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Postcolonial Theory & Crisis: Contemporary Interventions

The age of crisis

Just as Hobsbawm designated the nineteenth century as the Age of Empire, and the twentieth as the Age of Extremes, the twenty-first century might well be on its way to being seen as the Age of Crisis. It is not that past ages were not themselves marked by profound crisis. However, the sense of crisis in the present has come to dominate, so that instead of being perceived as an exception, or as a catalyst ushering in historical change, crisis now rather seems to be perpetual. In the wake of the anti-colonial struggles that culminated in most cases in independence for former European colonies all over the world, postcolonial theory succeeded, or so it seemed, in breaking through the colonial mindset with its obsolete, toxic, and endemic categories designed to perpetuate inequality. Yet inequality, in all its forms, has only increased, and in giant leaps, instead of being reduced as once seemed possible. Since the Covid pandemic started spreading through the world, reducing most polities to a generalized *de facto*, and not infrequently *de jure*, state of exception, the concept of crisis has been on everyone's lips. But its ubiquity was already clear, at least since the global financial collapse of 2007. In the millennial transition, the prefix 'post' had come to signify more and more not just the realization of a 'coming after' but also the impossibility of not seeing the present as still very much dealing with the wounds of the past. Yet, with the appearance of pseudo-concepts such as 'post-truth' after an equally imaginary 'death of History,' the logic of the 'post,' itself always already being questioned, may appear to have outlived its usefulness.

We also wanted to write this book in conjunction with the larger European PIN project on "Postcolonial Intellectuals and Their European Publics" (funded by the Dutch Research Council)[1] which investigates the role of postcolonial public in-

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1 The network was a collaboration between Utrecht University in the Netherlands and the Universities of Leeds and Warwick in the UK, Münster University in Germany, Ca' Foscari University in Italy, Aalborg in Denmark and the University of Lisbon in Portugal (https://www.nwo.nl/en/projects/ig18014). See: https://www.nwo.nl/en/projects/ig18014 and http://www.postcolonialstudies.nl/p/missionstatement.html.

The network, which was coordinated by Prof. Ponzanesi, has held several conferences and been publishing the results of the research developed by an international team of scholars over the past few years, in the forms of edited volumes, special issues and digital projects.

tellectuals as crucial actors in renewing the function of the humanities and of democratic participation in Europe (Ponzanesi 2016). The network generated very productive exchanges because: (1) it included figures that are not strictly postcolonial but are seminal for the postcolonial legacy (Ponzanesi and Habed 2018); (2) it rethought the category of the 'intellectual' by including not only migrant academics and political spokespersons but also writers, artists, activists, organizations, and social movements (Ponzanesi 2021; Ponzanesi and Mendes 2022); (3) it addressed uprisings, protests, marches, and commemorations as acts of citizenship; (4) it accounted for the shifts in "publics" through social media and citizen media activism and artivism (Baker and Blaagaard 2016; Blaagaard, Marchetti, Ponzanesi and Bassi 2023).

More interestingly for the concept of crisis, the project explored the idea of the "intellectual" as being in crisis, and waning in popularity, visibility, *and* authority. No longer iconic and titanic figures that solitarily speak truth to power (Foucault and Deleuze 1977; Said 1996), on behalf of silenced and subaltern communities, but more "agonistic intellectuals" who are not enemies but adversaries whose task is to create conflictual consensus, in order to enhance democratic participation. The project looked at the idea that by distinguishing between "antagonism" and "agonism," it is possible to visualize a form of democracy that does not deny radical negativity (Mouffe 2013: VII). Therefore instead of upholding the widely shared idea that intellectuals are in decline and bound to disappear any time soon (Posner 2001; Kristof 2014) there seems to be a return of the intellectual in the renewed form of collective movements, activism, and participatory social media engagements that promote not the death of the intellectual but its transformation, democratization, and pluralization into different communities, genres, and media expressions. As Helen Small claims (2002: 10–11), the notion of crisis might be a Western cliché, informed by a universalistic bias that equates the conditions of all intellectuals regardless of their specificity or social groupings (see Ponzanesi and Habed 2018). Therefore intellectuals are becoming more visible and invisible at the same time, hard to locate and identify. But their apparent evanescence and unlocatibility create a sense of anxiety, for who should now address the urgent issues of our times and critically tackle crises, emergencies, and conflicts using their lucidity, wisdom, and capability? Who can speak to wider audiences and constituencies in an influential, effective, and affective manner that can bring change, solidarity, and impact? For these reasons, it is important to rethink the very notion of crisis, as it is often used and abused for political fearmongering and spectacularization of disasters.

