

*Rethinking Postcolonial Europe:
Moving Identities, Changing
Subjectivities*

Introduction

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Where does Europe begin and end? Has it always existed, and if not, when did it start? What is the 'new' Europe's relation to its past? Which parts of Europe belong to "the idea of Europe" and which do not? (Hall 2003, 36)

Europe is not only deterritorialized, but also de-localized, put out of itself, and in the end deconstructed. (Balibar 2004b, 10)

What is Europe? The answer to this question can be divided into two groups: 'Europe' as seen from 'within' and 'Europe' as seen from 'without.' (Khair 2008, 211)

Europe has always presented a problem for postcolonial studies. In the elisions of temporal and spatial coordinates that occur so frequently in theoretical discourse that ostensibly addresses the task of understanding the nature of colonialism and its aftermaths, of how colonialism shaped the modern world, and of how it may be resisted in the name of an equitable, peaceful, and just 'postcolonial' future, the 'when' and 'where' and 'why' of Europe has often been obscured. The anti-Eurocentric focus of early postcolonial studies, for example, belied a fixation on Europe—conceived as monolithic, undifferentiated, belligerent—as the locus of colonialist and imperialist energies. It was Europe that colonised and dominated the rest of the world, to Europe that the wealth of much of the world was expropriated, and it was against Europe that anti-colonial movements directed their animus. That early focus gave way to developments that, on the one hand, identified how the European continent has always been a colonised space, and how, on the other hand, other non-European or state-based colonialisms have proliferated in modern times—economic, cultural, and political. While the dominant trend in postcolonial studies has been to de-centre Europe, critical focus has

returned to Europe, especially since the 2000 publication of Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, to critically examine its status as a space within which "both colonial legacies and new forms of colonialism, some of these operating under the rubric of globalization, are impinging powerfully on both individual nations and the region as a whole" (Huggan 2008, 242). The contributors of 'Rethinking Postcolonial Europe' take up this challenge of examining Europe as postcolonial and in doing so re-examining and challenging some of the core assumptions of the discipline of postcolonial studies.

On Terminology: Post/colonial Europe Re/visited

When imagining postcolonial Europe, the question arises as to what Europe is – a geographical space, a shared culture, a discursive formation, or the political institutions of the European Union? Scholarship on postcolonial Europe encompasses a wide variety of critical approaches concerned with how colonial power relations continue to influence geographies, politics, and subjectivities in and beyond geographical, cultural, discursive, or institutional Europe. According to Lucas Jensen, "to invoke the term postcolonial Europe requires insisting on analysing the many dimensions to the current conflictual space that Europe represents" (2020, 14). This may imply analysing the origins and reproduction of racism (Huggan and Law 2009; Jensen et al. 2018, 1), considering how the arrival of postcolonial subjects

challenges European self-perceptions (Jensen 2020, 14), or reading European integration in the context of “colonial and postcolonial globalization, migration and ethnicity” (Kinvall 2016, 155), to name but a few dimensions. In light of this multiplicity of perspectives and approaches, it is almost impossible to consider and address all the major discourses that surround postcolonial Europe. Rather, we seek to initiate a dialogue between narratives, media, debates, or policies that engage with different ideas of Europe, its colonial history, and its connection to different regions of the world.

Just as the term postcolonial and its various offshoots such as postcolonialism, postcoloniality, and postcolony have become familiar within the lexicon of academic humanist discourse, so too have a range of adverbs become common adjuncts. Among them are remapping, rerouting, revising, readapting, reframing, re-imagining, revisiting, or reworking, all of which point to a need to repeatedly unpack the term postcolonial in light of contemporary political, economic, and cultural changes¹. This process of critical unpacking is perhaps no-

1 See e.g. Amar Acheraiou, *Rethinking Postcolonialism: Colonialist Discourse in Modern Literatures and the Legacy of Classical Writers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008); Janet Wilson, Cristina Sandru, and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2009); Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Wales: University of Wales Press, 2004); David D. Kim, ed., *Reframing Postcolonial Studies: Concepts, Methodologies, Scholarly Activisms* (Cham: Palgrave, 2021).

