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Postcolonial Justice

An Introduction

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Postcolonial Justice
An Introduction

Anke Bartels, Lars Eckstein, Nicole Waller and Dirk Wiemann

I.

In July 2014, some of us participated in a handover ceremony of 14 ancestral remains to their Australian traditional owners, performed on the premises of the Charité Campus in Berlin. It was one of the first of its kind: Berlin institutions had only recently begun to think about returning human remains and other secret sacred objects in their colonial collections. Since the first restitution in 2012, about 90 human remains were given back to their communities to date, mainly in Australia and Namibia, a number that falls into place given that an estimated 10.000 skulls from the colonised spaces of the world found their way to Berlin in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of the Berlin collections are tied to the name Rudolph Virchow in one way or the other, claimed as the founding father of modern pathology by Berlin's foremost research clinic, the Charité, yet also founder of the Berlin Anthropological Society and personally responsible for commissioning one of the largest colonial collections of human remains in Europe.

Most institutions in Berlin emphatically hold on to their collections in the name of Science – such as the successor of the Society for Anthropology, the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory (BGAEU), which still proffers its Rudolf-Virchow-Collection holding more than 4.000 skulls to basically any researcher willing to pay 40 Euros a day. Only the Charité more recently adopted a policy of returning remains upon request, responding to restitution claims which began to tinge its international reputation. Such restitutions require to assign, if not identities, then at least the provenance of the defaced bones piled up in thousands of cardboard boxes in the limbo of Berlin archives. And given the collections' histories of dubious acquisition (from sacred burial sites, battlegrounds, prisons or camps), at best loose archival documentation, and the frequent displacement or loss of handling papers, letters, registers, etc., this requires intense research. Already in 2011, though, the German government declared that it "sees no need for a state-

sponsored research programme."[1] There is no political interest in proactive research into German's colonial pasts; restitutions are exclusively reactive, responding to diplomatic pressure from nations and interest groups powerful enough to make such claims.

Both political and academic restitution debates are thus representative of a larger disavowal of postcolonial obligations in Germany. What is worse, this disavowal is more often than not played out against overriding obligations arising from Germany's Nazi past. The Hitler regime eclipses all previous obligations according to this logic which refuses to explore, in Paul Gilroy's words, "the connections and the differences between anti-semitism and anti-black and other racisms and asses[s] the issues that arise when it can no longer be denied that they interacted over a long time in what might be seen as Fascism's intellectual, ethical and scientific pre-history."[2] This logic is clearly at work, for instance, in the *Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections*, published in 2013 by the German Museums Association. A key term in these *Recommendations* is "context of injustice." Against an acknowledgement that the fascist imperialism of the Nazis constituted a *regime* of injustice (Unrechtsregime), they imply that European colonial regimes were in principle *just* contexts of imperial acquisition. According to the *Recommendations*, any postcolonial restitution claim is legitimate only if supported by conclusive evidence of a very specific "*context* of injustice" in which bones were acquired. Such contexts apply when: a) "the person from whom the human remains originate was the victim of an act of violence and/or parts of his body were or are processed and retained against his will"; or b) "the human remains were added to a collection against the will of the original owner(s) or person(s) entitled to dispose of them, in particular by means of physical violence, coercion, theft, grave robbery or deception."[3] While it is difficult to imagine many contexts of colonial 'justice' under these premises, this is much harder to prove: for it is the dispossessed communities rather than the heirs of imperial collectors who must unearth case-by-case evidence which *de*legitimises the abduction of their ancestral dead. What is worse, the rules of the game are exclusively set by the West.

There is a dramatic disavowal of Indigenous knowledge in any European dealings with human remains. The consequences are particularly perfidious, for instance, in an "exception" listed by the German Museums Association which further delegitimises potential restitutions *even if* there is

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[1]Quoted in Reinhart Kössler & Heiko Wegmann, "Schädel im Schrank: Das düstere koloniale Erbe der deutschen Rasseforschung muss endlich aufgeklärt werden," *Die Zeit* 42 (October 2011): 18.

[2]Paul Gilroy, "Route Work*:* The Black Atlantic and the Politics of Exile," in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Ian Chambers & Lidia Curti (London & New York: Routledge, 1996): 26.

[3]Deutscher Museumsbund e.V. [German Museums Association], *Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections* (April 2013): 10, 11.

evidence that ancestral remains were collected in colonial "contexts of injustice." The second of two caveats specifies this:

> From an ethnological perspective, memories of a deceased person fade after approximately four to five generations. This equates to approx. 125 years […]. Consequently, it is no longer possible to identify direct descendants in whose eyes the injustice which occurred could continue to have an effect.[4]

The *Recommendations* fail to annotate where exactly the "ethnological" notion of "approx. 125 years" comes from. But it is obvious that they draw on Eurocentric theories of social memory. A major point of reference would have been Aleida Assmann's widely popularised proposition that "[t]he temporal horizon of social memory cannot be extended across the time span of lived interaction and communication, this is beyond three or four generations at most."[5] To project this notion of social memory as an anthropological universal, however, is a dramatic act of epistemic violence. It wilfully ignores the difference between dualistic Western philosophies primarily organized around time, and for instance Indigenous Australian philosophies of being and belonging that are organized around a specific relation to place. In a system of knowledge where, in Stephen Muecke's words, "[t]he safe return of [an ancestor's] spirit is imperative to the wellbeing of the *place* so that it may continue as an enduring life source,"[6] memory is not a temporal variable. It makes no difference whether remains are 60, or in fact 60.000 years old. 125 years are thus hardly an anthropological universal, but a function of epistemic power: They conveniently decree that human remains in German collections acquired before the 1890s can no longer be claimed, and that the window of opportunity shall close within the next 25 years.