For example, the notion of a "migration crisis" that emerged in the media from 2015 as an aftereffect of the civil war in Syria signals the mobilization of media publics towards either the fear of the "refugee" Other as a mass invasion

in faceless waves and the surge of the politics of pity and solidarity that mobilize humanitarian responses and welcoming infrastructures. The status of Europe, which is supposed to welcome so-called "legitimate" refugees, is itself so very precarious at the moment; instead of identification with the needy, this has led to antagonism, ambivalence, and fear, often erupting into pure xenophobia, expertly manipulated by right-wing demagogues and anti-immigration parties – what Zygmunt Bauman has called a "moral panic" in his book *Strangers at Our Door* (2016).

The recent refugee crisis in Europe is the first of its kind in a fully digital age. This has meant that migrants have been able to use new digital affordances to aid themselves in risky transnational crossings, keeping in touch with the loved ones left behind but also with their peers who have successfully arrived in the destination countries. But the combination of technology and migration deserves further scrutiny as it has not only allowed for geographical distance to be bridged through digital proximity but also created new anxieties and fears. The tools that speed up this passage provide many benefits, but they are also used to exploit refugees, and they raise questions about surveillance. Mobile phones and messaging services like Viber, Snapchat, and FaceTime are primary means for smugglers to organize illicit crossings via trucks, rubber boats, and dinghies. Refugees are therefore also particularly vulnerable to manipulation or crimes enabled by digital connectivity (Ponzanesi 2019; Ponzanesi and Leurs 2022).

Furthermore, technology use, in particular among non-elite migrants, is treated with suspicion, whereas hyper-mobile global nomadic expatriate groups are commonly celebrated (Leurs and Ponzanesi 2018). Recent media images of refugees reaching dry land and taking selfies, for example, have sparked heated debates on whether these refugees are worthy of aid and support (Chouliaraki 2017; Risam 2019; Ticktin 2016). Images of refugees as technologically savvy and digital natives have instead generated fear and anxiety about an invasion of bogus refugees feeding into "high tech orientalism" (Chun 2006: 73).

In her book *Crisis and Critique: A Brief History of Media Participation in Times of Crisis*, the media scholar Anne Kaun asks in her opening whether new crisis situations enable or require new forms of critique (Kaun 2016: 1). This is a valid question for our volume. The very notion of critique has undergone serious "critique" and it had been subject to a rethinking in its own right (Habed 2021). This is especially related to Latour's warning that "critique has run out of steam" (Latour 2004), followed by scholars such as Felski (2015), Anker and Felski (2017) and K. Sedgwick (1997) moving towards the notion of post-critique as a way to recuperate the affective and holistic engagement of literary creativity and participation beyond the nihilism of critique for the sake of critique. Critique is often automatically equaled with political relevance and engagement, for this see the

debate of Robbins (2017) on Felski discussed more in details in this volume in the chapter by Colpani and Habed.

In her specific case, Kaun investigates how media technology plays out in activism as a form of critique. Referring to Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht's idea of *Krise und Kritik* as a form of transition that enable new forms of critique, Kaun writes that Brecht and Benjamin "saw intellectuals and artists as the driving forces of this process of critique as they had the aesthetic responsibility to speed up the critical juncture. Through their engagement, critique would lead to a fundamental social change" (Kaun 2016: 1). This is much in line with the above discussion about intellectuals becoming "democracy helpers" (Misztal 2007: 1), but also more democratized and less elitist, including writers, artists, and activists, and tending towards more spread-out protest movements that combine media and social change as a response to deep political crisis and the endangerment of democracy. In addition to the Arab Spring, social and digital movements such as Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement, and Occupy Wall Street share the need to address a societal crisis in which technical savviness leads to new forms of collective, global, and intergenerational activism for change.

Much of this discussion has also to do with the crisis of Europe. Now more than ever the very notion of Europe is daunting and dangling. One of the most acute thinkers on the question of Europe, Étienne Balibar (2004 [2001]), has for quite some time now been alerting us to the crisis of Europe, meaning both a crisis of the idea of Europe as a transnational identity, and a crisis of the very concepts of citizenship and democracy. With the resurgence of far right movements practically everywhere and the European Union's forced tolerance for illiberal, autocratic, even dictatorial, regimes either within its borders or close by, the notion of a crisis of democracy cannot be ignored, nor can it be dismissed as yet another folly of radical intellectuals who are forever discontented. At the same time, a crisis of citizenship makes itself felt not only through the massive disengagement with politics in general, but also in the full-fledged cynicism about politics as another name for corruption, as Wendy Brown, for instance, has duly analyzed in her recent book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (2019). She notes several ways in which we, and particularly those on the Left, have failed to properly take into account what has been happening:

> [the Left] does not register the intensifying nihilism that challenges truth and transforms traditional morality into weapons of political battle. It does not identify how assaults on constitutional democracy, on racial, gender, and sexual equality, on public education, and on a civil, nonviolent public sphere have all been carried out in the name of both freedom and morality (2019: 7).

