links to the palace. It is even insinuated that he was rewarded for his services as a thug during the National Schism between partisans of the Pro-German king Constantine and the liberal pro-Entente prime minister Eleutherios Venizelos. He is represented as uneducated, greedy, perverted, and unreliable. The fact that he is not trustworthy and tries to renegotiate an agreement by asking for more money seems to undermine the legal foundation of economic activity in a modern state. Mitrogrivas grew up in a village where agreements depended on the notion of honor, which in turn depended on strong relations with members of his clan. He does not feel bound either to the banker or to the entrepreneur, who in his eyes are foreigners trying to take advantage of his ignorance. He therefore does not consider it a violation of his moral code to increase his profit by renegotiating the agreement.

By contrast, the cosmopolitan, educated refugee entrepreneur Keramidas is presented as the core of what we consider as the modern state, confident in his notions of progress, justice, and integrity. His perception of "word of honor" is incompatible with that of the premodern Mitrogrivas, who is bound to keep a promise only to the members of his group. Instead of keeping the land idle, Keramidas aims at developing its resources, and trustworthiness is essential in order to achieve his goal.

Both the primitive, untrustworthy Mitrogrivas and the cosmopolitan entrepreneur Keramidas are juxtaposed to the banker Thanopoulos, a representative of unproductive capital who only tries to speculate on new sources of profit. For him, the tragedy of the refugees is just a new business opportunity. Speculating that the Western powers will give loans to Greece for the settlement of refugees, he convinces Keramidas to broaden the scope of his activities and invest in housing construction. He is the necessary intermediary between the Mainland and the Anatolian Greek, but both sides equally distrust him.

In one of the last scenes of the series, a prisoner of war who became private tutor to a Turkish officer's wife leaves her a love letter on his release, accompanied by Rudyard Kipling's "If," commenting that Kipling is the author who best managed to penetrate the soul of Asia.<sup>4</sup> This scene does not exist in the book, but it is evocative of the orientalist discourse the film evokes: although the Other who serve as a point of reference are the Muslims before 1922 and the Mainland Greeks thereafter, Anatolian middle-class Greeks are presented in both eras and places—in the Ottoman Empire and in twentieth-century Greece—as the European element with a civilizing mission to uneducated "indigenous populations" in need of guidance.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the twentieth century, the series' visually pleasing images reflect nostalgia not only for the Belle-Époque Ottoman Empire lifestyle but also for a class ethos that should serve as an example in a country that appeared to have lost its ancestral values. It permits us thus to reflect on relations of power and the shifting boundaries of a colonial gaze outside the overseas European colonial possessions.

This idealization of the Anatolian Greek entrepreneurial ethos is evident in all three Koutsomytis series, notwithstanding the different ideological perspectives of the authors on whose books they are based. In the *Witches of Smyrna*, a 2005 series based on Mara Meimaridis' book of the same title, a widow moves with her children from Cappadocia to Smyrna. There, under the guidance of the goddess Astarte, in the guise of a wise Turkish woman, one of her daughters learns how to use magic to gain money and power. The book has been criticized as a pulp-fiction bestseller that overemphasized the importance of magic among common people in Smyrna. Although it expresses a naïve theosophical cosmology, the author manages to give an accurate image of social stratification in Smyrna and the daily interaction of various ethnic and religious groups. Orientalist stereotypes about Turks and the traditional role of women are not absent, but the author also criticizes the hypocrisy of higher classes and the ruthlessness of people with power. Mega Channel's decision to adapt the book for television was probably due to the vivid interest Greeks were starting to show for Turkey as the "Near Orient" of Greece. The series obviously shows the destruction of Smyrna, but the emphasis is rather on the charms of the cosmopolitan city and the use and abuse of special powers given to an Oriental woman, as such the character of Katina. Instead of focusing on the European culture of the Anatolian Greeks, it showcases the common practices that bound Christians and Muslims. Even the upper strata of Smyrna society share the fascination of commoners with apocryphal knowledge and sorcery. The Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Smyrna thus appear as Europeans compared to the Muslims, but at the same time, they are acculturated in the local habits. Smyrna, in this respect, looks as a Westernized city when seen from the interior of Anatolia, but it is represented in Europe as a hybrid "Levantine" society where oriental charms frame local attitudes. In reality, these common cultural elements were not able to stop the fragmentation along ethno-religious lines that led to bloodshed.

The focus of the last series that Koutsomytis directed was the ethnic conflict in Anatolia during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The improvement of Greco-Turkish relations may have been the reason for the 2008 TV adaptation of Dido Sotiriou's novel *Bloody Lands*, translated into English as *Farewell Anatolia*. The book is based on the memoirs of Manolis Axiotis, a farmer from Kirkince (nowadays Sirince) near ancient Ephesus who served in the forced labor camps (Amele Taburu) and the Greek Occupation army and spent some time in a prisoner-of-war camp before settling in Greece. Since both Axiotis and Sotiriou were members of the Communist Party, they saw ethnic enmity in Anatolia, which finally led to the expulsion of Greek Orthodox populations, as a result of the intervention of Western Powers and the interests of capitalist forces. As Sotiriou notes, "I was the first author to show that there are no evil Greeks and Turks, but only people who live well during peaceful times when the Great Powers don't interfere, and how they are transformed into beasts when

the war erupts” (Sotiriou 2008, and interview, *Monogramma* 1982/2008). Sotiriou was interested in using a witness’s testimony to describe the refugees’ collective experience and to underline that it was the Western Powers who cultivated enmity between Greeks and the Turks and were to blame for the atrocities and the uprooting of Asia Minor Greeks (Stavropoulou 2014, 10). Moreover, as is common in heritage films, the series follows historical events through the gaze of a simple, uneducated Anatolian Greek whose viewpoint contests many elements of official history (Chalkou 2017, 271).

The script of *Bloody Lands* remained faithful to the author’s (or maybe Manolis Axiotis’) perspective. In the depiction of various scenes, Sotiriou is the more critical towards the Turks, maybe because the book was published in the early sixties, whereas Axiotis’ memoirs appeared after the restoration of democracy. The script author Lia Vitali took many liberties and added the characters of the American consul, George Horton and the German general Liman von Sanders, as incarnations of good and evil, but Sotiriou herself believed that it was von Sanders who sent the Greeks to labor camps to complete the Berlin-Baghdad railway (Sotiriou 2008, and interview, *Monogramma* 1982/2008). Moreover, she mentioned that propaganda brochures by the German Bank of Palestine were pivotal for inciting Turkish hatred against the Greek Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire (Bedlek 2015, 114–115). But she underlined the peaceful coexistence in Anatolia and the strong bonds that united Muslim and Greek Orthodox populations. Contrary to the prevalent ideology of the “eternal enemy,” she presents the events that led to the disentanglement of populations as the rupture of a long and peaceful coexistence. The first scene of the series is evocative of this point of view. After the entrance of the Turkish nationalist army into Smyrna, Manolis Axiotis jumps into the sea to reach the ship carrying his mother. The Turkish officer who tries to stop him is his childhood friend Şevket. Their mutual recognition triggers a flashback to explain how “brothers” have ended up as official “enemies.”<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the traditional nationalist representations, in this series it is often a Greek who is treacherous (Colakis 1986, 103). Quitting his first job with a Greek merchant in Smyrna who cheats the naïve Turkish agricultural workers, Axiotis points out that he himself is a victim of the rapacious Turkish state. On another occasion, the Greek foreman of an estate mistreats the peasants, contrary to the orders of the Turkish agha.

Moreover, although the role of the Great Powers is underlined, Greeks and Turks are not represented merely as pawns without agency. The series refers to atrocities committed by both sides during the war. In the last discussion that Manolis and his childhood friend Şevket have during the Greco-Turkish war, Şevket refers to the destruction of villages and the rapes and massacres of civilians by the Greek army, and Manolis sighs as he remembers his own murder of a prisoner.<sup>7</sup> This sense of guilt permeates Axiotis’ memoirs, and he goes on to say that when he took part in the resistance against the Germans, he realized to what extent he identified with the

prisoner that he killed during the Greco-Turkish War. Although this self-reflection is influenced by the left's position on the Asia Minor Campaign, it is important that it finds its way in a prime-time series that aired on a private TV station. Koutsomytis had lengthy discussions with Dido Sotiriou about turning her novel into a series, as was her wish. In the series' closing scene, Sotiriou herself appears and reads the last phrases of the novel, sending her regards to the people across the Aegean, asking forgiveness from the land for the bloodshed and saying farewell to Anatolia.<sup>8</sup> This powerful scene, acknowledging the pain that both sides of the conflict caused and endured, but also sending a message of reconciliation, can be considered the culmination of the reconciliation policy between Greece and Turkey during the first decade of the twenty-first century. It also coincided with the debate about the sixth-grade history manuals that supposedly downgraded the suffering of Anatolian Greeks in an effort by "unpatriotic historians" to promote Greco-Turkish friendship to the detriment of "historical accuracy." Following the withdrawal of the above-mentioned history manuals in 2007, the then conservative government decreed the distribution of *Farewell Anatolia* to the high school students. This move, contrary to the hopes of its originators, didn't calm the nationalists (Natsios 2007), and neither did the screening of the series. Sotiriou's focus on ethnic cohabitation and her effort to criticize war did not reflect the memory discourse diffused by Asia Minor and Pontic Greek associations, which underlined ideas of perennial victimhood "under the barbarous Turkish yoke."

The first years of the twenty-first century in Greece were a period of economic growth and convergence with Western Europe. At the same time, the rapprochement with Turkey permitted a reappraisal of the late Ottoman period and the Greco-Turkish war of 1919–1922. Kostas Koutsomytis' series are a product of this process. All three of them conform to the conventions of "heritage films" and contribute to dispelling nationalistic stereotypes. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern the different ideological backgrounds of the novels they are based on.

*Niobe's Children* reflects the ideals of a middle-class author who uses the "Anatolian Greek ethos" as an example of a corporatist utopia. One of the favorite conservative explanations of the 2008 Greek financial crisis was that the country, since the ascendance of the Socialists to power in 1981, had become prey to populism: Law and order under the moderate conservative administration of Konstantinos Karamanlis had been replaced by a regime of politicians who tried to remain to power by praising the base sentiments of the people. This discourse appeared for the first time during the recession of the late 1980s, which was accompanied by corruption scandals and eventually led to the fall of the Socialists from power. It should also be linked to the cataclysm of the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. During that time, members of the traditional power elites, although largely a product of the post-war period, tried to appropriate the heritage of the diaspora and Ottoman Greeks to justify their claims. They thus tried to



dissociate themselves from the vulgar lifestyle of the nouveaux riches (“new fireplaces,” a term broadly used during that time) that appeared during the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) administration. Moreover, they claimed that the social policies of the Socialists had led the country into recession. The TV series, although aired during a period of affluence, reproduces this ideal of an “entrepreneurial ethos” as the core of national values, as well as a repudiation of lower classes’ political claims.

On the other hand, the *Witches of Smyrna* reflects the “New Age” ideas that penetrated Greece during the 1990s. The late Ottoman Empire served as a canvas for a love story that transcended the conventions of time. The focus was more on everyday life and sorcery than on historical events.

Koutsomytis himself considered *Bloody Lands* as the most important of these series, because of his admiration for Dido Sotiriou. The script digressed from the novel to conform to prime time series conventions and contained many historical inaccuracies. But by conforming to the spirit of the period of *détente*, it transmitted the message that Greeks and Turks could live peacefully if the Great Powers didn’t interfere in the affairs of the Middle East. Although the nationalist strategies of Greek and Ottoman-Turkish elites are presented, they are downplayed with the aim of underlining the idea of friendship between common people. In a way, the series presents the events at the beginning of the twentieth century as an example for future generations, and the final scene suggests the necessity of mutual forgiveness.

Watching these series with the hindsight of the Greek economic crisis, the increasingly authoritarian tendencies after the failed 2016 coup in Turkey, and the bilateral problems between the countries allows us to reflect on the impact of this period of *détente* on mutual perceptions. Negative stereotypes persist and are used by nationalist circles in periods of crisis. But the multiplication of social contacts and the airing of Turkish series on Greek television led to a humanization of the Other. In both countries, the left has long promoted the idea that it is politicians who create the enmity between the two neighboring peoples. But during the last 15 years, even moderate conservatives have realized that Greeks and Turks share common cultural elements, and they have at times acknowledged that Greeks were not only victims. We cannot be certain to what extent this rapprochement can withstand a major Greco-Turkish crisis. But it proves that popular culture may contribute to shaping public attitudes and modify long-standing stereotypes.

## Notes

- 1 See *Niobe’s Children* 2004, episode 1 (<https://youtu.be/o5Pg8hBCPIw>, last accessed 21 August 2018).
- 2 See *Niobe’s Children* 2004, episode 37 (<https://youtu.be/Ql3tOb3cZfk>; accessed 21 August 2018).
- 3 I thank Sophia Lalopoulou for her insightful comments on the relationship among these three characters.

- 4 See *Niobe's Children* 2004, episode 37 (<https://youtu.be/kecynIYx8No>; accessed 21 August 21).
- 5 Two Turkish women who helped one of the heroes escape from captivity decide to settle in Greece and get baptized, recognizing the new prosperity due to Anatolian Greeks and the superiority of progress represented by Christians.
- 6 See *Bloody Lands* 2008, episode 1 (<https://youtu.be/OyWt2b6KRBo>; accessed 21 August 21).
- 7 See *Bloody Lands* 2008, episode 21 (<https://youtu.be/uCrBEJjUxTk>; accessed 21 August 21).
- 8 See *Bloody Lands* 2008, episode 21 (<https://youtu.be/rhpAIBkASyA>; accessed 21 August 21).

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## 9 The postcolonial condition, the decolonial option, and the post-socialist intervention

*Madina Tlostanova*

The starting point of my reflections on postcolonialism and its old and new discontents is the idea that postcoloniality should be regarded as a *condition*, a certain human existential situation which we have often no power of choosing. While decoloniality is an *option*, consciously chosen as a political, ethical, and epistemic positionality and an entry point into agency. The postcolonial condition is more of an objective given, a geopolitical and geo-historical situation of many people coming from former colonies. The decolonial stance is one step further, as it involves a conscious choice of how to interpret reality and how to act upon it. It starts from a specific postcolonial situation, which can fall into the traditional sphere of interests limited to the British and French colonies, focus on a more typically decolonial Central and South American configuration, or even go beyond both locales and venture into the unconventional imperial-colonial histories of Central and Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Sultanate, or Russia. A mere description of a postcolonial predicament or an analysis of its present outcomes in a concrete locale, then, must lead to the next step of developing an active and conscious ethical, political, and epistemic position whose goal is to decolonize thinking, being, perception, gender, and memory. So it is not enough to call a scholar postcolonial. It is crucial to take into account from the start not only our given objective positions but also who and what we chose to be in our profession and in our life. This understanding of the postcolonial and decolonial realms is rather unorthodox as, instead of stating for the umpteenth time the rather obvious differences in their origination and their links to various types of colonialism in India and Africa and in the Americas, I try to divorce them from their respective genealogies of knowledge and see how relevant these theories are when tested in quite different geopolitical regions such as Eurasia or Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The distinction between the *condition* and the *option* sheds some light on the main postcolonial flaw in the eyes of decolonial thinkers. It cannot be fixed with a mere addition of the new voices and geopolitical experiences (such as the post-Soviet, the post-Ottoman, or the post-Austrian-Hungarian) to the postcolonial choir. The postcolonial and the decolonial discourses refer not only to different locales but also to different modes of thinking and

being in the world, although they frequently overlap with each other: The decolonial thinkers are quite often postcolonial people and the postcolonial scholars in their majority share the decolonial agenda. Still, there are spaces and conceptual tools within each of these discourses that remain opaque for the other, and areas which demonstrate their limitations when applied to a different local history such as the post-socialist postcolonial regions and experiences.

What is needed is a radical rethinking and clarification of theoretical and methodological grounds on which the imperial and colonial classifications are made, to problematize the predominantly descriptive and formal approach of the postcolonial studies, in the sense of assessing phenomena of completely different orders based on their formal affinity, such as being empires or colonies, yet often remaining blind to correlational structural and power asymmetries. Along with the Western liberal principle of inclusion (of the old and new others), which has repeatedly demonstrated its paternalistic inadequacy, or maybe instead of it, a different principle should be formulated. It should be based on a revision of the very architecture of power, knowledge, being, gender, and perception. It is necessary not to build into the existing system by merely expanding it with new elements, as postcolonial studies has mostly been doing, but rather to problematize this system as such and offer other options as the decolonial thought has attempted to do in the last two decades.

### **Global coloniality and the postcolonial condition**

The decolonial thought offers a number of categories and ideas which could take the imperial-colonial complex in its diachronous and synchronous dimensions out of its postcolonial impasse. This refers particularly to the concept of the *global coloniality* (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009), which is not the same as colonialism or postcolonialism. Colonialism is a historical phenomenon, while coloniality (Quijano 2000, Maldonado-Torres 2007) is its outcome in which we all reside. Decolonial option does not accentuate the historical description of (neo)colonialist strategies but rather the long-lasting ontological, epistemic, and axiological traces left after any colonialism seems to be a matter of the past. The global coloniality (of power, of being, of perception, of gender, of knowledge, of memory) is always manifested in particular local forms and conditions, remaining, at the same time, a connecting thread for the understanding of dissociated manifestations of modernity.

Coloniality is an overall design or optics determining relations between the world, the things, and the humans. Its control is realized through a naturalized objectifying principle of perception and interpretation of the world, of other human and nonhuman beings, of manmade objects, and of knowledge. The main tools of modernity/coloniality in both Western liberal and Socialist versions are vectorial time and progressivist teleology; the absurdly

rationalized management of knowledge and subjectivity; the sanctification of technological development; the cult of the future and the dismissal of the negatively marked tradition, particularly if this is a spatially alien past, with regular lapses into exoticism and antiquarianism.

The concept of coloniality allows drawing the Ottoman Sultanate and the Russian Czarist and Soviet empires into the modern/colonial matrix, while at the same time provincializing and humbling the Anglophone post-colonial studies through downsizing them to their specific geopolitical and corpopolitical experience. Significantly, the decolonial thought is not doing this in order to occupy itself a central place as a champion of the new universalist Truth but only to draw the attention to the optional nature of any theoretical discourse.

### **Revisiting the logic of coloniality and the limits of postcoloniality**

Ten years ago, together with Walter Dignolo we co-authored a book chapter on the logic of coloniality and the limits of postcoloniality (Dignolo and Tlostanova 2007), where we tried to explain that the postcolonial discontent stems from its too close (and not seen as a problem) link with modernity as a set of particular epistemic assumptions. In decolonial view, this leads to the ultimate failure of postcolonial critique attempting to use the methodological tools of the master in order to dismantle his house, to paraphrase Audre Lorde (Lorde 1984, 112). Since it is indeed impossible, the postcolonial theory stops at the level of changing the content but not the terms of the discussion.

The delocalized universalism of postcolonial theory in launching terms that stem from particular local histories but are then subsequently presented as applicable to any context is discordant with decolonial pluriversality (Dignolo 2013)—a coexistence and correlation of many interacting and intersecting non-abstract universals grounded in the geopolitics and corpopolitics of knowledge, being, gender, and perception, reinstating the experiential nature of knowledge and the origin of any theory in the human life-world. Pluriversal critique targets not the concrete constellations of race, gender, and class but rather the aberration of the universal as such. And this goal is usually beyond the interests of postcolonial scholars.

What is at stake here is the degree of postcolonial and decolonial involvement in de-automatizing of and delinking from the Western epistemic premises, naturalized cognitive operations, methodological clichés and disciplinary divisions, and consequently, attempts to build a different conceptual apparatus to launch or set free an alternative world perception. The postcolonial critique of the (neo)colonialist Western tactics in the past and in the present is usually framed in the very terms of the Western post-structuralist, neo-Marxist, post-Lacanian or affect theories, or at least with some curtesy to the West as an uncontested producer of

disembodied universal knowledge. This leads to a reproduction of monotopical hermeneutics (Mignolo 1995, 13), with its privilege of controlling knowledge and meaning from the position of sameness and through inventing its otherness. Hence the postcolonial discourse still interprets the (post)colonial other for the same, in a language that the same is able to understand and share.

In decolonial terms, this syndrome is called the “hubris of the zero point,” which, according to S. Castro-Gómez, is a specific Eurocentric positionality of the sensing and thinking subject, occupying a delocalized and disembodied vantage point which eliminates any other possible ways to produce, transmit, and represent knowledge, allowing for a world view to be built on a rigid essentialist progressivist model:

The co-existence of diverse ways of producing and transmitting knowledge is eliminated because now all forms of human knowledge are ordered on an epistemological scale from the traditional to the modern, from barbarism to civilization, from the community to the individual, from the orient to occident. [...] By way of this strategy, scientific thought positions itself as the only valid form of producing knowledge, and Europe acquires an epistemological hegemony over all other cultures of the world.

(Castro-Gómez 2007, 433)

As a result, the Western monopoly on knowledge production and distribution and the disciplinary matrix of the modern/colonial knowledge remain intact even if postcolonial theorists offer considerable reinterpretations of the initial Western critical concepts and theories. An interesting example is the postcolonial theory of affect as envisioned by Sara Ahmed, who offers a radical and powerful critique of Eurocentrism, racism, heterosexism, sexism, yet always formulates it within the accepted terms of the affect theory with its essentially Western instruments and assumptions (Ahmed 2014). This postcolonial strategy facilitates a dialogue with the mainstream Western theories by remaining within the same hermeneutical horizon and hence brings an easier and more successful institutionalization, yet at times may inadvertently reproduce coloniality of knowledge.

Decolonial option performs a different epistemic operation. It does not start with Lacan or Butler, slightly modifying their theories to make them fit the analysis of the post/neocolonial reality, but rather focuses from the start on the genealogy of decolonial thinkers and their epistemic tools (Marcos 2006, Kusch 2010, Adorno 2000). Then, instead of postcolonial version of affect emerges a decolonial geopolitics and corpopolitics of knowledge, being, and perception (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012) and a decolonial aesthesis (Mignolo 2011, Tlostanova 2017) that focus on who produces knowledge, from where, and why, and never starts with applying the established theories to some new postcolonial material.

## **The postcolonial disciplinarity and the decolonial antidote**

Even in their most critical versions, postcolonial studies remain within the established disciplinary mode in which a study presupposes a firm subject/object division. Their successful and quick institutionalization has required a sacrifice of choosing the side of the studying subject, not the studied object. The institutional disciplinary frame coded by the word “studies” does not presuppose by definition, putting theory and life-world on the same axis and practicing decolonization in our everyday writing, thinking, and activism. This does not mean that postcolonial theorists neglect the corpopolitics and the geopolitics of knowledge and perception, or that they do not take radically decolonizing positions as activists-cum-theorists. It just means that their discipline does not require or presuppose this kind of move on their part and it becomes a matter of a personal decolonial choice.

A successful institutionalization also means a necessity to defend one’s disciplinary territory and compete with other disciplines, which can be a stumbling point between the better and longer institutionalized postcolonial studies, and the decolonial option, which makes a point out of its refusal to institutionalize. Similarly to post-structuralism, postcolonial studies still deconstruct modernity from within, whereas the decolonial option is from the start speaking from Dusselian exteriority as an outside created from the inside (Dussel 1993) and often from a position of an absolute other of modernity, or the Fanonian “wretched of the earth” (Fanon 1963).

Decolonial option does not offer a self-sufficient single truth proclamation (being an option among other options), and it does not describe phenomena from a detached and objectified vantage point. By contrast, any “studies” do not have a choice but to be defined by contrast with other disciplines and promote their own universal truth. Institutionalization leads to disciplinary decadence as a proliferation of disciplines and their losing links with reality (deontologization), in Lewis Gordon’s formulation (Gordon 2006), and a compliance with the coloniality of knowledge in trying to secure a more stable position for one’s scholarly group within the existing epistemic matrix of modernity/coloniality.

## **The post-Soviet experience disrupting and complicating the postcolonial theory**

As a trained Americanist, back in the 1990s I worked on a book on the US multiculturalism which introduced me to the postcolonial theory, non-Western feminism, critical race theory, and other discourses that provided a necessary language for the representation of my then indistinct anticolonial sensibilities. My interest was both theoretical and personal, as I am a post-colonial racialized other in the Russian/Soviet/post-Soviet empire. Reading postcolonial books, I recognized many similar complexes and deadlocks but



also creative possibilities with which me and other ethnically non-Russian post-colonial Russian citizens were struggling at the time.

However, our experience has always remained somewhat opaque and untranslatable into the postcolonial language. For instance, the Soviet empire represented itself as already a postcolonial and liberating federation in relation to the non-Russians who were invariably pictured by the Soviet historiography as previously suffering in the “prison for the peoples”—the Czarist empire. One of the favorite rhetorical devices of the Soviet propaganda was to contrast itself with Czarist Russia, carefully hiding the evidence of their close connection and continuity (Sahni 1997). On the surface, the USSR was promoting theatrical multiculturalism and other forms of affirmative action and advocated creolization instead of the racial/ethnic segregation (which was an important argument in its juxtaposition with the demonized West). Needless to say that most of it was a cardboard mockup, hiding racism, Orientalism, progressivism, structural inequality, and other familiar modern/colonial vices, but also its own specific and often contradictory features. Among them, the most prominent one is Russia’s drastically different attitude to different colonies in accordance with the degree of their closeness to Europe, which is connected with the inferiority complex of Russia itself as a second-rate, forever-catching-up empire of modernity.

The latter is important as it allows to formulate a crucial concept of the imperial difference parallel to the colonial differences better investigated in decolonial thought (Boatca 2010, Tlostanova 2014). Starting from the emergence of the world system, a global imperial hierarchy came to being. Within it, several imperial leagues were formed and transformed in the course of time. In the post-Enlightenment modernity, several formerly powerful empires were pushed to the position of the South of Europe and hence to internal imperial difference. The Ottoman sultanate and Russia became the external imperial difference, as they were rooted in different (from the core European) religions, languages, economic models, and ethnic-racial classifications. Both internal and external imperial others were never allowed to become equal to Great Britain, France, or the US today. These markers continue to affect the global geopolitical relations, classifying people very much according to the original modern/colonial human taxonomy.

The second-rate empire of Russia is reduced in its rank from the semi-periphery to an ultimately peripheral status today. It follows the rule of regressive turning of imperial difference into colonial one. A second-rate empire, in the imaginaries of the winning rivals, is regarded as a colony, soon starts to realize this status, and react in aggressive and negativist ways both in relation to its stronger imperial rivals and the weaker colonial others. Imperial difference in itself is an evidence of the agonistic and rigidly hierarchical nature of modernity/coloniality. At its core, there is an implied and delocalized reference point which was originally in the heart of Europe and today is shifted to the US. The rest of the people are taxonomized along

the human scale of modernity in accordance with their proximity to this vantage point. Some are assigned a status of the forever-catching-up agents or even voluntarily define it as their goal. Others are placed into the absolute otherness and withdrawn from history and modernity.

The postcolonial theory does not offer any major category comparable to imperial difference since it traditionally focused on the British and French empires as the winners of the second modernity, but it is generally stronger in nuances due to the fact that it grew out of literary criticism, historically meticulous analysis of the concrete case studies, deconstructivism, and the post-Lacanian psychoanalysis (Spivak 1999, Bhabha 2004). Therefore, it is often advisable to work with decolonial concepts on a more general level (including the categories of the internal and external imperial differences, the geopolitics and corpopolitics of knowledge and of being, voluntary epistemic and affective self-colonization), and with postcolonial tools (canonical counter-discourse, mimicry)—on applied and descriptive levels. Both can fill each other's gaps and omissions.

Particularly complex, fruitful, and also falling out of the standard postcolonial model is the intersection of the postcolonial and post-Soviet experiences, as the Soviet modernity had its own coloniality as a darker space for the non-Russian territories and people. Many of these groups are post-socialist and postcolonial others at once who will always be excluded from the European/Western/Northern sameness into exteriority, yet due to a colonial-imperial configuration will never be able to belong to any locality—native or acquired. Such groups are often products of a specific Soviet creolization detached from any mono-ethnic cultural belongings, born and brought up in the Russian (imperial) linguistic continuum and within the late Soviet intelligentsia culture oriented towards the West. The imperial sameness inside the USSR and Russia has continued to exoticize and demonize them as a colonial other on many levels. Yet the binary opposition of ethnic culture fallen out of time and the modern and progressive dimension which could be only Russian/Soviet or Western/global does not hold anymore.

The postcolonial, post-Soviet others may easily turn to be not only notorious singers of their native land—according to the old Soviet Orientalist model—but also decolonial critics, cunningly subverting both local antiquarian and global mainstream models, mocking the contemporary versions of docile Ariels as opposed to rebellious Calibans. There are more and more people who refuse to be assimilated Ariels or much less archaic singers of their native land. Both of these extremes dangerously seal one into a narrow ethnic identity, which many post-Soviet, postcolonial people reject due to the multiplicity of their ethnic roots, the Soviet educational Russification, and the impossibility to look for these roots in the family or social environment. The postcolonial, post-Soviet other survives without the Russian/Soviet mediation of modernity, reaches directly for the Western/global sources, or turns to various de-Westernizing (Mignolo 2012) models and, in some cases, to the Global South today—in quest of decolonial discourses

that are missing in the rhetoric of the catching-up ex-empire. Such a complex positionality certainly falls out of the postcolonial dichotomous division into the colonizers and the colonized.

The failed Soviet modernity/coloniality and its aftermath could not be sufficiently interpreted through the traditional postcolonial lens, which is too often marked by the typically modern/colonial delocalized universalism. The complexity of the post-socialist-postcolonial intersection needs its own discourse and its own critical optics overlapping but not coinciding with either postcolonial high theory or more applied postcolonial studies. Importantly, this discourse would have to take into account the wider than colonialism dependence and postdependence relations in modernity, stemming from the critical analysis of modernity as such not as an objective reality but, first of all, as a set of epistemic conditions and patterns created to justify and maintain its order.

Post-socialist feminist trajectories are particularly sensitive to the geopolitics of knowledge in the core of neocolonization of the post-socialist reality and subalternization and “housewifization” of its women, in Liliana Burcar’s terms (Burcar 2012, 108), which is linked to the urge to make women once again, or rather, back into a naturalized super-exploited class. This “back into” is significant, as it allows a glimpse into a difference between postcolonialism and post-socialism. It stems from the failure of the Soviet modernity—a losing cousin of the Western capitalist liberal one. Consequently, the willing and reluctant practitioners of this failed modernity were instructed on how to become fully modern (in the only remaining neoliberal way), and therefore, fully human. In a sense, it was a recolonization of a society that was previously colonized by a different modernity/coloniality yet made to believe that it was a liberating and decolonizing power.

According to Boris Groys, “the post-Communist subject travels his route not from the past to the future, but from the future to the past; from the end of history [...] back to historical time. Post-Communist life is life lived backward, a movement against the flow of time” (Groys 2008, 154–155). When the socialist modernity failed, we were told to go back to the usual established course, speed, and most importantly, direction of history, and to the camouflaged but recognizable mild progressivism as opposed to a radical Soviet one. Such nuances and paradoxes are unimaginable in postcolonial narratives. And no matter how hard the academics have been trying to establish dialogues and alliances between the postcolonial and the post-socialist discourses, so far our success was modest. Reflecting on the reasons for this lacking dialogue may help us better understand the evolution of the postcolonial discourse vis-à-vis other important shifts in the global epistemic architecture.

The schematic juxtaposition of postcolonial and post-socialist trajectories shows that there are many intersections between the two, but they take place at different moments and are triggered by different reasons, leading nevertheless to similar results and even possible coalitions because ultimately, they manifest different reactions to the same phenomenon of coloniality.