The multiple reverberations of injustice in the *Recommendations* continued to resonate, however subtly, even in the moving restitution ceremony in July 2014. For to celebrate the restitution of the remains of 14 Torres Strait Islanders and one Western Australian,[7] the Charité invited to its most representative function centre, the so called *Hörsaalruine*, a building which preserves the ruins of a former lecture hall in a spectacular piece of postmodern architecture. The original lecture hall was crushed by an aerial bomb in the final months of the Second World War and reconstructed in the 1990s, clearly to serve as a mnemonic site for the destruction brought to the world by the racist

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[4]Deutscher Museumsbund e.V. [German Museums Association], *Recommendations for the Care of Human Remains in Museums and Collections*, 11.

[5]Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006): 28, our trans.

[6]Stephen Muecke, *Ancient and Modern*: *Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy* (Sydney: U of New South Wales P, 2004): 16, our emphasis.

[7] Charité, "Restitution of Australian Remains 2014," http://anatomie.charite.de/en/history/human_remains_projekt/restitution_of_australian_remains_2014/ (accessed 20 October 2014).

hubris and genocidal imperialism of Nazi Germany. Intriguingly, the ruined lecture hall was none other than the *Rudolf Virchow Hörsaal*, named after the very man who commissioned the majority of Berlin's precarious anthropological collections. Its only adornment today is a cinematic photo on one wall that highlights the historical palimpsest of the architectural design: for it shows the original lecture theatre, with Virchow himself at the lectern at a festive event in honour of his 80th birthday in 1901. The logic of the spatial composition clearly suggest that there is no connection between Germany's scientific racism and the racist crimes of Hitler's regime. On the contrary: In the face of its Indigenous Australian guests, the venue of the reception defiantly claimed a proud continuity of the scientific Enlightenment, only wantonly interrupted by the terror of the Third Reich.

II.

Examples like the restitution of human remains from imperial collections showcase how vital it is to continue to foreground questions of justice in Postcolonial Studies. At the heart of debates around postcolonial justice is an inbuilt tension: If the postcolonial is typically imbued with a drive towards the assertion and reciprocal acknowledgement of difference, justice supports the opposite dynamics toward universality and the normative. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in a recent essay, marks a similar tension when he reflects on the position of Europe in the thought of critics like Etienne Balibar and Sandro Mezzadra:

> their writing is caught in tension between two tendencies: on the one hand they have to acknowledge the historical and current barbarisms that have in the past acted as a foundation of European "civilization" and continue to do so to some extent even in the present; on the other hand they have to appeal to the highest utopian ideals of their civilizational heritage in order to imagine into being a vibrant European polity that not only practices the ethics of hospitality and responsibility that Derrida, Levinas, and others have written about, but that also grounds itself in a deep acceptance of the plurality of human inheritances inside its own borders.[8]

In our own reading, the concept of postcolonial justice carries an unwavering commitment to difference within and beyond Europe, yet it equally rejects radical cultural essentialisms which refuse to engage in "utopian ideals" of convivial exchange across a plurality of subject positions and differences. Such utopian ideals can no longer claim universal, transhistorical validity, as in the tradition of the European enlightenment; they are bound to local frames of speaking from which they project world. For Balibar and Mezzadra, this is the European South facing unprecedented waves of postcolonial migration decreed 'illegal' by the authorities and combatted by an

[8]Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change," *New Literary History* 43.1 (Winter 2012): 8.

unprecedented militarisation of the Mediterranean. For us, at the time of writing in early 2016, it is impossible not to project our ideas about postcolonial justice under the impression of German and European responses to the so-called refugee 'crisis' and recurrent news about burning asylum centres and racist mobs rallying the streets of Potsdam and Berlin. Indeed, foregrounding questions of justice in postcolonial studies asks us to carefully rethink the vexed relationship between academic investments and political engagement, at a moment in history when it is ever harder for Germans to pretend not to be postcolonial, that Postcolonial Studies mainly concerns the history of others.

Yet surely, speaking and projecting world from local trajectories of knowledge and experience is not enough. A genuinely postcolonial reformulation of planetary justice must also learn to de-privilege Western re/visions of ethics and justice, be it in the form of Derrida's radicalisation of Kant's cosmopolitan hospitality or Levinas' riffing on Heidegger which Charabarty invokes. If it turns to such ideas, it will need to also reflexively foreground their colonial entanglements and racist legacies. Yet more importantly, the project of postcolonial justice will have to set into conversation visions of planetary justice from other parts of the globe. As such, it will not only need to take seriously visions of justice beyond Eurocentric confines, it will also need to critically investigate the material, political, and epistemological mechanisms which have led to their disavowal in the global marketplace of ideas.