where more common than in relation to the discipline's engagement with Europe per se, and the interest in Europe in relation to the rest of the world. Jacques Derrida's reflections on European identity in *The Other Heading* (1992) and Zygmunt Bauman's evocative metaphor of *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure* (2004) challenge us to re/imagine Europe not as a fixed domain but as a new contact zone where people of different backgrounds and nationalities meet and interact. These meetings and interactions in the age of global mobility and migration have altered not only conventional notions of Europe but have also evoked new perceptions – different mindsets, the manifestation of which are conspicuous in diverse disciplines, especially literature, art, history, sociology, law, and cultural studies.

Recent scholarship on postcolonialism, such as E. San Juan Jr.'s *After Postcolonialism* (2000) or Ania Loomba et al.'s *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005), not only indicates a dissatisfaction with the postcolonial paradigm but more importantly points out its limitation in making sense of our globalised world, shaped by diversity and syncretism. Janet Wilson et al.'s *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (2010) attempts to connect the postcolonial to globalisation and transnationalism in order to demonstrate new turns in the postcolonial field whereas Sandra Ponzanesi and Gianmaria Colpani's *Postcolonial Transition in Europe: Contexts, Practices and Politics* (2016) sets out to map and interrogate

the complex terrain of Europe in transition. Wilson et al. believe that “the postcolonial has moved in recent years from being a historical marker to a more globally inflected term applicable to a variety of regions” (2010, 2) whereas Ponzanesi and Colpani declare that engaging with postcolonial Europe today “demands that we find ways to open it up once again, rearticulating Europe otherwise” (2016, 7). In effect, Ponzanesi and Colpani aim at “turning this particular province of the world into an object of political, transformative desire for those who happen to inhabit it, or just want to pass through it” (2016, 17). Studies such as these testify to the ongoing struggle to define the elusive and slippery terrain of postcolonial Europe, and confirm the conclusion drawn by Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande that “Europe is not a fixed condition. Europe is another word for variable geometry, variable national interests, variable involvement, variable internal – external relations, variable statehood and variable identity” (2007, 6). Hence, it is virtually impossible to examine or explore Europe as a unified notion in a historical, cultural, or political sense.

The main title of this special issue, “Rethinking Postcolonial Europe” indicates a critical approach that considers Europe from myriad angles, examining legacies of European colonialism in the present, interrogating dominant ideas of Europe as a community of values, and attending to the marginalised narratives and voices that tell of ambiguous, fragmented, migratory Europes.

Significantly, the ‘post’ in postcolonial does not necessarily refer to a time when freedom was granted to the former colonies, or a return to the vital historical moment of gaining independence from the imperial rulers. Instead, ‘post’ in the context of our issue alludes to the inseparability of present-day Europe from its hegemonic position in the world and its colonial history of violence and exploitation in the name of European modernity and civilisation (see also Balibar 2004a, 7; Jensen 2020, 33-64). How present-day Europe grapples with former colonial practices and resonates with the legacy of power and dominance is central to our special issue.

The subtitle, ‘Moving Identities, Changing Subjectivities,’ attests to our view of European identity as a work in progress. In an age of globalisation, of cross-cultural transactions, of travel and mobility “across the lines” (Cronin 2000, 1-7), borders and boundaries are perpetually crossed and re-crossed, dismissing the myth of stable geographies, identities, and subjectivities. In short, ‘Rethinking postcolonial Europe’ is deployed as a frame, as a motif, as a trope, as a vantage point to comprehend the various dimensions of contemporary Europe faced with new political and cultural transformations.