Such assaults also tend to go hand in hand with a pervasive xenophobia that conveniently ignores not just ethical issues, but even economical reasoning, in its tar-

geting migrants as the (old) new convenient scapegoat for society's ills. The figure of the migrants, originating from outside Europe but often also from within some of its regions, be it from the South or the East, continues to be instrumental in channeling fears so many of us experience in a world rent by multiple, successive, and often simultaneous crises. Twenty odd years ago, this is how Balibar reflected on his own intervention: "During the interminable discussion over the situation of immigrants and 'undocumented aliens' in France and in Europe, I evoked the specter of an apartheid being formed at the same time as European citizenship itself. This barely hidden apartheid concerns the populations of the 'South' as well as the 'East'" (2004 [2001]: 22). It is no surprise that intellectuals practically everywhere have sought to engage with, and reflect on, what crisis means in the present, how it has become instrumentalized, normalized, and consequently, to some extent trivialized.

At Leiden University, for instance, a group of scholars formed the "Crisis and Critique Network." As they put it:

> This network approaches crisis not as an objective condition but as a framing through which specific narratives of the present gain valence while others are excluded. Making crisis an object of interrogation, our network brings together scholars whose work explores how different frameworks of crisis produce experiences of the present, rest on or disrupt established narratives of the past, and broker specific outlooks on the future ("Crisis and Critique Network" n.d.).

Another pertinent example from the many that could be given, specifically from a materialist perspective, is the international journal *Crisis and Critique*, started in 2011 and publishing its first issue the following year. Its editors, Agon Hamza and Frank Ruta, note the journal's aim and focus on its website:

> "Crisis and Critique": concepts are of immense importance for philosophical, yet also for political thought. But, especially today it is crucial not too hastily assume one already knows what either means. Both concepts are obviously related to concrete but also rather abstract practices. Both crisis as well as critique are practical concepts that, as we assume, do not have any transhistorical or transcendental status and thus do neither come with a pregiven unchangeable content. Crisis as well as critique must be thought from within a specific contemporary time frame. This frame is the frame of the present ("About us" n.d.)

How to make sense of postcolonial theory in Europe in the present? One way might be to renew its significance as world conflicts have entered a new "post-imperial phase" with the return of ideologies of empire in various parts of the world no longer so much as the active forces that propelled European, or Western, attempts at global domination, but more as reactive, largely nostalgic, but no less corrosive and destructive impulses, be it the rapid spread of open xenophobia throughout most of Europe or the particular form that "Empire 2.0" has been

taking, most visibly in Britain, the erstwhile dominant imperial and colonial power of the late nineteenth century, with Brexit or in Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine and ongoing Palestinain-Israeli conflict and staggering ensued humanitarian crisis. The present volume aims at a conceptualization of the relations between Postcolonial Theory and Crisis as well as the crisis of postcolonialism and the ways in which it can respond to contemporary issues in the present, trying to understand, situate, and analyze postcolonial theory in the face of neo-liberalism, neo-imperialism, and neo-colonialism. Indeed, the relation between "post" and the increasing use of "neo" is in itself part and parcel of the question. The essays in this volume address those questions both at a conceptual theoretical level and through the analysis of specific case studies.

The volume is organized into four sections, divided thematically and reflecting different aspects of crisis in relation to postcolonial emergencies, be they critical, environmental, cultural, or imaginative. Even though all the chapters present a reflection on Postcolonial Theory and Crisis, some focus more specifically on certain aspects of the crisis from a global perspective. Section 1, concerned with "New Approaches to Postcolonial Studies and Crisis," looks at current and urgent issues in Postcolonial Studies from various contemporary angles, from humanitarian crisis and the role of the mediatization of conflict to issues related to human rights, refugees, migrancy, and the Anthropocene. Section 2 follows on from this and focuses on the urgent questions posed by the environmental crisis in direct relation to postcolonial issues and questions of capitalist extraction, violent ecosystems, and ecotopias. Section 3 moves the focus to the current debates in the humanities concerning critical theory and the questioning of critique and representation, engaging variously in the theoretical concerns while also providing specific studies of both literature and the media. Section 4 opens up debates to other areas and focuses on questions of memory and postmemory as well as the critique of art and utopian thought.