As our opening example about the restitution of human remains from Berlin collections testifies, the notion of postcolonial justice contains a range of related challenges and aspects. In its most literal sense, it calls upon the law and its role in redressing, to take up Chakrabarty's phrase, "historical and current barbarisms." This concerns specific questions of restitution, compensation or reparation for historical injustices including land rights and native title issues. On a more general level, it extends to the discourse of human rights, and the question whose definition of the human, and whose definition of right are included in the negotiations. Postcolonial justice envisions a decolonization of law and its Eurocentric bias in all these contexts. Indeed, the *Recommendations* of the German Museums Association, while not legally binding, are a telling example of discourse which eschews postcolonial obligations; as a document which takes exclusive recourse to European legal frameworks in a narrow understanding of the 'law' (as opposed to, for instance, conceptions of the law in indigenous Australian frameworks); which measures its conception of injustice against a distinctly European norm (Nazi fascism and the Holocaust) against which colonial injustice is strategically trivialised; and which was drafted by a diverse group of representatives of European institutions alone, without the involvement of any of the communities whose ancestral remains are at stake.

Postcolonial justice accordingly extends to much more than the legal: One of its most foundational interventions concerns the decolonization of knowledge at large, and the acknowledgement of different ways of being in and knowing the world. This involves, not least, our own academic disciplines and the ways in which we produce knowledge usually about, rather than with others. For there are many more than just the two academic cultures J.P. Snow was on about, and again, German restitution debates are a case in point. There is indeed a dramatic hiatus of silence between scholars in the humanities and the natural sciences, most notably between cultural and physical anthropologists: While the first focus on the colonial archive surrounding the body in provenance research, the latter investigate the physical bones, usually using morphometric systems. By matching the results of elaborate 3D measurements of skulls against data samples of various 'populations' across the globe, they thus profess to more or less reliably attribute remains to specific geographical regions. In so doing, they tend to be fully unprepared to reflect on the continuities of their research with 19th-century raciology; to admit that the data bases against which cranial measurements are matched today are themselves a product of 19th-century raciological sampling; that the idea of stable 'populations' informing such samples wilfully ignores convoluted histories of migration and cross-cultural exchange; or that 'populations' (postulating the convergence of genetic variation) merely reproduce the colonial construction of 'race' with a difference. Neither of the two camps, however, humanities or national sciences, both of whom contributed to the *Recommendations* of the Museums Association, are prepared to open up their trajectories of knowledge to non-European Indigenous knowledges. The installation of the notion of a 'generational memory' of no more than 125 years to delegitimise restitution claims is only one example of a much wider ongoing, institutionalised epistemic imperialism.

Epistemic justice is thus intricately linked to the power of representation, and to privileged frames of speaking and interpreting world. The notion of postcolonial justice underscores the ongoing importance of critique in the trajectory of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* which investigates how literatures, film, art, music, even architecture as in the case of the Charité's *Hörsaalruine*, perpetuate narratives of Self and Other which entrench legal, epistemic, political and social injustices. The project of postcolonial justice is thus one which in a distinctly "pluritopic" way,[9] by encountering world from a plurality of subject positions from all over the globe, needs to assess how texts in the widest sense, how literatures, film, art, music, architecture and other discourses have shaped a cultural imaginary which has nourished and sustained, or evaded or critiqued a world economic (and ecological) system that is deeply entangled with the colonial project, and which has today produced the most radical material inequality in human

[9]Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: U of Princeton P, 2000).

history. Let us in the following zoom out from the specific case study of colonial human remains in German collections, and address some of the larger issues at stake.

III.

As should have become clear from the opening observations, postcolonial justice is not only a matter of restitutions, reparations, official apologies and other forms of righting the wrongs of past colonialisms, even though efforts of this kind are indispensable dimensions of all projects that work towards a more equitable present and future. Along with this, however, the pursuit of postcolonial justice has to develop and if possible enact an interventionist critique of present (and future) dynamics and structures of neo-colonial injustice as well. In this perspective, postcolonial justice is emphatically neither a matter of the 'back then' nor of the 'out there' but instead a vital issue of the here and now. In this understanding the 'post' in the postcolonial does not indicate a temporal reductionism according to which we had somehow entered a period *after* colonialism; instead, the 'post' marks a conceptual claim to think *beyond* the constitutive coloniality of both past and present. If, as Walter Mignolo has persuasively argued, modernity itself cannot be analysed or explained without its genealogical implication in the project of colonialism,[10] then this ineluctable nexus of modernity and coloniality is by no means a merely historical phenomenon. Instead, in the ongoing triumphant project (Mignolo would no doubt speak of a 'global design') of a thorough and seamless "financialization of the globe,"[11] the real subsumption not only of the global South and the former Soviet bloc, but also of what used to be called 'the First World' intensifies after the demise of the post-WW2 Keynesian settlement at a staggering pace and to a hitherto unthinkable extent. Spectacularly, Oxfam's 2015 report on *An Economy for the 1%* delineates how "the richest 1% have now accumulated more wealth than the rest of the world put together,"[12] while the dramatic shifts, over the past 20 years or so, towards neoliberal deregulation and privatisation have not only engendered a substantive decline of the state as an actor of political intervention into the economic, but also "a switch from incorporation to expulsion"[13] by multiple measures of *dispossession*. In the current conjuncture, this global economy of dispossession involves unprecedented foreclosures and

[10]Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 23 and passim.

[11]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York & London: Routledge 1993): 95.

[12]Deborah Hardoon, Sophia Ayele & Ricardo Fuentes-Nieva, *An Economy for the 1%: How Privilege and Power in the Economy Drive Extreme Inequality and How This Can Be Stopped* (Oxfam Briefing Paper 102): 2.