From Empire to Cosmopolis: Challenging Old Problems in a ‘New’ Europe

Rethinking or thinking beyond postcolonialism takes us first back to the time after the Second World War when

a new democratic Europe, emerging from the debris of fascism and war, found itself struggling with the legacies of colonialism and caught up between still-powerful nationalist ideologies and a drive towards a renewed cosmopolitanism. These struggles remain palpable in present-day Europe (see also Beck and Grande 2007, 165). The question arises as to how to define the 'New Europe' and the 'New Europeans' when most European countries are increasingly multicultural and "newness has already entered the world," to use a phrase from Salman Rushdie (1991, 394). In the past century, Europe experienced many different migration flows: the Windrush generation from the Caribbean and the Indians and later Pakistanis to post-war Britain; the mass movement of North Africans to France; the relocation of Indonesians as well as Surinamese to the Netherlands; the settlement of Latin Americans in Portugal; the arrival of Turkish labour migrants in Germany; and most recently the resettlement of Syrian and Afghan refugees in different European countries. At first mainly driven by its economic prosperity and the demand for labour, these migration experiences are now indispensable to European identity as mobile and malleable.

However, the racisms and imperial ideologies of 'Old Europe' prevail in the 'New Europe' and cast a doubtful light on Europe's newness. The second and third generations of migrants express disillusionment and discontent with Europe as their *only* homeland when they continue to be relegated to the margins of society and are

targeted as the outsiders. Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla, therefore, underline the “role of migration in reshaping European identities” (2005, 1). “Postcolonial Europe,” in this sense, becomes “a critical term that reassesses Europe not only in its past imperial pluralities and contemporary divergent multicultural scenarios,” but also in “its rearticulation of migration an integral part of its territorial indeterminacy” (2005, viii). Reflecting on migration in postcolonial Europe leads us to think deeply about the dynamics of identity and belonging, roots and routes, home and homeland, nationality and citizenship. These are intertwined with contemporary debates about diaspora, exile, expatriation, dislocation, or deterritorialisation, all of which urge alternative ways of representing and thinking Europe in this issue. As Ponzanesi and Merolla’s volume also reveals, postcolonial literature is increasingly considered to be an important site to address and scrutinize the experience of migration, which distinctly overlaps with several historical factors. Ato Quayson is, hence, rightly convinced that

as the sign of a critical orientation towards colonialism and its legacies, postcolonial literature [...] designates the representation of experiences of various kinds including those of slavery, migration, oppression and resistance, difference, race, gender, space and place, and the responses to the discourses of imperial Europe. It is conventionally assumed that postcolonial literature is as much a reflection on conditions under imperialism and colonialism proper as

about conditions coming after the historical end of empires. (2012, 6)

The precarious social position and disillusionment of third generation migrants with Europe is conspicuous in a considerable number of postcolonial novels, especially in Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996), Jamal Mahjoub's *The Carrier* (1998), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001), or Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2003). All of these works focus on characters in disparate national and historical settings, whose plights and perils shed light on the dislocation of people of former colonies in Europe in a literal and metaphorical sense – people whose struggles seem to go unnoticed and undocumented but in the realms of literature.

Thinking of Europe as an idea, a geographical space, and a political force – in literature as in other cultural and political formations – is inseparable from thinking about its history of imperialism, its postcolonial legacies, and its preoccupation with questions of who is in or out, native or foreigner, rooted or displaced. Eurocentric colonialism not only aimed to exploit its colonies but also to shape the world in Europe's image, treating its Others as “flawed reflections” of the European ideal (Jensen 2020, 2; see also Balibar 2004a, 7). Two world wars, the end of Empires, decolonisation, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the Eastern bloc shifted Europe's

focus from imperial domination to global leadership as a community of shared values. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the European Union was explicitly founded as an antidote to internal differentiation and warfare. This founding idea of the “ever-closer” union that would secure lasting peace is still strongly present in the EU’s self-narration (European Union, n.p.).

Europe’s imperial past and its ongoing complicity in asymmetric regimes of power and subordination, however, remained largely unacknowledged by European thinkers for much of the twentieth century (Kinvall 2016, 155). Even as we move into the second decade of the 21st century, binary distinctions of the self and the other, us and them, normative beliefs in European superiority, and an astonishing blindness towards its own constructedness continue to form the core of Europeanhood². Perhaps more subtly but no less harmfully, Europe continues to self-stylise as an “originator and exporter of ‘modern society’” (Jensen 2020, 3). How such Eurocentric logics prevail, sometimes where we would least expect them, becomes evident, for example, in Barbara Schenkel’s analysis in this issue of the construction of the Jordanian female citizen in the context of international development relations.