Section 1 opens with a chapter by Sandra Ponzanesi on post-humanitarianism and the crisis of empathy. What is signaled with the notion of post-humanitarianism is not only the death of the grand narratives and the breakdown of the notion of a "common humanity" as a universal and shared value, but also a change in attitude towards the suffering of the Other. This implies a more fragmented, volatile, and opportunistic form of engagement, which is also caused by the constant mediatization of conflicts, violence, and suffering, which in turn has created a feeling of "compassion fatigue" (Möller 1999; Sontag 2003) among viewers who consume images of "distant suffering" from the safe space of their own living rooms (Boltanski 1993; Chouliaraki 2006; 2013).

The chapter attempts to reinstate the connection between the distant sufferer and the viewer through the analysis of a series of Virtual Reality (VR) productions made by the United Nations, artists, and major media organizations, in efforts to

use new technologies to break down the "compassion fatigue" or apathy generated by the exposure to too much crisis. VR is heralded as an "empathy machine" par excellence, because of its innovative technology that allows the user/spectator to experience another person's point of view through immersion and embodiment. In this chapter the author explores the enthusiasm, but also the ethical reservations, surrounding this new media genre of post-humanitarian appeal through the analysis of some VR projects dealing with migration and refugee issues, namely Nonny de la Peña's *Project Syria* (2012), Gabo Arora and Chris Milk's *Clouds over Sidra* (2015), Ben C. Solomon and Imraan Ismail's *The Displaced,* (2015), and Tamara Shogaolu's *Queer in a Time of Forced Migration* (2020).

The crisis of migration is also central to Alessandra Di Maio's chapter on "Coming of Age Across the Central Mediterranean Route." It analyzes the work of E.C. Osondu's *When the Sky is Ready the Stars Will Appear,* which deals with the Mediterranean crisis and the dangerous crossings of mostly young people hoping for a better life in the West. Facing border control, racism, and pushback operations, the narrative analyzed here is that of a coming-of-age novel about an initiation journey. The book *When The Sky is Ready The Stars Will Appear* shows how these crossings are not only dictated by desperation, conflict, and fear but are also a way to fulfill the young migrant's dreams, hopes, and ambitions. The protagonist is an orphan from an unspecified African village who decides to leave home to reach the city of his dreams: Rome. Alessandra Di Maio has written extensively on the notion of the "Black Mediterranean" and this story of discovery and arrival is testimony of the need to revisit and rethink the notion of the Black Mediterranean not only as a sea of death but also as a fluid and enabling contact zone that constructs migration as a right to have rights (Arendt 1973) and as a way to trespass.

Charlotte Spear continues to elaborate on the issues of human rights for migrants in her chapter on "Crisis and the Postcolonial State: Human Rights and Contemporary Emergency." This essay aims to explore the "Age of Human Rights" as a discursive device enabling the neo-imperial situating of the state of emergency within the peripheral zones of the world system. It shows how countries from the Global South are exposed to a unique form of crisis: one which not only traverses national borders but also consolidates the displacement of the state of emergency away from the capitalist core and into distant regions. Spear also describes the twenty-first century as the Age of Crisis, but "crisis" in the peripheries of the world system is actually linked to a protraction of the colonial state of emergency which came about with colonization, whereby external powers install arbitrary dictatorial rule as theorized by Fanon and Césaire. This state of crisis comes about also through an instrumentalization of discourses surrounding human rights. This chapter, like Ponzanesi's chapter on VR and humanitarianism,

shows how neo-imperial humanitarian interventions actually fail to solve ongoing crises. On the contrary, they succeed in reinforcing some forms of colonial cultural hierarchies identified by several postcolonial theorists. Inspired by the work of the Warwick Research Collective (2015) and other thinkers such as Fanon and Césaire Charlotte Spear uses critical analyses of the colonial state of emergency to analyze contemporary twenty-first-century phenomena. The novel Bofane's *Congo Inc.* (2018) works as a literary registration of the "postcolonial state" as the site of the externally enforced law of arbitrary rule.

