Editorial
Cross-cultural Engagements in Decolonial Times: Subverting Euro-centric Structures, Epistemologies and Ontologies

There is no doubt that we are living during times of epistemological decolonisation. On-going efforts made by scholars, practitioners, activists, writers and others internationally, but especially in Africa, South Asia and Latin America, show that considerable progress has been made in rendering transparent and subverting the workings of western Euro-centrism. The 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest in South Africa in 2015 spearheaded and paralleled new student-led efforts in the UK demanding the decolonisation of curricula, pedagogy and admission processes to higher education. Universities are increasingly called to respond to gaps in the representation of BAME minorities, while scholars in all parts of the world have been preoccupied with producing and articulating independent post-colonial identities and representations,[1] decolonising theoretical paradigms,[2] exposing geographical inequalities in the production and the distribution of knowledge globally,[3] and re-envisioning how knowledge production that encapsulates the diversity of thinking and experience in the world can be better accommodated within the universities of tomorrow.[4] On the other hand, the emergence of new funding schemes in the UK to fund international research has called attention to more structural and material parameters that underline the dominance of western

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[1] See for example Fanon Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001 [1961]); Grosfoguel Ramón, *Colonial Subjects. Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (London: University of California Press, 2003); Archie Majefe, *Anthropology in Post Independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-redefinition*, African Social Scientists Reflections Part 1, (Heinrich Böll foundation, 2001) and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[2] See, among others, Mignolo D. Walter, and Walsh E. Catherine, *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (London: Duke University Press, 2018); Bhabha Homi K, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Quijano Anibal, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580 and Said Edward, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1979).

[3] Sarah Cummings and Paul Hoebink, "Representation of Academics from Developing Countries as Authors and Editorial Board Members in Scientific Journals: Does this Matter to the Field of Development Studies?" *European Journal of Development Research* 29, no. 2 (2016): 369–383; Márton Demeter, "The World-Systemic Dynamics of Knowledge Production: The Distribution of Transnational Academic Capital in Social Sciences," *Journal of World-System Research* 25, no. 1 (2018): 111-144; Matthew Harris, James Macinko, Geronimo Jimenez and Pricila Mullachery, "Measuring the Bias against Low-income Country Research: An Implicit Association Test," *Global Health* 13, no. 1 (2017), http://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-017-0304-y;

[4] LSE Africa Talks: Decolonising African Knowledge Systems, 16 January 2020, http://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-player?id=4803

societies in knowledge production in the world.[5] A recent event at SOAS, which attempted to apply a decolonial lens to international research structures, practices and norms within and outside higher education, pointed to numerous aspects of international research practice that continue to impede the development of egalitarian research collaborations with unfavourable consequences for the non-western partners and non-western knowledge production and diffusion.[6] Differences in the availability of research funding across the world has combined with the uneven geographical distribution of publishing houses and academic publishers, favouring the perpetuation of western standards of research excellence and impact.[7]

The decolonisation of epistemological Euro-centrism is certainly prevalent in most conversations and initiatives, but the concept is often used in ways that do not render explicit what precisely is meant by it. In this issue, and through the work of *Decolonial Subversions* more generally, we would like to focus our attention on the link between theories on knowledge and peoples' own worldviews[8] and draw attention to how this link played out historically in colonial experience, with some of its vestiges still manifesting in contemporary times. As it has been documented profusely, the western European colonisers consistently deployed their worldviews, interests and understandings of the 'other' in their colonisation tactics. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o seemed to be referring to this precisely in his description of colonialism:

> Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.[9]

In other words, colonialism was material and ideological as much as it was epistemological: employing fundamental ideas about humanity, civilisation and progress to propagate itself and its objectives. In contemporary times, failure to recognise the context in which historical ideas and paradigms emerged—their embeddedness in western European worldviews and ways of making knowledge dictated by historical sentiments of superiority toward the

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[5] See Romina Istratii, "The Long Read on Decolonising Knowledge: How Western Euro-Centrism Is Systemically Preserved and What We Can Do to Subvert it," *Convivial Thinking*, 29 February 2020, https://www.convivialthinking.org/index.php/2020/02/29/decolonising-knowledge/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=socialnetwork

[6] SOAS Decolonising Research Initiative, https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/researchstrategy/decolonising-research-initiative/; The SOAS-OXFORD Research for Development (R4D) Lunchtime Series, https://www.soas.ac.uk/decolonising-research/;The Sheffield Institute for International Development, Research Ethics, http://siid.group.shef.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/

[7] Romina Istratii, "Bridging the Epistemological, Structural and Normative in Knowledge Production: How Euro-centrism is Systemically Preserved and Can Be Subverted", https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/32174/; Demeter, "The World-Systemic Dynamics of Knowledge Production."