The development of postcolonial and post-socialist discourses reminds us of a musical counterpoint; in many ways, the two discourses coincided, but it happened at different historical moments and in different political contexts, which prevented them from hearing each other. The early postcolonial discourses were largely leftist, anti-capitalist, and still progressivist without questioning the universalized Western norms of education, human rights, democracy, and women's emancipation. Post-socialist trajectory, on the contrary, was marked by an almost emotional rejection of everything socialist and a fascination with Western knowledge, at a time when postcolonial scholars still largely rehearsed the leftist anti-capitalist discourses and at least indirectly opted for socialism. Later, a number of post-socialist activists and scholars started reinterpreting the socialist legacy in a less negative way, criticizing the Western infiltration of the post-socialist academia, NGOs, and other bodies of knowledge production. It happened at the point when postcolonial thinkers developed their anti-Western modernity discourses, and objectively the two positions intersected, although the traditions they had in mind were completely different and they did not hear each other then just like they still do not hear each other today.

One more concept which can serve as a medium connecting various un-freedom conditions and ways of their conceptualizing, going beyond the postcolonialist agenda, is the concept of "post-dependence" (Nycz 2014) if we rethink its original Central European meaning formulated at the intersection of the postcolonial, secondary Eurocentric, post-imperial, post-socialist, and other complexes. "Post-dependence" can be also a pluriversal term applicable to many situations such as the post-apartheid, post-dictatorship, or post-Fordism, as it does not focus exclusively on ideology and class (as in the case of post-socialism), or on race, colonialism, and Eurocentrism (as in the case of postcolonial discourse). The commonality of the experience of traumatic dependence should not be formulated exclusively from the Western/modern position anymore. Yet the imperial-colonial complex cannot act as the universal common denominator either. The post-dependence condition stems from the nature of modernity, yet it is not always unproblematically connected with its darker colonial side. It can be also a trauma of the imperial difference, as in the Russian case, or of a secondary European positionality of Eastern Europeans who have been long multiply dependent on various empires and today are slowly re-entering Europe, struggling to accept the affinities of their experience with the Global South. It is crucial not to withdraw into any local standpoint experience of oppression but to create conditions for an alter-global vision and coalitions against all modern/colonial forms of dependence instead.

### **Toward the deep coalitions?**

In today's situation of the global conservative and essentialist backlash and the alarming revival of nationalist and neoimperial discourses, it is high time

we forgot about discrepancies between the postcolonial studies and decolonial option and look at possible intersections and eventual coalitions which could help us oppose something positive to the global defuturing tendencies. Perhaps the division into the postcolonial and decolonial approaches would be even eventually softened.

The opposition of colonialism versus coloniality can become a source of future dialogues, as we are all now in the situation of the global coloniality, which affects not only the colonized and the subaltern but also, increasingly, the people in the Global North and in the semi-periphery, who used to think that colonialism was not their problem and now discover that their lives are becoming increasingly dispensable within the architecture of the global coloniality. This is a unifying drive for postcolonial and decolonial theorists and activists to build alter-global alliances and intersectional coalitions for the future struggles for a different world marked by a genuine interest in a far-away other and, eventually, a world where no one would be an other anymore, where there will be other economic options than neoliberal global capitalism, other ways of thinking than Western, and other ways of communicating with nature than exploitation.

Initial differences between the postcolonial and decolonial discourses had to do with different types of colonialism in the Americas and in Asia and Africa. These configurations led to accents on indigeneity in decolonial case and on subalternity, migrations, and creolization in postcolonial case. However, today the original links between the metropolis and its colonies are no longer so obvious and visible in the directions of migration waves. So it is wrong to claim that postcolonial studies focus on migrations whereas decolonial thought deals with indigenous populations of the settler colonies who do not migrate. Equally the markings of regional and historical affiliations of the postcolonial and decolonial scholars are not relevant, and researchers who are postcolonial in their origination and decolonial in their views can be found in many different regions of the world—Southeast Asia, the post-Soviet space, or Eastern Europe (Kalnačs 2016).

This is particularly true in the case of decolonial and postcolonial feminists. We exist in a complex intersectionality not only with mainstream Western feminism but also within our own respective postcolonial and decolonial groups. Hence an important internal critique of the dogmatic heteronormative male version of decolonial option in María Lugones's works (Lugones 2008), hence the problematizing and nuancing of various postcolonial assumptions in the works of women of color feminists (Minh-ha 1986, Barlas 2002, Oyěwùmí 1997). At the same time, both approaches face the problem of choosing the tactical allies in our struggles, and often it is a hard choice between feminist and postcolonial or decolonial agendas. Generally, in both discourses, it is the feminist group which comes up with the most promising, less dogmatic, and dialogically open ideas, allowing for freer collaborations with other critical discourses of modernity and looking for alliances instead of concentrating on differences and opacities.

Can there be a dialogue between the postcolonial studies and the decolonial option as the two parallel versions of the imperial-colonial critical discourses? Such a dialogue could bring rethinking into the agenda of human subjectivity and political agency, knowledge production, gender, ethics, and perception. This dialogue is needed on many levels—from the tactical importance of re-building coalitions along the South-South and South-semi-periphery axes for a more successful struggle against neocolonialism, racism, Eurocentrism, sexism, heterosexism, and other xenophobic manifestations of modernity, to efforts to multi-spatially understand the intersecting concepts in both discourses signifying similar things but having different genealogies. Among them, the postcolonial concept of the “subaltern,” whose origin can be traced from A. Gramsci to G. Spivak, and partly synonymic decolonial concept of the “wretched of the Earth,” which echoes the lyrics of *The Internationale* but is used in decolonial option clearly in its Fanonian sense.

We all have to survive in the Western-oriented academy, in the increasingly neoliberal university where institutionalization remains the only way of legitimation. Yet such moves do not come without certain losses and among them a political collaboration with the neoliberal Global North and a necessity to speak its language in order to remain legitimate and be considered safe. A decolonial refusal to institutionalize then is crucial as a realization of the principle of living and acting in accordance with the ideals we defend. And if our aim is to decolonize knowledge and being, then it is not recommendable to turn decolonial option into a “studies,” as it would only add to ubiquitous disciplinary decadence.

Yet this radical refusal to institutionalize obviously forecloses a number of administrative, financial, and other possibilities and may lead to isolation and a lack of legitimation of decolonial scholars. As a minority trickster who has spent many years inside a highly repressive academic system, I claim that it is almost always possible to infiltrate, undermine, and destabilize such systems from within. Having learned like a Caliban to speak the colonizer’s language, the trickster uses this power not to curse but rather to overcome the colonizer intellectually, existentially, and affectively, opening new vistas for both the docile Ariels complying with theatrical multiculturalist rules and the indignant Calibans, striving to forcefully come back to the reservation of irrecoverable past. In the present conditions, the best strategy for critical imperial-colonial discourses is a negotiation, a cunning sneaking of the radical emancipating ideas into the institutionalized structures. Such a skillful balancing is possible only when we have access to more opportunities. In this respect, decolonial option has to learn from postcolonial studies.

We are at the stage when postcolonial and decolonial discourses are more in need of a dialogue than further differentiation and mutual exclusion, of effective strategies for shaping the open and flexible “deep coalitions” (Lugones 2010) of resistance which are always in the making. One of the mechanisms for the organization of this opposition is critical border thinking shared by

both postcolonial and decolonial discourses and first formulated in the works of Chicana predecessors of decolonial feminism (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, Anzaldúa 1999). Critical border thinking as a product of a complex and dynamic interaction with modernity from the position of exteriority, of living in hostile environments yet reinstating one's epistemic rights, leads to an itinerant, forever open and multiple positionality, marked by transformationism, shifting identifications, and a rejection of either/or binarity, turning instead to a non-exclusive duality which is to be found in contemporary models of conjunctive logic, in many indigenous epistemologies of the Global South, and in diasporic trickster identifications overcoming the previous Ariel-Caliban dichotomy in ironic forms of activism. It is necessary to advance an open critical basis, taking into account the existing parallels between various echoing concepts and epistemic grounds of postcolonial and decolonial discourses, and find a trans-disciplinary language for expressing oppositional being, thinking, and agency across transcultural and trans-epistemic pluriversal spaces.

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**Part III**

**Towards a multidirectional  
approach to the postcolonial**



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## 10 Unthinking postcolonialism

### On the necessity for a reset instead of a step forward

*Monika Albrecht*

Not too long ago, in a discussion with colleagues at my home university, I outlined a project that would bring together a range of fields similar to those represented in this volume. One of the first questions I was asked about this project was whether “former colonized people” were amongst the scholars involved. This was another manifestation of the “normalization of the postcolonial perspective” (Göttsche 2012, 185), a normalization that reflexively generates, amongst other things, time and again exactly this kind of question. However, there was no simple “yes” or “no” answer in this case—the case of a project that brought together scholars from Western, East-Central, and South-Eastern Europe. Even though I would not necessarily go so far as to insist on the term “former colonized people” or “colonialism” for that matter, the answer could have been “yes.” Amongst the scholars involved were several whose ancestors have been affected by *other* types of imperial rule than that of the Western colonial and imperial powers.

With this introductory anecdote, I have already addressed some of the main issues this chapter will discuss: First, I will call concepts and assumptions about postcolonialism and post-imperialism, as developed in the field of postcolonial studies, into question, and second, I will outline reflections and ideas for a fresh start. In my view, this fresh start must go beyond a rethinking or revising of the foundations of postcolonial thought. At the same time, I will occasionally draw attention to the apparent normality of a “postcolonial view” (Lützel 1995), as touched upon above. A few words in advance, since critique of postcolonial premises is often misunderstood or even perceived to be a retrograde defense of colonialism: My critique aims at a reductive discursive framework. This chapter is, of course, *not* meant as an attempt to relativize any kind of colonial wrongdoings. Focusing on other areas and carving out alternative concepts does not mean that colonial and neocolonial discourses of power, as prioritized by mainstream postcolonial scholarship,<sup>1</sup> do not exist. There is no possible justification for colonial violence or exploitation, of either the colonial subject or the natural or cultural resources of colonized peoples. One of the merits of postcolonial scholarship is that it has emphatically drawn attention to the tremendous injustice of colonial endeavors. In this respect, the most welcome aspect of

the current normalization of the postcolonial perspective includes—simply put—the fact that unlike 60 or 70 years ago, insight into these injustices and into the monstrosity of colonialism is being widely discussed. Discussions of colonial atrocities have not only reached academic discourse but also a wider public. As an article in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* put it ten years ago, “who would nowadays, in all seriousness, cast the crimes of colonialism into doubt?” (Freitag 2007). Indeed, the “normalization of the postcolonial perspective, in a sense, necessitates a critical glance at colonial domination” (Göttsche 2012, 185). Having said this, in order to illustrate why I will nonetheless highlight the problematic sides of postcolonial thought, I would like to use an argument developed in a quite different context. The Russian anarchist and philosopher Pjotr Kropotkin was faced with a set of objections which are, in a sense, similar to those I may face.

In the late nineteenth century, Kropotkin published his theory of “mutual aid as a factor of evolution” as an alternative concept to Darwin and to what political ideology made out of Darwin’s biological theories. Opposing the normalization of a social Darwinist view amongst his contemporaries, Kropotkin pointed out in the introduction of his study:

It may be objected to this book that both animals and men are represented in it under too favourable an aspect; that their sociable qualities are insisted upon, while their anti-social and self-asserting instincts are hardly touched upon. This was, however, unavoidable.

(Kropotkin 1902)

From today’s perspective, his following explanation reads like a Foucauldian insight *avant la lettre*. Kropotkin’s theory brings to mind Foucault’s idea that “the discourse” not only “makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also *limits* the *other* ways in which the topic can be constructed” (Hall 1992, 201; *my emphasis*). Or, as Kropotkin himself put it:

We have heard so much lately of the ‘harsh, pitiless struggle for life,’ which was said to be carried on by every animal against all other animals, every ‘savage’ against all other ‘savages,’ and every civilized man against all his co-citizens—and these assertions have so much become an article of faith—that it was necessary, first of all, to oppose to them a wide series of facts showing animal and human life under a quite different aspect.

(Kropotkin 1902)

Kropotkin by no means denies that there was ample evidence for the theory of “survival of the fittest,” “the (financially) fittest,” or for that matter, the “might is right”—but he was only too aware of the power of discourse. He therefore realized the importance of a, in Judith Butler’s terms, “reiterative and citational practice” (Butler 1993, 2). A practice necessary to create an

alternative discourse and thereby present an argument in “oppose to” what has already become “an article of faith” in an existing discourse.

Returning to the thesis of this chapter, to the “articles of faith” in postcolonial studies that I consider to be problematic, I will begin to analyze the contradictions within the field. Let me start to unravel these “articles of faith” by pointing to a central contradiction which is, strangely enough, rarely discussed. On the one hand, the mainstream postcolonial view conceives postcolonialism to be a global phenomenon. On the other hand, as documented extensively in the introduction to this volume, the majority of postcolonial approaches are in time and space confined to a part of the globe and its history. Indeed, as a glance at the *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* of 2013 illustrates, this idea is actually still prevalent in the field of mainstream postcolonial research (Huggan 2013). The same goes for an already established reference in postcolonial studies. The collection of *Key Concepts* implies that postcolonialism mostly concerns Western Europe and its former colonies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013). In exclusion of any other empire, mainstream postcolonial studies has managed to *establish and normalize* colonialism as a mere Western European issue: and there are to this date hardly any constructive debates about the possibility of going beyond this marked-out area. This persistent self-confinement to “the history and legacy of Western colonialism” (Young 2016, 5) entails, in my view, severe errors in reasoning. This is one of the reasons why I would argue that the current normalization of the postcolonial view has two sides, a most welcome one and one that is deeply problematic.

The focus on the temporal and spatial dimension of Western colonialism, with its tremendous power imbalance, on the racial, political, and social hierarchies imposed by European colonizers on non-European people, may have made it indeed appear natural to develop an overall *unidirectional* discursive framework of any colonial issue. This very framework, however, seems to turn certain phenomena which have been observed in this context erroneously likewise into merely *unidirectional* phenomena. Take, as an obvious example, the so-called “logic of coloniality,” which is considered by many to be a mere Western logic or, as some would have it, an Enlightenment logic. Many implications and consequences of this very construct are nowadays “articles of faith” and part of the apparent normality of a “postcolonial view.” If we pick out the field of difference and identity as developed in mainstream postcolonial studies, one could say without undue generalization that one of the most important implications of this specific “logic of coloniality” is that it translates—in the colonial as well as in our contemporary neocolonial context—“differences into values” (Mignolo 2011, xxvii and *passim*). Again, this is not to question the dreadful impact that ideas of superiority and inferiority had on colonized people or the role these ideas played in justifying the economic exploitation of one group by another. However, on a conceptual level, it would make more sense to stop at the observation that the colonizing powers exercised the option of

turning differences into values in favor of their own group and to the detriment of colonized people. Instead of blending the normative-ideological and the conceptual, acting on the assumption of a Western “logic” that *creates* this phenomenon in the first place. After all, the observation that people translate differences into values can likewise be made on the other side of the colonial divide. Colonized people—and this is perfectly understandable as a response to devaluation by the colonial rulers—were likewise inclined to insist on their otherness and “cast these differences as synonyms of ‘cultural superiority’” (Narayan 1997, 402). In particular, with regard to India (Narayan 1997, 401f.), but also other areas colonized by Western powers such as Egypt or the Maghrib (Ahmed 1992),<sup>2</sup> some scholars argued that colonized people conversely increased the value of their own culture. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s well-known study, *Provincializing Europe*, is another rich source in this respect.<sup>3</sup> While these studies do not address the question how this *reverse* translating of differences into values could possibly fit into the relevant postcolonial “article of faith,” they provide invaluable source material for a widening of the mainstream postcolonial horizon.

A related *unidirectional* concept of mainstream postcolonial studies is certainly the idea and notion of “othering.” This idea of “othering” “was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its ‘others’” (Ashcroft et al. 2013, 188; cf. Spivak 1985, 252 and *passim*) for the processes of differentiation by which the presumed superior culture of the colonizer experiences a clear upward revaluation. The culture of the colonized is marked as inferior and uncivilized. The necessity to *unthink* this concept becomes immediately clear when applied to the just outlined *similar* but *reverse* phenomena, where colonized Indian people cast cultural differences as synonyms of their own cultural superiority: They are “othering” the colonizers. One could likewise cite cases of “reverse othering” from the East-Central European imperial and colonial contexts. In these cases, one could argue that, for instance, many Baltic people thought of themselves as culturally superior to their Soviet occupiers. Given the fact that the concept of “othering”—time and again repeated by scholars as well as journalists and other opinion-makers—by now seems to be naturalized and publicly accepted, it seems to be high time to reflect on the reductionism that this very concept constitutes.

Another example, from the *unidirectional* discursive framework of mainstream postcolonial studies, is Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. It seems to be no coincidence that a critique of the *unidirectionality* of postcolonial concepts first appeared in the context of a critique of Said. A few scholars from outside the fields of postcolonial thought discussed this *one-way concept* from various angles. It was, to my knowledge, Sheldon Pollock, a scholar of South Asian studies, who in an article of 1993 introduced the attribute *unidirectionality* to the debate along with suggestions for an alternative concept of *multidirectionality*. Pollock particularly directed attention towards the possibility “that ‘orientalist constructions’ in the service of colonial domination

may be only a specific historical instance of a larger, transhistorical, albeit locally inflected, interaction of knowledge and power” and suggested “to consider the possibility that the movement of orientalist knowledge may be multidirectional” (Pollock 1993, 76f). While Pollock underlined that “[w]idening the scope of orientalism to include discursively similar phenomena is not meant as an attempt to relativize and thereby detoxify European colonialism,” he strongly argues that it is “precisely by expanding our analysis that we may be able to isolate a certain morphology of domination that many such discourses share.” Pollock refers to discourses that tend to “naturaliz[e] cultural inequality” by “invoking higher knowledge,” discourses which create “the idea of race and concurrently legislat[e] racial exclusivity, assert linguistic hierarchy and claim superiority for the language of the masters,” and so forth (Pollock 1993, 78).

In 2000, the historian Katherine Fleming, a specialist in the modern history of Greece and the broader Mediterranean context, resumed the discussion of the idea of an intrinsic *multidirectionality* of Edward Said’s allegedly *unidirectional* concept. Fleming resumed this discussion in relation to the Balkans. Acknowledging the work of historians who focus on “the adoption of ‘orientalist’ rhetoric by both East and West,” Fleming states that, due to the way it sheds light on different variations of orientalist discourse, “Orientalism loses much of its *unidirectionality* (as a discourse imposed by the West on the East) and becomes instead embedded and internalized in East and West alike.” And, just like Pollock, she believes that by insisting on the *multidirectionality* of orientalist discourse one gets much closer to what she calls “the nature [...] of that discourse” (Fleming 2000, 1224). I would even add here that with a consequent broadening of the scope, the term and concept of “Orientalism” as such does not make much sense anymore. That goes, likewise, for other terms and concepts based on the *unidirectional* discursive framework of postcolonial studies. From this follows that there is a need not just to revise or rethink these postcolonial “articles of faith” but to *unthink* them and create new ones which mirror the *multidirectionality* of the phenomena in question. In this case and for the time being, one could provisionally describe the phenomenon just discussed as “a general principle of construction of cultural identity” (Polaschegg 2005, 38).

Many of the postcolonial “articles of faith” which I would consider problematic<sup>4</sup> seem to be indeed derivatives of the overall *unidirectionality* of postcolonial thought (in the outlined sense). An important objective in this regard should therefore be, in my view, the broadening of the postcolonial horizon, not only in cases of *reverse* “turning differences into values” and *reverse* “othering,” such as the examples just cited, but more general also. The objective would be a shift in terms of a “genuinely comparative and global discussion of colonialism and empire” (Berman 2011, 172) that would go beyond the time and scope usually being considered. I already touched upon the so-called successor states to the Soviet Union. It is obvious that the postcolonial model of a Western imposition on, or the exploitation of, a non-Western “other”



does not apply to this case. Many years of research on post-Soviet postcolonialism—widely ignored by the postcolonial mainstream—brought forth illuminating findings on the experience of people affected by *other* types of imperial rule than that of the Western colonial and imperial powers. Of interest for including of, say, the Baltics in the discursive framework of postcolonialism, are not least the reversals of the imperial or colonial situation, most notably the role reversal of “Europeans” vs. “Orientals.” According to postcolonial approaches, the customary colonial opposition is that of a civilized metropolis and a barbaric or primitive periphery. Many people in the Baltic countries, by contrast, considered themselves European and their Soviet occupiers “barbaric,” echoing the widespread stereotype of “Russian cultural inferiority” (Uffelmann 2013, 112).

While post-Soviet postcolonialism is already—if rather parallel to instead of part of postcolonial scholarship—a well-established and prolific field, other imperial powers such as the Ottoman Empire seem to be completely ignored in the postcolonial mainstream. This goes back as far as to the very beginnings of postcolonial scholarship, or more precisely, to Edward Said. Said casts the Ottoman Empire, at least for the time period he investigates, in the role of a mere victim of Western imperialism or colonialism (Albrecht 2019). What is more, there is evidence that there are mainstream postcolonial scholars who seem to consider its discussion even detrimental and strive to deliberately exclude it from the debate. In this spirit, an article in the *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, instead of closing the actually identified research gap of a missing discussion of the Ottoman Empire in postcolonialism, insists that “there are good reasons” for the omission of this and other Islamic empires (Sayyid 2013, 127; for a critique, cf. Albrecht 2019). However, this view certainly did not prevent a small but seemingly growing number of historians of the Ottoman Empire from discovering the unknown territory of postcolonial thought. On the contrary, as the historian Vangelis Kechriotis summarized in his 2013 article, “Postcolonial criticism encounters late Ottoman studies”: “Postcolonial criticism has inspired late Ottomanists in various ways” (Kechriotis 2013, 41).

The wide research field of Ottoman Studies seemingly underwent a number of changes over the decades. As the historian Norman Naimark summarized in 2002, for a long time there was (and to some degrees still may be) a certain tendency towards polarization, depending on the background of the respective scholar:

Historians of the Ottoman Empire tend to paint a rosy picture of the minority peoples within its borders. By contrast, historians of the subject peoples—Serbs or Bulgarians, Greeks or Armenians—tend to do the opposite, they emphasize the brutality of the Ottoman yoke and the inevitable victories of their respective national movements or, in the case of the Armenians, the inevitable tragedy that engulfed the nation.

(Naimark 2002, 18f.)

Since then, further changes in Ottoman historiography could be observed. In the latter camp in particular, there is a tendency in some areas to counter the earlier nationalistic view in turn with a somewhat euphemistic delineation of Ottoman rule. There are still traces of this euphemistic view to be found: A 2012 study of the *Muslim-Christian Coexistence and its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia*, for instance, received severe criticism in this regard as an “ideologically contaminated” book that brings to the fore almost exclusively the harmonious aspects of the everyday coexistence of these groups (Zelepsos 2014). At present, however, a more balanced approach seems to prevail, at least outside of Turkey’s official presentation of history (Reinkowski 2011; Seufert 2008, 21). The authors of an article on “Dilemmas of Ottoman Legacy” may capture this state when they write that: “It is tempting to view the Ottoman mosaic of ethnic and religious communities as an instance of ‘multiculturalism’ *avant le mot*.” Yet by the same token, they emphasize that great caution is needed here: “Just as the ‘Turkish yoke’ is a creation of a modernist and nationalist historical paradigm [...], ‘multiculturalism’ in the Ottoman Empire is also subject to the same fallacy of trying to narrate the past with today’s lexicon” (Yilmaz and Yosmaoglu 2008, 682f.).

As for the relation of Ottoman Studies to Postcolonial Studies, about the turn of the twenty-first century, a small group of nineteenth-century historians began to sound out the usefulness—or perhaps uselessness—of postcolonial thought for Ottoman Studies (Kechriotis 2013). They were surprised about the lack of interest in the Ottoman Empire in the field of mainstream postcolonialism. As Selim Deringil put it in 2003: “Although it covered a huge geography until its last days, and its study presents fruitful challenges to any student of colonialism and postcolonialism, the nineteenth-century Ottoman empire has been largely ignored by the literature covering these issues” (Deringil 2003, 313).<sup>5</sup> At present, some still refer to the “Ottoman Empire’s uncomfortable positionality in postcolonial studies” (Mikhail and Philliou 2012, 739) and tend to be cautious in their assessment of whether or not a postcolonial approach is of use. There seem to be, broadly speaking, two different approaches to this question. Some strive to theorize the late Ottoman Empire as an imperial power with colonial aspirations, such as Vangelis Kechriotis—who points out that “nineteenth-century historians [...] have reversed the argument and tend to include the Ottoman Empire not among the states that were subject to colonization but among the colonizers” (Kechriotis 2013). Selim Deringil, likewise, assumes “that sometime in the nineteenth century” the Ottomans, although quite different from the British or French, “adopted a colonial stance toward the peoples of the periphery of their empire” (Deringil 2003, 313). Other scholars question the Ottoman Empire’s comparability with Western powers, and disapprove of the various imaginative linguistic acquisitions from the history of colonialism—“the Ottoman civilizing mission” (Herzog and Motika 2000, 151), “the Ottoman man’s burden” (Makdisi 2002a, 782), or “Ottoman

orientalism” (Makdisi 2002a; Makdisi 2002b). These scholars insist that “the fundamental elements of modern colonialism” (Türesay 2013, xvi) are taken into account. Still under discussion is also the reverse approach to the Ottoman Empire as a victim of the Western powers’ drive for expansion; that is, the approach Edward Said introduced to the debate. From the perspective of German history, for example, it seems to be obvious that the Wilhelmine Empire strived for “German dominance in Ottoman space”—a kind of dominance that some would call “a colonial empire in all but name” (Krobb 2014, 10; see also MagShamhráin 2009, 146). Florian Krobb, in a recent article, points out that “Germany’s official policies towards Turkey” at that time “showed traits of informal imperialism” (Krobb 2014, 5). Krobb borrows a term coined by two historians of the British Empire, John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, in an influential 1953 article on economic history (Gallagher and Robinson 1953). The economic historian Şevket Pamuk, while he likewise discusses the concepts of “formal colony” and “informal empire,” underlines in this context “the inability of any European power to transform the Ottoman Empire into a formal colony or incorporate it into its informal empire” because “no single [European] power was able to exclude its competitors from the Ottoman Empire” (Pamuk 1988, 132f., 147, 132f.).

My own interest in and advocacy of incorporating the Ottoman Empire into the postcolonial debate stems from a culture studies background and does not include the ambition to solve unresolved questions in the field of historiography. While a culture studies approach likewise does not, in my view, permit any kind of ahistorical lines of argument, the kind of questions posed in this field are certainly different. Scholarship in the wide field of memory studies, for example, is not so concerned with whether or not the Ottoman Empire could be described as a colonizing power but rather with how it was and is perceived by various interest groups. In this respect, the legacy of centuries of Ottoman rule at the latest since the Fall of Constantinople 1453 in contemporary post-Ottoman countries is certainly highly interesting. The *Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, to cite the title of a study of the mid-1990s (Brown 1996), for example, was followed by a related publication in 2011 on the *Cultural Impact of Ottoman and Habsburg Rule in Southeast Europe* (Sindbaek and Hartmuth 2011). These are simultaneously studies that provide highly interesting material, material that could be exploited in the field of postcolonial studies.<sup>6</sup> One of the well-known key premises of memory studies is the assumption that we reconstruct the past from the perspective of the present and, according to our present-day needs—that memory is the “past made present,” so to speak (Terdiman 1993). Ever since this fundamental insight by Maurice Halbwachs in the early twentieth century, it has become almost a matter of common knowledge that memory is an issue of our contemporary concerns. While historians may insist that, for instance, “the ‘Turkish yoke’ is a creation of a modernist and nationalist historical paradigm”

(Yilmaz and Yosmaoglu 2008, 683), scholars in the fields of cultural memory studies are interested in the motives and the purpose of dealing with the past. These scholars are interested in topics such as the “political choice” of what is remembered, how it is remembered, and what is not remembered (Irvin-Erickson, La Pointe, and Hinton 2013, 2).

A culture studies approach to the Ottoman Empire from a postcolonial perspective—or to the Soviet Empire, for that matter—naturally includes a reconceptualizing and re-theorizing of “the postcolonial.” It should begin with the identification and redressing of the conceptual roadblocks of the *unidirectional* discursive framework in postcolonialism. Both research on the Ottoman Empire and on the Soviet Empire provide invaluable tools, and not just for the deconstruction of mainstream postcolonial premises. These tools may also help to generate a genuine *multidirectional* approach (in the sense outlined earlier on) that will meet the challenges of the many commonalities and diversities of imperial and colonial experiences and legacies. As a working assumption, the Ottoman Empire or the Soviet Empire may be understood—here I am following in parts the anthropologist Sarah Green—as political orders which used to organize the various ethnic and religious groups differently (or similarly), compared to other political orders, as political orders which would engender different (or similar) patterns of imperial experience (Green 2005, 147). What is highly interesting about the Ottoman and Soviet versions of imperialism for the discussion of postcolonial premises is the different basic constellations of rulers and ruled. Unlike in Western colonialism, it was, for instance, not European Christian colonizers against non-European, non-Christian colonized people. The majority of those “ruled” by the Ottomans “were of the same religion” as the rulers (Türesay 2013, x). What we are looking at in the Ottoman Empire’s European areas is predominantly “Christian subordination to Muslim rule” (Kechriotis 2015, 70). As Vangelis Kechriotis put it, what is necessary here is reflection on “the implications” of these *reverse* situations of imperial rule “for thinking about [...] domination” and about what he calls “the Ottoman version of colonialism” (Kechriotis 2015, 70). Several other *reverse* situations of imperial rule come to bear in this regard. To mention one more example: When Greece started its War of Independence in 1821 and several years later became, in Christine Philliou’s words, “the first independent successor-state to the Ottoman Empire” (Philliou 2008, 670), the Greek people, as Gregory Jusdanis put it, “sought freedom in, rather than from Europe” (Jusdanis 2011, 110).

What else may be of epistemological value in the envisioned broadening of the postcolonial horizon? In my view, Sheldon Pollock and Katherine Fleming show us the way with their suggestion of what Pollock calls a “morphology of domination” (Pollock 1993, 78) and Katherine Fleming describes as “the nature” of the “Orientalist discourse” (Fleming 2000, 1224). Although I am not necessarily in favor of these terms and descriptions as such, I think that they point to an area where, first, postcolonial questions extend far into

our present-day concerns—for instance to issues of multicultural societies—and, second, the need for a *multidirectional* approach to imperial or colonial pasts and a post-imperial or post-colonial present becomes most apparent. Certainly, the fact that a wide range of completely new case studies becomes conceivable in the first place points to a necessity for a fresh look at “the postcolonial.” Examples in the field of literary culture studies are certainly the numerous authors from successor-states to the Soviet and Ottoman Empires—for instance, the Baltics, the Middle East, or the Balkans—who have yet to be discovered from a wider postcolonial perspective. One of many obvious examples is the Greek author Níkos Kazantzákis, who grew up on the island of Crete—Ottoman-occupied Crete, to be precise (Albrecht 2019). A short comparative glance at Kazantzákis’ novel *Freedom or Death* of 1953 and Chinua Achebe’s seminal postcolonial novel *Things Fall Apart* of 1958 may, in conclusion, indicate the potential of new case studies and the kind of new question that can be posed in a wider postcolonial horizon. I am aware, though, that the epistemological value of literary texts is obvious to literary scholars but in need of explanation to anybody else. Two sentences in this respect seem to be advisable at this point. The advantage of literature as a source of knowledge about historical, political, and social realities and on how these realities are being experienced is that writers may ask for causes and effects different from those considered in academic and public discourse, and ideally provide alternate visions. Literary texts are ideally, as Jan Philipp Reemtsma puts it, what “in the field of sociology is likewise considered to be a legitimate means of insight: thought experiments” (Reemtsma 2007). In this sense, just like scholars in the humanities and social sciences, writers may also be capable of rethinking, exploring, and deconstructing ideologies or premises otherwise taken for granted. Therefore, they may be able to introduce new insights into the postcolonial debate. Chinua Achebe certainly did this with his writing; the potential of Níkos Kazantzákis in that respect has yet to be explored.

Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* is set in colonial Nigeria of the 1890s; Kazantzákis’ *Freedom or Death* on the island of Crete at about the same time, when Crete was still part of the Ottoman Empire. A culture studies question would not be whether Nigeria or Crete could be designated as colonies—Nigeria certainly was, Crete maybe or maybe not. Moreover, Crete can certainly not stand for the entire Ottoman Empire. Rather, as historian Pinar Şenişik put it, what distinguished Crete “from the other provinces of the Ottoman Empire” was resistance on a very large scale and “the high frequency of its revolts” (Şenişik 2011, 232). Ottoman rule in other parts such as Anatolia or the Balkans brought out different forms of resistance or collaboration. However, a culture studies question could be, for instance, what kind of rationale does the author Chinua Achebe develop in his novel in order to explain the phenomenon of “things falling apart”? Achebe is certainly famous for his depiction of the social cohesion of the Igbo society—the specific way this society “holds together,” so to speak, *before* it falls apart. What are the conditions under which a tightly woven social

fabric can actually “fall apart” in the colonial encounter? And, why does the Greek writer Kazantzákis, despite the fact that he describes power hierarchies very similar to that in Achebe’s novel, think that the Cretan society did not *fall apart*? Kazantzákis depicts harsh discrimination of the population of Crete by the Turkish rulers of the island, rebellion and suppression of the revolts, violence on both sides, and certainly the *potential* for a *falling apart* of the Cretan society because of the imperial situation. A comparison of the two novels suggests that the difference arises from the relational constellation of ruler and ruled: According to Achebe, British colonization brought major cultural differences to colonized Nigeria. In Kazantzákis’ setting, the culture and societies of Ottomans and Greeks—both patriarchal, both sharing similar values—are, with the exception of religious beliefs, basically very much alike. It is this kind of insight that a discussion of post-colonial or post-imperial writers, in particular if they are major writers like in this case, can contribute to a wider postcolonial debate.

It is these kinds of questions, against the backdrop of an entire new set of comparative studies, that a wider postcolonial approach will be able to discuss. The potential of new objects of investigation in the field of literary culture studies alone is obvious. So is the scope of possible new comparisons of the familiar postcolonial texts, say, from and about India or Africa with as yet unfamiliar post-Soviet or post-Ottoman texts. To name an example that the recent 70th anniversary of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 brings to mind: No postcolonial taboo should prevent scholars from comparing texts about the partition of India and the population exchange after the end of British rule, with texts about the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire with its population exchange in Turkey and Greece. These texts include displacement and extinction of Anatolian ethnic groups and the Armenian genocide. On the whole, what will come in view with a widening of the postcolonial horizon are “recurring political, intellectual and cultural practices” as well as “ideological constructions and similar functioning mechanisms” (Kołodziejczyk and Şandru 2016, 2). They will all show the necessity to exceed the *unidirectional* discursive framework set by mainstream postcolonial studies and the need to strive for a *multidirectional* approach to post-colonial and post-imperial phenomena. However small the input of the respective case study may be, these kinds of new comparisons and juxtapositions have a contribution to make. This change is necessary if we want to sound out the idea of “the postcolonial” as an explanatory tool, for the understanding of today’s post-imperial and post-colonial world.

## Notes

- 1 For my use of the term “postcolonial mainstream,” cf. the explanatory note in the introduction to this volume.
- 2 Unlike Narayan, who explicitly points to it, Ahmed rather implicitly confirms this phenomenon of reverse inferiorization.
- 3 For a discussion, see Albrecht 2008, Chapter 4.1 on “Universalismus und Gender.”

- 4 Cf. Albrecht 2019, 2017a, 2017b, 2014a, 2014b, 2013, 2012a, 2012b, 2011, 2010.
- 5 As Deringil likewise pointed out, ignorance can also be observed in “the Subaltern group” who “completely ignores that there existed a major non-Western sovereign state whose destinies were in many ways intertwined with the destinies of India” and adds in a footnote: “Witness the fact that there is no mention of the politics of pan-Islamism in *Subaltern Studies* vols. 1–10 (1982–1999)” (Deringil 2003, 314f.).
- 6 A likewise interesting very recent endeavor was a conference at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (MPI-MMG), *Ambivalent Legacies: Memory and Amnesia in Post-Habsburg and Post-Ottoman Cities* (Göttingen, 26–28 April 2017), hosted by the Max Planck Research Group, “Empires of Memory: The Cultural Politics of Historicity in Former Habsburg and Ottoman Cities.”

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# 11 From Cuzco to Constantinople

## Rethinking postcolonialism

*Gregory Jusdanis*

Can we consider Greece a postcolonial nation? Does it make sense to include Balkan, Baltic, and Caucasian countries into the postcolonial fold? What do we gain by expanding the definition of postcolonialism to study a host of nations from Albania to Azerbaijan? These questions have invited spirited and controversial responses since they have to do with the conceptual boundaries of both empire and postcolonialism along with the practice of comparison itself (Albrecht 2019; Türesay 2013).

The disciplinary boundaries of the field are related to the methodologies used by its practitioners. Asking whether Greece is a postcolonial nation is another way of asking whether Greece constitutes an object of the field's comparative outlook. For this reason, I propose here that reflection on the borders of postcolonialism should be accompanied by a reconsideration of comparison itself. I will consider, therefore, the question of Greece's postcoloniality by rethinking how we compare. I will approach this topic by juxtaposing a chronicle of Cuzco's destruction written by an Amerindian author alongside descriptions of the fall of Constantinople composed by three Greek historians.

But is postcolonialism prepared for such unorthodox comparison? I begin with Jan C. Jansen's and Jürgen Osterhammel's recent *Decolonization. A Short History*, which defines decolonization as a process which dissolved the intercontinental European empires in the global south between 1945 and 1975, and which delegitimized the idea of foreign rule (Jansen and Osterhammel 2017, 1–2). Although the authors provide a brief overview of previous anticolonial movements in the Americas, they ignore the Greek War of Independence of 1821—indisputably the earliest national struggle in the world, that is, the first fought against rule of an alien power. With the exception of Haiti, the wars of independence in the Americas were by contrast struggles of Europeans and their creole descendants against European powers. Jansen and Osterhammel rightly point out that these conflicts left untouched the idea of empire itself and the right of Europeans to conquer people they regarded as inferior (Jansen and Osterhammel 2017, 21). But Jansen's and Osterhammel's omission of Greece is not just a historical lapse but a limitation of their comparative methodology (Therborn 2017).<sup>1</sup>

This absence of Greece represents a greater tendency of postcolonial studies to see the world divided between Europe and its former colonies. The field is still indebted to the center-periphery model of empire thinking, a model that regards communication, travel, and commerce moving from Europe to its former colonies and vice versa. Rarely does it direct its focus to countries that were not colonized by England, France, Spain, Portugal, or Holland. Even Elizabeth Buettner's exemplary look into the consequences of decolonization on European societies still focuses on these countries. Her laudable claim that we can't really understand the process of postcolonialism by focusing on it from the perspective of one national tradition is limited by her historical and geographical conception of empire (Buettner 2016). Postcolonialism, in other words, continues the tendency of other humanistic disciplines like world literature to favor Western nations and their colonial Others as objects of analysis. Moreover, it privileges direct currents of political, mercantile, and cultural traffic at the expense of implicit or possible ties. In short, it encourages critics to compare what is acceptable, predictable, sanctioned, making them hesitant to imagine incongruous comparison.

I propose my comparison of the sack of Constantinople with the destruction of Cuzco in this context. Why undertake the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated documents, institutions, and historical events? Why risk removing objects of analysis from their historical and cultural contexts? Traditionally scholars have tended to compare societies that share a historical or geographical relationship, the place of Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, for instance, or the German appropriation of classical Greece. They have justified such an analysis by referring to the perceived equivalence of the societies or the historical, political, and cultural links between the two cultures.

Increasingly, however, some literary critics compare institutions or concepts that seem incommensurable. Borrowing insights from anthropology, world systems theory, translation studies, and comparative religion, they are rethinking the idea of comparison (Felski and Friedman 2013). They place side-by-side elements from divergent areas and eras and bring together individuals, ideas, nations that hitherto had not had contact (Berman 2016).

There are many reasons to do this:

- 1) Incongruous comparison challenges accepted disciplinary boundaries such as those of postcolonialism while promoting the interaction among scholars from various academic subjects.
- 2) It brings attention to the inevitable incommensurability in all comparison. All comparisons, even of related things such as of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* or German and French modernist poetry, necessitate the removal of objects from their social or cultural context and their placement in another. Something will be always lost in this process as no comparison is perfect or trouble-free.
- 3) It tempers the presumed universality of our own particular perspective by directing attention to the cultural centrism (i.e. chronocentrism,

Eurocentrism) in all thinking. In so doing, incongruous comparison defamiliarizes the self-other dichotomy by emphasizing the presence of the other in the self and the self in the other.

- 4) Incongruous comparison undermines the practice of regarding the Other as a way of elucidating the Western. In the past, as Chinua Achebe has argued, critics used Africa as a trope to understand Europe rather than accepting it on its own terms, with its own validity (1989).<sup>2</sup>
- 5) Finally, this type of comparison enables us to view ideas, epochs, and societies from unique vantage points, to draw out unorthodox implications, and to direct attention to situations that might have escaped our notice.

### The first American?

I would like to test this type of comparison by turning to a remarkable but little-known figure, Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca, the author of *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* [*Los comentarios reales de los Incas*] (1609).<sup>3</sup> Born in Cuzco to a conquistador father (Garcilaso de la Vega) and an Inca princess (Palla Chimpu Ocllo) in 1539, seven years after the first encounter between the Incas and Spaniards, he is one of the original Americans; that is, a product of the cultural mixing between colonizers and indigenous peoples. Moreover, he was one of the first to see Latin America as a multi-ethnic continent, a depiction that eventually inspired the final rebellion by Túpac Amaru against Spanish rule 40 years before Bolívar proclaimed the independence of Peru.

Growing up in Cuzco, he learned from his maternal relatives' stories about Inca society and rule, speaking in Quechua with them. "I often heard as a child from the lips of my mother and her brothers and uncles and other elders about" Inca history (I, 40). At the age of 21, he left Peru for Spain in 1560 to receive a formal education, never to return. Aspiring to capture this society now in permanent change, he used the insights of his mestizo heritage to write about the rise and fall of Inca society. Indeed, he ended his second volume with the hope that it be received as great a service "to the Spaniards who won the empire as to the Incas who formerly possessed it" (II, 1487).

His *Comentarios* was the first text to be published in the Old World by a person of Amerindian descent and the first to incorporate indigenous elements in Western discourse, striving to reconcile Inca experience with European history, native religion with Christianity, oral narrative with humanism, Quechua with Spanish. No other writer before him reflected so systematically on the representation of the Indian in European discourse (Zamora 1988, 3, 37). Needless to say, until Garcilaso and indeed much afterwards, the native perspective was excluded from European writing about the continent. The *Comentarios* appeared as a revisionary work that

startled readers, forcing them to see the world from unexpected perspectives. Having written in Spanish and within Spanish discourse on the Americas, he tried to negotiate his own position (Ross 2008, 136–137).<sup>4</sup> Garcilaso himself captured this shifting of perspective, saying that in a round world, “there is no certain way of knowing which provinces are the antipodes of which others” (I, 11).

Though not formal history today, his study should be seen as a rhetorical work, aiming to persuade Western readers that Inca society had a cultural legitimacy and that its destruction by Spain was unjust. Garcilaso’s chief argument was that the pagan Incas played a privileged role in world history, paving the way for the arrival of Christianity in South America. As children of the sun, they brought monotheism and civilization to the “savage” tribes of the area.

Garcilaso began his work with an assertion that must have shocked contemporaneous readers: “I am an Indian” and write “like an Indian” (Garcilaso I, 5). He had to assert his ethnic identity and his capacity for logical judgment because in his time and for much afterwards, indigenous peoples were rejected as morally and intellectually inferior to Europeans.

Writing against this prejudice, Garcilaso wanted to place the Inca state in the context of world history, to demonstrate that his forebears were authentic human beings capable of building monumental works and of administering an empire stretching from southern Colombia to northern Argentina. Inca history merited the attention of readers (MacCormack 1998, 26).

Recognizing the suspicion his text would arouse among Spanish readers, he wrote it in the manner of a testimony, much like the accounts of conquistadors, such as Bernal Díaz’s *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1568). “I was brought up among these Indians [...] and I frequented their society until I was twenty.” His relatives spoke to him about the history, religion, and political administration of Inca society. He also observed much himself. “I experienced and saw with my own eyes a great deal of their idolatry, festivals, and superstitions which still had not altogether disappeared in my own time,” having been born only eight years after the conquest (I, 50).

In offering the native perspective for the first time, Garcilaso had entered into a public dispute raging in Spain since Columbus’s arrival in the new world between two distinct representations of indigenous Americans and their capacity for rational judgment. This controversy eventually led to the holding of the famous Valladolid Council of 1550/51. Called by Charles V just 30 years after the siege of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire, this council was the first and only time a colonizing nation ever organized a formal inquiry into the justice of empire. The question it posed: Was it lawful for the King of Spain to wage war on the Indians before preaching the faith to them and subjecting them to his rule (Hanke 1959, ix, 38)? Unlike the Muslims in Spain who knew Christianity and rejected it, the native peoples of America had no experience of the Catholic faith. Spain’s encounter

with these idolaters, therefore, raised the question about their treatment (Reséndez 2016, 5).<sup>5</sup>

Garcilaso was influenced by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566), one of the chief speakers at the Council and a profound critic of Spanish injustices in Latin America, and Blas Valera (1544–1596), a person of mixed descent like himself, who wrote *Historia Occidentalis* in Latin, which was burned during the English sack of Cadiz in 1596. Valera argued that Incas had understanding of true God and of Christianity, and king Atahualpa's conversion to Christianity demonstrated that he was among Christ's elect (Hyland 2003).

From these writers, Garcilaso learned that to succeed with his narrative, he had to make Inca society not only less exotic but also religiously acceptable. He maintained that the Incas were monotheists, worshiping the Sun, whom they called "God our Lord," Pachacánc, meaning, "him who gives life to the universe" (I, 70). "The God of the Christians and Pachacánc were one and the same" (71). The Spaniards, however, had not realized that the Incas had introduced monotheism to the idolatrous people and thus prepared the way for the Gospel in the Andes. This claim allowed Garcilaso to make the wider argument that Incas and Spaniards misinterpreted each other. The Incas could not fully understand that their life was theologically an error. By the same token, the Spaniards, ignorant of Quechua, were misinformed about Inca society (I, 51).

As a comparative text, the *Comentarios* sets one society next to another, pleading for empathy among Spanish readers while also disrupting their Eurocentric point of view. But Garcilaso interpreted Inca society for Spanish readers rather than the other way around. As such, he is one of the first colonized intellectuals who, versed in languages of the colonizer and colonized, and who, having discovered the belatedness of his own society, sought to chronicle and restore his indigenous history. He was stirred to safeguard the shared culture that survived. "I myself, moved by the desire to preserve the few shreds of the ancient traditions of my country that have survived, lest they should completely disappear" (417). There is a direct line here from Garcilaso to the postcolonial intellectuals of the twentieth century.

In order to persuade his readers, he wrote not only in Spanish but also adopted the principles of humanism and its celebration of classical learning. To make the foreign society graspable, he often made parallels to European history, seeing Cuzco as another Rome: "Cuzco fue otra Roma." Indeed, he took pains to describe the glories of Inca architecture he remembered from his youth. The most impressive was the Temple of the Sun, which was "adorned with incredible riches" and contained "vast treasures." The building was so "incredible," Garcilaso says, that he could not "dare to describe it" (I, 180). Overall, the Incas "made marvelous buildings, fortresses, temples, royal palaces, gardens, storehouses, roads and other constructions of great excellence, as we can see today from the remaining ruins." When Pizarro's scouts visited the city ahead of their leader, they too were "filled

with admiration at the majesty of Cuzco and the splendor and wealth of its temples and palaces, though these were already much diminished owing to the recent wars between the Incas” (II, 702).

Sorrow for the destruction of Inca civilization suffuses Garcilaso’s text. His mother’s visiting relatives always fell into stories about “the origins of the Inca kings, their greatness, the grandeur of their empire, their deeds and conquests [...] From the greatness and prosperity of the past they turned to the present, mourning their dead kings, their lost empire, and their fallen state” (I, 41). They ended these sessions in tears.

What really tormented Garcilaso was how quickly the state fell. Given the might and majesty of the empire, he wondered, how could it have crumbled so abruptly in the face of so few foreigners (I, 575)? He asked his maternal uncle this very question. “Inca, how is it that as this land is naturally so rough and rocky, and you were so numerous and warlike, and powerful enough to gain and conquer so many other provinces and kingdoms, you should so quickly have lost your empire and surrendered to so few Spaniards?” His uncle repeated the prophecy that had widely circulated about the imminent arrival of unknown foreigners and how the king, Huayna Cápac, “had bidden them obey and serve the Spaniards since they would prove superior to them in everything.” Turning to the young Garcilaso in anger, the uncle said that these final commands of Huayna Cápac “were more effective in overcoming us than the arms your father and his companions brought to this country” (I, 578).

Prophecies of impending doom were useful for Garcilaso to explain the defeat of the Incas, as they were for the Byzantines and for the Aztecs. There also occurred a man-made catastrophe. The sudden death of Huayna Cápac, who had extended the range of the empire, resulted in a bloody civil war between his two sons who struggled for succession, with Atahualpa situated in the northern empire with its capital in Quito and Huáscar in the capital city, Cuzco. This internecine war weakened the empire just as Pizarro and his men were approaching Peru. Ultimately Atahualpa was the victor, but not before committing unspeakable atrocities against his opponents, having Huáscar and many members of his royal household butchered. But Garcilaso’s mother and her brother, who belonged to the Huáscar household, managed to escape these cruelties (I, 620).

By a diabolical coincidence, Francisco Pizarro and his 150 men reached the Andes just at the point when Atahualpa was making his way to Cuzco. Having heard of the civil war between the two brothers, Pizarro sought to exploit this discord just as Cortés had done in Mexico, from whom he learned about his military successes during their meeting in Spain. He sent two ambassadors to Atahualpa who, incredibly, agreed to see Pizarro in at Cajamarca. When the Spaniards arrived in the square of Cajamarca, they laid out plans to capture the king despite being surrounded by a hostile army.

Atahualpa never attacked this small band of men, allowing them to pass through his territory in a route guarded by forts and towers. We will never



understand why he spared them or why he met them. Yet, we have to bear in mind that Atahualpa was at a semiotic disadvantage, not knowing how to interpret the new arrivals. The Inca king knew nothing about the newcomers, neither their culture nor the reason for their mission. Pizarro, on the other hand, had knowledge of Inca society, detailed information about the civil war, and also the successful strategy used by Cortés in Mexico City, not to mention horses and superior arms. This epistemological and technological superiority contributed to the Spanish victory. Pizarro, like Cortés before him, demonstrated that the conquest of knowledge inevitably led to the conquest of empire (Todorov 1984, 252).<sup>6</sup>

There are many dramatic accounts of this fateful encounter, based on various sources.<sup>7</sup> I wish to focus on Garcilaso's description of Fray Vicente de Valverde's address to Atahualpa:

“It is proper that you should know, most famous and most powerful king, that it is necessary that Your Highness and all your subjects should not only learn the true Catholic faith, but that you should hear and believe the following.”

Then he added that Atahualpa should submit his empire to the authority of King Charles V and be his vassal and also “receive and believe the faith of Jesus Christ, our God, and scorn and utterly repudiate the abominable superstition of your idols” (II, 680–681).

According to Garcilaso, Atahualpa was receptive to the priest's message, making reference to the prophecy and his father's request that they submit to a more powerful people. Indeed, Atahualpa wanted to know more about Jesus Christ and did not utter the statement ascribed to him by Spanish historians, which read: “You believe that Christ is God and that he died: I worship the Sun and Moon, which are immortal. And who told you that your God was the maker of the Universe” (II, 688)? Garcilaso likewise rejected Fray Vicente's account that Atahualpa put the Bible to his ear, found it did not speak, and cast it on the ground, causing the friar to shout: “Christians, the Gospels have been dashed down! Justice and vengeance on these Indians!” (II, 688). Nor did he accept Atahualpa's response: “I am free and owe tribute to no one; nor do I intend to pay it, for I recognize no superior” (II, 689). According to him, after the battle which led to the death of 5,000 Indians, the cross still lay where the friar had left it. “And the Indians [...] worshipped it in the belief that the piece of wood had some great divinity and power from God, and in their ignorance of the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ, they begged its pardon for having offended it” (II, 689).

At the end, the Spaniards captured Atahualpa and held him prisoner. Despite the princely ransom they received, they tried, convicted, and executed him for the murder of his brother and for conspiring to kill Spaniards. “With the death of the two royal brothers and enemies, Huáscar and Atahualpa, the Spaniards remained absolute lords of both their kingdoms, for there was

no one to resist them or oppose anything they tried to do thereafter. With the death of the Incas, the Indians of both parties were like sheep without a shepherd" (II, 721). The war between the two brothers, Garcilaso said, brought about the total destruction of their empire, "facilitating the entry of the Spaniards and making it possible for them to win Peru with such ease [...] But our Lord God took pity on these gentiles and permitted the discord between the two brothers to rise so that the preachers of His Gospel and Catholic Faith might enter the more easily and with less resistance" (II, 723). As soon as the "sacraments of our holy Mother, one Church, Roman, Catholic, Apostolic, entered Peru, the demons that used to deal so familiarly with the heathen, lost the power of speech in public" (II, 699). In the eyes of the Andean people, rapid victory by Spaniards over Atahualpa was a sign of their invincibility and almost divinity (Stern 1993, 27).

Pizarro marched towards Cuzco and crowned Tupac Hualpa, the younger brother of Huáscar, as the new Inca ruler, but he died shortly thereafter, most likely of small pox. Pizarro then installed the young Manco Inca, another son of Huayna Cápac, as puppet emperor. The Spaniards entered Cuzco on November 15, 1533, facing little resistance. Jubilant at their accomplishment, they marveled at the city's architectural splendors, all the time sacking and looting one of the great cities of the world (Hemming 1970, 132).

Humiliated by his insolent treatment and angered by the injustices the Spaniards committed against the population, Manco Inca turned against them. Having escaped from captivity, he assembled an army of 100,000 men to attack Cuzco. Manco Inca and his forces reached Cuzco, showering the Spaniards with bows and arrows. Pizarro with his two brothers and 200 others fought back against the 2,000 Incas, finding themselves outnumbered by a determined enemy. The Spaniards believed that they would perish, but at that very moment of their plight, Garcilaso writes, "our Lord was pleased to favor his Faithful with the presence of the blessed apostle St. James, the patron of Spain." The Incas were terrified at the appearance of this knight who turned towards them, making them flee. And when the Incas attacked the Spaniards on the other side, he rushed to their defense. The Spaniards fought on, killing scores of Incas (II, 802).

Unrepentant Manco Inca struck again. On the night of the attack, his followers arrived with their weapons ready. But as they were about to fall upon the Spaniards, another miracle appeared, this time the Virgin Mary herself, holding Jesus in her arms. "When the infidels beheld this marvel they were astonished. They felt a dust fall into their eyes" which prevented them from seeing. So they retreated (II, 803). Although Manco was routed, he organized a second revolt in 1538. Insurrections spread more widely a year later in wide swaths of Peru and Bolivia, but they were all crushed with savagery. "No one could say that they Inca empire went down without a struggle" (Hemming 1970, 255).

That the Inca state was subdued does not mean that Andean culture was assimilated into Spanish colonial society. Defeat did not spell obliteration.

What took place is a syncretism of local and Christian practices that gave rise to a creole fusion, different from both aboriginal and Spanish cultures. Native peoples survived and adapted to colonial conditions (Adorno 2008, 37).

### Constantinople

A number of contemporaneous accounts by Greeks and foreigners describe the siege of Constantinople on May 29, 1453. I will refer to three Greek historians, Kritovoulos (1410–1470), Michael Dukas (1400–c1462), and Laonikos Chalkokondyles (1430–1470). Kritovoulos wrote one of the most vivid and accurate descriptions in his biography of Mehmed the Conqueror (1432–1481), which he translated into Turkish. Though not present at the siege, Kritovoulos visited the city afterward and witnessed the devastation and spoke to survivors. Eventually, he came into the service of Mehmed (1432–1481) as governor of the island of Imbros. While mourning the loss of Constantinople, Kritovoulos wrote favorably about the Sultan’s accomplishments, finding him in “no way inferior to Alexander.” Indeed, he dedicated the tome to Mehmed, “by the will of God, Kritovoulos, servant of servants” (Kritovoulos 1954, 3).

Like Kritovoulos, Laonikos Chalkokondyles placed the sack of Constantinople in the wider context of Ottoman expansion, though he treated the siege incidentally rather than as the climactic event of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>8</sup> By taking this perspective, he became the first Christian author to describe Islam as a living culture and view Muslims on their own terms rather than as a theological error (Kaldellis 2014, 101). His history is a fusion of Herodotus’s ethnographic openness and Thucydides’ severe style. But whereas Herodotus dealt with the victory of the Greeks over Asia, Chalkokondyles covered the victory of Asia over Greece (25). Having been given a copy of Herodotus’ *Persian Wars* by his teacher Plethon (1355–1452), Chalkokondyles wrote “what he imagined Herodotus would have written about Islam” (Kaldellis 2014, 102). It is remarkable that a Greek/Christian author could be capable of such empathic thinking, that is, to see the world from someone else’s perspective.

He began in the declarative Thucydidean manner: “Laonikos, the Athenian, has written here, in the form of a history, the events that come to his attention during his lifetime, both those that he witnessed and those he heard about” (Chalkokondyles I 2014, 3). But he narrated his history from a Turkish vantage-point, using Turkish textual and oral sources, intending to write about the fall of the Greeks and the rise of the Turks to a great power, “greater than that of any other powerful people to date” (3).

Kritovoulos too started in a grand mode: “Kritovoulos the Islander originally of the inhabitants of Imbros, wrote this history in the belief that events so great and wonderful [...] should not remain unrecorded” (9). At the same time, he feared that his Greek readers might condemn him for celebrating the accomplishments of their Turkish oppressor rather than grieving their enslavement (12).

Turning specifically to the siege, Kritovoulos described the apprehension in Constantinople, with the residents marveling at the fort Mehmed was constructing on the European side of the Bosphorus as well as at his army of 400,000 men. Days before the sack of May 29, 1453, a range of inexplicable events took place, such as earthquakes and irregular movement of stars. The last Byzantines were facing their impending doom.

Unlike the Incas, however, the Byzantines had known of the Ottomans for centuries, as they had been losing increasing territory to their Muslim foe. There was neither semiotic nor technological imbalance as in the case of the Incas and Spaniards. There was tactical disadvantage, however, with Byzantine defenses weakened and finances dwindling. The Byzantines could no longer pay their Hungarian master cannon-maker, who crossed over to the Turks. The sight of a huge cannon being transported in January 1453 by 30 wagons towards the city terrified its residents. And in March, the forces appeared before the gates (Michael Dukas in Melville Jones 1971, 71, 77). On April 5, Mehmed began to attack the city's walls with cannons. Eventually, he ordered that the artillery be brought in front of the Middle Wall and fired (Kritovoulos 1954, 46). At one point, the section of the wall with the tower in the middle collapsed, and the tower by the gate of Saint Romanus tumbled to the ground, "so that the besiegers and the besieged were left looking at each other (Dukas in Melville Jones 1971, 88).

Although the residents repaired the walls, they became despondent at apparitions of doom: "divine signs and portents of the terrors that were very soon to come to the city." In order to seek God's favor, they organized a procession on the city's ramparts, with the "Icon of the Mother of God." But suddenly the icon slipped from the hands of its bearers. "And when everybody shouted immediately, and rushed to raise up the icon, it sank down as if weighted with lead" (Kritovoulos 1954, 58). The next day a dense fog descended, which faithful took to mean the departure of the "Divine Presence," leaving the city "in total abandonment and desertion" (59).

Meanwhile, outside the walls, Mehmed spoke to his men about the opulent prize they were about to capture (Kritovoulos 1954, 60). He promised them the opportunity to pillage the city uninterrupted for three days and enumerated what they could take as booty—women, girls, and boys. He then had fires lit outside the walls. "The light of the fires shone more brightly than the sun through the city [...] the surface of the water glittered" (Dukas in Melville Jones 1971, 93).

On May 29, Mehmed ordered the trumpets, flutes, and cymbals to sound for battle. The final assault began. "What happened then was what usually happens in such upheavals; as each person tries to save himself with no discipline or order." As the Janissaries rushed through the city, plundering and slaughtering, some Greeks tried to save themselves by running into the Hagia Sophia, the largest building to survive from classical antiquity. "The city was full of slayers and the slain, pursuers and the pursued" (Chalkokondyles 2014, 195, 197).

With more emotional language, Kritovoulos lamented how “hapless Romans were destined finally to be brought under the yoke of servitude and to suffer its horrors”<sup>9</sup> (70). He described the bravery of the Byzantines, who were heroes in battle. But their valor went to naught. Once the walls were breached, the Turks stormed the city. “A great slaughter occurred” as the troops rushed through the streets, “stealing robbing, plundering, killing, insulting, taking and enslaving men, women, and children” (72). Tursun Beg, the secretary to Mehmed and an eyewitness, said that every Turkish “tent was filled with handsome boys and beautiful girls.” Each soldier pillaged so rapaciously that “many were delivered from poverty and made rich” (1978, 37).

“And the desecrating and plundering and robbing of the churches,” Kritovoulos asks, “how can one describe it in words” (73)? He depicts the burning of holy books, trampling of relics, and the overturning of the altars from the foundations. The entry into Hagia Sophia proved difficult to comprehend. Dukas could not find the right words to express his horror at the desecration of the Holy Altar. “My tongue cleaves to my throat.” Yet he described how the “savages began directly to break up the sacred images, stripping them of their decorations and ornaments, and tearing the furnishings from the Holy Table” (in Melville Jones 1971, 99).

When Mehmed finally entered the city after the three days of plunder, he was moved: “What a city we have given over to plunder and destruction” (76). Kritovoulos himself was affected deeply by the devastation, calling it a great blow, “a disaster the like of which had occurred in no one of the great renowned cities of history,” such as Troy, Carthage, Rome, and Jerusalem (72). He personally lamented the loss of the imperial capital, “its goods summarily disappeared, and it was deprived of all things: wealth, glory, rule, splendor, honor, brilliance, of population, valor, education, wisdom, religious orders, dominion—in short, of all” (80). Even Chalkokondyles in his dry, restrained mode, characterized the end of the Byzantines as a tragedy.

That, then, is what happened regarding the Greeks of Byzantium. Their calamity seems to be the greatest that ever took place throughout the world in its excess, suffering, similar to the fall of Troy: in fact, wholesale destruction was the penalty that the Greek suffered at the hands of barbarians for what they did to Troy.

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Dukas compared the arrival of Mehmed at Constantinople to that of Nebuchadnezzar at the gates of Jerusalem and ended his account by citing Jeremiah’s lament for his city (in Melville Jones 1971, 80, 106).

One of those Greeks who witnessed the capture and who suffered the consequences was George Sphrantzes (1401–1478), a courtier in the Byzantine palace and later historian. He did not provide details about the

siege other than to say that 4,773 Greek defended the city, along with 200 foreigners. But he was taken prisoner and “suffered the evils of wretched slavery. Finally, I was ransomed September 1, 6962 (1453) and departed for Mistra” (1980, 70). His wife and children, however, passed into the hands of elderly Turks who did not treat them badly, but the Sultan found out about his children’s beauty and bought them for himself. At the end, the Sultan executed his son and confined his daughter to a harem (12).