To close this section Jesse van Amelsvoort develops the concept of "The Postcolonial Anthropocene" in his chapter, which pleas for an engagement between postcolonial studies and the Anthropocene, in order to address the complexity of the colonial legacy on climate change within Europe itself. If the Anthropocene draws attention to the geological causes of the climate crisis, postcolonial studies make visible the human impact of the crisis in all its depth and complexity. The postcolonial Anthropocene is not only able to think about the long-term causes of the crisis, but also about its possible futures. The chapter makes links with the urgency of the environmental crisis which is unfolding, captured in the new geological epoch of the Anthropocene. The environmental crisis is seen as a "hyperobject" (Morton 2013) which is difficult to make tangible and visible, due to its slowness but also because of "representational concern[s]." The author describes the difficulties of making this crisis observable and present on an everyday and affective level. In particular, the author focuses on the notion of the climate migrant and their increased role and vulnerability. Within contemporary Europe, the effects of the climate crisis are acutely felt at both its northern and southern margins. Rising temperatures threaten both the Sámi way of life in the north, and people in Spain who are increasingly suffering from droughts and extreme heat. From both these apparently extreme peripheries of Europe, the risk of becoming a climate migrant is real, to give an example. It is especially difficult to make changes at the level of biased representations, while also making sure that images continue to make an impact that can change the public opinion, with changes made possible within a foreseeable time. This chapter focuses in particular on the double bind of the Sámi people, as their precarious position vis-à-vis Nordic nation-state policies is compounded by climate change, and on the Prado Museum in Madrid's recent (2019) project with "updated" versions of its masterpieces that show climate change gone awry.

Jesse van Amelsvoort's chapter is a natural transition to the second section, which focuses on postcolonial studies and ecological crisis. In the following chapter, "'None of that shit matters to the Swedes': Venice, Bangladesh, and the Postcolonial Anthropocene," Shaul Bassi discusses the case of the Postcolonial Anthropocene by using Venice as a case study. In particular, the author examines recent literary and

visual texts that represent the Bangladeshi migrant community in Venice as a vantage point from which to observe the postcolonial condition in the context of the planetary environmental crisis. Referring to authors and texts such as Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island* (2019), Francesco Dalla Puppa, Francesco Matteuzzi, and Francesco Saresin's graphic novel *La linea dell'orizzonte* (2021), and Emanuele Confortin's documentary *Banglavenice* (2022), Bassi exposes the Anthropocene unconscious of a city that has been traditionally seen as a romantic getaway, or synonymous with apocalyptic scenarios due to rising water and the climate threat. The decadent and moribund portrayal to which the city is often subjected is undermined in the texts analyzed by the author, showing a more complex, living, cosmopolitan, and amphibian Venice where new and old communities interact and reinvent themselves in relation to a fragile ecosystem threatened by rising sea levels. These narratives connect the local city with global dynamics, showing how the long-term effect of colonialism and that of the Anthropocene are intertwined. In times of crisis, new stories can provide alternative views and takes on how migrants negotiate their lives and identities and offer new registers to rethink our environmental and human predicament.

Elena Brugioni continues the investigation of violent postcolonial ecosystems, environmental crisis and eco-critique through her analysis of "João Paulo Borges Coelho's Literary Writing." The work of this acclaimed Mozambican contemporary novelist is characterized by a deep reflection on the relation between violence and the environment, and in this chapter Brugioni offers bio-political and eco-critical readings of his work. The chapter addresses a wide range of issues that could be squarely placed within the postcolonial eco-critical perspective, re-signifying bio-political paradigms and pointing to what has been defined as "eco-materialist aesthetics" (Mukherjee 2010). Beyond the necropolitical condition of human and non-human life in Mozambique, the author wants to underline the ways in which Borges Coelho's novels offer the possibility to add further complexities to the entanglement between the "ordered colonial violence" and the "violent postcolonial order" (Borges Coelho 2003). The crisis registered in Borges Coelho's work *Cidades dos Espelhos. Novela Futurista* (City of Mirrors. Futurist Novella) (2011) serves as a paradigmatic example to reassess the meaning of environmental and eco-materialist aesthetics and therefore to grasp his critique of violent postcolonial (eco)systems, in Mozambique and in the world.

In the closing chapter in this section, "Fuel Scavengers: Climate Colonialism in the South African Science Fiction of Alex Latimer's *Space Race*, Henrietta Rose-Innes' *Poison*, and Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*," Peter J. Maurits explores the role of science fiction as rooted in colonialism and how the connection between science fiction as a genre and postcolonial studies has developed in the last two decades with the aim of subverting colonial tropes. In this chapter, the author argues,

however, that the connection between science fiction and postcolonial studies needs further critical scrutiny, in particular as there is now increased attention being paid to the climate crisis and colonial aftermath, to an extent that we could speak of climate colonialism. This chapter suggests that a focus on tropes may be insufficient to demonstrate how climate colonialism operates discursively. Therefore, a Saidian analytical sensitivity is invoked to show how colonialism continues to be a codified presence in fiction. Three South African science fiction works are analyzed as examples: Alex Latimer's novel *The Space Race* (2013), Henrietta Rose-Innes' short story "Poison" (2009), and Neill Blomkamp's film *District 9* (2009), using the Saidian technique of scavenging which makes colonialism and the climate crises narratives overlap in a concern about fuel shortages.