[8] Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Racialised Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies". In Denzin, N. and Linkoln, Y. (eds)., *Handbook of Qualitative Research. Second Edition* (California, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications 2000), 257-277.

[9] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: JamesCurry, 1986), 16.

'other'—and limited self-reflexivity about one's personal positionality in research and knowledge production means that western assumptions continue to be transposed uncritically or implicitly to other contexts and to dictate knowledge paradigms in the mainstream.

Simultaneously, our era is one characterised by polarisation and conflicts of all sorts that fuel misunderstandings and lack of cooperativeness, whether at the political, economic or socio-cultural level. From Hong Kong to France, to India and Ethiopia, we have seen the rise of public protests and inter-group violence. While reasons for these are deeply embedded in complex context-specific histories and political competitions, the overarching force of extremism pervades them all. The UK has not eschewed these effects, where rising street crime and racism, combined with the on-going 'immigration crisis', polarise an undeniably multi-cultural and multi-national society. We may then say that we are faced with a sharpened decolonial awareness among western populations and amplified political and societal uncertainty globally that requires increasing understanding within and across national boundaries.

It is this recognition that has fuelled our decision to dedicate the first issue of *Decolonial Subversions* to the promotion of cross-cultural engagements to reflect on and to subvert more systematically the colonial legacies[10] that still pervade much mainstream knowledge production. The choice of topic also reflects our fundamental stance that research and science should always be guided by the everyday priorities and needs of real communities and should seek to respond to these with creativity, genuine engagement and a spirit of cooperativeness. We envision a more active and critical role for academics and other knowledge-makers, serving as the bridge across communities and helping polarised sides achieve more mutual understanding through nuanced, history-informed and critical scholarship. This opposes the individualistic, self-interested and deeply ideological model of much standardised academic knowledge production and aims to foster a process to knowledge-making that can be both personally/professionally fulfilling and guided by more collective and action-oriented needs.

What do we mean by cross-cultural?

Any objective to promote cross-cultural engagements and understanding must start with a discussion of the concept of 'culture'—paying particular attention to the genealogy of the concept in western thinking and how it entails ethnocentric epistemological and ontological assumptions wanting to be deconstructed and subverted.[11] It is important to recognise that what has come to be identified with scientific thought and knowledge in Anglophone writing today has historically been influenced by the conditions in which it emerged: capitalism, imperialism, secularism and 'enlightened' philosophical discourses. Much knowledge

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[10] As emerges from several contributions to this volume, colonial politics extend beyond the oppression of non-westerners by westerners, with colonial hierarchies reproduced internally in non-western contexts (see Barve, this volume). Our primary focus here however remains on colonialism as a western mode of conquest and oppression.

[11] The analysis and deconstruction of the concept of 'culture' in this editorial is largely based on the following paper presentation: Romina Istratii, "Cross-cultural understanding and the recovery of histories in post-colonial times: An argument for epistemological decolonisation at SOAS, University of London", European Association of Archeologists Beyond Paradigms, 4-7 September 2019, Bern, Switzerland, https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/31565/.

production still carries the vestiges of an era that associated intellectual supremacy with an exclusive number of (typically male) individuals who had the proper conditions, political support or funding for scholarly study and dissemination—what we might describe as a predominantly elite epistemic community.[12] These natural scientists, philosophers, historians, philologists, ethno-scientists, anthropologists, sociologists and other thinkers left their mark in numerous direct and indirect ways, with their works or thinking being reformulated, criticised and responded to by subsequent generations over and over again, sometimes in a circular manner. As a result, citing 'authoritative' figures in mainstream western epistemology has been essential for the legitimation of 'objective', 'rigorous' or, more recently, 'excellent' research output or theoretical argument. The same workings of legitimisation feature also in the genealogy of western conceptualisations of 'civilisation' and 'culture', which were inevitably shaped by western politico-historical realities and the epistemic power that these granted to the primary theorists.