Mexico City and Cuzco suffered similar fates. Yet we don’t have descriptions of these events through the eyes of the defeated, as we do in Kritovoulos and Dukas. Las Casas, for his part, spared no details of bloodied corpses, the burning alive of frightened peasants, of babies smashed on the ground. Garcilaso, despite his superior literary prowess, never described the horror his family must have felt as the Spaniards desecrated the Temple of the Sun. Dukas, on the other hand, tried to place us in the shoes of the Greeks: “Let us consider the state of mind of the defenders who were thinking of ways of keeping their city [out] of the hands of Nebuchadnezzar” (in Melville Jones 1971, 73).

### **The Muslim conquest**

Strange as this may seem, many Byzantines preferred Ottoman to Catholic occupation, believing paradoxically that they could preserve their faith under Muslim rule better than under their co-religionists. Fearful of Catholic proselytization, many accepted the impending doom as a lesser of two evils. When Gennadius (c1400–c1473), the philosopher and theologian who would later be invested by Mehmed as Patriarch of Constantinople, saw the Ottoman troops storm the walls, he said that he preferred the Turkish turban ruling the city over a cardinal’s hat. Although originally in support of the union with Rome, Gennadius turned against it when he got back to Constantinople. Disappointed at the lack of military assistance from their co-religionists, he said, “miserable Greeks who trust the strength of the Franks.” Others around him shouted: “We need neither aid nor Union from the Latins” (Dukas in Melville Jones 1971, 81, 74).

This position might seem irrational. But the Byzantines remembered the Latin sack of Constantinople in 1204, an event that sapped its defenses and set up a period of political decline. Although the Byzantine Empire regained its power, it became a weakened and poorer state. By the thirteenth century, its authority in the Aegean Sea had ceded to Venice on the western shores and Genoa on the east, with the Latins having appropriated not only these territories but also commerce (Inalcik 1994, 271–272). So, when the Ottomans had arrived in Thessaly in the fourteenth century, they found a territory devastated by foreign invasions, civil wars, and black death. By 1453 the Byzantine Empire, impoverished, powerless, and underpopulated, had been reduced to the City itself (Greene 2015, 2, 22).

Yet upon the capture of the City, Mehmed chose it as his new capital, repopulating it with Muslims, Christians, and Jews. He repaired the walls and constructed new fortresses. Kritovoulos says that he showed great benevolence and pity to the Byzantine prisoners (Kritovoulos 1954, 95). Although he executed many Byzantine nobles, he incorporated others who had converted to Islam into his administration. Within a short period of time Greeks gained positions of privilege and influence. Indeed, the prominence of Byzantine families like the Kantekouzenoi and Paleologoi caused resentment among Muslims of the city (Greene 2015, 22, 25). By 1477 the Greek Orthodox percentage of the population had reached 25 percent.

In order to stabilize the Orthodox population and continue the Ottoman practice of organizing the population in millets (self-governing religious communities), Mehmed appointed Gennadius Patriarch of Constantinople, granting him complete authority over his flock. Among the privileges he conferred upon him were the right to collect taxes from his community, to appoint hierarchs, authority of family law, and control over church property (Greene 2015, 29).

After the shock of conquest, the Greek population increased in the countryside. In central Greece, for instance, it quadrupled between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries despite the conversions taking place during this time (Greene 2015, 7). To be sure, elite families were absorbed, thus disappearing as a separate ethno-religious group. Sometimes conversions occurred on a large scale, as peasants seeking economic security and advancement turned to Islam during the sixteenth century (Greene 2015, 73).

In contrast to the indigenous peoples in the Americas, the Greeks under Ottoman rule were able to preserve their religious institutions and cultural identity as Greeks, separate from their Muslim overlords. The attachment to Greek language and to Hellenism was strong among a sizable number of Byzantines and was only strengthened under Ottoman rule (Greene 2015, 49). Although cultural interchange occurred between the two ethno-religious groups over the centuries, the resulting society was not the creole fusion of Spanish and indigenous elements. There remained after the four centuries of Ottoman rule a society sufficiently distinct in language and culture from the Muslim polity.

The Greek War of Independence of 1821 was called partly in the name of this national uniqueness. Of course, nationality did not exist at the end of the eighteenth century either in Greece or elsewhere. But the Greek elites were able to rouse peasants to revolt by exploiting their economic and political grievances and their sense of ethnic and religious difference. Decades earlier, these intellectuals were able to delineate the boundaries of a distinctive culture in terms of language, history, religion, and the classical past. As a result, the Greek War of Independence was a national struggle for self-rule, the first to be fought against a foreign foe.

### Points of comparison

1. The Inca Garcilaso had to legitimate himself as an Amerindian author before Spanish readers and to demonstrate the efficacy and integrity of Inca culture. The Greek authors, on the other hand, conscious of their place in the grand Hellenic tradition going back to Herodotus, did not have to prove that they were human, Christian, or capable of organizing a great civilization. Moreover, they composed in their native language, with Kritovoulos translating his text into Turkish. They didn't consider themselves culturally disenfranchised by their Ottoman enemies and indeed may have felt superior to them. By writing their histories, they were in fact granting legitimacy to their Ottoman rulers, incorporating them into Greek historiography.
2. While Garcilaso had to strain to include Inca culture in the course of world history, the place of the Greeks was never in question. Indeed, Kritovoulos and Chalkokondyles were both confidently aware of the long tradition of Hellenism, Greek historiography, and Orthodox Christianity. When they compared the sack of Constantinople with the siege of Rome, they effortlessly placed the assault in the context of world history. Garcilaso's comparisons decontextualized Inca history. When he said that Cuzco was a new Rome, he sought to grant to the Incas historical gravity and civilizational authority.
3. Feeling torn between his two national patrimonies, Garcilaso claimed that Spaniards and Incas mutually misinterpreted each other. The Greek historians made no such arguments. On the contrary, the Byzantines and Ottomans had been part of each other's world for centuries, aware of each other's presence.

The Incas, on the other hand, had no way of identifying the origins of the Spaniards nor understanding their intentions, their language, world view, or technology.

From their perspective, their encounter with the Spaniards was an astonishing event. Out of nowhere they witnessed men who had beards, wore strange clothes, rode large, unknown animals, mastered thunderbolts, and communicated through white cloth. Originally the Incas perceived the appearance of the Spaniards as the return of their own gods (Wachtel 1977, 16, 21).

4. The Incas and Byzantines observed omens of impending doom—earthquakes, unnatural movement of stars—and understood national tragedy as a product of divine intervention. In Garcilaso and Kritovoulos, Christian saints either abandoned or aided Christian combatants. In both cases, the loss of Constantinople and of Cuzco were interpreted by the Christians as acts of divine will, punishment of the Orthodox for their errant ways and of the Incas for their idolatry.
5. Garcilaso was motivated to write his history in part to preserve the memory of Inca culture. For the Incas, the murder of the Inca king meant the



death of the son of god. The gods were robbed of their power, and the new priests showed the old religion to be meaningless (Wachtel 1977, 26, 30). Kritovoulos and Chalkokondyles felt little sense of loss nor the need to save an endangered society.

6. While we have accounts of the Greeks as victims of imperial violence, Garcilaso does not place us in the shoes of Incas observing the desecration of their temples. He was always torn between his indigenous, Inca loyalties and his conviction of Christianity as a true religion, never being able to reconcile these warring sides of his soul. Neither Kritovoulos nor Chalkokondyles shared such dilemmas, nor had they converted to Islam.
7. We have ultimately a different sense of empire. Of course, it is impossible to make definitive distinctions. Generally, we can say that an empire is “a large composite and differentiated polity linked to a central power by a variety of direct and indirect relations, where the center exercises political control through hierarchical and quasi-monopolistic relations over groups ethnically different from itself” (Barkey 2008, 9). The Ottoman Empire represented the sprawling, multi-ethnic polities of antiquity and the medieval period, whereas the Spanish Empire pointed to a new system, linked to capitalist modes of production and the concept of race.

The modern definition of empire as a “relationship of domination and subordination between one polity (metropole) and one or more territories (colonies) that lie outside of its boundaries yet claimed as its legal procession” (Abernethy 2000, 19) does not completely apply to the Ottoman or Holy Roman Empires. Nor did these empires make a clear distinction between core and periphery populations and core and periphery elites. The Ottoman Empire consisted of multiple, overlapping forms of control, such as the millet system, the Ottoman bureaucracy, and the administration, which gave rise to varied forms of identity (Barkey 1997, 105). It managed its multiethnic diversity through cooption of elites, indirect system of rule, and through a policy of toleration which should not be celebrated as an early example of liberal multiculturalism since the Empire strived for neither equality nor democracy.

Modern empires, then, pursue domination. Unwilling to make cultural concessions to its colonies, they expect subject peoples to acculturate. Quite often they have a missionary zeal, either to civilize or proselytize (Osterhammel 1996, 4, 15). The Ottoman Empire, by contrast, did not regard its colonies as territorially distinct. We can’t really speak of colonies per se. When Greeks formed their state in 1832, most of the Greek population was in the Ottoman Empire, and even by 1922 a sizable portion remained in Asia Minor. The Empire benefited from control over its territories, but this occupation was too loose to be described as colonial (Türesay xvii).

Moreover, it had few ambitions beyond the Mediterranean. When the English and French arrived in the area, however, they connected it to wider world of commercial exchange (Greene 2009, 4–5). Their

empires, like Spain's settlements in the new world, required advanced systems of bureaucratic organization on a grand scale for which there was no medieval precedent (Osterhammel 1996, 29). They extracted resources and maintained civilizational differences between metropolis and native peoples.

8. While Ottomans wrecked many buildings, they spared the most sublime, the Hagia Sophia, converting it into a mosque. The Parthenon, having been used as a church during the Byzantine period, functioned as mosque with the arrival of the Turks. The Spaniards, on the other hand, systematically destroyed the monumental structures of Mexico City and Cuzco, leaving only foundations upon which they built their own edifices. Few Amerindian cities survived the Spanish conquest intact (Lavrin 2008, 288).
9. In his rebuilding of Istanbul, Mehmed favored the Greeks. After the conquest, Greeks became a dominant economic force in the commercial life of the empire. Istanbul had a sizable Greek population with rich Greek financiers who had amassed huge fortunes. In time, the Greeks were the prevailing ethnic group in Ottoman foreign policy, serving as interpreters and higher officials (Inalcik 1994, 209).
10. The Ottomans had no concept of race in the modern sense (Türesay xvii). Conquered peoples could hold high positions within the Ottoman administration. In contrast, the Europeans subjected a concept of race upon the captured populations of the Americas, making firm distinction between whites, the indigenous peoples, and the enslaved Africans.
11. In both Greek and Latin American folk traditions, the defeat led to new national myths of rebirth and rebellion. The Incas experienced the Spanish conquest as a cataclysmic event. The execution of Atahualpa, for instance, became the subject of poems, dances, and places, and to this day "The Death of Atahualpa" is performed in Peru and Bolivia (Wachtel 1977, 33). After initial setbacks, Incas rebelled, first in insurrections led by Manco Inca and decades later by Túpac Amaru.

In the Greek case, the death of the Emperor Constantine resulted in his becoming a popular figure in Greek folklore, an emblem of enslaved Greeks and avenger who would return and reclaim the empire. This myth attached itself to Mediterranean notions of death and resurrection and blossomed into nationalist aspirations of restoring lost dreams of empire (Phillipides and Hanak 2011, 214). The recapture of Constantinople remained a constant theme in popular and learned discourse, and prophecies of retaking the city exercised a powerful influence on people, especially after the eighteenth century (Herzfeld 1982, 129).

12. While Garcilaso claimed that Incas prepared way for Christianity, Greeks felt that Ottomans were sent to protect Christianity from Catholics. Christianity proved intolerant in South America. Early explorers

expressed revulsion at the worship of idols and demanded their destruction. Priests marched hand in hand with the conquistadors. After the Reconquista of Spain from the Moors, Spaniards were convinced they were the vanguard of the chosen, called by God to conquer and convert infidels (Castro 2007, 20).

The Ottoman Empire was, of course, Islamic, and promoted conversion. And large swathes of the population in Anatolia, on Crete, and certain parts of the Balkans assimilated to Islam. But there seems to be agreement that this process was gradual and the result of weakening Christian institutions; the desire of Christian elites for social prestige, advancement, and political advantage; and due to the need of many peasants to avoid the onerous taxation imposed on non-Muslims (Barkey 2008, 85; Greene 2009, 40). Moreover, the Ottomans imposed the practice of *Devshirme*, the levying of Christian boys who were taken into Muslim families, raised as Muslims, and often directed to the Janissary forces. It has been disputed whether boys were taken by force or voluntarily given by parents seeking social and economic benefits. While the issue will never be settled, it seems that it involved a combination of both. By the time the practice was abolished in 1695, approximately 200,000 boys had been converted in this manner (Barkey 2008, 123–124).

13. Conquistadors were attracted to the Americas by dreams of unparalleled riches which would enable their social advancement in America and Spain (Stern xxvii). Fortunes made in the New World could be shipped home to buy titles and land (Spalding 1984, 113). They came with religious zeal and an even greater lust for gold and silver. The Ottomans, of course, strove to extend their empire, collect tribute, and to loot cities not willing to submit to their authority of the Sultan. But they had not developed a systematic system of extracting resources from the conquered territories. The Spaniards, on the other hand, pointed the way for the system of colonialism that would define world relations.

In order to understand this difference between medieval and modern empires, let us compare the mining of silver. In the six centuries between 1250 BCE and 350 CE, 40,000 to 50,000 tons of silver had been mined in the Mediterranean world. By contrast, Peru's mines produced 40,000 tons in one-third of the time. This unparalleled sum was made possible by rich mines but primarily by the exploitative system employed by the Spaniards to unearth this valuable resource (Stein and Stein 2000, 21, 27).

So, to return to the initial probe of the paper, perhaps we should reformulate the question of Greece's postcoloniality. Instead of wondering whether Greece can be compared to traditional postcolonial nations, we should ask what we could gain from such a comparison. For by expanding the

boundaries of empire, we are in a sense broadening the scope of possible inquiry. If comparison between self and other lay at the heart of the colonial project from the initial arrival of Europeans in the Americas, comparison as a scholarly methodology continues to inform postcolonial writing.

I have argued that we should rethink comparison, moving beyond the center/periphery, north/south, east/west axes so central to thinking on empire. We have much to gain by going from Manila to Montevideo without having to pass through Madrid or Miami. Indeed, it would be valuable and liberating to connect Cuzco and Constantinople analytically, even if not a single person had actually traveled between these two cities directly.

## Notes

- 1 As a corrective, see Gören Therborn's *Cities of Power: The Urban, the National, the Popular, the Global* (2017). Although it offers a breezy, roller coaster ride through the urban history, it examines the city as a nexus of national, global, and local forces without privileging any particular region.
- 2 For my own response to Achebe, see <http://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/looking-africa-looking-ourselves>.
- 3 Part one dealing with history of Incas was published in Lisbon and part two dealing with conquest appeared posthumously in Cordoba in 1616–1617.
- 4 He was often praised for his beautiful Spanish, people being amazed that an Indian could write so elegantly.
- 5 Spain banned the enslavement of native peoples in the Americas in 1592 but the law was unenforced. Andrés Reséndez estimates that 2.5–5 million aboriginal peoples had been enslaved on the entire continent between 1492 and the nineteenth century.
- 6 Monika Albrecht discusses a literary reconstruction of this encounter between Cortés and Montezuma, a travelogue, “Orchideen und Aasgeier,” by the Swiss writer, Max Frisch. In this fictional recreation, Frisch has Cortés reconsider why he would attack such a developed civilization with majestic architecture. Frisch concludes that it's greed for gold. He concludes that it was not just superior semiotic knowledge of the Other that enabled the conquest but superior arms and this lust for riches. (Frisch 1976, 208. Albrecht 2008, 168).
- 7 See Hemming 1970 for a summary of the events leading to the capture of the king.
- 8 He began writing his *Histories* in the 1450s and finished them a decade later.
- 9 He refers to the Byzantines as Romans because the Byzantines saw themselves as heirs of the Roman Empire.

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## 12 Afrasian prisms of postcolonial memory

### German colonialism in East Africa and the Indian Ocean universe in contemporary anglophone and German literature

*Dirk Göttsche*

Despite the prominent role of scholars from India and the Arabic world in anglophone postcolonial theory, postcolonial research in modern languages has often focused on transatlantic connectivities and the relationship of individual overseas countries with individual European states and North America. The synergies between postcolonial studies and slavery studies, as reflected prominently in the concept of the “Black Atlantic” (Gilroy 1993), have tended to reinforce this selective approach to the global history of colonialisms and their legacies. International historical research and some strands of literature in various languages, however, have recently accelerated the exploration of the equally dynamic historical connectivities across the Indian Ocean—before, throughout, and after the age of European imperialism—which underlines the significance of South-South relations. Since the days of Egyptian antiquity, and thanks to mastery of the Monsoon winds, East Africa, the Arabic world, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, and to some extent China have been linked through a history of trade—ranging from natural produce to gold, ivory, and slaves—as well as the movement of people, cultural practices, ideas, and religions. These connections led to some of the oldest diasporas in human history and to cosmopolitan cultural exchange, in particular between legendary harbor towns such as Zanzibar, Kilwa, Mombasa, Mascat, Bombay, Goa, Calicut, and Canton (Guangzhou) (see Karugia 2017; Schulze-Engler 2014). Recent research has rectified the colonial narrative of European superiority by showing that—well into the eighteenth century and, locally, such as in the case of Zanzibar and Madagascar, into the late nineteenth century—the Portuguese, French, British, Dutch, and German ventures of the early modern period merely added new competitors to a well-established Indian Ocean infrastructure. Only in the course of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did political crises in India and the imperial turn of European colonialism rewrite the political map of the Indian Ocean. But even at this stage, European colonial occupation and exploitation continued to build on the established infrastructure of the Indian Ocean universe (see Hawley 2008a; Alpers 2014;



Pearson 2015; for Zanzibar and Madagascar see Campbell 2005; Nicolini 2012). The use of existing Arab-Swahili caravan routes, including relevant expertise and labor, by European colonial pioneers such as Richard Burton, Henry Morton Stanley, or Oscar Baumann, and later also by the German and British military and administration, are a prominent case in point. As is the fact that British East Africa and British relations with Zanzibar, in the nineteenth century the hub of a trading network stretching into the African interior and all the way to the Congo, were administrated from British India, building on the long-established role of Indians in the commerce, administration, and finance of the Arab-Swahili economy (see Mangat 2012, 1–63). At the same time, there is an older history of African immigration to Western India and Sri Lanka, which accelerated with the spread of Islam (see Oka and Kusimba 2008, 208–209) and is still reflected today in the distinct culture of the so-called “Sidi,” the descendants of African slaves in India, and other African diasporic communities that have recently attracted postcolonial attention.<sup>1</sup>

Both anglophone world literature and contemporary German literature engage with this multi-layered history of the Indian Ocean universe, often combining the postcolonial memory and critique of European imperialism with the validation of Indian Ocean history and its cosmopolitanisms. This case study focuses on four authors and novels which combine the literary representation of Indian Ocean connectivities with the critical memory of German colonialism in today’s Tanzania: Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Paradise* (1994), Ilija Trojanow’s *Der Weltensammler* (*The Collector of Worlds*, 2006), Hans Christoph Buch’s *Sansibar Blues* (2008), and M.G. Vassanji’s *The Magic of Saida* (2012). Gurnah (\*1948) and Vassanji (\*1950) both come from the Indian diaspora in East Africa but moved to the UK and Canada respectively; Bulgarian-born German author Trojanow (\*1965) has lived in Kenya, India, and South Africa, amongst others, before more recently moving from Germany to Austria; Buch (\*1944) is a well-traveled German pioneer of the “postcolonial gaze” (Lützel 1997), with particular experience of the Caribbean and Africa. All four authors thus share cosmopolitan experiences reflected in their novels, and their narratives all work with advanced postcolonial poetics. Their Afrasian prisms of postcolonial memory are both similar and different in the way they portray the experience of German colonialism in East Africa and they all encourage re-conceptualizations of postcolonial critique from an Indian Ocean perspective.

My case study therefore combines two objectives: On the one hand, it aims to promote comparative postcolonial literary studies, placing the rediscovery of colonialism in contemporary German literature (see Göttsche 2013) in context, reading prominent sources in conjunction with anglophone novels on the same theme. On the other hand, it asks how the novels’ critical rereading of German and European colonialism from the perspective of Indian Ocean narratives relates to recent criticism of established postcolonial theory by scholars working on the Indian Ocean as a space

of Afrasian interactions. John C. Hawley, for example, has suggested “that the Indian Ocean world offers a philosophical challenge to the hegemony of Western modernity” (Hawley 2008b, 5); he sees the history of interaction between Africa and India, in particular, as an example of “mutual exchange on economic and cultural levels that continues to run parallel to the current dominance of the West” (Hawley 2008b, 10), opening up “alternative universalisms” and “the notion of a globalization from below (from the global south, in one imaginary, from subalterns, in another)” (ibid., 8). Comparing conditions across the Black Atlantic with those across the Indian Ocean, Isabel Hofmeyr, South African scholar of African literature, has taken this line of inquiry one step further, reading the Indian Ocean as a “complicating sea” and “a method” that questions “our ideas of colonial and postcolonial histories, which tend to be turned into binary stories of colonizer versus colonized, white versus black” (Hofmeyr 2012, 584, 587; also see Hofmeyr 2007), an approach unsuited for the multi-layered conditions of Afrasian interaction. In addition, she argues, “[t]he Indian Ocean [also] requires us to take a much longer perspective” than one focused on the period of European colonialism and subsequent decolonization; it necessitates “a revision of older ways of thinking about diaspora” and warns against “the pitfalls of both anticolonial and colonial approaches” (Hofmeyr 2012, 589, 587). Critical self-reflection has noted the dangers of “Indocentrism” and “romanticising Indian-African interactions” (Schulze-Engler 2014, 160) in cosmopolitan conceptualizations of the Indian Ocean universe. Gaurav Desai has suggested more cautiously that “Indian Ocean exchanges and African-Asian interactions [...] alert us both to the possibilities of interracial and interethnic collaborations as well as the potential derailment of such alliances” (Desai 2013, 25). Beginning, like others in the field, with Amitav Ghosh’s travel narrative, *In an Antique Land* (1992), and concluding with Vassanji’s first novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989), Desai sees such postcolonial literature negotiate “the pressing competing claims of indigeneity and diaspora, of secularism and religious belief, of hybridities and discourses of purity, of ethnic identities and political goals, and of (neo) liberal democracies and socialist aspirations” (Desai 2013, 25). It is along the lines of tensions such as these that the novels analyzed here remember East African experiences of (German) colonialism in the context of deeper Indian Ocean history.

### **Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Paradise*: Reconstructing the Swahili universe in the heyday of European imperialism**

Abdulrazak Gurnah’s acclaimed novel *Paradise* (1994) is at one level a postcolonial *Bildungsroman* of its young protagonist, the Swahili boy Yusuf from the East African interior, who is “pawned” at the age of 12 to a rich Arab merchant from one of the coastal trading centers “to secure his father’s debt to the merchant” (Gurnah 2004, 47). Employed in the merchant Aziz’s

town shop as assistant to the shop manager, an older Arabic youth who also works off his father's debt and acts as his mentor, Yusuf is then taken to one of Aziz's business partners in the African interior for a year before being asked to join a second, much larger trading mission to the Western shore of Lake Tanganyika, which ends in life-threatening failure. Back with his mentor Khalil in the town shop, he undergoes a dangerous 'éducation sentimentale' with Aziz's wife and her slave-like servant, Khalil's adopted sister, before refusing the merchant's offer to become his personal assistant and supposedly joining the German askari soldiers instead, the emblems of colonial imperialism. Moving beyond older interpretations that saw Yusuf's final move as a desperate "trading [of] one form of subservience for another" (Jacobs 2009, 87), Nina Berman makes a convincing case for reading Yusuf's break with the system of bondage in which he grew up as a self-emancipatory choice in line with many other Africans at the time who saw collaboration with the Germans as an opportunity, even if in hindsight this does not seem like a politically or historically wise form of agency (Berman 2013).

At a second level, the novel uses the teenager's introduction into the Swahili universe for the historical account of a decisive turning point in East African history in the early twentieth century, the heyday of European imperialism: the decline of the nineteenth-century Swahili-Arabic trading system and its Indian Ocean infrastructure under the influence of European imperialism, which requires local Africans, Arabs, and Indians to reposition themselves in a regional economy now operating in a global context. Yusuf's coming of age as he leaves the merchant Aziz and his world coincides with the outbreak of the Great War, and readers know that the downfall of German imperialism will lead to British rule rather than a return to pre-colonial conditions. At a third level, the novel is a postcolonial response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), unfolding a rich tapestry of intertextual references that includes the Quran, the Bible, and Swahili literature of the colonial period, amongst others (see Mustafa 2015a and 2015b).

One of the most intriguing features of *Paradise* as a historical novel is the fact that the German presence, and indeed Germans and other Europeans, are largely absent from the narrative (see Berman 2013, 54), and yet the irreversible transformation of the Swahili world under the impact of European imperialism is a major theme. There are two occasions where German officers and their askari troops intervene forcefully in the story: at the critical point when Aziz's trading caravan has been taken captive, brutally attacked and plundered by a defiant chief in the African interior who rebels both against the slave trade and German rule before being forced to release his captives by a superior German army contingent; and at the end, when a German officer, marching into the coastal town with his askari, is cast as a specter of living death with "the face of a cadaver" behind a "smile" that is "a fixed grimace of deformity," anticipating the violence of World War I in its "ugliness" and "cruelty" (Gurnah 2004, 245). This episode is indicative

of the representation of the Germans throughout the novel as particularly brutal in the way they implement what is seen as European “ferocity and ruthlessness” (72): They are “afraid of nothing” (79), merciless (76) and delight in inflicting “punishment” (115).

Although those involved in the East African trade network make some distinctions between the “Mdachi” (the Germans; Gurnah 2004, 176) and other European nations—e.g. preferring the Germans and the English to the Belgians (91)—, it is noteworthy that the characters typically speak of Europeans as a whole. This is clearly part of the novel’s postcolonial critique of European imperialism (rather than comparing individual systems of colonial rule). For example, the characters note that the Europeans “take the best land without paying,” impose taxes and forced labor, and “build [...] a lock-up” first, “then a church, then a market-shed” to impose their system of violent rule and exploitation (72). One of the Arab-Swahili shopkeepers in the African interior, originally from Zanzibar, notes that “[t]hese Europeans are very determined, [...] they will crush all of us,” since “[t]hey want the whole world” (86–87). Gurnah uses this trader to insert later debates about decolonization into the novel when he criticizes European racism (“In their eyes we’re animals,” 87) and anticipates that Africans and Arabs will “lose everything, including the way we live” in the process of colonization—to the point where colonial narratives (“their story of the world”) would be adopted by the indigenous youth, reducing Swahili culture to the rejected legacy of slave trading (87). This sharp mind is equally critical of Swahili conditions, however, e.g. comparing Yusuf’s bondage to the merchant Aziz to “slavery” (89). The sense of melancholy in the novel’s memory discourse that resonates in the title *Paradise* does not imply an uncritical celebration of the nineteenth-century Swahili universe portrayed at a point of historical crisis. Berman has noted that Gurnah avoids celebrating Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism in favor of a detailed and uncompromising account of “material conditions” and “practices of socio-economic interaction” at the time (Berman 2013, 52).

Indeed, despite the virtual absence of the Germans from most of the story as focalized through the protagonist Yusuf, the irreversible transformation of East Africa under European colonial rule is one of the principal concerns of the characters. References to the construction of the railway which is about to link the coast with Lake Tanganyika (Gurnah 2004, 131), the use of “line-construction gangs” (6), the imposition of German “law” (170) that is not understood, the banning of tribute payments on the caravan routes (176), the ban of guns (171), and trade with rhino horns (189) are some of the more specific references to the way European rule changes existing infrastructure. On a larger scale, merchants such as Aziz find it increasingly impossible to maintain their trading system with the African interior. A reference to “Hamed bin Muhammad, who was also called Tippu Tip” (131), whose memoirs Gurnah clearly used along with other Swahili sources (Mustafa 2015a), recalls the days not many decades earlier

when Arab traders working on behalf of the Sultan of Zanzibar “buil[t] little kingdoms for themselves” in central Africa (Gurnah 2004, 130). Now, in the early twentieth century, the Germans’ infrastructure bypasses previously crucial market towns (131) and the merchants have to take greater risks to find places that are not “already under the shadow of European power” (119). Smaller traders find that “[e]verywhere they went now they found the Europeans had got there before them” (71–72), compromising traditional trade. Aziz’s failed second caravan expedition into today’s Congo illustrates the historical turning point. This is also reflected in the motif that this time, unlike previously, Aziz is “forced to borrow a large amount of money from Indian creditors on the coast, which was not his usual practice” (109). The failure of his expedition takes him to the brink of bankruptcy, underlining the suggestion that the days of the Arab-Swahili caravan trade are over.

Portraying a culture that is at the point of disappearing, Gurnah’s *Paradise* provides rich detail on the Indian Ocean world in East Africa on the eve of World War I. This includes various vignettes of Arab-Swahili shop life and an account of Aziz’s career as initially a small trader between Zanzibar and the coast who went on to marry a rich widow and expand his business into the African interior. While the focus is on Arabs and Africans, there is also a range of references to the role of Indians in East Africa’s society and economy, and to the social diversity of the Indian diaspora. The Indian financiers of the Arab-Swahili economy remain at the margins of the story, admired in the portrait of a rich Indian wedding (Gurnah 2004, 50–51) but also confirming the stereotype of the “moneylending and cheating” Indian (74). On the other hand, the novel’s outspoken critic of what he calls “Gujarati scum” (74) is himself an Indian immigrant, a Sikh mechanic who becomes one of Yusuf’s mentors. This Sikh sends his earnings back to his family in India, underlining continuing ties across the ocean. Yusuf’s father, an African whose late first wife was from an Arab family in Kilwa, worked “in an ivory warehouse belonging to an Indian merchant” in Bagamoyo (14) before taking over a shop in the interior and remarrying. From the perspective of a perceptive African chief, on the other hand, who registers that the Arab-Swahili “caravan trade is finished,” Indians appear as allies of European imperialism: “The Europeans and the Indians will take everything now” (176). The prestige of the Indians is also visible when, for example, Yusuf’s father wants his son to “play with the children of the Indian storekeeper” rather than with other African boys who are seen as “savages” (6, 34, and *passim*) by the Arab-Swahili traders. There is clearly a complex racial and social hierarchy at work in the East African space portrayed.

According to the “civilized people” from the coast (Gurnah 2004, 13), the uncivilized “places” of the interior are “brought to life by trade” across the caravan infrastructure (119). Gurnah thus creates symbolic equivalences between the European colonizers and the Arabs who preceded them (Mustafa 2015b, 234). Indeed, the description of “Uncle Aziz the seyyid” on his caravan expedition into the African interior casts this Arab merchant

as equal with, and similar to, the European explorers in his relation of presumed superiority over the African world around him: “Despite everything, he managed to look untroubled, said his prayers five times a day at the appointed hours, and almost never wavered from his appearance of amused detachment” (Gurnah 2004, 117). Yusuf’s comparison at the end of the novel of Aziz and “[t]he white man” in terms of their “superiority” over Africa (237) underlines this parallelism. Such “assumptions of superiority” and patterns of “othering” are “not restricted to the Arab, Indian and Mswahili traders, however; they permeate all social groups in the novel” (Jacobs 2009, 85). *Paradise* portrays a fractured and fragile socio-cultural universe in which emerging European colonial rule reorganizes existing identities and conflicts. In the case of Aziz and his class, Gurnah’s *Paradise* highlights the irony of a privileged position that is about to be compromised by European rule rather than the role of the Arab traders as precursors of Europe’s colonial expansion foregrounded in Buch’s and Trojanow’s novels, discussed below. In the eyes of the rebel African chief who destroys Aziz’s caravan, the Arab-Swahili trading system has only “brought evil into our world”: “You have made slaves of us and swallowed up our world” (Gurnah 2004, 160). In the broader context of the novel’s postcolonial memory discourse, this criticism of Arab hegemony reads like a direct echo of the Arab-Swahili traders’ complaints about European imperialism; there are obvious parallels between both systems of exploitation and rule, which represent “competing modernities” (Mustafa 2015a, 21), and Indians have a stake in both.