Section three on postcolonial Studies and critical theory deals with the need to rethink and reinvent our theoretical paradigms to address the many crises we are facing and the need to rethink the role of critique in our intellectual engagement. In his chapter, Paulo de Medeiros opens by proposing to look at crisis in conjunction with what he terms "postimperial remains": that which is left in the wake of imperialism and colonialism, or haunted legacies. His essay takes its motivation from a reading of one of Adorno's fragments in *Minima Moralia*, especially its conclusion: "Extreme injustice becomes a deceptive facsimile of justice, disqualification of equality" (2005 [1951]: 194). Starting with a reflection on how the views of Immanuel Kant in his philosophical sketch on *Perpetual Peace* from 1795 are particularly relevant at our present conjecture, he then proceeds to discuss one novel and two films, all from 2019, as examples of how belonging, loss, and justice, or better said, injustice, operate and intersect in our postimperial condition. The novel, Damon Galgut's *The Promise* (2021), is an accomplished narrative that explores how the present in South Africa, after the abolition of apartheid in 1994, is still necessarily haunted by the past. The two films were released in 2019. One, Senegalese, *Atlantique* (2019) is directed by Mati Diop. The other, *Bacurau* (2019) Brazilian, is directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles. Although there are stark differences between them, inevitably given their different contexts, there are strong convergences as well since both films can be said to register the conditions of oppression in the wake of imperialism and to offer ways of resistance.

In the same section, Caitlin Vandertop's chapter is entitled "(Dis)inheriting Stevenson: Inheritance Crisis, Postcolonial Periodization, and Literary Property in the Pacific." It deals with writers from Oceania and the ways in which they complicate existing postcolonial periodization. The chapter argues that Oceanic literature actually intensifies the crisis of periodization in postcolonial studies, as it invites the reader not to follow the traditional patterns of literary "influence" but to focus instead on the "inherited" structures of property accumulation. The focus is not on the aesthetic features or the abstract "transmission" of culture but, as

the author explains, on technologies of textual enclosure. Drawing on Joseph Slaughter's "World Literature as Property," Vandertop focuses on the theme of "inheritance crisis" in the work of Samoan writer Albert Wendt, in particular his short story collection, *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974). In this text, a series of formal disruptions to the narrative of inheritance in a colonial context is identified. Vandertop further analyzes how Wendt troubles the "inheritance" of a European literary tradition by engaging in intertextual dialog with R. L. Stevenson, who is a writer considered to be the so-called "father" of Samoan literature. By incorporating oral forms that insist on the collective rather than individualized nature of cultural production, *Flying-Fox* disturbs the sequence of literary genealogy and its underlying property model, Vandertop concludes.

In the closing chapter of this section, Gianmaria Colpani and Adriano José Habed discuss how the past decades have been marked by an accelerating cycle of crises, and propose to think with Stuart Hall about crises and their conjunctures. In their "Critique without Guarantees: Thinking with Stuart Hall in a Time of Crises," Colpani and Habed focus on the crisis of critique, starting with the discussion of a number of discontents voiced by proponents of postcritique. One of these many discontents includes the reduction of critique to a set of theoretical and ideological automatisms and the potential convergences with the structure and content of conspiracy theories. The authors make the theoretical and political move to respond to these discontents by turning to Hall's work, especially the collaborative volume *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978). Here Hall emerges as the quintessential critical thinker of crisis, whose practice of critique is open and "without guarantees." This critique without guarantees addresses some of the problems highlighted by the proponents of postcritique, yet without calling for an abandonment of critical practices. The chapter is intertwined with the readings of two critical and problematic responses to the coronavirus crisis, by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and African American journalist Steven Thrasher, proposed through the framework of a critique without guarantees.

The final section reflects on the consequences and connection of these crises across art, memory, and race. In his chapter on "Traumatic Memory and the Postcolonial: Disruptive Genealogy" Max Silverman asks how postcolonial studies have influenced the development of memory studies, which privilege trauma theory and a vocabulary of wounds and victimhood. Though this approach has provided a much-needed focus on how past violence continues to impact today's present, often in invisible ways, it tends to foreclose, as Silverman explains, the wider international and intersectional analysis of cultural works, where trauma and memory are interconnected with other processes, often of colonial and postcolonial descendants, in paradoxical ways. He asks whether postcolonial theory can open up cultural works to ambivalent encounters in a way that readings

through the lens of traumatic memory rarely allow. The author showcases this approach through a beautiful analysis of the film *Memory Box* (2021) by the Lebanese filmmakers Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. In this film, the return of the past can be read not only in terms of a genealogical transmission of the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) but also as a knotted story about time, culture, and media.