[13]Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge MA & London: Belknap, 2014): 211.

'debtocratic' austerity dictates but also large-scale ecological devastation including massive deforestation, land and sea grabbing, fracking-induced earthquakes, and other calamities in the course of which whole populations get expelled from their habitats. If traditional colonialism found its most brutal manifestation in genocidal instances of "state killing," the present global corpocratic regime pursues the strategy of "neoliberal modes of making die."[14] Accumulation by dispossession, then, ushers in a new stage of "enclosing the commons":

> Biopiracy is rampant and the pillaging of the world's stockpile of genetic resources is well under way to the benefit of a few large pharmaceutical companies. The escalating depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water) and proliferating habitat degradations that preclude anything but capital-intensive modes of agricultural production have likewise resulted from the wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms. The commodification of cultural forms, histories, and intellectual creativity entails wholesale dispossessions (the music industry is notorious for the appropriation and exploitation of grassroots culture and creativity). The corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets (such as universities), to say nothing of the wave of privatization (of water and public utilities of all kinds) that has swept the world, indicate a new wave of 'enclosing the commons'.[15]

Obviously, dispossession is not restricted to the global South as the various channels of expulsion run very much through European and US societies as well: They include, among other measures, "austerity policies that have helped shrink the economies of Greece and Spain, and environmental policies that overlook the toxic emissions from enormous mining operations in Norilsk, Russia, and in the American state of Montana."[16] If dispossession as a term "originally referred to practices of land encroachment [including] the misrecognition, appropriation and occupation of indigenous lands in colonial and postcolonial settler contexts,"[17] can it then be assumed that the newly dominant 'postmodern regime', thriving on accumulation by dispossession, is in fact a return of colonialist practices that are now no longer enacted only on north-south or centre-periphery vectors but are being instead more and more evenly dispersed across the smooth surface of the globe? Is colonialism, in short, not simply coming back but also, ultimately, coming home? In this perspective, e.g. the de facto degradation of Greece "into an economically colonized semi-state,"[18] whose every parliamentary legislating act depends on sanction from Brussels (if not the IMF), gets readable as a blatant instance of neo-colonial politics that Europe, in a deeply ironic twist, inflicts

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[14]Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham & London: Duke UP, 2011): 58.

[15]David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003): 148.

[16]Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, 2.

[17]Athena Athanasiou & Judith Butler, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Oxford: Polity, 2013): 10.

[18]Slavoj Zizek, "How Alexis Tsipras and Syriza Outmanoeuvered Angela Merkel and the Eurocrats," *In These Times* (23 July 2015).

on precisely that country that old-school Eurocentrism has always eulogized as its mythic point of origin "where it all began."[19] Of course we have no stakes in salvaging this sanitized version of a hyperreal Greek antiquity from which 'Europe' and its core values and achievements somehow derive; we are rather interested in the fact that the crisis in today's actual Greece (and some other European nation-states) looks very much like a rerun on European soil of the debt trap that has kept fragile Tricont economies immediately subjected to the structural adjustments impositions of the Bretton Wood institutions ever since decolonization.[20] Far from being a historical novelty, however, such an instance of what could be called a colonial return rehearses a time-worn pattern that Michel Foucault, in a discussion of seventeenth-century domestic politics in Britain, has long ago described as "the boomerang effect that colonial practice can have": In the long period of Europe's overseas expansion, Foucault suggests, "a whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonisation, or an internal colonialism, on itself":[21] The colonized and/or enslaved majority of the world historically served as a testing ground for the development and trial-and-error optimization of disciplining and 'improvement' techniques on which wave after wave of modernizing Europe was built. Thus, e.g., the panoptic "oversight" regimes so characteristic of the Caribbean slave plantations;[22] the colonial surveillance strategies through which "India became the experimental site for the Benthamite Panopticon";[23] the model housing schemes implemented in colonial Egypt;[24] the pedagogic monitoring systems invented and experimentally applied in the new English medium schools of colonial India:[25] they were all boomeranged back to Europe where they helped to introduce ever more efficient sites and processes of production, ever more tight-knit techniques to discipline populations, and ever more naturalised modes of ideologically reproducing subjects. Clearly these instances – the list could easily be extended – of colonially elaborated innovations underscore the general pertinence of Mignolo's notion of the inextricable coloniality of modernity: Far from existing in or deriving from some Cartesian or Kantian self-sufficiency, the subject of European

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[19]Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 57.

[20]See Cherrill Payer, *The Debt Trap: The International Monetary Fund and the Third World* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); Tim Jones, *The New Debt Trap: How the Response to the Last Global Financial Crisis Has Laid the Ground for the Next* (July 2015).

[21]Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003): 103.

[22]Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham & London: Duke UP, 2011): 49.

[23]U. Kalpagam, "Temporalities, History and Routines of Rule in Colonial India," *Time & Society* 8.1 (1999): 147.

[24]Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991): 44--49.