2 As Balibar puts it, distinction that are “[a]ready dramatic within each nationality [...] are reproduced and multiplied at the level of the postnational or supranational community” (2004a, 9).

The resurgence of populism and racism connected to the rise of right-wing parties in several European states such as the Rassemblement National in France, the AfD (The Alternative for Germany), or the FPÖ (The Freedom Party of Austria) are uneasy reminders of the continuing influence of hegemonic ideas of European exceptionalism and cultural superiority. Mass migration to European countries and the so-called refugee crisis in recent years seem to have escalated simmering “nationalist paranoia and xenophobic fears” (Kinvall 2016, 155). To shed a systematic light on these issues, Marina Choy in her contribution to this issue deconstructs three different types of myths that articulate immigration as a problem in the French national context.

Europe’s claim to universal values and its unity in diversity are put to the test as desperate and displaced populations arrive on the shores of the Mediterranean and across the Balkans. So far, the EU has not risen to the occasion. Quite the contrary, the idea of “Fortress Europe” (see e.g. Gebrewold 2016, 1-12) has returned to the European imaginary with a vengeance as images of heavily guarded borders circulate across TV screens and cover pages. Refugee films such as Wolfgang Fischer’s *Styx* (2018), analysed by Isabell Sluka in her paper included here, are haunting testaments to this failure. Within and without the EU, freedom of movement and access to supposedly universal human rights remains linked to where one comes from.

Having scrutinised its multidimensional history, part of which is often suppressed or manipulated to keep Western supremacy intact, Europe turns out to be a contested and fragile construct. The future of the EU, too, seems to rest on uncertain foundations. As developments such as the Brexit or, most recently, the Polish Constitutional Court's highly controversial ruling against the primacy of EU law have shown once more, it is impossible to ignore the power of nationalism in major European countries. The COVID-19 crisis seems to have significantly promoted this trend towards thinking in local and national, rather than supranational or even global terms and restored the internal borders of the Schengen area. On a more optimistic note, the demographic changes in European populations through immigration, diasporic communities, multiple citizenships, or globalisation also prompt us to think beyond the Eurocentric definition of Europe as a unified community based on racial, historical, and religious affiliations. Transnational migration, in particular, not only demands a changing perception of those power hierarchies that tend to divide the world between 'the West' and 'the Rest' but also compel new discourses of national and cultural identity and belonging. Practices of resistance and emancipation in migrant and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) self-organisation reimagine Europe as an entangled space (see Randeria 1999, 87-96.), a home for people of different backgrounds and origins. Consequently, received notions of nation and culture as well as identity

and subjectivity have undergone a dramatic change, vividly reflected in different kinds of media in the wake of rapid technological modernity.

Several contributions in this special issue are devoted to the analysis of such discursive interventions and renegotiations of identities in examples ranging from migrant literature (Miriam Hinz) to refugee film (Isabell Sluka) and from legal documents (Cresa Pugh) to political articulation (Marina Choy). Investigating these dynamics from a postcolonial perspective is crucial to understanding contemporary Europe as a contradictory space: a place of cultural collaborations as well as conflicts, cultural communications as well as clashes. Travel writing and road novels, as the analyses by Raphaëlle Efoui-Delplanque and Michelle Stork show, are ambivalent sites when it comes to generating discussions about “travelling cultures” (Clifford 1992, 97-110), hybrid identities, cultural translations, or transcultural and transnational relations (Hannerz 1996, 8). In a world where cultures and communities are on the move, it has become increasingly conspicuous that people, ideas, cultures, or resources cannot be understood in terms of binary models of centre and periphery, South and North or East and West. Reflecting these insights, the articles of Efoui-Delplanque and Stork, like others in this collection, remind us that Europe cannot afford to treat its cultural ‘Others’ as ‘Others’ in order to keep the myth of racial superiority intact. A myth, no less, that has been

thrown into doubt by the cross-cultural encounters in almost every European metropolitan city. Indeed, travel as a metaphor of “dwelling and displacement” (Clifford 1989, n.p.) defines the cultural dynamics in today’s Europe as a place of transcultural transformations and not merely post/colonial anxieties. As a result, “the transcultural turn” (Bond and Rapson 2014, 9) in cultural studies already shows new avenues in the field of postcolonial studies and more innovative ways of understanding contemporary Europe.