The fifteenth century[13] saw the rise of a new type of western European conquests that inaugurated centuries of geographical, intellectual and economic colonisation. While expansions and conquests go further back in time and are not limited to a single geographical area (from Ancient Greece to the Roman and Inca empires, to Islamic and Mongol conquests), what distinguishes the colonial era is its exploitative character based on a consistent effort to 'other' and to dehumanise those it encountered. People, including both slaves and soldiers to fight European wars, and goods were transferred across colonies or from the colonies to the colonising centre, for the sole benefit of the latter's development and hegemony. An extended and intricate network of centre-periphery dynamics was thus established, whereby the entire non-western world was increasingly reduced to an instrument for the aggrandisement of the colonising centre.

Encounters with non-European peoples and their ways of living brought western thinkers to frame their understanding of self in relation to evermore 'exotic' others. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen has perceptively observed, '[e]very major philosopher from Descartes to Nietzsche developed his own doctrine of human nature, his own philosophical anthropology, often basing it directly on current knowledge and beliefs about non-European peoples'.[14] Eriksen suggests that such queries accelerated the secularisation of scientific thinking in western Europe since scholars were forced to rely on methods other than theological revelation to make sense of these different ways of living.[15] As the Bible lost its grip on western European societies, the tendency to understand human existence in western Christian theological terms—with the western European being perceived as morally superior—was

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[12] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland and Nielsen, Finn, *A History of Anthropology* (Pluto Press, 2013); Masuzawa, Tomoko, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[13] Every historical analysis chooses arbitrarily where to begin, but all western scholarship seems to omit entirely the history of the Eastern Roman polity, known as Romania, and the western empire's gradual appropriation of its name and scientific achievements. From an eastern perspective, any account of western dominance and epistemological colonialism in the world should start as early as the ninth and tenth centuries and even earlier. See John Romanides, *Romiosini, Romania, Roumeli* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1975).

[14] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland and Nielsen, Finn, *A History of Anthropology*, 8.

[15] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland and Nielsen, Finn, *A History of Anthropology*.

gradually replaced by rational philosophical examinations. Rather than relinquishing racist and hierarchical convictions, however, the new secular mind-set became another means to fuel and to justify imperialist pursuits. This on-going appraisal of other peoples in view of quests for self-definition at home solidified the idea of the nation and national identity in western Europe.

In the seventeenth century, debates around the nature of human existence and knowledge intensified, moving toward a social scientific approach that increasingly prioritised empirical experience. The philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) took a paradigm-shifting rationalist approach that has been described as 'radical methodological doubt' to establish fundamental truths of life, while John Locke (1632–1704) approached similar questions through an empiricist lens, holding that the human cognition depended on sensual living.[16] These dispositions paved the road for the increasing societal antagonism toward authority (princes/nobility or the Church) and the consolidation of rational science characterising the western European bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century. Along with the French Enlightenment, scientific revolutions and movements in Germany and Britain established some of the foundational premises of contemporary secular epistemology.

The rise of New Imperialism (1884-1914), most exemplified in the 'Scramble for Africa' at the Berlin conference in 1884/5, encouraged comparative scholarship that rather amplified racist representations in academia. The emergence of Darwinian theory in 1859/60 added to pre-existing evolutionist understandings of culture that presented non-western peoples as backwards, while philological theories about the origin of languages were used, erroneously by most and intentionally by some, to enforce a racist classification of peoples and societies.[17] Imbricated in what was historically a monotheistic system of thought, many western Europeans were led to queries about the development of human civilisation in reference to the evolution of humanity's relation to the sacred/holy. For example, Edward Burnett Taylor (1832-1917) famously suggested that animism characterised the beginning of culture.

The advent of the Industrial Revolution during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries further stimulated the colonial enterprise, which began to be marked by capitalist tones: colonies became the repositories of primary goods to be extracted, imported to Europe, processed in factories and eventually sold in the west as well as in the colonies. The process of looting and exporting manufactured goods for profit unprecedentedly increased the wealth of industrialised nations at the expense of non-industrialised countries—colonies and not. This further consolidated the hegemony of a powerful centre in geographical, philosophical and economic terms. Industrialisation brought also the consolidation of a rigid gender-based division of labour enforcing social sexism, which was then transferred to the colonies.

In more recent times, the capitalist narrative has become ever more influential, and economic wealth is paramount in determining centre-periphery dynamics. With capitalism becoming a global phenomenon and the accumulation of economic wealth being depicted as the outcome of a meritocratic system that rewards personal efforts, financial profit and economic supremacy have been largely delinked—and absolved—from the historical abuses of power that have fundamentally shaped them. Hence, colonial relations can continue to be

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[16] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland and Nielsen, Finn, *A History of Anthropology*.