[25]Gauri Viswanathan, "Raymond Williams and British Colonialism," in *Subject To Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties*, ed. Susie Tharu (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1998): 195.

modernity is in this perspective an effect as much of colonial encounters and relations as of those techniques of modernity that emerged from colonial experimental contact zones. Thus, to say that the modern European subject is constitutively *colonial*, therefore, implies first and foremost that the "experience not only of discovery, but especially of the conquest [of Latin America], is *essential* to the constitution of the modern ego, not only as a subjectivity, but as subjectivity that takes itself to be the center or end of history";[26] however, it also implies that, due to the boomerang effect of colonialism, the subject of modernity emerges not only as master but also as subject-in-subjection. Something of this dialectics underpins, e.g., Linda Colley's purely historical account of how the experience of empire constituted English subjectivities in the contradictory horizons of expectation of both potential profiteering and victimization, including even slavery: In fact, "[f]or seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Britons, slavery was never something securely and invariably external to themselves."[27] Of course it would be frivolous to suggest that Western and non-Western subjects were in the same ways coerced into the universalizing formations of historical imperialism or current neoliberalism. Far from it: the experience of actual slavery that was suffered by millions of abducted Africans is completely incommensurate with the experience of the *threat* of slavery that early modern Britons underwent. Likewise, in our own times, the foreclosure of US suburban real estate is experientially incomparable to the enforced removal of entire populations for big dam or mining projects. And even if the austerity measures imposed on Southern European economies "insist that debts be repaid almost exclusively from the pockets of the poor,"[28] it is obvious that IMF policies implemented in Greece or Portugal do not have the same literally lethal effects that they have in the global South. Still the fact remains that all these experiences, however incommensurate, are somehow integrated and connected – or, as Edward Said has it, intertwined and overlapping as so many discrepant effects of the one vast dynamics that is empire. As Said points out, to think in terms of such a pervasive interconnectedness is intended "not to level or reduce differences, but rather to convey a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things."[29] Totalization, in other words, is not in the eye of the beholder but in the object itself:

> So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of 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.[30]

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[26]Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of* '*the Other*' *and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995): 25.

[27]Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World,1600-1850* (London: Cape, 2002): 51.

[28]David Graeber, *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011): 367.

[29]Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993): 72.

[30]Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 72 (emphasis ours).

If this scenario emphasises that which is shared by 'the whole of secular humanity', then what is *common* is not at all a harmonious fraternity/sorority but a conflicted and coercive experience: Empire, in short, is universal but internally antagonistic. In this respect, Said's analysis of (historical) imperialism has much in common with Marxist theorizations of capital as a unifying and at the same time hierarchically differentiating force that integrates everyone on the principle of inequality. Traditionally, Marxism and postcolonial theory have been uncomfortable bedfellows, with the latter accusing the former of complicity in the Eurocentric myth of Western supremacy (a critique classically put forth by Said in *Orientalism*[31]) and the former charging the latter of merely culturalist and relativist avoidance to elaborate "a plausible conceptualization of capitalism and imperialist social relations."[32] Simplistically put, a compromise formula to mediate between the totalizing (Marxist) and the pluralistic (postcolonial) tendencies was introduced by Dipesh Chakrabarty's re-reading of Marxian scripture in terms of a juxtaposition of the universalizing thrust of capital on the one hand and its multiple, locally specific articulations around the globe on the other. While capital's totalizing tendency establishes a world-historical dynamics that Chakrabarty calls "History 1," this universal narrative gets everywhere refracted by the multiplicity of 'histories 2', that are "charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1."[33] Thus, "[t]he idea of History 2 allows us to make room […] for the politics of human belonging and diversity. It gives us a ground on which to situate our thoughts about multiple ways of being human and their relationship to global capital."[34] No doubt, the mainstream of postcolonial theory with its commitment to particularities and marginalized differences has always given premium to elaborations of 'histories 2'. Said's notion of empire as universal, however, alerts us to the overlaps and connections that pertain between all these individual local particulars, and that need to be accounted for as well. Without a grasp of 'History 1' and its 'totalizing thrust', even the most accurate and committed study of any 'history 2' will remain placeless. Not only that: In the face of the relentless victory march of universal capital, itself thriving on the cooptation of all those "non-conflictual differences" that postmodern and postcolonial mainstream theory cherished,[35] a dose of 'totalizing' thought becomes an ethico-political must in the effort to envisage "an escape

[31]Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York: Vintage, 1994):153--156.

[32]Neil Lazarus, "The Fetish of the 'West' in Postcolonial Theory," in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich & Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002): 57.

[33]Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000): 66.

[34]Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 67.

[35]Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard UP, 2000): XX.

from the nightmare of history."[36] This perspective, which is obviously very similar to Said's notion of empire's universality, implies that every attempt to provincialize Europe and to push the world a little bit closer to some semblance of postcolonial justice must needs address not only the specifics of the locally circumscribed – Chakrabarty's decentralised 'history 2s' – but *also* the basic fact of the universality of capitalist subsumption. Pointedly put, "the way to provincialize Europe is not by continually harping on some unbridgeable gap that separates East from West, but by showing that both parts of the globe are subject to *the same basic forces* and are therefore part of *the same basic history*."[37] It is on the terrain of this shared history that colonial practices are coming back as so many boomerangs and make the quest for postcolonial justice a vitally important issue for fellows at all locations around the globe.

IV.