In light of these transformations in the field of postcolonial studies in the last decades and years, the contributors to this special issue set out scrutinise the idea of a new Europe from a variety of perspectives: considering how globalised travel and mobility alters the traditional concepts of culture and identity; examining how postcolonial art and literature imaginatively refigure Europe and Europeanness; investigating the role of marginalised communities in transforming the idea of Europe; and critiquing how past and present migration policies and other governmental practices shape the idea and geography of Europe, urging us to think of “multiple Europes” (see Boatca 2013). Imagining Europe as a hub of diversity, Étienne Balibar reminds us: “In all its points, Europe is multiple; it is always home to tensions between numerous religious, cultural, linguistic, and political affiliations, numerous readings of history, numerous modes of relations with the rest of the world [...]” (2004a, 5).

These tensions are all the more conspicuous in the age of global and digital modernity, which has created spaces of cultural encounters and communication hitherto imagined to be the prerogative of the West.

Europe and the Limits of Postcolonialism

Despite its pitfalls and new turns in cultural studies that express scepticism towards postcolonial/ism as well as postcolonial theory since its emergence with Edward W Said's *Orientalism* (1978), postcolonial studies in the present century continues its important work in deconstructing the myths around Europe by interrogating the histories and geographies of power associated with Europe and its (colonial) legacy around the globe. According to Pramod K. Nayar, postcolonialism offers not only a historical or theoretical framework, but also an interpretive method. Nayar claims that since the 1990s, postcolonialism has seen two important shifts:

The first is the shift towards a transnationalization of European histories, the second, extending the first shift to the contemporary age, an increased attention to locating the politics, problems, and processes of the postcolony within the contexts of globalization, neocolonialism, and decolonialization" (2016, 2).

To these two shifts, our special issue adds a third, namely postcolonialism as instrumental in generating chang-

ing perspectives on Europe and its former colonies and client states as the so-called periphery is now (re)located in the imperial metropolises (*ibid.*, 2-3). Thus, in this issue we examine how rethinking postcolonial Europe helps to identify and create new notions of identity and subjectivity, and new forms of political and cultural resistance. In this regard, Dipesh Chakrabarty rightly concludes that present-day Europe is certainly

...a new frontier of postcolonial studies – and not because the classical peasant-subaltern can be found in Europe. No, it is because the new subalterns of the global economy – refugees, asylum seekers, illegal workers – can be found all over Europe (2012, 8).

As Europe's 'Others' permeate and defy its geographical borders, new social and political dynamics arise that demand a rethinking of the future of Europe as a set of interconnected communities and as a meaningful project.

Concerning the first shift towards the transnationalisation of European histories and its extension to the present age, postcolonial studies have emphasised how the EU's foundations, despite its universal and transnational ambitions, are conspicuously founded on religious, racial, and cultural uniformity that excludes non-white, non-Christian nations and identities. As Susan Arndt states,

[Europe] needs to revisit its politics of belonging just as much as its history of becoming. Thus, antiquity, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment are to be revisited in order to relate their merits just as much as their responsibility for European atrocities committed in the eras of slavery, colonialism and National Socialism. It is this approach of re-narrating Europe that will offer new ways of understanding Europe in a global perspective. (2011, 47-48)

Arndt is justified in highlighting the need to place and comprehend Europe in a global context so that it is possible to deal with current political and cultural challenges with which New Europe and New Europeans are confronted – challenges that compel people of colour to render voice to their in-betweenness, namely their liminal European identity as opposed to the singular and so-called pure one, which is as mythical as notions of racial purity in postcolonial Europe. Speculating on the very perplexing notion of postcolonial Europe, Sandra Ponzanesi and Bolette B. Blaagaard attempt at “deconstructing Europe,” claiming:

[t]o read Europe as a postcolonial place does not imply that Europe’s imperial past is over, but on the contrary that Europe’s idea of self, and of its polity, is still struggling with the continuing hold of colonialist and imperialist attitudes” (2012, 4).