In the following chapter, Bolette Blaagaard tackles the issues of legacy media, journalism, and the role of citizen media. Titled "Postcolonial Critique in Practice: A Case Study of Citizen Media Resistance to Mainstream Media Discourses on Race," the chapter focuses more specifically on how postcolonial social movements and their citizen-driven media productions can counter the crisis of public engagement. The chapter deals in particular with the issue of race and racism in Danish society as it is produced in journalistic discourse. Through the analysis of the Danish section of the Black Lives Matter movement, the chapter argues that despite theoretical and academic postcolonial and anti-racist critique, journalistic principles and practices continue to produce a public of racial ignorance and disregard for marginalized and minoritized people. The chapter explores in more detail how the discourses of race in Danish legacy media and journalism are in serious need of postcolonial critique as practiced in this specific case by social movements and their citizen media, which manage to produce publics of postcolonial resistance. This bottom-up practice makes an intervention, disruption, and interruption of mainstream journalistic reporting, throwing journalistic representation into crisis, and confronts legacy media with their inherent perpetuation of racial ignorance. The discussion and analysis are built on a case study of 46 newspaper articles and 37 social media posts from BLM-DK's site about a racially charged murder on the Danish island of Bornholm in 2020 and the subsequent media coverage.

To conclude, Ana Cristina Mendes brings the various discussions in the book about theory, crisis, critique, and the arts to a close with her chapter on "Crisis and Planetary Entanglements: Ai Weiwei's *Pequi Tree* and John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*," This chapter focuses on the works of two global activist artists who have revolutionized the art field with their aesthetic and political provocations. In particular, the chapter examines two visual artworks: Ai Weiwei's 32-meter-high iron sculpture *Pequi Tree* (2018–20) and John Akomfrah's three-screen video installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015). Both artworks contribute to the debate on the planetary "crisis" and concepts related to the Anthropocene, such as the Plantationocene. As in the chapters by van Amelsvoort, Bassi, Maurits, and others in this volume, the chapter aims to further explore the relationship between postcolonial theory and the idea of "crisis" by emphasizing these artivists' impact on a new politics and aesthetics centered on planetary consciousness. *Pequi Tree* by Ai and *Vertigo Sea* by Akomfrah are presented as works of artistic-intellectual and activist expression that boldly speak truth to power

from within the museum and gallery spaces. To frame the analysis in the context of the artivists' engagement with the planetary "crisis," Mendes first discusses the idea of "the contemporary" and its connection to postcoloniality and the interconnected "crises" of the present, which intertwine with the Anthropocene. Secondly, she focuses on adaptation as a creative approach to address representational and epistemic violence in the visual realm. This is realized by transforming authorized, or official "sources" and material, to incorporate the past in an understanding of our current "crises."

Coda

This collective project aimed at addressing different, overlapping crises of our time (precarious and forced migration, climate catastrophes and ecological disasters, human rights violations and ethnic conflicts, media disinformation and crises of trust) through the magnifying lens of postcolonial critique. This has helped to provide an understanding of new or protracted crises as part of past colonial legacies, and their injustices as intertwined with contemporary neoliberal assemblages of inequalities.

Postcolonial Studies cannot be understood in separation from the profound societal changes that it both reflects and reacts against, the heady days of anticolonial struggle and national liberation, the various failures of succeeding regimes, the definite replacement of European hegemony by American power, and its own subsequent decay by the turn of the century. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, arguably the most significant development has been the reassertion of imperial, or neo-imperial, notions under the ideological banner of what one may well refer to as Empire 2.0. Indeed, neither the threat to European stability posed by Brexit and its open celebration of imperial nostalgia nor, in spite of all their differences, the clamour for 'Mak[ing] America Great Again' can be understood without referring to it. This is to stick to the West only, though of course the notion of an East-West divide makes even less sense nowadays than might ever have been the case.

Postcolonial Theory has gone through various iterations and if, to a large extent, it can be said that at heart it was always rooted in a sense of a fight against the oppression of capitalism and imperialism, this at times could feel very vague, as if it were possible to decouple colonialism from capitalism. As Neil Lazarus forcefully put it two decades ago already: "The problem, put simply, is that scholars in the field have tended to pay insufficient attention to the fact that colonialism is part and parcel of a larger, enfolding historical dynamic, which is that of

capitalism in its global trajectory" (Lazarus 2011: 7). Consequently, this interconnectedness has informed all of the essays that make up this volume.