[17] Masuzawa, Tomoko, *The Invention of World Religions*.

pursued undisturbed through the globalisation of markets, trade and commerce. On the other hand, with post-colonial debates becoming increasingly mainstream, there is a mistaken impression that hierarchical modes of thinking and behaving have been sufficiently challenged. In this matrix, capitalism (and more specifically, its latest paradigm neoliberalism) remains largely unacknowledged as primary factor in persevering neo-colonial exploitations.

Eventually, geographical colonial empires crumbled one after the other, putting an end to the western Europeans' 'civilising' project by the 'spade and the bible', although this had already reincarnated in liberal international development discourse and practice emerging in the post-World War II era.[18] Marxist and feminist ideological perspectives became especially salient from the 1960s onward and converged to question the epistemological basis of long-established conceptualisations of self and other. Edward Said's critique of Orientalism and post-colonial scholarship such as that of Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha are considered seminal examples of this effort, drawing crucial attention to the positionality of those producing 'knowledge'.[19]

Over the reviewed period, conceptualisations of civilisation, culture or societal progress proceeded hand-in-hand with the evolution of western European societies from predominantly feudal western Christian societies to capitalist secular nations. Knowledge production, informed by societal experience at home and in the colonies was inevitably forged by these societies' engagement with Enlightenment ideas and secularisation, fostering discourses of economic, racial and geographical supremacy. Although awareness around the coloniality of western scholarship increased over time and the dynamics underpinning encounters with the 'other' have progressed in recent years, western epistemological and ontological assumptions remain strong in both scholarship and public life, and persist in popular understandings of culture. In this issue we hope to depart from these historical connotations and to start re-claiming more explicitly and systematically the concept and its cognates. We believe that a decolonial approach requires actively subverting ethnocentric and racist assumptions as a prelude to exploring more community-led and diversified alternatives. Moreover, this needs to be pursued with transparency about one's personal positionality and awareness of the limitations that this situatedness implies for any research project and engagement with the world.

While we dedicate this first issue to cross-cultural engagements, we are cautious not to circumscribe the term culture to a new definition inevitably informed by our own experience with the world. This flexibility notwithstanding, it should be clear that in our usage of the term we do not assume the implicit demarcations that were discussed, such as between culture or religion.[20] We have rather been keen to let our contributors explore local

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[18] Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

[19] Eriksen, Thomas Hylland and Nielsen, Finn, *A History of Anthropology*.

[20] For further readings on the concept of culture see Wagner, Roy *The Invention of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), who reflects on the dynamics underlying politics and manipulations of culture, such as the ones outlined here.

epistemological and ontological issues through fresh lenses in ways that are reflective of their unique identities as these are integral to their understanding and experience of the world.

Decolonial Subversions: A more systematic decolonial initiative

This issue marks also the launch of *Decolonial Subversions*, a platform that responds to the structural, epistemological and ontological issues outlined earlier and aims to more systematically subvert biases and standards of knowledge production that perpetuate the dominance of western Euro-centric view on the world and the sciences. This platform does not claim itself to be a remedy to these issues and seeks rather to complement other efforts that are being made by the scholarly and non-scholarly community internationally.

In order to subvert the standardised knowledge production and diffusion process, we have introduced new measures and approaches, whose effectiveness we sought to confirm and to improve through direct interaction and brainstorming with our international partners and contributors. Whilst still pursuing research rigour, we have been more flexible in our approach by adapting to the specific conditions and backgrounds of each contributor. For example, in producing this volume, academic pieces were reviewed by fellow academics, while contributions from activists and practitioners were reviewed by peer activists and practitioners. The idea of requiring a standard blind peer review itself has been hotly debated: on the one hand, we have been conscious of the fact that blind peer review may enable the perpetuation of biases through the protection granted by anonymity; on the other hand, we feel that peer review is a valuable method for the creation of outstanding knowledge and can become a positive platform for dialogue. Thus, in line with the emphasis on positionality, for this initial volume we decided to offer our contributors the choice between the more traditional blind peer review process and an experimental open review.