Ponzanesi and Blaagaard point up the notions of race and race relations that still intersect with the debates on asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants in Europe who are treated beyond the parameters of white Christian Europe. These debates, we argue, point to the paradox of postcolonial Europe which is expanding its boundaries but closing its borders – which is multicultural but is bent on keeping its racial and historical identity intact.

Addressing Europe as a concept in constant flux, it seems pertinent to follow Beck and Grande in identifying at least two different kinds of Europe: the “old Europe” (2007, 165) of stringent nationalism and the “new cosmopolitan Europe” (ibid.) of transnational networks. In the wake of globalisation, Europe is increasingly becoming a space of cultural fusions and cosmopolitan transactions, despite the fact that the colonial legacies or practices seem to carry on in several ways: Northern Ireland and Scotland are significant cases in this regard. From another perspective, a number of acclaimed Black British and Asian British writers such as Mike Phillips, Johnny Pitts, Nadeem Aslam, Hanif Kureishi, or Leila Aboulela are not only critical of racism but its perpetuation in Europe and of Europe’s insistence on defining itself as a homogeneous rather than a heterogeneous concept. Similarly, a number of scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Tariq Modood, Basam Tibi, or Étienne Balibar are keen on re-imagining Europe as a place

of several historical and cultural encounters in order to deviate from the ancient idea of Europe as a closed container.

According to Robert J.C. Young, postcolonial remains cannot be ignored in our contemporary times, as the postcolonial frame urges rethinking the divide between the former colonial oppressors and the former colonised people from a critical perspective. However, Young highlights at the same time that postcolonialism is not just a disciplinary field, nor is it a theory which has or has not come to an end. Rather, its objectives have always involved a wide-ranging political project “to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below” (2016, 126). Young believes that “[t]he task of the postcolonial is to make the invisible, in this sense, visible” (2016, 128), which the members of the Subaltern Studies Collective particularly wished to emphasise. In light of these changing perspectives on Western power and dominance, it is important to address and demonstrate how different narratives about Europe in different fields create new meanings through which we may better understand our fast-changing present. Young is justified in claiming that a postcolonial perspective captures political and cultural “transformations” in the twenty-first century (2016, 128-129), a quest shared by the articles in this issue.

Finally, rethinking Europe through a postcolonial lens necessitates a rethinking of some of the core assumptions of postcolonial studies itself. Recently, a number of scholars, particularly Frank Schulze-Engler, have challenged postcolonialism both as a historical phenomenon and as a theoretical concept on the basis that the idea of the postcolonial falls prey to a binary opposition inherent in it, which it actually seeks to dismiss and dismantle, namely perceiving the world in terms of ‘West’ and ‘non-West’ or ‘Europe’ and ‘non-Europe’ (2007, 20-32). Imagining the world in terms of these neat and clean dichotomies is certainly problematic. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the seminal works of scholars like Arjun Appadurai (1996), James Clifford (1992), and Bill Ashcroft (2019) direct us to the blurring borders of nations and cultures in the wake of global mobility, modernity, and cultural change.

