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THE POINT OF EUROPE: POSTCOLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

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Is Europe a dead political project, as political philosopher Étienne Balibar provocatively wrote in the *Guardian* on 25 October 2010, addressing the Greek crisis; or is it an unfinished adventure, as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman more utopically auspicated in his book *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure* (2004)? What is the point of Europe?

In the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Paris on the satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* (7 January 2015), in which more than a dozen people were killed and the Syrian refugee crisis, the question is whether Europe still has any function in responding to global frictions. In the light of contending regimes that operate transnationally, such as fundamentalism versus democracy, religion versus secularism, solidarity versus xenophobia, Europe would seem to be in search of a common ground that can realign its self-representations with the reality of a rapidly changing society. This is a society in which other traditions, lifestyles and crises ask for a revision of the very notion of Europe as more accommodating and encompassing of differences as well as offering new forms of solidarity.

The ‘point of Europe’ invoked here refers, therefore, to the ambivalence of Europe both as a concept and as a project. It questions the relevance of its singularity in an era where boundaries and national sovereignties are increasingly eroded, but also posits a revisiting of the mission and ideals of the European project by including submerged perspectives and new interdisciplinary takes. This is possible by reassessing the working of different colonial pasts from a European comparative perspective, shedding light on contemporary conflicts and crises. The past resonates and informs the present in order to indicate the future trajectories of Europe, which account for transnational and cosmopolitan relations.

But where is Europe heading? Referring to Derrida’s famous text *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe* (1992), it is now necessary to change direction. The survival of Europe can no longer be predicated on its singularity and exceptionality; Europe – as Derrida observed – needs to shift its heading, question its unexamined privileging of ‘heading’ as a political modality, and certainly confront, in the process, the heading of the Other, recognizing the differences that have always been within: Europe becoming decentralized, provincialized and diffracted. This means that the point of Europe is a paradox that undermines the idea of Europe as a historical project based on singularity and exceptionalism while subscribing to the future of Europe as a location for hope and cosmopolitan solidarity.

This special issue focuses, accordingly, on this double take by bringing together the complementary and synergizing expertise of postcolonial scholars who work across different disciplinary fields, such as comparative literature, conflict studies, human rights, memory studies and international relations, as well as the arts, visual culture, music and cinema. The goal is to assess current postcolonial transitions through an ability to acknowledge the workings of the past and to rethink Europe as a new possible cosmopolitan space, yet rooted in its distinctive genealogy.

The essays in this special issue focus in particular on what the point of Europe is for postcolonial theory and on what Europe means for current postcolonial/global transitions. Conceptually, it aims to rethink the different past trajectories of Europe as an Empire and its current multicultural and/or neo-colonial predicaments. Methodologically, its goal is to locate the point of Europe within current interdisciplinary dialogues: where is Europe in memory studies? What does Europe mean within theories of conflict and transitional justice? How do we reframe the politics of visibility in Fortress Europe? How do we reinterpret humanitarian aid from a postcolonial perspective? How do we integrate the notion of postcolonialism with that of cosmopolitanism without reiterating Eurocentric and universalistic biases?

Issues of continuities and discontinuities are addressed; the role of deep time for the understanding of Europe within a global scale that takes account of history as well as of geography; the formulation of multidirectional

memory as a modality to encompass different truths and claims; the relation between fact and fiction in featuring representations of Europe and engineering narratives of belonging; the politics of non-involvement as intrinsic to humanitarian aid and its neocolonial underpinnings, along with the tense relationship between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Through these comparative and interdisciplinary contributions, Europe emerges as a complex space that needs to account both for its politics of inclusion and exclusion towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as for the reworking of past and present conflicts in light of political transitions and cosmopolitan imaginaries.

The issue opens with a preface entitled 'Europe at the Limits' by Étienne Balibar, whose philosophical contributions on Europe, citizenship, political identities, postcoloniality and the idea of equaliberty have been crucial in establishing the field of questions and debates that forms the primary condition of possibility for this collection of essays. He has been a leading figure in the field for decades, offering lucid and forward-looking views on Europe. Though pessimistic (recall his *Guardian* article), Balibar believes in the possibility of changing institutions from the bottom up, thereby creating transnational institutions that defy apartheid and counter racist and xenophobic populism. In his preface to this special edition, Balibar signals the major developments that are taking place at the borders of Europe (Kiev, Damascus, Lampedusa), which are affecting the identity and destiny of the European project as a result of globalization and because demarcations are now impossible to establish by administrative or juridical means. It is clear that postcolonial entanglements conjoin with the post-socialist reality – intersecting with the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean as well as with Islam and terrorism emerging from Syria and the Middle East. Revisiting the notion of postcolonialism to address these new crises in Europe, Balibar rethinks the role of postcolonial Europe outside the simple antithesis of Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism, calling for a political and ethical reorientation of the European project.

In the opening essay, 'Prolegomena to a Cosmopolitanism in Deep Time', Bruce Robbins, a renowned scholar in cosmopolitanism and postcolonial issues, explores the possibility of reconceptualizing the role of Europe and its deeds within a different framework – one in which cosmopolitanism entails not just a geographical dimension, but also a temporal one. This means expanding back in time in order to account for other cultural and historical references, such as the premodern empires of China and India, that marginalize or put into different perspective the role of Europe and its Eurocentric mission. Robbins discusses whether or not interest in other empires and their fraught histories is a way of mitigating or absolving Europe from its history of violent conquest. However, undermining the European monopoly of blame also means opening up other timeframes of oppression

and domination, which allow for other subjectivities or realities to emerge that are connected through relations other than the traditional centre–periphery model, such as the international indigenous movement, climate change and the degradation of the planet, and the internal logic of postcolonial studies itself. The moment seems to have come, Robbins states, when such awkward discipline-stretching issues are unavoidable.