At the same time, there is an analogy between this historical critique of internal East African power relations and the novel’s Swahili *Bildungsroman*. Cast as an exceptionally handsome boy whose beauty stuns all those he meets as the promise of a better world, Yusuf nevertheless fails to develop his sense of purpose. Weary of the ties of bondage and the world of trade in which he grows up, the young adult sees all those around him “stuck in one smelly place or another, infested by longing and comforted by visions of lost wholeness” (Gurnah 2004, 175)—a reference to the novel’s leitmotif of “paradise.” The melancholy element in the novel’s portrait of East Africa at the onset of World War I thus echoes in the protagonist’s growing identity crisis. Symbolically dismissed from Aziz’s walled garden, the novel’s Garden of Eden, and abused by Aziz’s wife in his affection for her maid, Yusuf takes the novel’s critique of colonial exploitation to the more general level of rejecting the commodification of human interaction seen not only in the novel’s erotic episodes but also in the young characters’ bondage and the system of investment and debt sustaining Aziz’s trading empire. In his “shame and anger,” Yusuf therefore accuses the Swahili world around him of turning “even simple virtues into tokens of exchange and barter” (236). In terms of the novel’s discourse of postcolonial memory, the protagonist’s disappointing choice of German military employment underlines the way in which Gurnah combines the validation of the Swahili universe at a critical

point in its history with a nuanced critique of its internal tensions and frictions. The melancholy of the novel's title is not nostalgic; it relates Indian Ocean history in East Africa to the history of European colonialism and global modernization, as well as to a history of exploitation and capitalism in which the Arabs (and their Indian financiers in the background) have as much of a stake as the Europeans.

### **M.G. Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*: The postcolonial memory of Indian Ocean histories and identities**

The memory theme, which is implicit in Gurnah's *Paradise*, moves to the main stage of a metafictional narrative in Vassanji's novel *The Magic of Saida* (2012), which interlinks the postcolonial memory of German rule in today's Tanzania and of wider East African history from the later nineteenth century to the present with the personal memories of protagonist Kamal Punja, a successful medical doctor from Canada who returns to his native Kilwa on the southern coast of Tanzania to reconnect with his African roots. Kamal retraces his childhood friend and teenage lover, the titular Saida, and rethinks his identity as a cosmopolitan postcolonial migrant in the novel's memoryscape, which straddles East Africa, India, and Canada. As the son of an African mother, a descendant of Matumbi slaves, and an Indian medical doctor who soon "abandoned" (Vassanji 2012, 26) his African family to return to India, Kamal is torn throughout his life between the African-Swahili identity, language, and culture of his early childhood in Kilwa and the Indian language, identity, and culture that he was forced to develop when his mother sent him to live with his Indian uncle in Dar es Salaam in 1963 at the age of roughly 12. There he successfully graduated from the Indian school in 1970 and went on to study medicine in Kampala before fleeing Uganda for Canada with his wife-to-be, another East African Indian, in 1972 at the height of Idi Amin's anti-Asian outrage. The protagonist reflects his own story as a "difficult" and "unfinished" dual "conversion," first "from African to Asian—more precisely, Indian," and then "into a Canadian" (215). Twice "transformed" (271) and yet always an outsider and "half-caste" (194) seen as Indian by the Africans and as African by the Indians, the protagonist is thus ideally placed to enable the novel to reflect about the relationship between Indians and Africans in the Swahili universe and the development of this multicultural society from pre-colonial times through to the present.

Like some of the recent German novels about colonialism, such as Stephan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* (*An Invisible Country*, 2003) or Christof Hamann's *Usambara* (2007), Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida* bridges the growing historical gap between the colonial past and the post-colonial present through a combination of family history and metafiction. In three of the novel's four parts, and in the prologue, Vassanji adopts a framework narrative that uses the Tanzanian publisher Martin Kigoma, an

African with a keen interest in Swahili history and culture, as the narrator who tells the protagonist's story based on what Kamal tells him in a number of friendly meetings first in hospital, then in cafés in Dar es Salaam. In the final part, this first level of the story, set in the present, coincides with the second, Kamal's account of his return to Kilwa in search of Saida, when the protagonist and the narrator jointly revisit the site of what now turns out to have been his final encounter with an aged and mysterious Saida, whose "African truth drug" (Vassanji 2012, 191) caused the medical crisis that put him in hospital. The third level of the story is the account of Kamal's life, of Swahili culture in pre- and post-independence Kilwa, of Indian diasporic culture in Dar es Salaam, and of deeper East African history since the nineteenth century. This historical theme moves center stage in the second part, "...of the coming of the modern age," in which the protagonist takes the role of narrator, engaging with German colonialism, Indian emigration to East Africa, and the history of African slaves in India, the Sidi, whose patron saint is said to have called upon Kamal's ancestor to emigrate to Zanzibar and Kilwa. This historical account crucially also includes the life of the intellectual mentor of Kamal's childhood, the Swahili teacher, poet, and historian Omari bin Tamim, who is also Saida's grandfather. Omari's "historical magnum opus" (176), an account of the African experience of German colonialism and African resistance against it, composed in traditional Swahili *utenzi* verse, provides the chapter title and punctuates the narrative in extracts that introduce the African voice (in English translation) to the novel's postcolonial memory discourse as this discourse seeks to "reconfigure the past" from the "fragments" of Afrasian history (132) that the narrators (the Tanzanian publisher and Kamal Punja as narrator of the historical chapter) collect.

The fact that Omari's start on his "final work," the "poetic history" that "relate[s] how we came to be what we are on this eastern coast of Africa" (11–12), also opens the first chapter of *The Magic of Saida*, i.e. the literary reflection of how postcolonial identity and the global Indian diaspora came to be what they are today, is emblematic of the novel's metafictional poetics of postcolonial memory. The opening, "Kilwa was all history" (11), underlines the author's well-established "obsession with historical truth and the quest for origins" (Vassanji 2014, 307), i.e. the central significance of "history and memory" (Sayed 2014, 295) in his writing. The role of the Indian Ocean universe as a central theme is obvious from the start as Omari embarks on his Swahili epic using "fine paper from Syria," a "pen from Europe and the ink from India," while "a framed certificate in the strange letters of the German language" on his wall anticipates the theme: the critical memory of German colonialism (Vassanji 2012, 12). Kilwa is portrayed as a "small but ancient entry point into the [African] continent" (135) that "saw its heyday in the nineteenth century trading ivory and slaves" (18), "gum," "grain and even wild animals" (28). It was an "important place" (28) as the starting point of caravans that also attracted trade in "Gold



from Rhodesia! Silk from India! Perfumes from Arabia!” (34). While the modern Kilwa is described as a provincial town that has “completely los[t] itself” (65), the novel’s memory discourse recovers the cosmopolitanism of the town’s former glory that still resonates in Kamal’s youth: The poet-historian Omari’s ancestors are said to have come from Baghdad (44), and the Swahili trader Lateef, who assists the returnee in his search for Saida, retraces his lineage to immigrants from Persia who came with Kilwa’s “first sultan” “many centuries ago” (22, 34). The significance of the port in the Sultan of Zanzibar’s sphere of influence also brings the protagonist’s paternal ancestor to Kilwa, an ambitious young Indian from Gujarat who goes out to Zanzibar in the 1870s to make his career and become the chief assistant to Tharia Topan, the Sultan’s “customs master” (127) and an influential historical example of Indians funding the Swahili caravan trade (see Mangat 2012, 19–22). Kamal’s ancestor Punja Devraj is then sent by the Sultan of Zanzibar to Kilwa as his “new ambassador and customs collector” (Vassanji 2012, 131) at the very point when the Germans take over control of the town. As “a respected Indian trader and honorary Swahili,” Kamal’s ancestor is “convinced” that the patron saint of the African Sidi in India “had sent him to Africa [...] to help his people, the Africans, resist the onslaught of the Europeans” (139). He becomes involved in a local uprising and is hanged by the Germans. The narrator notes the “singular irony, that those leading the fight against the foreign invasion on the east coast of Africa were eminent traders of slaves too” (139), since the Sidi in India were of course themselves the descendants of African slaves. On a later trip to modern-time India in an unsuccessful attempt to retrace his father, the protagonist feels, when visiting Somnath and its shrine of the patron saint Siddi Sayyad, that “everyone [...] looked completely African”: “He could have been in Kilwa, the young men chatting in Swahili” (279).

The Indian Ocean world and Afrasian exchange are thus central to the historical memoryscape of *The Magic of Saida*, and Zanzibar, as its economic and political hub but also as the mythical place where “[m]en of all races mingled” (Vassanji 2012, 126), plays a crucial role. Like Gurnah’s *Paradise*, Vassanji’s novel explores the multiple links and frictions between the various ethnicities, religions, and groups in East Africa. Although a third-generation member of the Indian diaspora in Kilwa, Kamal’s father, for example, still saw his marriage to an African from a family of slaves as a “fall from Indian respectability—having gone local, fathered a half-breed, an outcaste whom he could never call his own back in Gujarat” (29). There is clearly an analogy here with European colonial discourse and its racist trope of “going native.” Combining the theme of Afrasian migration with a critique of slavery, the novel also registers the Indian sense of cultural superiority that echoes European colonial attitudes.<sup>2</sup> Late nineteenth-century East Africa seemed to offer a career to Indians, and Zanzibar in particular was viewed as “the spice island of opportunity” (125), just as colonial space overseas did for Europeans; European racism in the perception of the

colonized is replicated in the Indians' racist perceptions of black Africans. To complicate matters further, both Indians and the Swahili of the coast see those in the African interior as "barbarians" (52). There is "crude racism" (232) at work in the way Indian kids treat the young Kamal at school (for looking too African), and the expulsion of Asians from Idi Amin's Uganda is marked as "cynical reverse racism" (261); racism is not restricted to the attitude of the Germans and British towards their colonial subjects. At the same time, there are individual Germans and British during German and British colonial rule who are portrayed as "friend[s] of the African" (175), while Omari, the celebrated chronicler of African resistance against German colonialism in Kamal's youth, turns out to have collaborated with the Germans and appropriated his late brother's superior poetry, passing it off as his own. This makes his heroic Swahili epic an act of personal atonement for past sins written in the spirit of his brother whom the Germans hanged as an anti-colonial activist in the very tree where Omari eventually takes his own life.<sup>3</sup> The novel's multi-layered universe has no place for a simple distinction between European colonizers and colonized Africans. It is concerned throughout with questioning established stereotypes and complicating ideological narratives. As the narrator notes: "Nothing was straightforward" (261).

Further examples of this postcolonial poetics include the references to the role of Sufi Muslims in Arab resistance against German colonial rule (Vassanji 2012, 132) and the distance between different groups within the Indian diaspora, e.g. Hindu and Muslims such as the "Shamsi community" (214) to which Kamal's Indian family belong. The publisher-narrator takes historical lines of inquiry from the colonial period through to the era of decolonization and the present. In a telling episode from Kamal's youth, learning "the rudiments of Arabic writing" (56) with its "wonderful letters, written from right to left, in books that began at the back made him feel a part of a world he had been denied" by his European-style school training (57). The cultural divide between Arab-Swahili (Oriental) and Western culture is marked as a burden of colonial history and transcending it as personal enrichment enabling cultural empowerment. Vassanji's postcolonial poetics break with the binary logic still prevalent, e.g., in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said 1978), and works towards an "intercultural hermeneutics" (Genetsch 2007, 191).

This refinement of postcolonial identity discourse goes hand in hand with the reconstruction of forgotten colonial history and its legacies. It is telling that one of the novel's most important *lieux de mémoire* (and its first setting) is the square in Kilwa near an "old German monument" which was at the heart of Kamal's childhood world but which the returnee now finds "forlorn amidst a dump and parking space" (Vassanji 2012, 14). The novel's objective of reconfiguring the past from the fragments of history and memory brings together personal history (the protagonist's) and the broader history of the Indian Ocean world, as seen from an East African perspective.

In this sense, the novel follows in the footsteps of the Swahili epic at its historical center, even if the memory discourse of *The Magic of Saida* is postcolonial and cosmopolitan and moves beyond the anti-colonial politics of memory of the 1960s seen in Omari's magnum opus.<sup>4</sup> Reflecting about different stages in the history of East African memory is part of the novel's self-reflexive approach to a postcolonial rereading of the Indian Ocean universe.

### Hans Christoph Buch's *Sansibar Blues*: The Swahili universe in the postcolonial memory of German colonialism

In German literature, interest in East Africa from an Afrasian perspective is largely part of the rediscovery of colonialism as a theme that emerged during the later 1990s and found wider public resonance in the context of the centenary in 2004 of Germany's colonial war against the Herero and Nama in South-West Africa, which is today seen as genocidal (see Zimmerer and Zeller 2003/2008). While the critical memory of German colonialism in novels about South-West Africa and Namibia therefore typically involves a politics of memory interlinking the memory of colonialism with the dominant German memory discourse about National Socialism and the Holocaust (see Göttsche 2016), novels about German East Africa and Tanzania, especially those from the popular end of fiction, often blend a critical postcolonial perspective, which has become normalized since the 1990s, with persistent tropes of exoticism, a sometimes naive fascination with East African multiculturalism, and occasional returns to colonial myth (see Göttsche 2013, 115–165). Zanzibar plays a prominent role in this corpus since the court of the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar, and the significance of Arabic culture more widely, allow for a blending of the traditional literary discourse about Africa with popular Orientalism. Both discourses combine with contemporary interest in multiculturalism and transnationalism when it comes to contemporary German literature's fascination with Emily Ruete, born Princess Salme of Oman and Zanzibar (1844–1924), who scandalously married a merchant from Hamburg and later published her memoirs to foster dialogue between the Occident and the Orient (for an annotated translation, see Salme 1993). She features in several of the contemporary German novels remembering colonialism in Africa (see Göttsche 2017).

Hans Christoph Buch's *Sansibar Blues oder: Wie ich Livingstone fand* (Zanzibar Blues, or how I found Livingstone, 2008) stands out against the more popular novels in the field for undercutting African exoticism and Orientalism and trying to give a voice to African and Arabic experiences of colonialism through a metafictional poetics working with surviving sources. Using irony and humor to put colonialism, neocolonialism, and existing stereotypes in critical perspective, the novel switches between four narrative strands which combine to cover the history of Zanzibar, its Indian Ocean role, and its African hinterland, as well as German involvement there, from the 1850s to the present day. The contemporary chapters and the author's

epilogue act as a meta-reflexive framework that ties the three biographical narratives together in order to demonstrate “daß und wie die koloniale Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart fortwirkt” [the fact that, and how, the colonial past continues to affect the present] (Buch 2008, 224).

While the first strand is basically an account of the author’s own travels to Zanzibar, the second one explicitly bridges the gap between past and present by telling the life of a fictional East German diplomat, the illegitimate son of Duke Adolf Friedrich zu Mecklenburg-Schwerin, a former governor of colonial Togo and the childhood mentor of this character-narrator who is sent into the political turmoil of newly independent Zanzibar after the Socialist revolution of 1964. The novel suggests uncanny continuities between German imperialism and the effectively neocolonial involvement of the German Democratic Republic in Zanzibar, while the diplomat’s subsequent marriage to the Asian-looking niece of the last ruling Sultan of Zanzibar (Buch 2008, 39), who follows him back to the GDR with her children, creates a symbolic link between the historical multiculturalism of the Indian Ocean universe and contemporary German transculturalism. The same is true more obviously for the third strand, Emily Ruete’s account of her life based on an adaptation of her own publications, her *Memoiren einer arabischen Prinzessin* (*Memoirs of an Arabian Princess*, 1886), and her posthumous *Briefe an die Heimat* (*Letters Home*, 1999) (Ruete 1999a and 1999b). However, the most extensive engagement with Indian Ocean narratives in East Africa comes in the final strand, the novel’s account of the life of the legendary Zanzibari slave trader and ivory dealer Hamed bin Mohammed, better known as Tippu Tip, in which Buch works with Heinrich Brode’s biography of 1905 (rather than with Brode’s principal source, Hamed bin Mohammed’s Swahili autobiography, published in German translation in 1902/03; see Brode 1905 and bin Mohammed 1902/3). In both cases, Buch’s rereading of these Arab-African sources combines retelling with reworking of his source material as he mixes extensive unmarked quotations with very loose adaptation involving condensation, fictionalization, and dramatization that sadly often reduces complexity for rhetorical effects (see Göttsche 2013, 206–220). Buch’s metafictional style also blends narrative with essayism in the way it deliberately blurs the line between the voices of the character-narrators (Ruete and bin Mohammed), their mediators (such as Brode), and the author himself, who therefore leaves the reader with the impression of looking over his shoulder as he works his way into the source material, rather than listening to an “authentic” historical voice. The historical maps and photographs framing the text, and the excerpts from colonial sources in the epilogue,<sup>5</sup> underline the novel’s metafictional postcolonial memory discourse, which addresses the historical portrait of Zanzibar from the perspective of German colonial history and its forgotten African context while also reflecting ironically (although not always critically) on the stereotypes of traditional German discourse about Africa and the Orient.

Buch's interest in exploring Afrasian interactions is evident from the very start. Zanzibar is introduced as a commercial and cultural hub in the Indian Ocean presented as "ein Kreuzungspunkt der Kulturen wie das Mittelmeer" [a crossroads of cultures such as the Mediterranean] that saw Chinese, Indians, and Persians arriving, "vielleicht auch Griechen und Römer" [perhaps also Greeks and Romans], and certainly the Portuguese, French, Germans, English, and Americans (Buch 2008, 10). As the author's alter ego moves through the streets of Zanzibar, and indeed through East Africa, "auf den Spuren eines untergegangenen Kolonialreichs" [following the traces of a colonial empire that has passed into history, i.e. the German Empire] (11), he also explores Zanzibar's cosmopolitanism as a place where "everyone" has been (10, 203), a center of the "Dreieckshandel zwischen der arabischen Halbinsel, Afrika und Indien" [the trading triangle between the Arabic peninsula, Africa and India] (152), hence the historical key to power in East Africa. As the novel's Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the representative of German imperialism, notes, "wer Sansibar besitzt, hält ganz Afrika in der Hand" [he who owns Zanzibar has all of Africa in the palm of his hand] (143). Fascination with Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism and the particular interest in German colonialism combine with two further characteristics of *Sansibar Blues*: a recurring and somewhat problematic insistence on continuities between the colonial past and the postcolonial present, between past and present atrocities deplored in the reference to the African American blues in the title of the novel; and a focus on the pioneering role of the Arab-Swahili trading system in Central Africa, which anticipates European colonization but also paves the way for European imperial rule superseding the caravan trade. This is where historical analysis of *Sansibar Blues* is closest to Gurnah's *Paradise* and Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*.

In the Ruete strand, Buch draws on Ruete's own detailed and often ethnographic account of life in Zanzibar and at the Sultan's court. Buch's adaptation highlights the intensity, sensuousness, and lively chaos of African-Oriental culture and the multiculturalism and multilingualism of Zanzibar. Moving beyond the relevant passage in Ruete's autobiographical account, the novel underlines Indian Ocean connectivities for example by suggesting that "Arabisch, Persisch, Türkisch, Tscherkessisch, Hindi und Urdu" [Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Circassian, Hindi and Urdu] were spoken in the palace, "ganz zu schweigen von den Sprachen Ostafrikas" [not to mention the languages of East Africa], while the young Salme was reading Homer's *Odyssey* "in italienischer Übersetzung" [in Italian translation] (Buch 2008, 47). The narrator compares this cosmopolitanism with the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva, also noting that Zanzibar saw the same sort of "Reibereien zwischen den Völkerschaften, Religionen und Kulturen" [frictions between the ethnic groups, religions and cultures] as the later League of Nations, including racialized "Mißgunst und Neid" [envy and jealousy] between Caucasian Asians (such as Ruete's mother), Arabs, and black Africans (48). The historical themes of this strand of the novel include

the role of India in the succession crisis that followed the death of Ruete's father, Sultan Said, in 1856, and saw her younger brother Bargash move into exile in Bombay (56–57). There are vignettes of Zanzibar's plantation economy, as well as references to the communication system spanning the Indian Ocean and East Africa (57), and to Ruete and her son's use by Bismarck as an "Instrument einer imperialistischen Strategie" [instrument of an imperialist strategy] (169) in Germany's naval threat to Zanzibar in 1885 forcing the Sultan to accept German control of the East African mainland (168–169). Buch's humorous appropriation of Ruete's voice, which goes along with anachronistic insertions of later historical knowledge and twenty-first-century views, becomes particularly problematic where he distorts historical fact—e.g. suggesting that Ruete traveled from Aden to Germany on a boat via Cape Town (153), when the historical Ruete clearly took the traditional Arabian route via the Red Sea and Egypt—or attributes potentially racist prejudice to her—the people of Aden are supposed to be "schwarze, weiße und braune Teufel" [black, white and brown devils] (151)—which the historical Ruete was keen to avoid in her own writing (Göttsche 2013, 212).

The motif that Tippu Tip is said to have lived next door to Princess Salme (Buch 2008, 50) provides the link to the novel's portrait of Hamed bin Mohammed, alias Tippu Tip, with a broader representation of Swahili culture and infrastructure in East Africa. Buch's Tippu Tip presents himself as the descendant of pioneering Arab immigrants, who is fluent in Arabic, Swahili, Kirundi, and Lingala (89) and uses Zanzibar's Indian financiers, in particular the influential Taria Topan (Mangat 2012, 19–22), to take the Swahili caravan trade into the African interior to a new level. Echoing the racist European colonial gaze in his disregard for the "Schensis" (Buch 2008, 191), the black Africans, he even manages to set up his own central African kingdom ("mein innerafrikanisches Reich," 196) in the Congo region—motifs already found in Gurnah's *Paradise*. At the same time, he also supports the European colonial explorers such as "Stanley und Livingstone, Cameron, Emin Pascha" in their expeditions across the African interior. Probably inspired by the subtitle of Brode's biography—"Lebensbild eines zentralafrikanischen Despoten" [Portrait of a Central African despot] (Brode 1905)—, Buch's Tippu Tip is a politician as much as he is a merchant, and proud of his place in history, keen for example to stress that it was he, rather than any of the vocal Europeans ("vorwitzige Europäer"), who first discovered the sources of the Nile (Buch 2008, 70). Buch adapts a wealth of episodes from bin Mohammed's memoir (as mediated through Brode's biography) but moves beyond his source material in also making his Tippu Tip a keen chronicler and critical commentator of East African and Zanzibari history in the later nineteenth century. For example, when returning to Ujiji on the Eastern coast of Lake Tanganyika several years after retrieving David Livingstone there in 1871, he notes the growth of Swahili commerce which now sees Arabs, Indians, and Europeans barter

with African traders on the local market and Arabic dhows cruise the lake (196). The novel is clearly fascinated with East African cosmopolitanism.

On a larger historical scale, *Sansibar Blues* casts the Berlin conference of 1884/85 as a decisive turning point initiating the gradual demise of the Swahili universe in the African interior—much earlier therefore than suggested in Gurnah’s *Paradise*. Much to Tippu Tip’s regret, Sultan Bargash of Zanzibar fails to preempt the Europeans’ hold by also claiming “Territorialbesitz” [territorial ownership] (Buch 2008, 201) on the East African mainland at this point when the European empires are engaged in their “scramble for Africa.” Carl Peters and his infamous “protection treaties” with local African chiefs are presented as direct and ultimately successful competition to Tippu Tip’s hold on the African interior (201–202). When Sultan Bargash, having been to Europe and impressed by European power, fails to support Tippu Tip in his endeavor to secure control of his Congo “kingdom,” the merchant knows that “all was lost” (“daß alles verloren war,” 203). Even though the Belgians make Tippu Tip their local governor in the Congo Free State (210), continuing the pattern of building European imperial rule on existing Arab-Swahili infrastructure, the historical tide has turned. The end of the Tippu Tip strand sees him in Zanzibar, fighting, like Gurnah’s Aziz, for what little remains of his former wealth and power. In his old days, Tippu Tip is supposed to have told his German biographer Brode that “der Vormarsch der westlichen Zivilisation sei nicht mehr aufzuhalten und der Aufstand des Mahdi eine sinnlose Verzweiflungstat” [the advance of Western civilization could no longer be stopped and the Mahdi uprising was a pointless act of despair] (208). This emblematic figurehead of the nineteenth-century Arab-Swahili world is thus ultimately portrayed as a figure of historical transition: Initially taking Zanzibar’s influence to a new level, he also becomes a facilitator of European colonial penetration and rule. On the one hand, *Sansibar Blues* shows how European colonialism developed in the footsteps of existing infrastructure; on the other hand, it suggests that the Europeans superseded it by installing their own system of trade and power. This narrative is in keeping with the melancholy title of the novel, but it also fails to acknowledge the history of anti-colonial resistance and African, Arab, and Indian agency explored in Gurnah’s and Vassanji’s novels.

### **Ilija Trojanow’s *Der Weltensammler*: Recovering Afrasian interactions in the rereading of European colonialism**

In his best-selling novel *Der Weltensammler* (*The Collector of Worlds*, 2006), Ilija Trojanow takes the well-established postcolonial strategy of critically rereading colonial sources one step further than Buch. This novel is a metafictional account of British colonial officer and explorer Sir Richard Burton’s (1821–1890) missions to India as an officer in the British East India Company, his hadj to Mecca in the guise of a Persian Muslim, and his

expedition, together with John Hanning Speke, to the supposed sources of the Nile in East Africa in 1857/58. Based on a “contrapuntal reading” (Said 1994, 78) of Burton’s own publications, Trojanow focuses on Burton’s obsession, in his Indian and Arabic missions, with full immersion in the non-European cultures and languages of the countries through which he traveled. However, his “collection of worlds” then turns openly imperial in the final, East African part, which clearly indicates a colonial mindset for which Africans, unlike Indians and Arabs, did not rank as equals with Europeans. One of the most striking elements of Trojanow’s postcolonial metafiction is the introduction of fictional Indian, Arabic, and East African counter-voices which frame Burton’s story and put imperial ambitions and perceptions in critical perspective.

The Indian Ocean universe is again a prominent theme. The three main parts of *Der Weltensammler*, devoted to Burton’s travels to British India, the Arabic peninsula, and East Africa, respectively, set out the geography of the Indian Ocean, and there are references to the “Sidis” as “Descendants of slaves from East Africa” (Trojanov 2009 = E, 170; “Nachfahren von Sklaven aus Ostafrika”; Trojanow 2008 = G, 204)<sup>6</sup> in the Indian part and to the Arabic trade with African slaves in the Arabic part (G 253; E 213). However, it is the final, East African part of the novel that really develops the theme. As he stands in the shallow water of the shore in Zanzibar, recalling his missions to India and Arabia and preparing for his expedition into the African interior, Trojanow’s Burton casts an imaginary gaze across the Indian Ocean “to the ports of Bombay and Karachi, the bays of Khambhat and Suez, the Arab Ocean” (E 312–313; “zu den Häfen von Bombay und Karachi, zu den Buchten von Khambhat und Suez, zum Arabischen Meer,” G 366). In addition, there is the life and perspective of Sidi Mubarak Bombay (1820–1885), the former Yao slave from the Central African interior who became Burton’s guide—although his narrative in the novel is of course entirely fictional given the lack of sources. This co-narrator of the East African part acts as the African counter-voice in the novel’s poetics of transcultural multi-perspectivism, complementing Burton’s Indian servant and his highly literary scribe in the first part, and the Ottoman Empire’s multi-stranded inquiry into Burton’s penetration of the sacred sites of Islam in the second. Defying expectations of one homogenous non-European “other” that would replicate the binaries of colonial discourse, and turning the postcolonial rereading of colonial history into “contrapuntal writing” (Domdey 2009, 53), all these counter-narratives are marked by “internal pluralism” (*ibid.*, 52). In the case of the East African part, the novel portrays an indigenous oral culture of memory as Sidi Mubarak Bombay, now an old man in Zanzibar, recalls the adventures of his life and tells them to an audience of family, grandchildren, and neighbors for whom the age of the caravan trade and European colonial exploration has already become a thing of the past.<sup>7</sup>

There are elements of a transcultural *Bildungsroman* in the story of Sidi Mubarak Bombay’s life, which serves to map out the cultural universe of



the Indian-Arabian-East African hemisphere. Violently taken into slavery at such a young age that he even lost his name to “the languages of slave-taking, Arab and Kiswahili” (E 398; “in den Sprachen der Versklavung [...], auf Arabisch und auf Kisuaheli,” G 463), and reflecting the stages of his life in his adopted name, Sidi Mubarak Bombay is sold to India, is emancipated after the death of his Indian master, returns to East Africa, to which he now brings the knowledge of Hindi, and makes his career as a guide in the Arab-Swahili caravan system, historically serving expeditions of Richard Burton, John Hanning Speke, Henry Morton Stanley, and Verney Lovett Cameron; in *Der Weltensammler* he is also cast as guide to the notorious German colonial pioneer Carl Peters (E 306–307; G 358–359). In Trojanow’s novel, his transcultural cosmopolitanism echoes and indeed eclipses Burton’s own vision of cross-cultural metamorphosis (Bay 2009, 135, 138). If Trojanow’s Burton has to learn that despite his attempts to assume Indian and Arab identities, he will “never learn what it’s like to be one of us” (E 177; “du wirst nie erfahren, wie es ist, einer von uns zu sein,” G 212), his African chronicler is cast as someone using his role as a guide to European explorers to search for his identity and the central African roots of which enslavement deprived him. Sidi Mubarak Bombay thus serves to draw attention to the forgotten theme of Indian Ocean slavery, its differences from the transatlantic slave trade—individuals’ status could shift over time between slavery, indentured labor, and liberty—and the history of Africans in India. In his role as Burton’s guide and African counter-narrator of European colonial achievement, he also helps the novel to subvert the colonial myth of discovery by showing, as Buch’s Tippu Tip does in *Sansibar Blues*, how European explorers followed in the footsteps of the slave and ivory traders, “the real explorers of the mainland”: “Wherever we went, they had been already” (E 393; “die wahren Entdecker des Festlandes waren die Sklavenhändler. Überall, wo wir hinkamen, waren sie schon gewesen,” G 457). The European colonizers fully depended on their local guides and traders and the existing pre-colonial infrastructure, in this case the Arab-Swahili economy of the caravan trade. In ironic comments on the Europeans’ infatuation with being the first to charter “virgin” territory in the African interior, Sidi Mubarak Bombay, for example, recalls an Arab expedition that crossed central Africa from East to West well before the Europeans, making contact with the Portuguese in Benguela and turning self-styled explorers such as Stanley and Cameron into mere “stragglers” (E 337; “Nachzügler,” G 393).