How, then, can Europeanness be (re)thought in and for contemporary culture? Graham Huggan maintains that postcolonial Europe in the sense of Paul Gilroy’s interpretations in his book *After Empire* (2004) is not only about “the *unmaking* of Europe as a space of exemplarity, exception, and privilege, but also the *remaking* of Europe as a convivial space of inclusiveness, transcultural ferment, and openness to the rest of the world” (2011, 1; emphasis in the original). Several constructs around the idea of Europe cropping up in the last few decades such as Euro-Islam (Tibi 1991), Afro-Europe (Branca-to 2009), or Afropean (Pitts 2019) already point to the

“mongrel” (Dawson 2007, 6) and transcultural European identity rather than the postcolonial one. Significantly, postcolonial Europe is not only about the legacies of colonialism but also about hybridisation of its identity. Postcolonial literature, culture, and art demonstrate and capture pluralisms which could be the beginnings of New Europe. Indeed, accepting and acknowledging plurality is the way to keep peace and harmony and believe in a society which is not defined by its borders but its horizons. Schulze-Engler in his essay “Irritating Europe” therefore declares that it is not sufficient to “fall back on postcolonial routines of ‘deconstructing Europe’” (Pieterse 1991, 7-10 as cited in Schulze-Engler 2014, 685) or “invoke the time-honoured postcolonial trope of ‘unthinking Europe’” (Ponzanesi and Blaagaard 2011, 4-9 as cited in Schulze-Engler 2013, 685). On the contrary, he claims that the real challenge for postcolonial studies lies “in rethinking and transforming” Europe (*ibid.*). This is the challenge with which our present issue engages. As we focus on a variety of approaches to postcolonial Europe, we are able to rethink the highly contested spaces of European colonialism and its legacy in our contemporary times.

The Contributions to This Special Issue

The special issue comprises seven articles and two literature reviews that respond to the challenge of postcolonial Europe from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives.

Most of the contributions expand on talks presented in the course of the three-day conference, held by the postgraduate forum Postcolonial Narrations at Giessen University, Germany in February 2021. Bringing together scholars of various disciplines and from various countries, the conference explored different ideas of Europe through the lens of postcolonial studies. The articles collected in this special issue represent a cross-section of the important perspectives and voices raised during the conference. Among them are critical discussions, case studies, and literary analyses that challenge hegemonic ideas of Europe, or draw productive attention to transcultural and migrant perspectives. Importantly, they also reflect the spirit of enriching transdisciplinary conversations and ongoing exchange that we believe to be vital if we are to rethink and transform Europe in and for the 21st century.

In the first article “Relational Reparations: On the Promise of Post-National Repair,” Cresa Pugh offers a post-nationalist critique of European reparation policies. In an in-depth critical analysis of the 2019 resolution entitled “Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent in Europe,” she demonstrates how the measures laid down in the resolution fall short of bringing about genuine atonement and repair largely because of their continued reliance on the logics of the nation-state. Pugh advocates a relational approach to reparations; an approach that is historical, transnational, and postcolo-

nial and which recognises the interconnectedness of the spaces and histories of Empire.

Continuing the critical work of interrogating contemporary Europe's self-perception, Barbara Schenkel looks towards the figure of the empowered female citizen in Jordan. Based on qualitative research and discourse analyses, her article "Postcolonial Europe and its Construction of Female Citizens in Jordan" carefully investigates how European development interventions targeting women's empowerment also serve to support Europe's geopolitical interests and perpetuates narratives of European superiority. The construction of the empowered female Jordanian citizen, Schenkel argues, allows Europe to simultaneously construct itself as a promoter of democracy and liberal values.

Migration and the current so-called refugee crisis, followed by the resurgence of populism and racism connected to the rise of right-wing parties in several European states, are among the most visible and urgent developments of recent years. They are also of central concern to two articles in this volume. In "Articulating the 'Problem of Immigration': Nationalism and Dominant Mythological Formations around Immigration in France," Marina Choy employs articulation theory and the Barthesian concept of myth to examine how immigration is constructed as a threat to the nation in France. She then proceeds to deconstruct three dominant myth-

ological formations about immigration that are deeply rooted in French history and continue to dominate discourses well beyond right-wing rhetoric. In this sense, the article not only provides insights into the discourses dominating the French national context in the 21st century but also testifies to the continued power of mythological formations in contemporary Europe.