The present volume is a collection of selected and expanded papers of the joint conference of the association formerly known as ASNEL (Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English) and GASt (Gesellschaft für Australienstudien) in Potsdam and Berlin, from June 29 to June 1, 2014. A second volume is currently edited by our co-organiser Anja Schwarz as proceedings of the GASt-part of the conference,[38] while this volume focusses on ASNEL contributions. In light of the previous discussion, it is fitting and rewarding that this conference not only marked the 25th anniversary of ASNEL, but more importantly, that it hosted the final official act in a longer process of discussion and debate which ultimately resulted in a name change from ASNEL to GAPS – the Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien / Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies. As GAPS noted on its webpage, the choice to (re)embrace the term 'postcolonial' – "while being reflexive and aware of the conceptual challenges" – "reflects a desire to acknowledge that for the past 25 years, the Association has played a formative role in the establishment of the field of Postcolonial Studies". What matters most to our understanding of 'doing' postcolonial studies at Potsdam, however, is that the new name signals a commitment to an interdisciplinary field of study which programmatically exceeds the mere focus on the interplay of aesthetic and cultural difference; that it draws from the genealogies of the postcolonial a commitment also to the analyses of primarily material, yet also medial and epistemic differences,

[36]Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998): 37.

[37]Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2013): 291.

[38]Gigi Adair & Anja Schwarz, eds., *Postcolonial Justice: Reassessing the Fair Go* (Trier: WVT, 2016).

and that it encourages to embed critical readings in the long histories which have shaped the dramatically unequal worlds in which we find ourselves. Most of all, we associate the postcolonial with engaged scholarship.

Framed around the theme of postcolonial justice, we accordingly attempted to organise a conference which combined outward perspectives on various sites and contexts of contestation with a distinct focus on local colonial entanglements in Potsdam and Berlin, and which fused academic analyses with artistic and activist inventions. We hosted three exhibitions: an interactive photo and video installation by Jens Vilela-Neumann documenting the widely unrecognised history of Mozambican labour migrants to the GDR, from both ends of the story and before the backdrop of a longer durée of anticolonial struggle; an exhibition on "Postcolonial Potsdam" focussing on silenced colonial traces in the New Palais castle and Park Sanssouci, just outside of our campus premises; and the "Anti-Humboldt Box," an "exhibition in a suitcase to trigger discussion about the Humboldt-Forum." Next to about 100 academic speakers from nearly 20 different countries form across the globe, we had writers (Gail Jones, Helon Habila, Rajeev Balasubramanyam and Priya Basil) read from their work, film directors (Tom Murry and Frances Calvert) present and discuss their films, and performance artists (Rosanna Raymond and Sumugan Sinavesan) discuss their art. Australian artist, activist and academic Fiona Foley discussed her sculptural interventions into Australian public space to counteract the erasure of Indigenous people in an artist's keynote. Further keynotes were held by Russell West-Pavlov, who offered a comparative reading of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Australian *Bringing them Home*-report in a presentation specifically catering to local teachers. Ann Curthoys investigated the changing governmentalities shaping the dispossession of Indigenous Australians across the past two centuries; Suvendrini Perera discussed the question of (in)justice in relation to UN policies during the Singhalese bombardment of Tamil civilians in the violent termination of the Sri Lankan civil war; Benita Parry, in a moving video keynote, contested the concept of postcolonial justice for its humanist and liberalist resonances, and thus an incapacity to account for not only sustained materialist critique, but ultimately violent resistance to the capitalist world system.

And finally, we hosted two public events. One, staged at the Werkstatt der Kulturen in Berlin, was titled "Post-Colonial Justice and the City: Reflections from/on Berlin". It opened with a keynote address by Paul Gilroy, who powerfully invoked an analogue archive of British racist violence consisting of community reports and early CCCS publications; an archive, he argued, that is indispensable to understand the continuities and difference between racial violence and rioting in the 70s and today, and which still showcases a method to confront the ever more powerful regimes of surveillance, militarisation and radical neoliberalisation. Gilroy's perspective on the anti-racist struggle in the UK and London in particular was then set into intense conversation with relating

struggles in Germany and Berlin, in a plenary debate with the Berlin-based activist critics Bilgin Ayata, Banjamin Zachariah, Nikita Dhawan and Joshua Kwesi Aikins. The second public event, finally, held at the New Palais campus, brings us back to the opening of this introduction: It addressed the difficult legacy of "Indigenous Ancestral Remains in German Museums and Scientific Collections," in a plenary debate with representatives of Berlin holding institutions (Andreas Winkelmann of the Charité's Human Remains Project) and other museum practitioners (Michael Pickering of the National Museum of Australia and Richard Lane, former director of science at the Natural History Museum in London), ethnologists (Larissa Förster of Cologne University) and Indigenous Australian academics (Fiona Foley), specifically debating the obligations arising from Germany's colonial pasts, the continuing legacies of scientific racisms, and the challenges of concrete restitution policies and practices.

V.

The contributions in this volume merely collect and preserve a fraction of the debates and interventions which happened during four days in Potsdam and Berlin in June 2014. Still, they give an idea of the range and scope and urgency of discussions, and underscore the vitality of rethinking justice and the postcolonial from and for a plurality of temporal, spatial and conceptual horizons.

The collection opens with a section titled *Decolonising Regimes of Knowledge*. Regimes of knowledge which focus on notions of a universal kind of justice inspired by Western thought while ignoring the local are still prevalent today. In order to overcome the injustices resulting from these practices in postcolonial contexts, the articles in this section address the knowledge/power nexus and the urgent need for change that brings about a decolonisation and furthers epistemic diversity.