Further expanding the theme of the Indian Ocean universe, Zanzibar, the setting of the oral African counter-narrative, is introduced as the center of the Afrasian slave trade as Mubarak the boy is sold to an Indian ivory dealer in Zanzibar’s market square (G 363). The fact that this merchant takes him across to Bombay, “to the city where he was born” (E 310; “in die Stadt seiner Herkunft,” G 363), rather than using him on his plantations in Zanzibar, reflects the mobility of skilled and affluent Indian migrants

across the Indian Ocean. This echoes the theme of East Africa as an Indian career, rather than a diaspora, in Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*. The brief account of Mubarak's "third life" in Bombay is then used to raise awareness of the "life of Sidis" ("Leben als Sidis"); there, the African slaves who, unlike Mubarak, stayed on, took Indian wives and formed an African diaspora in India despite initially being "as unfamiliar" ("so fremd") with one another as with the Indians around them (E 315; G 369). Sidi Mubarak Bombay is then said to support Burton by direct appointment by the Sultan of Zanzibar (E 337, G 394). Like any Arab or Swahili merchant, Burton is shown to rely for his expedition on approval from the Sultan and his officials, as well as on provisions from Indian traders (E 323–327, G 378–382). In the town of Kazeh, he benefits from the communication system established by the local Arab merchants, one of whom welcomes the British as a boost to their "business" despite the need to adapt to the rules of emerging European colonialism by shifting from the slave trade to other goods (E 382; "Unser Geschäft wird leichter werden," G 445). This assessment contradicts the impact of European colonialism discussed in Gurnah's *Paradise*, but it relates here to an earlier period before the European "scramble for Africa" fully took hold.

At a critical point on the journey, Burton's expedition is assisted by the faster caravan of an Arab trader who is nevertheless cast as the embodiment of "cruelty and terror" (E 370; "Grauen und Schrecken," G 431). This is one of the few points in *Der Weltensammler* where the novel also considers the internal frictions of East Africa's multiethnicity at the time. The racism underpinning the Arab slave trade is clearly exposed and the novel gives a sense of the hierarchies and stereotypes involved in the way different groups within East Africa see each other and relate to one another. Despite the inclusion of an East African voice, however, the focus is on the postcolonial critique of European imperialism rather than an exploration of the complications in the interaction between African Arabs, Indians (who only feature marginally), and various groups of Africans, the focus of Gurnah's and Vassanji's novels. Trojanow's postcolonial rereading of Burton's colonial missions makes a significant contribution to drawing the unfamiliar Indian Ocean universe to the attention of his German readers, but Gurnah and Vassanji go much further in mapping out its internal complications before, during, and after the colonial era.

## Conclusion

Moving beyond Atlantic connectivities and North-South relations to also consider the history of the Indian Ocean universe and its very different profile of colonial conditions clearly enriches the field of postcolonial literary studies. Addressing German colonialism in East Africa with reference to the deep history of interaction and exchange across the Indian Ocean, the four novels discussed in this case study present a very different historical scenario

from those engaging with the transatlantic history of European colonialism, and they all offer scope for the rethinking and reframing of more established tropes of postcolonial criticism. Gurnah's *Paradise*, Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*, Buch's *Sansibar Blues*, and Trojanow's *Der Weltensammler* all remember and critique German colonial involvement in East Africa from the perspective of Indian Ocean narratives with their deep history and continuing legacy, which puts European imperialism in perspective while still charting its violent and transformative impact. Moreover, the novels validate Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism while also registering the internal frictions of this universe in East Africa and reflecting on the impact of German and British imperialism on the transformation of East African society from the days of the Arab-Swahili caravan trade through German and British imperial rule to the postcolonial world today. All four novels underline the multi-layered conditions of a social universe marked by competition and interaction between various groups of Africans, Arabs, and Indians in the Arab-Swahili infrastructure of Zanzibar and its African hinterland, on which European colonial involvement builds until the Germans and the British eventually suppress and supersede the traditional power structures. This transformation, however, is not complete, and it does not happen without fierce opposition from local Africans, Arabs, and Indians who lay the foundations for decolonization decades later—a process conceived very differently in Buch's *Sansibar Blues* (in which colonial and postcolonial times are linked through an unfortunate history of violence) and Vassanji's *The Magic of Saida*, which retraces as a history of local agency, competing politics of memory, and the transferal of regional cosmopolitanism to the global stage of postcolonial migration. Comparative reading indicates that the two German authors combine the introduction of their German readers to the unfamiliar Indian Ocean world with a focus on the critique of German and European colonialism, while the two anglophone writers, both East African Indians by origin, explore the internal structure and development of East African multiculturalism in much more detail and for a different, potentially global, anglophone audience.

The novels' representation of the Indian Ocean universe in East Africa before, during, and after German colonialism also echoes some of the concerns raised in recent Indian Ocean research that seeks to challenge or expand the conceptual framework and geographical reach of postcolonial criticism. Gurnah and Vassanji in particular suggest echoes and analogies between European colonial perceptions, attitudes, and policies, and those of the Indians and Arabs in East Africa—analogs that force postcolonial critique to expand its remit beyond the European globe. The role of Indians and Arabs as a third group—or rather: a set of diverse groups—within the imperial society of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century East Africa also complicates older accounts of colonialism based on binary negotiations between colonizers and colonized. Finally, the novels in question suggest certain structural affinities between the multi-layered conditions

of colonialism in East Africa resulting from its Indian Ocean connections and the super-imposed colonialisms of the Baltics, of regions of the former Habsburg Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. Advanced postcolonial theory may wish to take these more complicated conditions as its starting point rather than treating them as an exception to a framework based on transatlantic history and British or French colonialism. Such rethinking of the postcolonial frames of reference arguably requires comparative analysis, and comparative literature has an important part to play in the advancement of comparative postcolonial studies.

## Notes

- 1 See the case studies in Hawley (2008a, 203–288).
- 2 Schulze-Engler (2014, 174) cites a similar example of the Indians' perceived "civilising mission" being reflected in Vassanji's novel *The Book of Secrets*.
- 3 See in more detail on the novel's politics of memory Göttsche (2018).
- 4 See in more detail Göttsche (2018).
- 5 These sources (Buch 2008, 229–241) are excerpts from Alfred Brehm's *Reiseskizzen aus Nord-Ost-Afrika* (1855), Hans Meyer's *Ostafrikanische Gletscherfahrten* (1890), and news coverage of the court case about Carl Peter's colonial atrocities.
- 6 Page numbers in this section refer to Ilija Trojanow, *Der Weltensammler: Roman* (Munich: dtv, 5th ed. 2008 [1st ed. 2006]); Iliya Trojanov, *The Collector of Worlds*, trans. William Hobson (New York: Harper Collins, 2009). The German original is referenced using the letter G, the English translation using the letter E.
- 7 See Göttsche (2013, 196–206) for a fuller analysis.

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# 13 The colonizer's day off

## Colonial subjectivities in the Soviet-era Baltics\*

*Epp Annus*

The title of this essay is inspired by a personal memory. This happened sometime before Perestroika, in the early to mid-1980s, in the Pelgurand part of Tallinn, in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic of the USSR. We lived within the carefully guarded borders of a stagnating Soviet empire. Our part of Tallinn was inhabited predominantly by Russian-speaking, Soviet-era settlers, so the Russian language was heard everywhere around us.<sup>1</sup> On our way home from school, we feared trouble from gangs of Russian youths. Russian-speaking soldiers were visible everywhere, and they guarded the seashore in the evenings.<sup>2</sup>

This day we were sitting, my best friend Kerstin and I, on the sandy seashore close to the 1960s-era, five-story, prefabricated apartment building where we both lived. This shoreline was commonly called “a beach,” though Estonians never went swimming there, since the bay was much polluted in those days. This beach, just a few hundred meters from our house, was generally considered “Russian territory”—a place that did not belong to our home zone and where we hardly ever went.

This day, however, we were sitting there together, in the grassy stretch between the sea and the first row of prefab apartment buildings. Occasionally, people would pass by, and, at one point, two soldiers sat down beside us and started a conversation. They had the day off, they said. They offered us candy, which tasted exotic. I had never seen such candy before, a yellow sugar coating around an almond—quite tasty. Our conversation did not succeed very well, however, since my friend and I were limited by our rudimentary Russian and, most of all, Kerstin urged that we get up and leave.

I, however, was much intrigued by this encounter. I had frequently seen soldiers marching by in their orderly lines, impersonal and always somewhat frightening with their military gear, guns clearly visible by their sides. I had seen them marching into the movie theater, I had seen their cars patrolling the seashore (a different seashore), I had seen them walking with fierce-looking

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dogs, and I had had a few unpleasant face-to-face encounters. Now I saw soldiers that had a day off, and they were friendly and sociable, eager to establish human contact. This did not fit into my tidily packaged set of expectations, the set of cultural imaginaries that circulated in our cultural zone, with more or less established, though never fully articulated, unofficial value-systems. According to this set of imaginaries, these soldiers were supposed to be hostile towards us. They were there to make sure that we would obey “Russian rule,” as we called it, and to prevent our escape to what we imagined as “the free world.” Could it be that these soldiers actually carried their roles like they carried their guns and uniforms—something one might put aside at the end of the working day? Could people simply shake off their previous identities and switch from hostile to sociable once they were off-duty?

These same questions of the potential limits of collective subjectivization also inform the present study. Can the colonizer take a day off? How stable are positions of “the colonizer” and “the colonized”? What happens when these terms lose their substance and are revealed—at least in some respect—as fluid categories, perhaps only incidentally related to actual human identificatory commitments? In order to address such questions, we have to first turn towards the discursive foundations of colonial relationships in the Soviet-era Baltics. Over the past two decades, questions of Soviet (post)colonialism have found plenty of scholarly interest,<sup>3</sup> so this essay leaves aside questions of the functionings and developments of Soviet colonial strategies on a large scale. Instead, I will focus on a particular aspect of Soviet colonial rule, the *formation of colonial subject positions* in the Baltic states. To limit the field of inquiry, I will focus my attention on Estonia, but general patterns and local imaginaries were quite similar across the three Soviet-era Baltic republics, and especially between Latvia and Estonia. I will first examine the ideological deployment of the colonial trope of the great Russian nation; I will then proceed to other aspects of Soviet colonial discourses, with a special interest in the ways these shaped—or failed to shape—Soviet-era subjectivities. This is what most interests me in this essay: the clashes, inconsistencies, and failures in the process of shaping colonial subjectivities in the Soviet-era Baltics.

### **I drink to the health of the most outstanding nation**

On May 24, 1945, Stalin proposed a toast at a victory banquet organized in honor of Red Army commanders:

“Comrades, permit me to propose one more, last toast.

I would like to propose a toast to the health of our Soviet people, and in the first place, the Russian people. (*Loud and prolonged applause and shouts of ‘Hurrah.’*)

I drink in the first place to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding nation of all the nations which make up the Soviet Union [...]



I propose a toast to the Russian people not only because it is the leading people, but also because of its clear mind, stable character and patience.”

(Boobbyer 2000, 132–133)

Stalin’s speech, heroizing Russians as the greatest nation in the USSR, offers a superb starting point for investigating not only the spread and rhetorical buildup of Soviet colonial discourses, but also the methods of constructing and disseminating colonial subject positions more generally. As we see, Stalin uses the occasion of the festive victory banquet to certify the position of the Russian nation as “the leading people”; in a typical instance of colonial rhetoric, he declares that Russian people are essentially more worthy than other nations of the USSR, in this way naturalizing Moscow’s rule over the different borderlands of the Soviet Union. Russians, we hear, are “the most outstanding nation,” the ones with “clear mind, stable character and patience.”<sup>4</sup> Such a rhetorical gesture positioned all other nations within the Soviet bloc in a subordinate position, one less outstanding and lacking in such clear minds, stable characters, and patience, and who should thus gratefully accept the guidance of the great Russian nation.

Stalin’s message reached all corners of the Soviet empire. These words were published in newspapers along the Eastern shores of the Baltic sea, areas inhabited primarily by Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, which by 1944 had been annexed by the USSR and where one might find already underway the establishment of a newly superimposed ideological and socio-economic model—commonly referred to by the locals as “Russian rule,” denoting it as a foreign imposition. To be more precise, Soviet armed forces had entered these areas already in 1940—the Soviet takeover at that time included setting up a puppet government, a secret service network, and control over the media, with some economic restructuring and massive waves of arrests and deportations (Tannberg 2005b, 274; Zubkova 2008, 256). Yet the three-year German occupation had put these processes on hold. In 1944–1945, when the Soviet army returned, the tasks related to the establishment of Soviet control over the Baltics were enormous: these included not only restructuring the entirety of Baltic society with their systems of government, education, economy, culture, and media, but also overwriting local values and worldviews. Indeed, much of the reorganization of Baltic societies in the late 1940s, even apart from a comparatively straightforward restructuring of the economy to serve the interests of the empire, served the aim of establishing new social modes of interpreting the role of Baltic peoples in their society, establishing a new understanding of the social geography of the Baltic world, one where the center of gravity would be situated not in one’s own homeland, but rather in Moscow, and where the decision-making role of Moscow would be taken for granted and the superiority of Russian culture would be accepted as natural. What makes the Baltic case especially interesting in the context of postcolonial studies is its lateness in history, the perhaps impossible effort of Soviet rule to overwrite already developed

national consciousnesses, and the accompanying clash between the formerly developed modes of Western modernity and the Soviet effort to overwrite these with Soviet versions of modernity. The Stalinist regime succeeded quite quickly, from its position of military domination, in severing longstanding Baltic economic connections with Scandinavia and Western Europe, but the reconfiguration of people's worldviews and values was a far more difficult task, one that never fully succeeded. In the Baltics, the main source of inconsistencies and inner dissonance in colonial subjectivities was the tension between *Soviet colonial discourses*, distributed by colonial power structures through official media channels and further spread through different social networks, and *local cultural imaginaries*, which to some extent internalized and to a certain extent resisted the interpretive patterns offered by colonial discourses. At the same time, further discursive dissonance abounded: Both Soviet colonial discourses and the local cultural imaginaries were vague and fluctuating sets of beliefs and value-systems which were in a constant process of alteration and extension—and which included unreconciled inconsistencies and incompatibilities among their subthemes.

Estonian media, by 1945, was already fully under the control of the Soviet propaganda machine, and Stalin's toast to the great Russian nation was printed in wide-spaced font on the front page of the widely circulated daily newspaper. The short text appeared under a portrait of Stalin, next to a general overview of the glorious victory banquet—which included a long list of other toasts also offered at the banquet, in honor of different Russian politicians and generals (Stalin 1945, 1). A year later, the toast was republished in the more substantial format of a book, in a collection of Stalin's writings (Stalin 1946). By that time, Estonians had also heard that the Armenian artist A. Nalbandyan was working on a large canvas, *To Russian people (Comrade Stalin proposes a toast to the health of the Russian people)* (“Ettevalmistusi üleliiduliseks kunstinäituseks” 1946, 4).<sup>5</sup>

Stalin's famous toast was effective in its brevity—this was a poem of a kind, an articulation of a single thought, without much development. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, these few phrases started to serve, together with Lenin's and Stalin's lengthier writings, as markers of symbolic authority among texts written by other less-known ideologists, following the dominant logic of enunciation in the Soviet era: Since Stalin (or Lenin, or Marx, or Gorky) has said x or y, then, under that authority, we can accept the following as true about z. For example, in 1951, Stalin's toast came to frame a quasi-scholarly discussion about methods in teaching Russian culture.

In the article “Questions of Russian culture within the framework of school programmes on the history of the USSR” (*Vene kultuuri ajaloo küsimused NSV Liidu ajaloo koolikursuses*), written by “prof V.N. Bernadski” and published in the Estonian journal *Nõukogude Kool* [Soviet School], the author states, with the indisputable voice of authority, that “in the Communist education of Soviet youth, the study of Russian culture is of special importance” (Bernadski 1951, 160). As Bernadski goes on to explain, the importance of Russian culture is twofold: First of all, Russian

culture has had an “immeasurable importance” in world history. In addition, it plays an “immense role” in the present day and age, as the Russian nation was the main founder of the first socialist society. Bernadski supports his claim with reference to Stalin’s toast of May 24, 1945, and he moves on to propose that

The study of developments in Russian culture in a Soviet school will help elucidate the historical role of the great Russian nation. Getting to know Russian culture in the schools of our fraternal Soviet republics will cultivate a love and respect towards the Russian nation.

(Bernadski 1951, 160)

Over the course of the next pages, Bernadski maps out the main achievements of the Russian nation. Russian scientists, we learn, are leading the way in many very important fields in science and, in technical innovation, Russian art is of indispensable importance to art everywhere—indeed, “the slogan ‘We must learn from the Russians!’ echoes back from all corners of the world” (Bernadski 1951, 167). Bernadski ends his 10-page paean with Stalin’s words, exactly repeating the quote he had introduced at the beginning of the article, about the Russian nation as “the most outstanding nation of all the nations which make up the Soviet Union” (Bernadski 1951, 169).

The sentiment and rhetorical moves of Bernadski’s article had plenty of company in the Baltic media of this period; in the same journal issue, the next article was entitled “Comrade Stalin about the vocabulary of language” (*Seltsimees Stalin keele sõnavarast*), and the article culminated with an encouragement for Estonian linguists to work on the basis of Stalinist ideas so that the Estonian language might likewise evolve into a rich and developed language (Kask 1951, 169–176). Over the Stalinist years, we find many variations and further articulations on the same general topic of Russian superiority. Indeed, this topic was commonly exhibited across the Sovietized media, with an emphasis on the backwardness of local cultures in relation to the great Russian culture. The dominant tone and theme of such statements was always similar: The glorious Russian nation is leading the way towards the best possible future (i.e., the best according to the standards of the hegemonic Soviet power).

One striking example comes again from the Estonian newspaper, *Postimees*, a lengthier piece by “prof. V. Lebedev” entirely devoted to the topic of Russian greatness, an article entitled “The great Russian nation—the most outstanding nation in the USSR and its leading force” (*Suur vene rahvas—Nõukogude Liidu silmapaistvaim rahvus ja juhtiv jõud*). Here, the familiar trope is developed in three directions: First of all, the whole idea of Russian greatness is explained in detail. Russians, we hear, are characterized not only by limitless bravery but also by selflessness and readiness to sacrifice their lives for the idea of liberty. Next, this topic is developed into the theme of the great Russian nation *selflessly helping other, underdeveloped nations* of the USSR,

it helped all the other nations of the USSR to overcome their centuries-long misery and their state of backwardness [...] In carrying out its Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policies, the Russian nation extended its brotherly hand to the formerly backward nations of our land in order to realize their economic and cultural ascent.

(Lebedev 1945, 2)

The third theme elaborated in the article is *gratitude*: All nations of the USSR are properly thankful for the selfless help of the Russian nation: The workers of Belorussia are “endlessly thankful” for their liberation, the Ukrainians happily confirm their love and reverence to the “most outstanding nation” of the USSR, and indeed, “each Soviet citizen” is proud of the Russian nation who shows the way for all other nations of the USSR (Lebedev 1945, 2).

To conclude this first excursion, we have looked at some rather clear examples of Soviet colonial rhetoric, aimed at positioning the Russian people as the leading force, as the main actor in the field of history, now stretching out its helping hand towards the backward nations, who in their turn are deeply grateful for this act of generosity. Indeed, the Soviet civilizing mission included typically colonial ideas of enlightening the “natives,” of helping to move other peoples up the ladder of civilization, and the Soviet mission was justified, again in a very typically colonial mode, by the superiority of the colonizing society. The specifically Soviet colonial understanding of progressive values was certainly different from those of earlier, nineteenth-century imperial powers: Here, the idea of progress included not only moving closer to Western norms of civilized life (which was certainly part of it, especially in Central Asia), but it was also based on the Marxist assumption that capitalism will progress into, one could say, a more “civilized” communist society. Again, as was typical for colonial conquerings, the local peoples were given little power to make their own voices heard, little regard was given to whether they actually acknowledged and supported the specific idea of progress imposed by the new occupying power. What makes the Soviet case especially complex is the way its rhetoric of friendship and equality sits side by side with its “civilizing” rhetoric.

Of course, the whole situation abounds in paradoxes, some of which are well known from other colonial enterprises, though some also have a specifically Soviet character. Certainly, the discourse of a colonial civilizing mission, imposed upon the subject ethnicities or nations, always invites questions of sincerity: Surely some of its advocates sincerely believed in the benevolence of their ideas and actions, yet how many and to what extent? In the case of the Baltic annexations, one can easily track the other side of this same discourse: Stalin and his confederates also openly discussed the geopolitical urgency for Soviet control of the Baltic lands, the usefulness of having access to the Baltic sea, and the strategic importance of controlling these territories (Zubkova 2008). Thus, another mode of Baltic discourse was primarily and openly belligerent.

**Enemy, you must obey!**

In 1940, *Kratkii russko-estonskii voennyi razgovornik* (*A short Russian-Estonian military phrasebook*) was printed in Moscow (*Kratkiy Russko-Estonskiy Voyennyi Razgovornik* 1940). The book runs just over a hundred pages—too short, it would seem, for courtesies such as “hello,” “goodbye,” “thank you,” “please,” and “excuse me,” which are not included at all. Here is the full list of expressions introduced in the opening two pages:

Do you understand Russian?  
 Understand. Don't understand.  
 Do you speak Russian?  
 Respond!  
 Respond only “yes” or “no.”  
 Speak more slowly!  
 Tell the truth!  
 If you don't know, say “don't know.”  
 You cannot not know!  
 You must have heard!  
 You must have seen!  
 You don't speak the truth!

(*Kratkiy Russko-Estonskiy Voyennyi Razgovornik* 1940, 7–8).

These phrases not only direct wartime Russian military personnel through a potential conversation, they also recognize or establish a set of expectations. The commander of a Red Army unit, looking into this phrasebook, orients himself towards an oppositional encounter. Indeed, the booklet stages a mismatch, an unwanted meeting, where one side tries to lie or hide the truth, and the other side has to force information from the liar. In the collection of several hundred phrases, intended for interactions both with Estonian-speaking soldiers and with local inhabitants, one finds just a single relatively friendly phrase: “Don't be afraid of the Red Army soldiers.” Otherwise, neutral questions (for example, “Where does this road lead to?” or “Is the road paved?”) are overwhelmed by the demands and threats that set the overall tone for the book.

While a phrasebook may be of little use in producing intelligibility from an actual dialogue, the phrases in this book do prepare the ground for any interactions to come. The authors and their intended readers are positioned in an imaginary dialogue with a person of a different nationality. The encounter is staged as one of opposition, and a coercive tone is established prior to any actual encounter; the Russian soldier is not assigned the position of a benevolent big brother or a liberator; rather, an aggressive stance is adopted, as if between parties understood to be enemies. It comes as no surprise that this part of Soviet colonial discourse did not make it into the Soviet-controlled Baltic media.

The same aggressively oppositional perspective also emerges from reports about the attitudes of Russian-speaking soldiers in Estonia. General Shcherbakov describes in his 1944 report how Red Army soldiers, amazed by the general prosperity of the Estonian countryside, presumed that Estonian farmers were German allies or even German settlers (Siilaberg 2010, 1434). As the Harju region committee of the Estonian Communist (Bolshevik) Party announced in October 1944, the crimes of Red Army soldiers—robberies, rapes, lootings, terrorizing the local farmers—had brought a halt to all normal life in the countryside, since people were afraid to move around or even to show up at work (although intrusions into farm homes were also frequent) (Siilaberg 2010, 1448–49). According to Ardi Siilaberg's archival research, the highest-priority problem that needed to be addressed by the new Soviet governing bodies in the countryside was in fact the undisciplined marauding of the Red Army soldiers (Siilaberg 2010, 1449). Such behavior does not, to put it mildly, comport with discourse of the benevolent and brave Russian nation. As a result, the incoming Russian-speaking soldiers were both feared and despised among the local populations (who, for that matter, had already experienced massive arrests and mass deportations from the Soviets in 1940 and 1941).

In the Russian imaginaries, the association of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians with fascism persisted throughout the Soviet years, and *fashisty* (fascists) was among the common curse words used by Russian-speakers for Estonians in situations of conflict (Ladõnskaja 2013). The association was further strengthened by Soviet film industry, where fair-skinned Baltic actors were frequently assigned the roles of evil Germans in the many stereotypical war movies of the Soviet era. The Estonian actor Tõnu Aav, Latvian Uldis Lieklidz, Lithuanian Algimantas Masiulis, and Laimonas Noreika were among the most common Baltic evil" faces in Soviet movies; Algimantas Masiulis even earned the nickname of the "fascist of merit" [*teeneline fašist*] of the Soviet Union (Liiviste 2008). For typical Soviet filmgoers, there was certainly something suspicious about the blend of "cultural manners and refinement with sadism and cynicism," as the film scholar Peter Rollberg has characterized the roles played by Laimonas Noreika (Rollberg 2016, 530)—how were these Baltic actors able to portray the evil Germans with such psychological complexity? And how could one reconcile the prevailing discourses of a benevolent Soviet civilizing mission in the Baltics with the deep Russian hatred for their ultimate enemy, the "fascist"?

To add to these conflicts of deed and discourse, discursive confusions in the Baltics stemmed also from the uneasy relationship between Western and Soviet modernity and from Russia's longstanding feeling of backwardness in comparison with the more developed West:<sup>6</sup> It was hard—and it became still harder over the coming years—to position the communist model as the highest, when the capitalist West was plainly more technologically developed and could showcase much wealthier lifestyles. The annexation of Latvia and Estonia produced a visible split between the Soviet colonial

rhetoric of Russian/Soviet superiority and the local material circumstances. This split was especially striking for the first Soviet representatives arriving in 1940, before the ravages of the war. Vladimir Derevianski, commissioner of the Soviet Communist Party in Latvia, was amazed by the quality of Latvian goods and services and sent to Moscow detailed reports (with drawings); he sincerely suggested that the Soviets might profitably learn from the Latvians how to produce quality goods and services (Zubkova 2008). Especially in the post-Stalin years of relative stability, the sandy beaches and a (relatively) Western atmosphere made the *Sovetskaya Pribaltika* or the Soviet Baltics attractive sites for Soviet tourism: The Latvian resort town Jurmala had not been seriously damaged by the war and it received its first vacationers as early as 1945. By 1959, approximately 107,000 tourists, mostly from Moscow and Leningrad, visited yearly. Two sanatoriums were later built for top party officials, and the USSR Council of Ministers' leisure home was completed there in 1971 (Laakkonen and Vasilevska 2011). Likewise, the Estonian resort towns of Narva-Jõesuu and Pärnu began to attract thousands of Soviet tourists once they recovered from the devastation of the war.<sup>7</sup> Russian artists and art lovers came to be inspired by the post-Stalin art scene in the Baltics (Rosenfeld 2002, ix–xi).

### Mismatches and discursive confusions

What, we might ask, becomes of the positions of the colonizer and the colonized in such a situation, where the claims of the civilizing mission suffer a mismatch not only with the local sense of a developed cultural identity but also with the technological and commercial superiority of the local culture, with the presence of Western-style historical landmarks, and, in later years, also with a more vibrant art and music scene than was permitted in the highly controlled metropolis?

We should also take into account another, quite different social factor, the massive influx of Russian-speaking war-time and postwar refugees: In Estonia alone (with a postwar population of just over one million), about 20,000 Russian-speaking refugees per year arrived in the postwar years (Mertelsmann 2005, 53). Such a chaotic, unorganized, and massive flow of culturally different peoples was certainly alarming and added significantly to postwar crime and chaos, but war refugees, squatting in half-ruined houses and begging or stealing to survive, hardly conform to anyone's typical images of the colonizer.

One must consider rather carefully the respects in which it does (and doesn't) make sense to deploy categories of colonizer and colonized in the Soviet Baltic context. Yet the colonial matrix of Soviet rule was clearly manifest, in the overall reconstruction of Baltic societies and so consequently in peoples' everyday lives: The Russian-speaking Soviet military was visible in the public spaces and significantly restricted the movements of the locals; education systems and programs of study were reorganized according to

the models prescribed by Moscow; and, in very different areas of decision-making, decisions were either made in Moscow or required confirmation by Moscow (Zubkova 2008, 12).<sup>8</sup> The local economies were restructured and new industries built prioritizing Moscow's interests, not the Baltics', resulting in serious pollution and environmental devastation at the industrial sites (Smurr 2009). Publishing houses had to receive approval from Moscow for their annual plans (Tamm 2012), and, in order to become a member of a creative union, the portfolio of a candidate was sent to Moscow for approval (Helme 2002, 6–16). Baltic films had to be approved in Moscow before their release (Trossek 2007), the prices of consumer products were set in Moscow ... in short, all this created a common understanding in the local imaginaries of living under a “Russian rule,” as indeed it was widely referred to in everyday parlance (Mertelsmann 2005).

Nevertheless, in important respects, applying the label “colonizer” to each of the new-arriving Russian-speaking settlers in the Baltics seems more to hinder rather than help understanding. We might, therefore, more productively understand “colonizer” and “colonized” as structural positions that refer to the subject's location within the colonial matrix of power.<sup>9</sup> Such positions get actualized in certain situations but might be deactivated in some others. Certainly, no social category can definitively position a singular human being, but we can see how these categories can indicate one's position in relation to a certain set of shared values and ideas. While soldiers are marching in their uniforms, some of them might form verses in their heads or think about a recent letter from home. Yet, collectively, these soldiers form a category that each of them might not necessarily approve of: In the Baltic borderlands they function as representatives of “Russian rule.” The soldiers themselves were not even necessarily Russian—some might have been recruited from Central Asia, others from Ukraine, and many of them might themselves feel uneasy in relation to Soviet rule. Even so, structurally speaking, they fulfill the function of the colonizer and are experienced as a hostile occupying force by the local population. In a similar way, Russian settlers arrived at the Baltic shores for any number of reasons—many came in search of a better life,<sup>10</sup> many were sent against their own wishes. Russian graduates of Leningrad and Moscow universities, for example, would have preferred to stay in Leningrad and Moscow, close to their friends and families, in their own cultural comfort zone (Waldstein 2007, 561–596; Annus 2018, 192–193).<sup>11</sup> Yet, *en masse*, Russian-speaking settlers *functioned* as colonizers in the eyes of the locals, for whom the great influx of Russian-speakers felt culturally threatening. These soldiers of course also functioned as colonizers in the political sense, forming military forces at the disposal of the colonial regime.

Do we then need to clearly distinguish between structural roles and human subjectivities? It is not certain, however, that one can abstain from internalizing structural positions as part of one's self-identity. Even if one could somehow shake off one's role in the system after working hours, still,



even after working hours, one remained lodged within the larger field of cultural imaginaries. For the local inhabitants, cultural imaginaries included memories and habits, customs and traditions that retained a communal connection with the pre-Soviet era—for newcomers, such a mental link to the local cultural zone was missing. For local inhabitants, pre-Soviet layers of memory, combined with the horrors of the Stalin years, created a certain counterbalance to official Soviet discourses, so that the Soviet civilizing rhetoric and the trumpeting of Russian superiority were commonly laughed at. Milder versions of the local critique of the Soviet civilizing mission made their way even into mainstream publications of the late Soviet era: In the novel *Ma langesin esimesel sõjasuvel* (*I Died in the First Summer of the War*, 1979) by Juhan Peegel, the Red Army commissar Dobrovolsky gives a speech to the Estonian soldiers who had just entered his command. Dobrovolsky explains (with the help of a translator) that, as the armed forces of the former Estonian republic are now integrated into the Red Army, so consequently “officers are no longer allowed to beat their soldiers” (Peegel 1979, 22). The first-person narrator, a former soldier in the Estonian armed forces, comments: “We all listened to this talk in great amazement, since none of us had ever seen or heard of such a thing—an officer laying hands on a soldier” (Peegel 1979, 22).

Local inhabitants might have been astonished by the new Soviet discourses, but, for the new Russian-speaking settlers, official media often functioned as their most important source of information. Certainly, Stalin’s idea of the great Russian nation was a self-flattering one, and one could easily identify with the role of bringing progress, especially as the new settlers were often recruited for building and/or working in new factories. Surely setting up new factories meant bringing progress! Yet such factories generally belonged to the all-Union system, with raw materials and workers imported from other parts of the empire and the final products being shipped out again, contributing to the local culture mostly an unwelcome set of problems: industrial pollution, uneven development, and a heavy influx of migration (Arman 1962, 3–16; Grava 1993, 9–30). Nonetheless, the discourse of the Soviet enlightenment retained its popularity among Soviet-era settlers well into the post-Soviet years. Kevin Platt describes his findings from interviews with Russian-speakers in post-Soviet Latvia,

a common explanation and legitimization of the Russian presence in the area revolves around the work of cultural and social construction that Russians are thought to have carried out in building Latvian society, industry, and such others. Discussions of Latvian educational policies, which impose education in Latvian on Russian children, are most often couched in terms of the relative inferiority of Latvian civilization by comparison with Russian civilization, which possesses “universally recognized world-wide significance.”