We have also actively pursued to challenge the rigid and exclusivist boundaries of what is deemed reliable knowledge by juxtaposing contributions in a variety of formats. In our own experience, and as many indigenous schools have pointed out, knowledge in the form of academic writing is but one of many and has tended to be narrowly circumscribed. Moreover, we have kept stylistic interventions to the minimum, recognising that presentation is a component of expression and argumentation. In order to achieve a balanced representation, we have paid particular attention to welcoming contributors with different positionalities in terms of geographic location, subject area, language and career and a comprehensive array of types of contributions, including essays, opinion pieces, manifestos, field-reports and recorded conversations.

We outline the premises, motivations and innovations of this platform in more detail in the Basic Manifesto, which can be found on the platform's website. As we underline there, the platform is envisioned as a work in progress, forever open-ended, tirelessly forging spaces for voices yet to be heard and truth-domains yet to be legitimised. We do not know what directions this project will take, which disruptions it will provoke or what impact it will have. We know, however, that change is impending and we are eager to contribute our energy, creativity and hard work to foster such a change.

Putting our contributions into context

Pertinent to the discussion of structural inequalities in research funding, the unequal distribution of publishing houses in the world and the dominance of Anglophone publication standards, is the paper by Romina Istratii and Márton Demeter "Plan S and the 'opening up' of scientific knowledge: A critical commentary." In it, Romina and Márton, both with records working in open access publishing, offer a critical response to Plan S —a new western European initiative to promote open access publishing in scholarly production. The article addresses the current debate around the effectiveness of Plan S, drawing attention away from access to knowledge to asymmetries in global knowledge production in reference to western epistemology, research funding and economic inequalities. Romina and Márton affirm the historically unequal distribution of knowledge production (defined in reference to publications statistics in the humanities and social sciences) and discuss how Plan S might exacerbate those. They call attention to inequalities in material resources, such as research funding and academic salaries, and the prevalence of English in publishing, alongside standards of peer review and journal metrics dictated by industrialised societies, and demonstrate how the combination of these can disadvantage less resourced researchers across the world and scholars in the humanities and social sciences whose research is not always conditioned on funding. Their commentary appears in both English and Hungarian.

The issue features also an audio contribution by Elisée Byelongo, who became one of the first translation partners of this platform. Elisée hails from the Democratic Republic of Congo but is based in South Africa and has been particularly committed to exploring ways for promoting linguistic justice and peaceful co-existence of languages in his home regions. His piece "Kiswahili as a language of peace in an environmentally-friendly approach" reflects this and makes a timely contribution in view of contemporary concerns around environmental degradation and discussions on the role of multilingualism in the decolonisation of knowledge production. In his speech, Elisée considers the potential role of Kiswahili as a regional lingua franca in Africa, and expresses his concerns regarding the normativisation of both language and usage. He affirms that people should be allowed to speak Kiswahili or other relevant languages of their choice and that no single version of transnational languages, such as Kiswahili, should be preferred or portrayed as superior to another since each context and community has come to use diverse expressions, reflecting unique histories and cultural experiences. These subtleties should not be lost in the attempt to facilitate communication across communities. To convey the urgency of preserving one's mother tongue, Elisée draws parallels with the collective need to look after and preserve the environment. Elisée's audio appears in both English and Kiswahili. We have encouraged audio contributors, including Elisee, to share their work via Soundcloud, which offers free services and can ensure that the contributor preserves their rights as the creator.

Tying in nicely with Elisée's piece on Kiswahili and his reference to the transnational ideas of humanity it implies, is the elaborate paper by Alena Rettová "Cognates of *ubuntu*: Humanity/personhood in the Swahili philosophy of *utu*." In this paper, which was originally published open access in Swahili (link provided inside the article), Alena seeks to contribute to current understandings of 'African humanism' expressed through the concepts of *ubuntu*, and especially its cognate term *utu*. Engaging with different modes of knowledge and types of expression, linguistic, scholarly and literary, she interrogates the humanist focus in Swahili

philosophy and how this features in cultural experience and scholarly discourse. Her quest around the meanings and usages of *utu* demonstrates the unquestionable normative undertones of the concept, while indicating a plurality in understandings across different audiences and contexts. Citing these different understandings in their original pronouncements in Swahili, Alena suggests what might be the distinguishing aspect of *utu* vis-à-vis European counterpart notions. She does so without isolating African notions of humanity and personhood from colonial histories and European social and political histories and counterpart philosophies, achieving impeccably the objective of this issue: cross-cultural engagements and entanglements.