In his contribution "Postcolonial Injustice: Rationality, Knowledge and Law in the Face of Multiple Epistemologies and Ontologies: A Spatial Performative Approach," David Turnbull argues for a spatial performative approach to counter postcolonial injustice. This not only yields a conceptual space able to provide generative life to the scalar tensions between the universal and the local but also provides the possibility to mount resistance to the mal-distribution of wealth, power and knowledge that have come about under present systems of law and justice.

In "Epistemic Injustice: African Knowledge and Scholarship in the Global Context," James Odhiambo Ogone, winner of the 2016 GAPS dissertation award, explores one of these instances of mal-distribution with regards to the politics of power and knowledge, namely the continuing injustices in mainstream scholarship. While the principle of fairness is supposed to govern the dissemination of knowledge, this is blatantly not the case where African Indigenous knowledge is

concerned. Rather, the influence of modernity and the prevalence of monolithic methodological approaches are perceived as a camouflaged form of colonialism. Ogone promotes epistemic diversity as well as self-determination in recognition of the contextual nature of knowledge.

Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Saswat Samay Das offer a critique of current postcolonial theory which would have to commit to immediate praxis to address instances of subjugation in an attempt to usher in postcolonial justice. In "Shakespeare in *Dantewada*: Rescuing Postcolonialism through Pedagogic Reformulations and Academic Activism," they ask for texts to be (re)embedded in contemporary conditions of hegemony to foreground issues of justice by means of radical academic activism and pedagogic reformulation.

Mahmoud Arghavan, on the other hand, discusses traces of postcolonial Orientalism visible in postcolonialist critiques of US imperialist politics. In "Postcolonial Orientalism: A Study of the Anti-Imperialist Rhetoric of Middle Eastern Intellectuals in Diaspora," he focuses on the role of diasporic Iranian intellectuals who seem to endorse a repressing regime and thus run the risk of strategically concealing injustices in their home country in order to challenge and delegitimise US Orientalist politics.

The subsequent section is titled *Literary Trials of Justice.* It comes as no surprise that (postcolonial) literary texts are supposed to contribute to justice while at the same time confronting (postcolonial) injustice. The trial as a metaphor for meting out punishment or granting acquittal definitely serves as a powerful rallying point for discussions about the way justice is represented aesthetically and who is granted agency.

In this context, Frank Schulze-Engler asks the important question which kind of injustice postcolonial African literature addresses. In "Poetic Justice? Christopher Okigbo, Dedan Kimathi and Robert Mugabe on Literary Trial," he rejects the too simplistic assumption that only the legacies of colonialism and the continuing dominance of the global North are responsible for postcolonial injustice. By discussing three imaginary trials conducted in literature from various African countries, questions of agency, accountability and justice are negotiated in Africa's post-independent past.

Lotte Kößler compares the lawsuit against Oscar Pistorius to the Mbombela case, which provided the background for Sachs' psychoanalytic case study *Black Hamlet*. In "A New Reading of Wulf Sachs' *Black Hamlet* (1937)," the question is raised which concept of justice is brought to bear on the accused and which understanding of justice this implies. Discussing the relation between poetic and material justice, Kößler demonstrates that Sachs may have championed a liberal discourse on justice by rejecting the idea of punitive law and proposing the idea of a psychoanalytical confession

and absolution, but this is ultimately negated by the epistemic violence exerted toward his Shona patient.

In "The Poetics of Justice in Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*: Narrative Construction and Reader Response," a different kind of trial, the *fatwa* issued against Rushdie, is revisited. Kerstin Sandrock engages with the representational dimension of justice in literature and the narratological features attached to this. In doing so, she questions not only culturally specific understandings of what is right and what is deemed wrong, but also theorises the role of the author in representing justice.

In her contribution, "HeLa and *The Help*: Justice and African American Women in White Women's Narratives," Christine Vogt-William, on the other hand, investigates two novels by white women writers who profess to acquire justice for their black female characters by making their voices heard. Exploring these texts from a postcolonial gender perspective, Vogt-William shows this endeavour to be an instance of textual colonisation which reinscribes racialised stereotypes of African American women resonating with discourses from the times of slavery and can by no means offer an alternative court of law.

The following section turns to *Re/Visions of Gendered Violence*. The gendered dimension of postcolonial injustice includes not only crimes committed against women and men by robbing them of the self-determination over their bodies through violations like rape or torture, but of course is also concerned with past and present-day slavery, human trafficking and coerced labour.

In "A Darker Shade of Justice: Violence, Liberation, and Afrofuturist Fantasy in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*," Julia Hoydis discusses what constitutes justice in the face of crimes committed against women and traces the multifarious ways in which Okorafor's novel rejects notions of forgiveness and reconciliation in favour of violent revenge aimed at eliminating any perpetrator. By providing a counter-narrative to western conceptions of justice, the representation of women as victims is challenged and substituted by a notion of "erotic justice," which provides empowerment.

Beatriz Pérez Zapata, in turn, approaches modern-day slavery (including the enslaving situation of migrant women in domestic service) within the framework of Zadie Smith's short story in "An Endless Game: Neocolonial Injustice in Zadie Smith's *The Embassy of Cambodia*." Zapata connects the issue of slavery with individual and collective trauma to explore the prevailing neo-colonial conditions which still lead to the subjugation of people from the global South and investigates the way narrative methodologies are employed to raise questions about ethics and the responsibility of the reader as witness.