(Platt 2014, 137)

One finds ample evidence of similar attitudes among Russian-speakers in Soviet-era Estonia. In Estonian life stories, these might surface in the form of recollections about a Russian teacher who explained to her Estonian students that they “did not have anything here” before the arrival of Russian aid (Hvostov 2011); or in references to Russian retail ladies and taxi drivers who would demand that Estonian customers need to *govorit' po-chelovechesku*—to speak like a human being, meaning “to speak in Russian” (Tammer 2004); one also finds a variety of jokes at the expense of Russians who mistake all Latin script languages for German and thus not worthy of their attention (Tammer 2004).

Should we conclude, then, that whatever the possibility of shedding one's structural position as a colonizer, Russian speakers in the Baltics generally internalized the colonial discourse of Russian superiority vis-a-vis Baltic cultures? Yet we should not forget the prevailing discourse of the Baltics as belonging to the West, a discourse which certainly undercut the discourse of Russian superiority. Could one subscribe *both* to the idea of the Baltics as more Western *and* believe that Russians were the leading people who stretch out their helping hand to those in need? There is no easy way to smooth over such contradictions—one is forced to contend with inconsistencies in the formation of colonial subject-positions. Certainly, the paradoxes of colonial subjectifications pertained also to the “colonized” parts of the colonial subjects: The ethnic Estonians and Latvians both objected to the official value-systems *and* internalized parts of them—they considered the new Russian settlers uncultured and unmannerly, loud and prone to excess drink, but they also visited Moscow and Leningrad as cultural meccas and/or as destinations for shopping for consumer products (Vahing 2006; Berg 2012).

Each concept, whether political or critical, is to a certain extent self-deconstructive. Colonial discourses and colonial subject-positions belong to such imaginary entities which are both treacherous and unavoidable: treacherous, because these simplify the complexity of potential subject-positions, and unavoidable, since we need to use certain categories to organize critical thought. The way to deal with the danger of producing simplifying conceptualizations, as I have tried to show in this essay, is to draw attention also to inner inconsistencies and deconstructive instances embedded in ideological constructions.

## Notes

- 1 The proportion of ethnic Estonians in Estonia dropped from approximately 94% in 1945 to 62% in 1989, and of ethnic Latvians in Latvia from 80% in 1945 to 52% in 1989 (Kasekamp 2010, 155).
- 2 The Baltic military district (including Kaliningrad) stationed about 250,000 soldiers. In Estonia, by 1991, the military units of the Soviet Army were distributed across 800 different geographical locations and occupied a total area of 87,147 hectares—all in a country with a population of about one and a half million (Plakans 1995, 162; Tannberg 2005a, 259).

- 3 Some recent examples include Annus (2018); *Novoye Literaturnoye Obozreniye* vol. 144, no. 2; Tlostanova 2017; Kalnačs 2016; Şandru and Kołodziejczyk 2016; Smola and Uffelmann 2016, 2017; *Journal of Baltic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2016); Pucherová and Gáfrík Platt 2014; Turoma and Waldstein 2013; Ştefănescu 2013; Mazierska, Kristensen, and Näreipea Platt 2013.
- 4 Colonial discourse tends to generate paradoxes: We might recall that Stalin himself was Georgian by birth—and not Russian. Though he treated Georgians preferentially as compared to other Soviet non-Russian ethnicities and nationalities, as the leader of the USSR he identified with Russians.
- 5 The artist was Dmitry Arkadievič Nalbandyan; the newspaper editors, not yet accustomed to using patronymics, have mixed up the first name and the patronymic.
- 6 Russian feeling of backwardness vis-a-vis more developed West is a topic often addressed in Russian and Soviet studies, see Etkind (2011); Tlostanova (2012); and Morozov (2015).
- 7 One should not forget, however, that sites of difference were also found elsewhere in the Soviet borderlands—Lviv, for example, was famous for its excellent café life; and Armenians would claim their relative closeness to “Western” cultures thanks to the generous support from the vast Armenian emigré communities. The most popular resort towns in the USSR were Yalta and Sochi by the Black Sea.
- 8 According to Zubkova’s data, during the period of 1944 to 1952, the Orgburo and Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party made 871 decisions about the Baltic republics, across very different fields of Baltic life.
- 9 I have developed this idea more fully in Annus (2018, 172–203).
- 10 See examples in Aarelaid-Tart (2012, 93).
- 11 Many Russian-speaking Jewish intellectuals, for example, ended in Estonia when they could not find employment in Russia.

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# 14 Latvian multiculturalism and postcolonialism

*Benedikts Kalnačs*

## Introduction

Recent research trajectories in the field of postcolonial studies have tended to cover an ever larger geographical area, and in doing so, have discovered new aspects for analysis. This has led scholars away from the initial exclusive focus on European empires and their possessions overseas or, in other terms, away from the First and the Third World. Postcolonial studies is by now, more or less, unanimously looked upon as a research field dealing with issues on a global scale. In addition to inter-continental relationships, it takes into account intra-continental aspects. This approach has contributed to the growing significance of discussions of European internal colonialism, as well as opening up a space for tackling the role of the Russian empire, and in the twentieth century, also including the Soviet Union's function in creating and stimulating colonial discontents.

These scholarly developments have been inspiring for a researcher like me, who happened to be born in Latvia, a Baltic country that had lost its independence during WWII, and re-established it only in the late twentieth century, after half a century of Soviet (and, for a short but significant period of time, also Nazi) rule.

The June 1940 occupation of Latvia by Soviet troops was only one consequence of the secret Soviet-Nazi agreement known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which was signed in 1939. This agreement dealt with a hypothetical (soon to become real) division of territories in East-Central Europe according to the zones of interest of two great colonial powers. In itself, a reminder of the late fifteenth-century Treaty of Tordesillas that divided the yet-to-be-colonized lands in South America, a newly discovered continent in the Western Hemisphere. The Soviet-Nazi declaration of shared interests revealed two, unfortunately quite obvious, truths in a nutshell. First, ungrounded territorial requests by empires, both in the West and in the East, were still a living reality of the twentieth century; secondly, for the Baltic littoral (and for Poland), this particular treaty meant the continuation of the decades or centuries-long presence of foreign rulers.

In the context of the discipline of postcolonial studies, the Baltic littoral made its first appearance in the early twenty-first century. The groundbreaking publication was that of *Baltic Postcolonialism*, a 2006 book edited by the Lithuanian exile scholar Violeta Kelertas that emerged through a close co-operation of established researchers whose academic affiliations were predominantly located in the West (Kelertas 2006a). The solid academic background of the contributors secured an excellent contextualization of this inquiry into Western scholarly discourses. *Baltic Postcolonialism* laid a strong foundation for all subsequent attempts in the field, notwithstanding certain doubts in the Baltic community, which was not necessarily immediately open to the treatment of its experience in postcolonial terms. In her introduction, the editor takes a clear stand in this regard, stating that

“totalitarianism” never defined the Baltic case. [...] The rich theory developed around postcolonialism offers a more contemporary approach to analyzing the situation in the Baltic States and provides many useful insights in dealing with the past. Meanwhile the present remains contradictory (corruption, crime, disappointment in democracy) and an excellent example of postcolonialism, in spite of the Baltic countries now having achieved membership in the European Union.

(Kelertas 2006b, 3)

Violeta Kelertas made an excellent choice, including an article by David Chioni Moore, that had already been printed several years earlier (Moore 2006). The author was one of the first to indicate the absence of the Post-Soviet sphere from the field of postcolonial studies, and more specifically, to position the three Baltic States in postcolonial contexts. The authority of Moore, and later also of Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 2006, 828) alongside other prominent postcolonial scholars, was of substantial support in opening doors for postcolonial investigations of the post-Soviet sphere.

The history of the Baltic littoral, however, reaches far beyond most recent political contexts and includes painful relations both with the East and the West. Even after the re-establishment of the independence of the Baltic countries, where Western neocolonialism started to manifest itself quickly in the guise of global capitalism and neoliberal economics, this dynamic hasn't changed much. Further complicating the situation in the governing structures of the new states is the continuing presence of some elites corrupted in Soviet times and also former collaborators of that regime.

The above description fits into the larger picture and provides a common background for most of the territory of East-Central Europe (a term we will return to later). The post-Soviet condition as the shared fate of the region has resonated into the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In a powerful recent study, the Romanian scholar Bogdan Ștefănescu persuasively argues that postcolonialism and post-communism can be considered “siblings of subalternity.” According to Ștefănescu, “an ideological description of

postimperialist identities, whether postcolonial or postcommunist, should, therefore, look for structural relationships between colonizer and colonized, rather than to the particulars of colonization” (Ștefănescu 2013, 39).

In her book *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East-Central European Culture*, Cristina Șandru notes a split of cultural consciousness between Western and East-Central Europe, which has contributed to the problematic attitudes and “Western practices of othering and peripheralisation, compounded by an uneasy recognition of these territories’ essential (though backward) Europeanness” (Șandru 2012, 22). The tension described has led to the rise of two mutually contrasting positions of East-Central European postcolonial scholars in their relation toward the West. One category of scholars, presumably the dominant, has been keen to claim that the area has always formed a substantial part of European modernity (Pucherová and Gáfrík 2015, 21). At the same time, and from a different perspective, such an approach has been linked with accusations of self-colonization. The neocolonial presence of Western powers in East-Central Europe has been the object of this criticism, at times conceived in rather strong language and terms (Kovačević 2008).

Whatever their positions, the majority of scholars tend to share the dominating self-evaluation of East-Central European communities and intellectual elites alike. That position is focused on “the experience of former second-rate Europeans from Eastern Europe who for centuries have been multiply dependent on various empires and today slowly and painfully are re-entering the European world and wider, the global world” (Tlostanova 2017, 16).

Summarizing the above opinions, it seems evident that if one wants to study an individual (and, more specifically, an intellectual) in post-Soviet space, it is necessary to recognize the potential overlap of postcolonial and post-communist discourses, as well as to pay due attention to each particular location. Thus, it is almost mandatory within the terms developed by postcolonial studies and post-Soviet studies to ask about the locus of enunciation.

In this chapter, I develop the following main points and concerns that relate to the issues at stake. First, I look at the importance of regional contextualization of the countries of East-Central Europe from a comparative perspective. I argue that the area being discussed has throughout the centuries been characterized by a multinational milieu where, despite social inequalities, different national and social groups existed side by side, even if they did not necessarily reach a mutual consensus. Second, I discuss the specific features of the Soviet colonial empire and its statist version of modernity. However, in my approach, I avoid an interpretation of the Soviet experience in terms of exceptionalism and look for comparative perspectives instead. Third, I proceed with the problem of marginalization of the local population, a process that took place from 1940 on, and discuss to what extent it changed the structure of society in the Baltic littoral. In the fourth part,



I more specifically pay attention to literature as a source of multidirectional memory. The primary example here is the work of contemporary Latvian author Inga Ābele, with a special focus on her most recent novel, *Duna* (*Drone*), published in 2017. I will demonstrate, through a close reading of excerpts from the text, the attempt of the author to represent a kind of post-war milieu that is totally alienated from the local population, both in historical perspective and from the viewpoint of a contemporary author who tries to recover deeper layers of collective memory. An important part of this recovery consists of the need to engage in a multidirectional interpretation and understanding of past events.

### Regional contexts of postcolonial East-Central Europe

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the Baltic experience is gradually becoming more and more integrated into the constantly expanding field of postcolonial studies. It is certainly important to position the Baltic case in a wider East-Central European perspective.

The most elaborated discussion of the societies and cultures of East-Central Europe has been provided by the multi-volume project of the history of literary cultures edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. In their discussion of the choice of what term to use for the region, the editors aptly remark that “*Mittleuropa* is both linguistically and ideologically oriented towards the German cultures, [while] ‘Eastern Europe’ suggests Russian hegemony” (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004, 4). The same logic is then developed further:

For our purposes the unifying feature of East-Central Europe is the struggle of its peoples against the German and Russian hegemonic threats. In this sense, the region is a liminal and transitional space between the powers in the west and the east, a long but relatively narrow strip stretching from the Baltic countries in the north to Macedonia in the south.

The concept of this wide-ranging book is clearly the discovery of many overlapping layers of various (social and ethnic) experiences that are concurrently shared by each local population. Specific regions of East-Central Europe have been discussed in numerous other investigations that come to similar conclusions with regard to the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of this territory (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004, 6).

Analyses of ethnic and cultural diversity have also been undertaken in the context of the Baltic littoral. Including not only the history of the three major cities, Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn, but also in minor locations and rural areas. For example, Riga as a multi-ethnic metropolis has been dealt with from the viewpoint of different national groups (Oberländer and Wohlfahrt 2004), while early twentieth-century Vilnius has provided

a fascinating terrain for studies of the co-existence of a number of literary cultures (Kvietkauskas 2007).

After World War II, scholars in exile were equally keen to discuss the Baltic littoral, not only as a stage of important historical events but also as an area of constant migration and multicultural encounters. This was also done for ideological purposes in order to provide a counter-narrative to the dictates of the Soviet communist ideology, according to which the Soviet rule in 1940 should be looked upon as the beginning of history for the Baltic nations. If there had ever been any previous developments, they had to be directly linked to the importance of contacts with the eastern neighbors.

Thus, it is noticeable that in the course of and after WWII, and with the overwhelmingly dominating rhetoric of “the great Russian nation,” an ideological rupture on a scale previously unknown in the area occurred. Already in 1939, after the Soviet-Nazi pact defined separate spheres of imperial interest, almost all the local population of Baltic Germans, who for centuries had lived in Latvia and Estonia, and whose families had their historical roots there, left for Germany in order to escape the upcoming military confrontation between the two political powers. Further consequences can be seen as a result of Soviet nationalities policies. Here it is sufficient to say that in the post-war reality a new group in society was created, a pseudo-unit of a “Russian-speaking community,” predominantly consisting of new settlers (of different nationalities). Using their knowledge of the Russian language as a marker, this group was ideologically opposed to the local population. Traces of this oppositional approach have remained so permanent that they are still alive in the Baltic littoral almost 30 years after independence. The presence of “Russian speakers” in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, along with their self-proclaimed political necessity to defend their interests, remains a major rhetorical tool constantly employed by Russian state propaganda.

Thus, despite the fact that scholars who research East-Central European countries have sufficient arguments to claim that the area has always formed a substantial part of European modernity, an undeniable imprint has been left by Russia’s territorial, as well as ideological and political, claims and ambitions. Followed (in the twentieth century) by the Soviet Union, an empire torn apart by its own internal contradictions that in an apt phrase by Madina Tlostanova, has been stuck in a deadlock of being “a paradigmatic second-class empire” with an explicit inferiority complex and politics which “reflect and distort the Western originals” (Tlostanova 2012, 135–136).

One of the aims of this chapter is to detect the painful consequences of the Russian/Soviet imperial policies as well as imprints of coloniality which have been left in the Baltic littoral while simultaneously keeping an eye on the fact that, in cases when the Baltic peoples have been exposed to different forms of expansionism originating in the West, Russian influence should neither be overestimated nor isolated from other historical developments.

## The Soviet colonial empire and its ideology of modernity

In this section, I proceed with a brief discussion of the compatibility of Soviet and Western narratives of progress, with a special focus on the concept of Soviet modernity. Michael David-Fox, who has devoted a book-length investigation into the topic of Soviet modernity and ideology, points out that from a scholarly point of view there have been two dominant approaches. Some researchers have argued that the development of Russia in the twentieth century, leading to the establishment of the Soviet Union and the rise of the ideology of communism, has shown a unique path, while others insist on the comparability of the Soviet case: “The binary opposite of uniqueness was the equation of the Soviet order with other societies, which for convenience I refer to here as generic or ‘shared’ modernity” (David-Fox 2015, 2). Further reflecting on the idea of shared or multiple modernities, David-Fox comments on the contradictory nature of the historical developments in Russia itself, reminding us that the early attempts at Europeanization, promoted by Peter the Great, have been passionately confronted with the concept of the unique nature of Russian identity that in the nineteenth century formed a fierce opposition to the ideas of so-called Westerners. This tension also helps to explain why twentieth-century communist ideology, even if constantly employing the rhetoric of progress and liberation, was itself tormented by the wish to catch up with developments in the West while struggling with its own subalternity complex. This situation made Soviet policies in the Western borderlands it controlled even more straightforward in order to secure a sufficient level of control. The ill-fated Soviet nationalities policies certainly contributed to the relentless, even if to a great extent silenced, opposition of the local population in the Baltic littoral. This was one of the principal failures of the regime and one that proved the attempted Soviet version of modernity to be unsustainable.

On the imagined road to progress and leading toward the triumph of communism, the Stalinist era was one of the most outspoken periods of transformation. As David-Fox asserts, “Stalin’s Soviet Union, with its state ownership of the economy, ban on private property, takeover of autonomous organizations, and massive and relentless, if rampantly inefficient and bumbling, bureaucracy developed perhaps the most intrusive state and authoritarian ‘high modernist’ ideology of all” (David-Fox 2015, 5). A major failure, however, was the incompatibility of the interests of the state, on the one hand, with the improvement of conditions on the level of personal lives, on the other. Despite officially enforced optimism, it was the lack of individual involvement and initiative that contradicted the statist version of modernity promoted by the imperial rulers. In the Baltic littoral, and to a proportionally much greater extent than in other parts of the Soviet Union, this led to an economic decline when compared to the pre-war situation in the independent states. Eventually, the failed mobilization of people resulted in a political disaster that helped determine the dismemberment of the Soviet Union.

In accordance with the popular disagreement with the Soviet version of modernity, we can identify the lack of consensus with the official rhetoric of the regime among local populations as one of the most important causes of the decline of the Soviet project. This kind of inner discord, despite the growing awareness of the temporary inevitability of the regime and the necessity to adapt oneself to the existing conditions of everyday life, remained a constant feature of the Soviet period (Annus 2018, 99).

On a psychological level, disagreement with Soviet power always remained in place and generated feelings that can be attributed to colonial sensibilities. This can be shown by contemporary discussions on the nature of Soviet hegemony in the Baltic littoral. In her 2012 article, Epp Annus convincingly demonstrates that the temporal sequence of events was of vital importance in establishing a long-term presence of foreign rule. The initial occupation was followed by consecutive measures that strengthened the colonial matrix of power despite the paradoxical reality that colonial relations were imposed on modern twentieth-century nation-states (Annus 2012, 35–38). Thus, the concept of coloniality proves to be even more painful than that of occupation, still more frequently in use. Kevin M.F. Platt notes that contemporary politicians would prefer the term occupation. He argues that “the Latvian historical discourse of ‘occupation’ may be seen to oppose an alternate discourse of colonization” (Platt 2013, 139). The consequences of the occupation of the independent Baltic countries proved to be even more dramatic in the long term as the effects of the colonial matrix of power inscribed their lasting effects on the minds and bodies of the local population. It is possibly for this reason that “Soviet colonialism” remains a term less frequently approved of and used by the Baltic communities.

Simultaneously, it is exactly the understanding of the processes of global coloniality as inextricably linked to modernity that might help Baltic societies to avoid an interpretation of their experience from a narrowed standpoint and provide it with a wider perspective.

### **The marginalization of the local population as the loss of place**

In the 1930s, the Soviet government crystalized its future plans where one of the most prominent roles was ascribed to the restructuring of the earlier image of cities. “Architecture’s central role in Stalinist culture has its own logic in that building and spatial organization lie at the heart of Marx’s account of society: the base-and-superstructure model. This potential was picked up in Bolshevik Party rhetoric about ‘building communism’” (Clark 2003, 4). The process was promoted from 1931 on, when the Party plenum in June discussed a plan for rebuilding many major Soviet cities, and in the center of this undertaking stood Moscow as the legitimate example while it “was not merely a model; it was also the seat of power” (Clark 2003, 6). This kind of development did not take into account local specifics, to which the plan to rebuild Vilnius, developed in 1940 and 1941, also

testifies: “Its principal aim was to rid Vilnius of its old-town core, with its irrational, narrow, serpentine streets, including the old Jewish quarter. In this instance, the layout of the city was described as ‘semi-feudal,’ and the ‘chaotic, haphazard arrangement’ of buildings was blamed on ‘bourgeois Poland’” (Davoliūtē 2016, 54).

Even if these plans never materialized, they demonstrate how little appreciation of the uniqueness of the local environment was apparent in the minds of the ideologues and builders of Soviet modernity. The effect that was aimed at by such an approach (and finally indeed reached by other means that included the construction of new Soviet suburbs in major cities and the complete destruction of the traditional way of life and housing in the villages) is comparable to the feelings of alienation that were created by war-torn landscapes, as well as by the experience of exile people forced to flee from their native environment. This is how human geographer Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše describes this latter aspect, from the perspective of war and exile: “Since I was dispossessed of my homeland at an early age, my life has been dominated by a conscious awareness of home and homelessness, of being on the road both literally and metaphorically” (Bunkše 2004, 6). He goes on to comment on his childhood memories: “I experienced enough fear, anxiety, and loss, enough armies (four), enough shelling, bombing, strafing, and shooting (including a bullet wound at the age of seven) for them to be a permanent part of my being—tissues, nerve endings, psyche” (Bunkše 2004, 6).

The Latvian art historian Jānis Kalnačs has recently completed a painstaking examination of the process of the appropriation of flats in Riga that were abandoned when their inhabitants were forced to flee under the threat of Soviet occupation at the end of WWII. Kalnačs makes a telling remark in an interview, that he would like to encounter a single flat in Riga where the same family would have lived for several generations, and that to his knowledge there is no such place (Nagle 2018, 28). The experience of utter destruction was made even more painful by the fact that Sovietization in the Baltic littoral overlapped with the devastating impact of Nazi rule; the Soviet occupation came first, and its later steps were partially preceded (and partially overshadowed) by Nazi atrocities (Davoliūtē 2016, 52). The war and exile in the Baltic littoral resulted in destroyed cities that to a considerable extent were void of local people. The consequences of these tragic events initiated the feeling of inescapable and painful loss, described by Cristina Șandru in East-Central European perspective in terms of the need to recover the lost layers of experience: “One other thing that postcolonial and post-communist cultures share is the experience of trauma and the predominance of the retrospective look, an almost obsessive calling to account of the past, in all its forms; their major tonality is the confessional, with undertones of nostalgia or anger” (Șandru 2012, 31).

The projections of post-war Soviet architecture in the Baltic littoral, as part of “building communism,” were inevitably confronted by the reality of writing

from the ruins in a metaphorical as well as a direct sense. Taking into consideration the more than complicated responses to the question, “what does it mean to write and remember from the site of a ruin?” (Rothberg 2009, 135), I see the problem of marginalization of the local population, caused by multiple destructions, in the context of the necessity to recover multidirectional memory. This recovery solely can bring together different manifestations of oppression in the area (including the Holocaust) and also ask, what did it mean for local people of different nationalities in the Baltic littoral to start their life again from scratch, and thus also to write from the ruins?

The following observation by Michael Rothberg, drawn in another context, seems also fully applicable to our case: “It is not simply that [André] Schwarz-Bart’s experience as the son of Holocaust victims opens him to the suffering of others—although this is certainly true—but also that a recognition of the other’s suffering opens up a new way of thinking about his own historical location” (Rothberg 2009, 139).

### Literature as a source of multidirectional memory

The growing intensity of the quest for truth in the Baltic littoral is well documented by the often-repeated observation that history has become a popular topic, and there is a particular interest in twentieth-century history. In this context, it is important to note that recent Latvian fiction, moving beyond the limits of national memory, pays tribute to the multilingual society of Latvia and reflects on the diversity of everyday experience. Several important texts, among them *Duna (Drone)*, the most recent novel of celebrated prose writer Inga Ābele (born 1972), tackles events linked to the experience of WWII and its aftermath of occupation, war, and suffering, and the effects on people. Through the experience of time and space, an intriguing interplay between forgetting and remembering is established.

As Katerina Clark notes of the Soviet Union, “[t]he entire country was organized in a hierarchy of spheres of relative sacredness, a cartography of power. It was the task of socialist realism, whether in art, in film, or in literature, to present the public with its landmarks and its route maps” (Clark 2003, 8). The political power paradoxically enough had its impact on the flow of time and partially on the landscape. However, through the act of remembering not only are the lost threads of individual lives being recovered, but this process evolves in the same locations, bringing together different layers of experience. As pointed out by Aleida Assmann, “what time has made invisible through removal and destruction is still mysteriously retained by place” (Assmann 2013, 294). Writing more specifically from the perspective of postcolonial studies, Madina Tlostanova stresses the recovery of space as one of the most important issues for postcolonial societies: “Rediscovering and re-inhabiting a certain space and the return of spatiality is an important tendency of contemporary cultures” (Tlostanova 2015, 32–33.).

Contemporary Latvian authors who focus on the traumatic experience of the past provide various frames of reference. Trauma is one of the driving forces in re-appreciation of passing time, which in this case “does not propel the disappearance but (re-)emergence of memory” (Assmann and Shortt 2012, 6), and this also refers to the evaluation of culture left behind by Soviet ideology. In the officially promoted art form of socialist realism, “[t]he positive hero encapsulates the cardinal public virtues, and his or her career over the course of the novel symbolically recapitulates the nation’s progress toward communism, thereby legitimating the status quo and affirming that Soviet society is on the correct, Marxist-Leninist track” (Clark 2003, 3). For the Baltic cultures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, there has been an obvious necessity to challenge and overthrow such narrative patterns.

Clearly, contemporary literary practices have moved beyond the stage of “writing back” to metropolitan cultures. However, the question of choice of literary form, especially when historical issues are at stake, is still relevant. One of the principal tasks in this process, as clearly put forward by John McLeod, is to dispute the view that looks at “colonial people and places as essentially devoid of any meaningful history, culture, and creativity of their own” (McLeod 2013, 452). In the context of Latvian culture, this task has been consciously undertaken by the recent series of historical novels which deal with twentieth-century experience. The specific dates and events tackled by the authors cover the uprising of 1905 in the Russian empire, the events of the Great War, the creation of the independent republic of Latvia in 1918, the authoritarian regime of the second half of the 1930s, the Soviet occupation in 1940, which was almost immediately followed by mass deportations of the local population, and the ascent of Nazi rule in 1941. Several novels deal with the traumatic events of Soviet rule after World War II. Of crucial importance for this undertaking is the fact that, while born during the Soviet era, all the authors have experienced the transition from one regime to another and are able to provide a critical evaluation of both previous and present (post-Soviet and neocolonial) reality. Discussions about these texts also cross generational boundaries, and readers of the series include people who do not usually pay serious attention to fictional texts. This is not only additional proof that this series contributes to a serious discussion on matters of history and memory but also an indication that Latvian society recognizes the necessity for such an evaluation.

In the final part of this chapter, I discuss some characteristic aspects of one of the novels in the series *Duna (Drone)*, written by Inga Ābele. This text has two narrative paths that link contemporary and historical experience.

The novel begins with the first-person female narrator, who is looking for a witness of past events personally related to her family story, and meets an elderly man. Their conversations, evolving after a grudging initial response from the new acquaintance, who is unwillingly confronted with painful memories of his past, gradually lead to a partial recovery of the lost

experience. An album with old drawings, introduced by the narrator as a link between the two people, provides the connection that stimulates a revitalization of their memory archive.

The main focus of the novel is post-WWII Riga. At the very beginning of the narrative, the protagonist's long walk through streets that are well-known to him introduces scenery that by the late 1940s had almost completely changed its appearance. Old houses are filled with new inhabitants. There is an overwhelming presence of war invalids on the streets. These are predominantly new settlers, people who have been involved in the warfare—which was declared a patriotic duty—who now are completely uprooted and left without sufficient support to lead a decent life. An encounter with a group of such people, at St Peter's church in Riga that has been partially destroyed during the war, provides a telling example of the situation. The church interior is almost empty at night, and a group of invalids settled there are warming themselves by a fire. This is a situation that is in complete contrast to the previous functions of the building. It doesn't provide any perspective for the outcasts of society, nor for potential believers who might be willing to attend the sacred place. Local people have left their homes, or in the case of those who stayed, have been completely alienated from the environment.

The Riga racehorse track serves as one of the principal metaphors in the novel and acquires various important meanings. First, it is one of the landmarks of the pre-war city of Riga, known as a bustling and vital place with numerous cultural and leisure opportunities. A significant part of the narrative is made up of stories about the former glory of this place. Eventually, as the author remarks in the Afterword to her novel, the Riga racehorse track was shut down in 1965, and, from then on, a disruption in time continued (Ābele 2017, 420). As I strolled through this area in my childhood, there was only a huge empty and abandoned place of no use for any purposes. In the twenty-first century, new construction has begun that transforms the environment beyond recognition.

Second, people encountered in the novel as employees of the race track share memories of the pre-war period. Irrespective of their different ethnic backgrounds, the majority of them embody ethic norms characteristic of the society of the independence period. They are characterized by a true affection for the horses that goes far beyond their professional duties.

Third, the Stalinist era is clearly distinguished by the arrival of new people and changing relations on all levels. The very first encounter in the novel that relates to the events of 1949, when the historic narrative starts to develop, reveals a meeting of the protagonist with two unfamiliar people who are impatiently waiting for him at the sidelines of the horse race. They introduce themselves with important keywords that make an immediate sharp cut through the unpleasant foggy air of the early spring morning. One of them declares his links to the KGB, while the other works at the Department for Agriculture and has been given the task of making



himself familiar with the situation in Latvia. He comes from Moscow, and this reminder of the intrusion of the imperial center is enough to create an immediately chilly atmosphere, not expressed in words but rather revealed by the sudden awareness of the protagonist that a new timeline has entered the race course.

The events of the novel unfold in the weeks leading up to a mass-scale deportation of the Baltic people, that was carried out simultaneously in all three occupied countries on March 15, 1949. In order to demonstrate the full extent to which the rupture of the Soviet occupation has changed the lives of the local population, the narrative also covers earlier historical events.

It is obvious that the current rise of historical fiction in Latvia is closely linked with a re-evaluation of history after the restoration of independence of the Baltic States in 1991 and with the recent political changes in East-Central Europe. After the initial period of applying postmodernism to literary theory and practice, especially during the 1990s, a gradual return of interest to social and political issues, and among other themes to the re-interpretation of history and memory, has acquired a growing importance.

## Conclusion

The analysis attempted here has followed recent trajectories in the field of postcolonial studies and noticed that it constantly becomes increasingly inclusive, allowing for a comparative approach to a number of experiences formerly treated in mutual isolation. In the context of East-Central Europe, and more specifically the Baltic littoral that has been the focus of this examination, these scholarly developments lead to at least two important observations. First, there is a new stimulus to look at Baltic literatures from a broad comparative perspective, one that lifts them out of isolation and engenders previously unnoticed connections. Second, in tracing the development of societies in the Baltic littoral and in the process of discovering hidden layers of experience, it gradually becomes possible to evaluate the lively and multicultural nature of earlier encounters in the area. This helps to look far beyond contemporary social tensions that are rooted in the relatively recent ideological dictates of the colonial center.

Thus, postcolonial studies remains a fertile research terrain. One that, on one hand, has yet to come to terms with the swift expansion of its own development, and on the other, could appreciate the ever more widening scope of potential discoveries and conclusions that remain fascinating and enable truly global visions.