In her essay ‘Whither Europe? Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism in an Austere Europe’, Gurinder Bhambra importantly pleads for a historiographical turn in which European history is reassessed by incorporating colonial dimensions. This implies that the notion of cosmopolitanism should also include multiculturalism, not as something that pertains to non-European people, but to people who have always been part of the European project through its wider imperial history. Yet the disavowal of multiculturalism by leading European politicians, plus the recent euro crisis and accompanying austerity measures that have exacerbated Europe’s politics of resentment, have reduced the role and understanding of cosmopolitanism in its inclusion of difference and minorities. Therefore, Bhambra advocates a new understanding of postcolonial European cosmopolitanism that includes differences and pluralities.

Paulo de Medeiros embraces this historiographical turn by reconfiguring the notion of ‘postimperial nostalgia’ through a visual account of the Portuguese colonial legacy and its ambivalent cinematic representation. In his analysis of Miguel Gomes’ internationally acclaimed film *Tabu* (2012), which resonates with Friedrich W. Murnau’s famous 1931 film of the same name, images of a ‘lost Africa’ are contrasted with the bleakness of current Portugal, which is the ‘paradise lost’, emphasizing Portugal’s economic crisis and subaltern status in Europe. *Tabu* in a sense embodies such a subaltern position as it reflects on a dominant Hollywood production such as Murnau’s, yet it also reinvents it and in doing so transforms our perception of Murnau’s film. The correspondence between the two films not only enables a consideration of similarities between our present and the 1930s, but also forces a questioning of what, if anything, might have changed. The film duplicates, questions and problematizes the relations of power, both cultural and political, between North and South, centre and periphery.

Along similar lines, I argue in my own contribution that cinema as a transnational medium is particularly appropriate to convey postcolonial interventions and to account for the synesthetic impact of migration on the visual screen. In my essay ‘On the Waterfront: Truth and Fiction in Postcolonial Cinema from the South of Europe’, I articulate the need to define postcolonial cinema as a specific register that makes it possible to deconstruct the visual master narrative of empire, the gaze that fixes the Other into stereotypes or prejudices. Through an analysis of recent migrant films that depict the Mediterranean as a location of trespass and crossing, I discuss the instability of the

notion of Europe. The essay proposes a new engagement with the postcolonial cinema of migration that accounts for the truth and fiction of the documentary genre, as a way of representing the Other as well as involving audiences and spectators in specific ways.

Questions of migration to Europe cannot be solved by turning the continent into a fortress or by strengthening immigration laws, but by offering means to change the conditions that force people to migrate and escape violence, famine and conflict in their home countries. Yet such interventions are neither neutral nor innocent, as Kristín Loftsdóttir articulates in her contribution, 'International Development and the Globally Concerned European Subject'. Loftsdóttir discusses the history of international development as deeply unhistorical in its 'forgetfulness' of colonial histories and postcolonial entanglements. She examines international development in relation to memory and the spatial organization of the world, using Iceland's ambiguous positioning as a former dependency and as a European country to reflect on some of the issues at stake. Development creates spaces of imagination that work outwardly and become oblivious to operations of discrimination within the borders of the nation state, such as policies towards asylum seekers and migrants.

Issues of memory and accountability are also central to Rosemarie Buikema's essay, 'The Revolt of the Object: Animated Drawings and the Colonial Archive: William Kentridge's *Black Box* Theatre.' Proposing an analysis of the multilayered and impressive installation *Black Box*, Buikema unravels the complex history of representation through art following the principle of multidirectional memory, in which the history of both colonialism and genocide is intertwined with the rise of Nazism and the role of extermination camps in the Holocaust. *Black Box* becomes an allegory for the European unconscious, which has to be accessed by way of the necessary griefwork, a project of working through past events politically as well as affectively. With its particular focus on Germany, the essay intervenes in the field of postcolonial Europe in two crucial ways. On the one hand, it contributes to a growing awareness – both political and academic – of the history of German colonialism, which has so far received too little attention. On the other hand, through *Black Box* and the central concept of 'multidirectional memory', Buikema makes the memory of the Holocaust meet and collide with the memory of colonialism, thus calling for the decolonization of one of the major European cultural archives.

In closing, Birgit Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele address the core of this special issue: the Other heading, drawing from Derrida's text. Derrida asks after the critical condition of Europe today – then and now – and what it might imply to 'think today, for Europe, for a Europe torn away from self-identification as repetition of itself ... the unicity of the "today", a certain event, a singular

advent of Europe, here and now' (Derrida 1992, 12). In line with my own investigation of the Mediterranean and its many dangerous crossings, Kaiser and Thiele focus on the narratives of *harragas* (burning), the clandestine crossings of the Mediterranean by people of Maghreb origins, through an analysis of novels from the Maghreb (Ben Jelloun's 2006 *Partir* and Sansal's 2005 *Harraga*). *Harragas* has the double meaning of burning documents so as to leave no trace behind, which becomes synonymous with taking risks or gambling with one's own life, and also literally of hitting the road – in other words, to migrate. Europe emerges as a location of desire but also of rejection (Fortress Europe). The authors ask how these different perspectives can be reconciled.

That is the open-ended intervention proposed by this special issue: putting the idea of Europe under erasure, contesting its history of singularity and exceptionalism while opening up to the ideal of Europe as an unfinished project which has still not fulfilled its potential, as invoked by Bauman. The point of Europe lies in redirecting the course of Europe, finding new pointers and new signposts, as well as acknowledging its continuing dark legacy, the 'black box' of Europe that still needs to be decoded.

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