Slavery is also the focus of Karin Ikas' contribution "Slavery and Resilience in Caryl Phillips's Novel *Cambridge*." Ikas employs the notion of resilience to discuss two different positions of subjugation, that of a slave of African descent and the daughter of a Victorian plantation owner. This represents an interesting framework to rethink questions of agency in the face of trauma as a means to overcome past injustices without eliminating past horrors, although it may run the danger of simplifying and homogenising different forms of suppression.

The section *(Post)Imperial Orders of Travel and Space* then turns to the colonial legacies and postcolonial ironies of appropriations of space, both in a material and metaphorical sense.

In her contribution "Justice and the Company: Economic Imperatives in *The Journal of Jan van Riebeeck (1652-1662)*," Lianne van Kralingen sets out to delineate the forms that justice can take when it becomes entangled with corporate business. She argues that the present-day celebration of the economic mentality of the VOC (Dutch East India Company) is to be understood in the context of (neo)colonial ethics, which ultimately inadvertently question notions of universal justice. Using Jan van Riebeeck's journal, van Kralingen argues that the Company was mainly interested in economic gain which in turn guided local politics that resulted in 'just' as well as 'unjust' behaviour towards the local population, as it only aimed at being economically consistent and thus effectively configured notions of justice.

Prudence Black focuses on an often neglected aspect of postcolonial justice, namely the practicalities involved in bringing representatives of different nations together. In her contribution, "The Speed of Decolonisation: Travel, Modernisation and the 1955 Bandung Conference," she examines the Bandung conference with regard to the technological basis for the modernization of transportation, which contributed to achieving self-determined mobility and accelerated the speed of politics.

Monica van der Haagen-Wulff traces the historical narratives of guilt and responsibility that are part of German national and historical consciousness. Taking the fiasco surrounding the return of human remains to the Namibian government as well as the parliamentary debates on repatriation as her starting point, in "De-cloaking Invisibility: Remembering Colonial South-West Africa," she discusses the unresolved German colonial history, which is not only visible in colonial street names, but also in the way that the genocide committed against the Herero, Nama, Damara and San in German South-West Africa is dealt with. But this, she argues, is more than a historical legacy, because the same discourses of guilt and responsibility characterise present-day dealings with migrants.

The last section, finally, addresses ways and formulations of *Justice within and without the Law.* Postcolonial justice is intimately connected to legal proceedings and rightful contestations of Western interpretations of what legitimacy or lawful practices consist of. To this aim unjust colonial legacies as well as present-day injustices need to be reviewed to implement practices and conceptions of justice devoid of hegemonic Eurocentric influences.

In her contribution "It's All about the Children": Child Asylum Seekers and the Politics of Innocence in Australia," Carly McLaughlin traces the presence of children in Australian detention centres and the demonization of asylum seekers as negligent parents which, in turn, are instrumentalised as a political tool to justify the intervention of the state and the harsh Australian asylum policies. The rhetoric of the innocent child as well as the representation of these children as innocent victims subjects them to a double silencing and empties their protests of political meaning. To prevent this, McLaughlin argues for a recognition of children as political subjects with a potential for agency.

"Aspirin or Amplifier? Reconciliation, Justice, and the Performance of National Identity in Canada," engages critically with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, which presents another prominent instance of trying to come to terms with colonial injustices by means of aiming at providing reconciliation. With its emphasis on transitional justice and 'right relationships', which are firmly grounded in Christian principles, Hanna Teichler argues that the TRC ultimately fails in fostering a sense of community or bringing about justice. But while truth commissions seem not to be able to live up to the task of reconciliation, cultural productions surrounding these discourses could act as a trigger for identity re/negotiations.

In "So It Happens that We are Relegated to the Condition of the Aborigines of the American Continent": Disavowing and Reclaiming Sovereignty in Liliuokalani's *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* and the Congressional *Morgan Report*," Jens Temmen traces the legal discourse employed by the US in the annexation of Hawai'i by contrasting a reading of the *Morgan Report* (which overwrites US and Hawai'ian jurisdiction to create the island as a legally Native American space) with Queen Liliuokalani's autobiography which locates Hawai'i outside US jurisdiction and creates legal evidence against its annexation to emphasise the legitimacy of Native Hawai'ian sovereignty. Temmen's analysis of these legal and literal negotiations underlines the way indigenous communities make use of legal discourses to contest colonisation as well as Anglo-American legal imperialism.

Every essay in this collection proposes conclusive arguments speaking towards distinct cases of postcolonial (in)justice, often drawing on specific historical moments, geographic regions, socio-political configurations and modes of representational practice. It is important to us, however, that

those essays shall not be read in isolation, but that they are read in conversation, that they set into motion complex negotiations across historical, regional, political, epistemic and aesthetic differences. The volume is conceptualized as a kaleidoscope of perspectives which collectively chart, to quote Said again, "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." We hope that, taken together, they inspire local engagements and interventions, such as in debates around the restitution policies of ancestral remains in German colonial collections, yet that they also call for a critical practice that acknowledges the inevitable entanglement of local debates in the larger, ongoing exploits of a modern world system which has grown out of colonial violence, and whose global regimes of dispossession and enclosure ever more aggressively entrench injustice on a planetary scale.

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