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Part IV

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# 15 Narratives of the Anthropocene

## From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental humanities<sup>1</sup>

*Gabriele Dürbeck*

In recent years, postcolonial and other scholars have articulated various elements of a critique of the Anthropocene discourse which has mostly centered on its universalistic implications (Baucom 2012, 2014; Emmett and Lekan 2016). As a result, the Anthropocene discourse has been significantly elaborated and differentiated. This chapter differentiates between five Anthropocene narratives and sketches a distinct critique of each of them from the perspective of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism. The Anthropocene hypothesis interprets human agency as a geological force that fundamentally affects all aspects of the Earth system, in particular through anthropogenic climate change, species extinction, and land use change. Therefore, as has been articulated in the fields of ecocriticism and environmental humanities, it is important for a postcolonial critique to include an ecological perspective (DeLoughrey et al. 2015; Heise et al. 2017).

My point of departure is the observation by the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty that as human agency has transformed the Earth system, “humans now exist in two modes [...]: as a geophysical force and as a political agent” (Chakrabarty 2012, 14). Elaborating on this double bind, Chakrabarty argues that globalization and climate change challenge us “to think human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once” (ibid.) and that we therefore need the historical insights of enlightenment, postmodernism, and species thinking disjunctively. Chakrabarty concludes that “the idea of the human needs to be stretched beyond where postcolonial thought advanced it” (ibid., 15). Following Chakrabarty’s line of thought, the postcolonial perspective needs to reflect on the human condition against the background of global spatial scales and deep time: It needs to reflect without losing sight of the different impacts of “environmental violence” (Nixon 2011, 8) on different groups or communities across the world and the different voices that respond to the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Another important point of departure is Chakrabarty’s earlier, much-discussed article, “The Climate of History: Four theses,” in which he proposes a “negative universal history” in the face of the global climate crisis

which raises the question of a “human collectivity” (Chakrabarty 2009, 222). The article’s suggestion of a “new universalism” received many critical responses, including the *RCC* journal special issue, “Whose Anthropocene. Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty’s ‘Four Theses’,” which articulates the need to redefine the “onto-existential status” of *anthropos* (Emmet and Lekan 2016, 10). As “ecocriticism and postcolonialism have every reason to be suspicious, if not necessarily dismissive of humanism, which has been routinely attacked for practising a selective universalism that disguises specific race, class, gender” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 206), it is important to pay attention to “multiple fractions of humanity” and “diverse communities,” recalling the tools of social sciences (McAfee 2016, 72).

Keeping in mind that the postcolonial approach requires an “always culturally situated” understanding of knowledge and experiences of ecology (DeLoughrey et al. 2015, 9), this chapter applies a postcolonial and ecocritical perspective to critically assess five different strands of the Anthropocene discourse. The first section briefly explains the perspectives of postcolonial ecocriticism and the broader field of environmental humanities. The second section introduces the Anthropocene concept and distinguishes five narratives of the Anthropocene. The third section provides a critical discussion of these narratives, from the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental humanities.

### Postcolonial ecocriticism

Mutual engagement between the fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism has been a surprisingly recent occurrence. Four reasons have been suggested for the long span of “mutually constitutive silences between environmental and postcolonial literary studies” (Nixon 2005, 235): (i) While scholars of postcolonialism have “foregrounded hybridity and cross-culturation,” ecocriticism has “historically been drawn to discourses of purity: virgin wilderness, and the preservation of ‘uncorrupted’ last great places” (ibid.); (ii) while postcolonialism is concerned with displacement, mobility, and diaspora, ecocriticism turns to the ethics of locality and “*Heimat*,” stressing the “sense of place,” and appears more open to the literatures of indigenous cultures than postcolonial studies; (iii) while postcolonial studies has “tended to favor the cosmopolitan and the transnational” (ibid.) and defined itself as “urban-metropolitan” (Mackenthun 2015, 85), earlier ecocriticism concentrated on the pastoral and wilderness as the national emblem of US identity (Heise 2015a, 21). This identity also inspired the bioregionalism movement which advocates rootedness in a certain place and “remains [often] inside a spiritualized and naturalized national frame” (Nixon 2005, 236) (iv). While postcolonial studies are strongly concerned with the “marginalized past: history from below and border history” (ibid., 235) and excavate colonial and migrant memory, the (earlier) ecocriticism often seemed ahistorical and “subordinated to the pursuit of timeless, solitary moments of communion

with nature” (ibid.). Conversely, Pablo Mukherjee (2010) has accentuated the complex interdependencies of environmental conditions and social, historical, and cultural factors, emphasizing the link between space and cultural diversity.

Another equally controversial strand of this field is the discussion on environmental and climate justice in regards to the North-South divide. It harks back to the environmental justice movement present in the US since the late 1970s, which—although not a postcolonial project in the first place—rapidly spread across the globe. Its continuing influence has been visible, for example, in the climate marches during the climate summit in New York City (2014) and Paris (2015) and in the now globally organized Peoples Climate Movement.<sup>2</sup> The environmental justice movement draws attention to the fact that people of color, the poor, and other minorities often live in polluted environments and aims to improve their living conditions by “creating multi-racial, multi-class, and transnational coalitions” (di Chiro 2016, 375). The practice in industrialized nations of locating nuclear reactor plants on reservations or properties of indigenous people has produced concepts such as “radioactive colonialism” or “environmental racism” (cf. Mackenthun 2015, 81).

Another important aspect of postcolonialism is its attempt to decolonize the relationship with nature. Val Plumwood has criticized the enduring construction of the “Other”—be it land, be it human or nonhuman populations—as part of the Eurocentric hegemonic system. The dualism of the colonized “Other” exaggerates differences by radical exclusion, homogenization and stereotyping, polarization, assimilation, and instrumentalization. This “centric structure imposes a form of rationality” and “insensitivity to the Other’s needs, agency and prior claims” (Plumwood 2003, 59–60); it construes humans as the only agents in the world; thereby conceiving indigenous land mostly as inferior, silent, and empty (Plumwood 2003, 65). In contrast, postcolonial environmentalism aims for a re-conceptualization of nature through alternative concepts of wilderness, attention to property relations, to indigenous knowledge and practices, and through renaming and empowering the local place and “more-than-human sphere as major constituents of identity and meaning” (Plumwood 2003, 67). Postcolonial ecocriticism also connects the notions of indigeneity with an understanding of land not as an object of exploitation but as a “protagonist in its own right” (Banerjee 2016, 194).

In times of globalization, ecological thought has further developed by “decentering environmentalism” and diversifying its scope to create a “transnational ethics of place” (Nixon 2005, 243). Many scholars in this field have emphasized that environmentalism can no longer be limited to immediate nature experience and the local, that it should be expanded to what Ursula Heise calls “eco-cosmopolitanism” in which a “sense of place” is inter-connected with a “sense of planet” (Heise 2008, 61–62) to include issues of ecojustice. The first wave of eco-cosmopolitanism brought



a perspective of comparative cultural theory into environmental thought and highlighted the diverse social and cultural understandings of human-nature-relations. More recent eco-cosmopolitanism has broadened its lens to include multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), and the multispecies justice movement, in order to make room for the stories, rights, and cultures of humans in different geopolitical spaces and social institutions as well for the rights of nonhuman species (Heise 2015a, 28).

The extension of the field of ecocriticism to eco-cosmopolitanism is relevant for a critique of the Anthropocene discourse. If we follow Chakrabarty's suggestion of stretching the human as a political agent in postcolonial thinking to the human as a geological force, we need to complement the postcolonial critique of the Anthropocene with an ecocritical analysis. This *inter alia* allows us to connect the local and the global, culturally situated knowledge and universal concerns without reducing the one to the other. A recent volume explores how postcolonial thinking is "integral" to global ecologies and the environmental humanities as a wider field of ecocriticism (DeLoughrey et al. 2015, 2). The editors emphasize that postcolonial-informed environmental humanities are not only "interdisciplinary, transnational, and comparative" but also "self-reflexive in [their] engagement with histories and knowledges of ecological difference" (DeLoughrey et al. 2015, 3). Concerning the global nature of environmental crises which "require collective response," they stress the need to consider the "positionality of such claims" (DeLoughrey et al. 2015, 6), "emphasize tensions between different forms of knowledge," and "focus attention on how power relations affect environmental decision[-]making and practices at multiple scales, from domestic to the global" (DeLoughrey et al. 2015, 10). The following narrative analysis of the Anthropocene discourse takes up these concerns and enables a reflexive ecocritical and postcolonial critique.

### **Narratives of the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene concept originates from Earth system analysis and conceptualizes *anthropos* as a planetary geophysical force (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Crutzen 2002). The Anthropocene connects current action-oriented time horizons with deep history and deep future. An important part of discussion in the natural sciences is the periodization of the new geological epoch. After different suggestions of chronostratigraphical markers (around 8,000 BC, around 1610 due to the consequences of European colonialism, and late eighteenth century with the invention of the steam engine and the following industrial revolution) in recent years, the time around 1950 and the following Great Acceleration is seen "as stratigraphically optimal" (Zalasiewicz et al. 2015, 196). While official recognition of the new geological epoch by the authoritative Geological Society London is still pending, further meanings of the Anthropocene have already been established: It refers to the changes in the Earth systems and it marks a

“threshold” in the relations between human and nature (Hamilton et al. 2015, 3). For example, at least 75 percent of the inhabitable Earth surface has been transformed by humans into “anthromes,” “anthropogenic biomes” (Ellis 2011, 1010).

Beyond geology and natural sciences, the Anthropocene idea has been influential in various fields of science, from social economy and science and technology studies to law and political sciences, from architecture, urban studies, and archeology to philosophy, history, literary studies, and the arts. Its broad resonance in media, exhibitions, and the public sphere shows that the originally geological concept also functions as a “cultural concept” which “blurs established boundaries on many different levels between science and the public as well as the sciences and the humanities” (Trischler 2016, 318). In this respect the Anthropocene can serve as an inter- and transdisciplinary concept, bridging different discourses and disciplines (Dürbeck 2015).

The Anthropocene concept has been presented as a narrative from the beginning, as a story with protagonists, a plot with cause-effect relationships, a spatial and temporal structure that serves the purpose of the foundation of meaning. The protagonist is the entire human species, a geophysical force that leaves a footprint on the planet which will still be detectable in the sediments, for example by radioactive isotopes, even after hundreds of thousands of years (Steffen et al. 2015, 81). Narratives are “central cultural forms of expression, which contribute significantly to culture’s self-interpretation and the construction of meaning” (Erll and Roggendorf 2002, 79). The narratives of the Anthropocene provide orientation in light of an enormous complexity of causal relationships, feedback loops, and unintended side-effects of human activities. In a large body of scientific and journalistic texts, five narratives of the Anthropocene can be distinguished (Dürbeck 2019): (i) *the disaster narrative*, which considers the Anthropocene as the sum of environmental depletion; (ii) *the court narrative*, which blames the developed countries in the Global North and the neoliberal socioeconomic system as generators of global environmental destruction, proposing terms like “Technocene,” “Capitalocene,” or “Plutocene”; (iii) *the narrative of the Great Transformation*, which advocates for efforts to mitigate the causes of environmental destruction along with reasonable adaptation to Earth system changes, using novel technologies and higher environmental efficiency; (iv) *the (bio-)technological narrative*, which propagates technocratic interventions such as geoengineering and ecomodernist ideas; and finally, (v) the reflexively oriented *interdependency narrative of nature-culture*, which presents the Anthropocene as an opportunity to rethink mankind from a posthumanist perspective.

These five narratives articulate divergent political, economic, ethical, and anthropological interests and values while at the same time displaying many overlapping elements and motifs. Strategically, the Anthropocene narratives propose certain measures to address the global climate crisis and to stay within “planetary boundaries” (Rockström et al. 2009). In a reflexive sense,

Anthropocene narratives question established human self-understanding and reassess dominant epistemological categories (e.g. the subject/object or the nature/culture dichotomies). At a structural level, the Anthropocene appears as a “meta-narrative” (Dürbeck 2019) that interprets *anthropos* as a geophysical force, has a deep-time dimension, adopts a planetary perspective on global environmental change, assumes that nature and culture are inseparable, and calls for humanity’s responsibility.

### **Postcolonial ecocriticism and narratives of the Anthropocene**

From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism, the cultural Anthropocene discourse must not fall behind established levels of reflexivity in “a world of difference” (O’Brien 2001, 140). Contra this standard, a key question is to what extent the shift from “infra-human concerns” for the struggle of freedom to a “trans-human category of species” (Baucom 2014, 125) can integrate a “culturally differentiated, historically nuanced understanding of human-environmental relations” (DeLoughrey et al. 2015, 9). This section sketches, in a stylized manner, how a postcolonial ecocritical analysis of the five Anthropocene narratives can unveil different degrees of openness and reflectedness towards cultural differences, the positionality of interests, questions of ecojustice, implicit reproductions of power structures, experiences of environmental violence, and rupture.

#### *Ambivalence in the disaster narrative*

Numerous scholars describe the Anthropocene as a “message of almost unsurpassable moral-political urgency” and diagnose an “apocalyptic logic” in the discourse (Sloterdijk 2015, 25, 36). Humanity, for example, is characterized as a “planetary killer, concerned only with its own short-term survival” (cf. Chakrabarty 2009, 210). The “Collapse of Western Civilization” (Oreskes and Conway 2014) appears unavoidable. Philosopher Claire Colebrook questions the human capability to overcome anthropocentrism and “myopia of the future” (Colebrook 2014, 203), which she attributes to the managerialist approach dominant in climate change discourse. Stories of anthropogenic devastation and species extinction are often articulated in a melancholic language and use metaphors of illness (“sick planet”) and decay (the Earth covered by mold). Thus, the disaster narrative has an alarming effect and a precautionary function for its audiences. Contra to this pessimistic view, prominent voices from the natural sciences often portray humans as masters of the Earth by deploying green technological and economical solutions.

From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism, one should first ask which audiences are actually addressed by the catastrophic outlooks and from which position. The disaster narrative is usually directed at Western

audiences; it names and shames globalized industry, technology, and capitalistic systems and calls for fundamental cultural change, focusing on strategic purpose. Certainly, warning against a disastrous future also has a reflective mode, questioning the established human self-understanding. Given its mostly Western audience, the disaster narrative often unreflectively reproduces a center-periphery hierarchy. In reality, the effects of climate and environmental change in the rich countries of the global North (the center) are foregrounded, while the impact on the poorer and vulnerable countries in the Global South (extreme weather events such as droughts, storms, and devastating floods, environmental pollution, over-fishing, resource decline, etc.) appear more remote and are pushed into the background. From a postcolonial and ecocriticism perspective, the disaster narrative appears ambivalent: while it problematizes ecological violence, it neglects differential vulnerabilities. The disaster narrative tends to neglect issues of environmental justice, when for example the impacts of global environmental change hit the poor in the Global South, particularly women in rural areas (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 52, 56), much harder than the main culprits. The effect is a strong global discrepancy of both CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and burden sharing of climate change (Althor et al. 2016). Postcolonial ecocriticism calls attention to the implicit reproduction of power structures that emphasizes the agency of the Global North and neglects the voices in the global periphery. It calls for a more prominent inclusion of the disaster experienced and the agency at the periphery, a more multi-perspectival narration, and a more differentiated consideration of audiences.

### *Differentiating humanity in the court narrative*

When humans collectively are considered a geological force that changes the climate and the Earth system, an important question is, “who is the ‘we’ of this process?” (Chakrabarty 2012, 10). In recent years, a controversy has emerged in political science, philosophy, and cultural theory about questions such as: Who has caused the environmental destruction? Is the whole of humanity in the dock? Who is the judge? In this context, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk speaks of a “Eurocene” or a “Technocene” in order to mark Western industries and their “technocratic elites” (Sloterdijk 2015, 27) as the main culprits of the damage done in the Anthropocene. Since industrialization has been historically linked to the modern capital system and the “advanced capitalist countries or the North [...] were responsible for 72.7 of the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted since 1850” (Malm and Hornborg 2014, 64), several scholars speak of the “Capitalocene” (e.g. Bonneuil and Fressoz 2015, 222–252). Donna Haraway also uses the term “plantationocene” (Haraway 2015, 159), as the advent of the Europeans in the Americas set in motion a massive transformation of the continent (cf. Lewis and Maslin 2015). Discourse critics, on the other hand, accuse the proponents of the Anthropocene themselves of representing only a minority of male, white, Western upper-class agents, and characterizes them as the “(M)Anthropocene” (di Chiro 2017).

When proponents of the Anthropocene Working Group speak of “planetary stewardship” (e.g. Steffen 2015, 94), it is therefore necessary to differentiate more clearly who is responsible for the damages. Chakrabarty, among others, has pointed to the globally different per capita emissions, which have been established as a principle in multilateral law, that constitute a “common but differentiated responsibility for global warming” (Chakrabarty 2015, 153). Thus, speaking of humanity as a collective subject can serve “to conceal one’s own interests” (Chakrabarty 2015, 154) and disguise equity issues (Malm and Hornborg 2014). In response, Will Steffen et al. have conceded: “Treating the humans as a single, monolithic whole [...] ignores the fact that the Great Acceleration [...] has been almost entirely driven by a small fraction of the human population” (Steffen et al. 2015, 91). Therefore, a distinction should be made between the environmental damage caused by the OECD countries, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and others (ibid., fig. 2). However, China and India are quickly catching up, and “China has become the world’s largest economy and its worst polluter with per capita greenhouse gas emissions surpassing the EU average” (Spangenberg 2014, 1). Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that the Anthropocene discourse seems to not be equally present across the globe. For example, in most of Asia, the Anthropocene discourse has not been picked up despite the fact that vast land transformation occurred in China much earlier than in the Western hemisphere (Bergthaller 2018).

From a political science perspective, the idea of mankind as a collective actor is far from universal but arises from specific sociocultural conditions. Accordingly, Eva Lövbrand et al. have called for a re-politization of the Anthropocene and emphasize that the manifold changing possibilities of different societies and economies demand different responses as well as attention for conflicting interests and different social-political dynamics (Lövbrand et al. 2014, 7–9). Philosopher Rosi Braidotti argues that the idea of humanity as a collective agency appears abstract and monolithic because it disguises plurality and diversity and makes “crucial differences invisible—in particular structural discrimination and injustice” (Braidotti 2016, 36–37). In this regard, postcolonial criticism has pointed to the fact that *anthropos* as a geological force is still “in each instance, the product of specific political, social, cultural, and economic realities” (Quason 2012, 369).

Embedding the Anthropocene discourse in different cultural experiences also means reconstructing (historical) power relations that underpin scientific, economic, technological, and political interests. In this context, it is remarkable that the Anthropocene discourse “occurred primarily within particular social, cultural, and political contexts (Euro-Australo-American academic environmental studies and environmental politics)” and has not “gained any epistemic or political traction [...] [in] environmental justice/climate justice organizations and social movements” (di Chiro 2016, 364). This skepticism about the underlying universalism of the Anthropocene

concept sheds more light on the potential neglect of unequal power relations. Consequently, postcolonial ecocriticism should disentangle the ambivalent rhetoric of a planetary stewardship which backgrounds the decentered, bottom-up activities of diverse groups who support “regenerative politics based on life-enhancing political strategies” and proactively organize “a just transition toward renewable energy, local economies, and socially and ecologically sustainable communities.” (ibid.). In sum, a postcolonial-ecocritical analysis of the court narrative draws attention to the different polluters and the differentiated responsibilities for planetary environmental destruction. And, it calls for acknowledging different bottom-up solutions from diverging groups, communities, and societies, without subverting them to the measures of a collective “planetary steward.”

*Expertocratic hegemony in the narrative of the Great Transformation and the (Bio-)Technological narrative*

According to these two narratives, the global environmental crisis can still be managed if action is taken quickly and the business-as-usual approach is overcome. The Anthropocene is understood as an ethical-political challenge, to create a viable future for coming generations through a “planetary stewardship.” Two different options to address climate change are discussed: an integrated technical-ecological-economic-social modernization (a “Great Transformation”) and a more techno-centric development model. The Great Transformation narrative envisions a mixture of “mitigating” the root causes of environmental degradation and “measures of reasonable adaptation” using improved technologies with higher environmental efficiency, complemented by reduced consumption if necessary (Steffen et al. 2007, 619). This narrative adopts the long-established discourse on ecological modernization (Spaargaren and Mol 1992). Despite some differentiation of the responsible culprits and the victims and calls for solidarity and “fair burden sharing” (Schellnhuber and Huber 2013, 7), the narrative accepts and reproduces the capitalist-technological innovation process and its extension to the Global South. Similarly, the “Stockholm Memorandum,” signed by the third Nobel Laureate Symposium on Global Sustainability, has propagated a “mind shift for a Great Transformation,” aiming at a more equitable world, affordable food for all, and reducing human pressure on the Earth system. This should be achieved by “strengthening Earth system governance” and “enacting a new contract between science and society” (The Stockholm Memorandum 2011, 784); the core of these claims has been integrated into the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2015. From a post-colonial perspective and focusing on culturally situated knowledge, this narrative raises urgent questions about who exactly will be the stewards of the Earth, who will rule the “Earth system governance,” what will count as legitimate science, and who will represent society?

Furthermore, postcolonial ecocriticism has broadly discussed connections between economic growth and imperialism. Western ideologies of development are often associated with “top down forms of economic management, neocolonialist imperatives of global corporate commerce and a postcolonial version of ‘ecological imperialism in which the forced march to industrialisation’ has had disastrous cultural, as well as ecological, effect” (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 52). Indian historians like Ramachandra Guha and environmental thinkers and activists like Vandana Shiva are very critical about a forced industrialization in formerly colonized countries like India, suspecting this would cause an “erosion of social structures” (Huggan 2008, 67). Even environmentalism appears often as “a part of a system of global managerialism” (Clark 2011, 122), e.g. eco-tourism or nature reserve management. From this point of view, a Great Transformation should facilitate many small transformations which are not dominated by transnational agencies or multinational corporations but are decentered and take into account the “differences between human groups and local cultural concerns” (Clark 2011, 120).

In contrast, the (bio-)technological narrative, while partly a continuation and radicalization of the Great Transformation narrative, promotes large-scale and intensive interventions into the Earth system, such as geoengineering. The (bio-)technological narrative offers an array of exciting engineering plots, involving, for example, the stimulation of plankton growth through iron sulfate emissions into the oceans, or countering global warming by spraying sulfur sulfate into the stratosphere to reduce solar radiation (e.g. (Crutzen 2006)). Due to possible large-scale side effects, however, geoengineering is highly controversial (e.g. Steffen et al. 2011, 858). Equally ambivalent are the ideas of the so-called “Green movement 2.0.” For example, *The Ecomodernist Manifesto* (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015) promises “a good, or even a great Anthropocene” (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015, § 2), with prosperity for everyone, universal energy availability through highly efficient solar and nuclear power, high resource-use efficiency, and improved nature conservation. Two of the manifesto’s 18 authors, Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, known for proclaiming *The Death of Environmentalism* (2004), are co-founders of the industry-oriented US Breakthrough Institute. In favor of modernist high-tech solutions, the manifesto excludes any kind of small-scale efforts and older sustainable technologies. Furthermore, this techno-optimistic vision suggests a problematic “decoupling [of] human development from environmental impacts” (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015, § 6). However, the environmental humanities have demonstrated that human cultures, societies, and histories cannot be decoupled from nature in any coherent conceptual or viable practical way (Niemann 2017, 253). From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism, ecomodernist visions also lack attention to the plurality of societies and culturally diverse communities, ignoring small-scale agency and local movements as important elements of sustainable pathways into the future. Instead, critics accuse this narrative of

reproducing the “gendered, racialized, and dichotomous constructions of nature and society underlying dominant Euro-American thinking from early on” (di Chiro 2016, 368).

The “Green Revolution 2.0” discourse for sustainable agriculture of the future fluctuates between ideas that resemble the Great Transformation narrative and more bio-technological visions. It contains various stories on how to provide food security for 9–10 billion people on a limited planet through, *inter alia*, sustainable intensification, protein substitutes, technically modified seeds, and novel types of food, e.g. laboratory meat. Higher crop yields, reduced post-harvest losses, and improved market access should contribute to food security and poverty alleviation that would mainly benefit farmers in developing countries (Lynch 2007, 494). Critics claim that a technology-led strategy could lead to renewed economic, social, and ecological inequality, but this would be through concentrated market power and control over the food system being given to only a few firms and research institutes which would possess the patents and control the prices (e.g. Pingali 2012). Furthermore, “western” agricultural regimes could be “inappropriate to fragile and vulnerable environments” (Plumwood 2003, 64).

A different strand of criticism of the Anthropocene narrative targets a neo-Promethean approach towards nature, which is blamed for perpetuating current destructive trends affecting economic, social, and environmental systems (Rose et al. 2012, 2–5). Others criticize that, by suggesting that the evil in the world—such as the climate crisis and other economic, ecological, and environmental vulnerabilities—can be overcome through (eco-) Promethean control of society and the environment by technocratic means, the technological narrative is structured as a “theodicy” or, in a secularized version, as an “anthropodicy” (Hamilton 2015, 233). On the other hand, it has been problematized that neither the concept of hubris nor the counter-concept of humility were adequate to meet the challenges of the planetary environmental crisis (Niemann 2017, 250).

Addressing the discourse of modernization and emancipation, the historians of science Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz have pointed out that the Anthropocene narrative often appears as a “story of awakening” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2015, xiii, 72) in which humans have destroyed nature unknowingly and now have the Earth system sciences to understand and correct their mistakes. Bonneuil and Fressoz argue that the story should be told differently:

Far from a narrative of blindness followed by awakening, we thus have a history of the marginalization of knowledge and alerts. [...] Our planet’s entry into the Anthropocene did not follow a frenetic modernism ignorant of the environment but, on the contrary, decades of reflection and concern as to the human degradation of our Earth.

(Bonneuil and Fressoz 2015, 76)



By ignoring this historical evidence, the “story of awakening” would play an ideological role in order to present Earth system scientists as the new “heroes” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2015, 79) who lead humanity from darkness to light. Its compatibility with dominant economic interests in the great acceleration made the “story of awakening” not only “hegemonic,” as it represents “the world as a totality to be governed” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2015, 48), but also re-established an old-fashioned idea of the heroism of scientific work with a “geocratic” approach (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2015, 93). This analysis uses core arguments of postcolonial critique to reveal the downside of a Western managerialist perspective which propagates green technologies and resource-efficiency to reconcile environmental protection with economic growth but tends to overlook the potential re-affirmation of (neo)colonial power hierarchies implied in particular in the large-scale ecomodernist measures. In this respect, postcolonial ecocriticism can draw attention to the hidden inequalities and power relations in narratives of economic development and technological transformation which neglect variegated knowledge traditions, context-specific practices, and control over resources through property rights.

### *Differentiations in the interdependency narrative of nature-culture*

Narrating *anthropos* as a geophysical force at global scale casts doubt on the established dichotomy of humans as subject and nature as object. In the Anthropocene narrative, “nature” or the natural world becomes anthropogenic, a product of human activity at planetary scale. While critical theorists have bemoaned alienation from nature, environmentalists like Timothy Morton speak of an ecology without nature. Bill McKibben proclaims *The End of Nature* (1989) in the sense that humans as a global force manipulate nature through scientific methodologies, industrial capitalism, and colonial expansion. Other theorists have proposed the concept of nature-culture (Latour 1993; Haraway 2003) to highlight the interconnectedness between humans and the nonhuman world, as well to question the artificial boundaries between human-subject and nature-object.

Against this backdrop, the Anthropocene concept is presented as an opportunity to rethink humankind from a posthumanist perspective and to conceive *anthropos* as a “part of networks of distributed actors” that “also include animals, plants, substances and objects” (Heise 2015b, 40). Similarly, Bruno Latour argues that “the point of living in the epoch of the Anthropocene is that all agents share the same shape-changing destiny” (Latour 2014, 17). Far from implying that nature and society are reconciled, asserting an interdependence of all species raises the question: “What might it mean for a multispecies aggregate to act upon the world?” (Tsing 2014, 230). The concept of distributed and multispecies agency refers also to issues of multispecies justice and to a redefinition of human attitudes toward nature by finding responsible ways of living within agential networks and

with limited natural resources. Donna Haraway, for example, calls for a non-anthropocentric “becoming-with” of humans and nonhuman “intra-active entities-in assemblages,” including “myriad temporalities and spatialities” for which she has coined the neologism “Chthulucene” (Haraway 2015, 160). Here, the (re-named) Anthropocene narrative takes a reflexive turn by not only questioning established human self-understandings but also by rethinking the “ontological exceptionality of the human” (Rose et al. 2012, 2). Focusing on the network of humans and other agents is linked to an object-oriented ontology in the tradition of phenomenology and new materialisms (Oppermann 2016).

Rethinking the Anthropocene, recent studies in environmental humanities respond to the scientific, ethical, and political challenges of the global ecological crisis in a cross-disciplinary manner (Iovino and Oppermann 2016). Key topics are the politics of Earth, issues of vulnerability and resilience, nuclear disaster and environmental justice, climate change and terraforming (deLoughrey et al. 2015), the domestication of Earth, multispecies communities, inequality, decline, and resilience (Heise et al. 2017). Thus, scholars from e.g. anthropology, history, the arts, literary and media studies contribute to the interdependency narrative by engaging with ecological issues of multispecies networks at different and shifting scales of space and time. From the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism, it is important to maintain the differences between the specific claims of climate justice, (binary) interspecies justice, and multispecies environmental justice and to analyze to what extent these are instilled with power relations between humans, as well as between humans and nonhuman agents.

To summarize, a narrative approach to the Anthropocene discourse reveals five distinct narratives that merit specific analysis. A postcolonial and ecocritical analysis of these five narratives exposes a number of tensions and complications: (i) apart from the interdependency narrative, the Anthropocene narrative tends to reproduce asymmetrical center-periphery relations, for example in marginalizing environmental violence at the periphery. (ii) The court narrative and to a lesser degree the Great Transformation narrative emphasize differential responsibility for environmental degradation and its impacts. (iii) The (bio-)technological narrative ascribes agency, mainly to transnational corporations and science, within global managerialist systems and propagates large-scale solutions. In contrast, parts of the Great Transformation narrative also include diverse and decentral institutions and social movements which are engaged in small transformations, bottom-up solutions, and integral development. (iv) The (bio-)technological narrative, with its anthropocentric, Neo-Promethean, and techno-optimist storyline triggers counter-stories of new economic, social, and ecological inequalities; it legitimates the implicit “hegemonic” power relations. (v) Only the interdependency narrative articulates a reflexive perspective through multi-perspective and multi-directional stories that portray humanity as part of multispecies agential networks that blur time-honored nature-culture dichotomies.

Overall, Anthropocene narratives tend to disguise, overlook, or obscure cultural differences and the multiple systems of representation of the human-nature relation. A postcolonial and ecocritical analysis of the Anthropocene discourse exposes tensions between the purported universalism of planetary stewardship, based on the collective responsibility and capability of an imagined humankind and an asymmetric diversity of interests, resources, values, concerns, and vulnerabilities. This perspective can help to explain the various constraints of the Anthropocene discourse. For example, a relative neglect and othering of the marginalized, such as indigenous communities, contaminated neighborhoods, or impoverished people, might explain why the Anthropocene concept has not been adopted in the “world of environmental justice politics” and “climate activism” (di Chiro 2016, 371, 373). Postcolonial-ecocritical analysis also shows that the call for differentiated responsibility, if linked to ecological modernization of (bio-)technological narratives, not only serves to acknowledge historical accountability but is also easily associated with an unquestioned acceptance of technocratic solutions. Therefore, it could be used to legitimate a leading role of already powerful corporate and state actors in their implementation. In contrast, embracing the postcolonial and ecocritical analysis could help to enhance the reflexivity of the Anthropocene discourse by critically assessing which stories, experiences, representations, and vocabularies matter (cf. Feindt and Weiland 2018). The Anthropocene narratives are an important medium for conveying ideas about a viable future; it therefore matters who is included, who is assigned agency, and, of course, who narrates.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter draws on results from the research project, “Narratives of the Anthropocene in Science and Literature,” which is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) under grant number DU 320/8-1.
- 2 Cf. <https://peoplesclimate.org/our-movement/> (accessed 04 November 2018).

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