Taking the issue of language a step forward, Giridhar Rao's contribution "Linguistic Human Rights and Multilingual Education: Report from an Indian University" zooms in on the practicalities of providing a multilingual education at MA-level courses informed by an activist commitment. Presenting the case study of a private, not-for-profit South Indian university with an explicit social justice orientation, Giridhar reflects on the links between teaching and linguistic human rights. The MA-level courses observed present a deliberately diverse student body, with one class of 46 students counting for 35 language-names: a unique scenario to explore multilingualism in the classroom and in society. The university aims to create reflective practitioners for the social sector, particularly within education, development and the public policy sector; thus, students are especially receptive to issues concerning exclusion, rights, equality, discrimination and policies. However, the author notes that while class, caste, gender and region are familiar axes of exclusion, students are much less aware of the role that language plays in reflecting, constituting and reproducing privilege, discrimination and exclusion. Giridhar then shows how, building on the strengths of both existing programmes and the students themselves, the courses on multilingual education and linguistic human rights go one step further and invite students to critique existing linguistic inequalities. The outcome is an innovative curriculum and pedagogy fostering a more just and humane society. In keeping with the paper's emphasis on multilingualism, Giridhar has provided an English and an Esperanto version of his piece.

Shedding light on a less-explored yet equally important and disturbing side of colonial thinking and oppression, is Suyash Barve's article "Subalternity and Subjectivity in *Sairat*". Suyash, having studied film direction and screenwriting in India and focusing on participatory media for social development, analyses dynamics of oppression between castes that unfold within the Indian community. His in-depth essay thus complements other works of this collection dealing with forms of oppression unfolding between different states and groups, western or non-western alike. The article unpacks discourses of caste power and social inequality in contemporary India through an attentive analysis of cinematic representations of marginalised groups. Through a sound theoretical background and applying a postcolonial lens to politics of representation, Suyash illustrates how caste as a social power reflects colonial and postcolonial modes of governance in India. Suyash's effort is to decolonise representations of subaltern subjectivity by highlighting how themes of differences are treated and can enable a more critical spectatorship of mainstream cinema. In particular, the article focuses on *Sairat* (*The Wild One*), a commercially successful film centred on caste relations, in order to destabilise the orientalist image of Indian culture that is generally presented by mainstream cinema.

Decolonial Subversions

By focusing on the intricate histories of Maroon ecology, Lavinya Stennett, a writer and CEO of *The Black Curriculum* with interests in Black history, explores the complex, layered histories of agency that shaped and redefined Maroon experiences. In her essay "An exploration of agency within Maroon ecological praxis: Unearthing the histories of Maroon ecology in Jamaica and Brazil from 1630 to 1780", rather than relying on one-sided colonial narratives of Maroon spatiality and ecological praxis that confine these experiences to the institution of slavery and defence against enslavement, Lavinya goes deeper, and investigates agency through the ecological relations in the Maroon sites of Jamaica and Brazil from 1630 to 1780. By examining existing literature on Maroon experiences, Lavinya's work seeks to reimagine these relations, recognising Maroon ecology both in context and as a legitimate part of history. The author ultimately seeks to develop a framework that offers a deeper insight into Maroon ecology by understanding better the inextricable link between the environment and Maroon experiences.

In her "Manifesto for *Decolonial Subversions*" Monika Hirmer lays out her vision for a decolonial platform and beyond, stemming from her many years of engagement with decolonial matters in India and the UK. After outlining the dissatisfactory status quo of decolonial projects, which have repeatedly failed to bring about the radical ruptures and revolutionary transformations of the world-order envisioned by anticolonial intellectuals, politicians and activists, Monika moves on to present a series of pragmatic points of action. While she gives considerable attention to the dismantling of dynamics in the production, legitimisation and diffusion of knowledge that preserve the divide between Global South and Global North, Monika calls for a much wider-reaching endeavour that unapologetically challenges western hegemony in general. She highlights the profound—and reciprocally reinforcing—interconnections between imperialist configurations, race-informed marginalisations, capitalist and neoliberal market-structures, unethical patriarchal setups, ableist discourses and the relentless destruction of planet Earth. She insists that genuine decolonisation can occur only when exploitative relations of all kinds are radically and systemically condemned and tackled. Such a project is necessarily open-ended, collaborative and decentred, and promises innovative and enriching spaces for change.

Dr Romina Istratii and Monika Hirmer