Postcolonial critique as a field, approach and perspective is subjected in this volume to further critique and scrutiny in order to transition from past ossified relations between colony and post-colony to more complex, webbed configurations. This is achieved through the rethinking of classic intellectual engagements, such as coming from iconic thinkers, activists and scholars (Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Aimé Cesaire, Stuart Hall, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Étienne Balibar, Gayatri Spivak), with more porous and collective forms of resistance expressed by social movements on the streets as well as through digital platforms, avoiding presentism while opening up to new technological challenges and opportunities. Social and digital movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo movement, and Occupy Wall Street share the need to address a societal crisis in which technical savviness leads to new forms of collective, global and intergenerational activism for change.

The volume is also particularly rich and expansive in including a kaleidoscopic range of differentiated case studies and locations (from Syria to the Black Mediterranean, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Venice old and new, the Sami peoples of the European north, Mozambique, Brazil, South Africa, Oceania/Samoa, Bangladesh, the Lebanon and Denmark, among others). It leaves behind the old map of the Commonwealth and Anglophone world and the postcolonial theories of the dominant US in favour of new fluid and relational approaches that challenge disciplinary boundaries, territorial confines and representational dogmas.

Offering a wide range of material, from literature (novels, short stories, graphic novels and poetry), visual culture (films, documentaries, video installations and photo anthologies), and the arts more generally to emerging immersive technologies such as VR projects, the volume explores new avenues of representations that can narrate, visualize and intervene in the notion of crisis without reproducing false binaries or presuming easy solutions. Indeed, in our present time it has become if anything more obvious that there are no easy solutions and never were. As Donna Haraway expressed in her notion of Capitalocene/Chthulucene, "One way to live and die well as mortal critters in the Chthulucene is to join forces to reconstitute refuges, to make possible partial and robust biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition, which must include mourning irreversible losses." (Haraway 2015: 160).

At times crises cannot be represented; they escape representation, as amply articulated in trauma and memory studies. The failure of representation to encompass the incommensurable and the unthinkable does not mean that literature and art in general remain mute. The registration of such incommensurability is often a strong form of denouncement, protest and witnessing. This volume offers several reflections on the connections between trauma and the postcolonial. Max

Silverman's chapter takes central stage here as it both covers the development of such an imbrication and advances it. But other chapters also have occasion to consider how trauma, and traumatic memory, often cannot be ignored when considering postcoloniality, whether one thinks about slavery, the aftereffects of Apartheid, what by now is called the Black Mediterranean as disussed in her chapter by Di Maio, or indeed other places of migration.

As such postcolonial critique is disrupted and renewed at the same time, it is being asked to rise to the challenge of our time and offer new analytical tools as well as epistemological quests to convey the urgency of the present through the prism of the past, while offering possible future scenarios through the creative role of the arts, literature, cinema and media in the wider sense. These innovative creative engagements provide new routes to reimagining the crisis by understanding the very logic which upholds it. As Dominic Thomas writes in the fore-word to the novel *Congo Inc.*, discussed by Spear in this volume, "in tapping into this power of reimagination, we can explore modes of interventions that do not enforce and reproduce pre-existing structures of the world-system but begin to move beyond them." (Spear: p. 80). The rise of the field of World Literature, with its presumed global reach, drawing on both the discipline of Comparative Literature and the critique of Eurocentrism at the basis of much of Postcolonial Studies would appear to be one of the more recent, and critical, challenges to Postcolonial Theory. Diverse views on both fields, World Literature and Postcolonial Studies, will mean divergent takes on the question. In many cases, at least on an institutional level, there has been a *de facto* merging of the two, whether for ideological or tactical reasons, as renowned universities such as Oxford and Southampton, and many others offer courses and even degrees that combine both. Fruitful discussions of the intersections between postcolonial critique and World Literature, such as that by Debjany Ganguli in *This Thing Called the World: The Contemporary Novel as Global Form* (2016), have much to offer.

And yet, one would do well to remain alert to the need never to forget about capital if one really wants to engage with the world as a system. Certainly, some articulations of a postcolonial critique of World Literature are well intentioned, for instance, Pheng Cheah's *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (2016). And yet, as much as his claim for the importance of literature in making worlds is appropriate, his vision of 'worlding,' influenced as it is by the thought of Heidegger, raises a whole new set of questions. Ontological perspectives in and of themselves are one option of course. But, at least in this case, it becomes difficult to see how to reconcile such a perspective with other claims. As can be seen from various of the essays in this volume, the emphasis must rather be put on other questions related to capital and the systemic oppression and inequalities it is based on and incessantly reproduces, whether in terms of the

cruelty that often accompanies migrations or the destruction of our ecosystem, our world. That, we argue, is how Postcolonial Theory can continue renewing itself.

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