Isabell Sluka, in her article “From Nation States to Communities of Interest: Solidarity and Human Rights Declarations in Wolfgang Fischer’s *Styx*” then zooms in on *Styx* (Fischer 2018), a drama film dealing with the moral implications of the ‘refugee crisis’ unfolding in the Mediterranean. Approaching the film from a human rights perspective influenced by Hannah Arendt, Sluka argues that the film critically engages with human rights, and especially the dilemma of the right to seek asylum, which is not necessarily secured by an obligation to grant it. Of particular interest to Sluka are the potential solutions suggested by the film; solutions that build on the transformative power of political actions carried out by individuals and ordinary citizens. *Styx*, in Sluka’s view, is profoundly Arendtian in that it recognises the responsibility of anyone with citizenship privileges to put human rights into practice in solidarity with those who do not hold such privileges and to resist state policies that do not comply with human rights.

The special issue’s second part encompasses three literary analyses of contemporary migrant literature. In

“Towards Afropean Perspectives: Evolving and Conversing Afro-European Narratives from *The European Tribe* (1987) to *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe*” (2019), Raphaëlle Efoui-Delplanque provides a joint reading of two travelogues by Black British writers Caryl Phillips and Johny Pitts. Published almost three decades apart, these works bridge two generations of Afro-European writers and consequently the article places special emphasis on the genealogical and intertextual relations between them. Through her comparative perspective, Efoui-Delplanque identifies a generational shift, from the portrayal of tribalist, fragmented, and conservative European societies and an overall sense of displacement in Phillips’ *The European Tribe* to Pitt’s vision of an unhyphenated Afropean identity and his focus on new, post-diasporic forms of belonging in *Afropean*.

Another example of travel writing is found in Michelle Stork’s article “Identities Lost and Found? Transcultural Perspectives on Jamal Mahjoub’s Road Novel *Travelling with Djinnns*.” Taking the road novel genre as its point of departure, Stork’s case study is concerned with the crossing and recrossing of European borders as it portrays cultural and political contexts and phenomena that transcend individual nation-states and national identities. Like Efoui-Delplanque, Stork points out the importance of intertextual references, travel, and diasporic experience to the literary construction of Europe as an interconnected space shaped by transcultural crossings and encounters. Writings such as *Travelling with Djinnns* thus

reimagine Europeanness as a transnational and transcultural work in progress.

The final article in this volume, Miriam Hinz's "I ain't no homosexual, I am a . . . Barrysexual!": Queering the Bildungsroman in Bernardine Evaristo's *Mr Loverman* (2013)" offers an intersectional and multi-layered close-reading of the novel *Mr Loverman* by Bernardine Evaristo. Hinz examines how Evaristo's novel rewrites the classical European *Bildungsroman*, a genre entangled with imperial histories and Eurocentric ideologies. The novel, she argues, queers the genre through its atypical coming-of-age story focussing on a seventy-something, homosexual, Caribbean-British protagonist. She furthermore points out the productively unsettling effects of literary techniques such as polyphony, multiperspectivity, non-linearity, and intertextuality. Queering, to Hinz, refers not only to the protagonist's sexual identity but also to a creative and subversive process that holds immense transformative potential.

The special issue concludes with a review of the anthology *Reframing Postcolonial Studies: Concepts, Methodologies, Scholarly Activism*, edited by David D. Kim (2021). The reviewers, Nele Grosch and Anne Stellberger, pay attention not only to the major themes and ambitions connecting the individual chapters of this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary volume but also contextualise them with regard to this issue's thematic focus on postcolonial

Europe. As with the other articles in this special issue, their work draws our critical attention to the importance of rethinking Europe, and, in doing so, rethinking the postcolonial.

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to our contributors for their excellent work as well as to the editors of *Postcolonial Interventions* for their assistance and support. We also thank all contributors, discussants, supporters, and organisers of the conference 'Rethinking Postcolonial Europe,' as well as members of the Postgraduate Forum Postcolonial Narrations, the Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies (GAPS) and the Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC), who made the conference an enlightening and illuminating platform of academic exchange.

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