

## Race, violence and biopolitics in Francophone postcolonial contexts

Hardwick, Louise; Corio, Alessandro

DOI:

[10.1386/ijfs.17.3&4.285-2](https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.17.3&4.285-2)

License:

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Early version, also known as pre-print

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Hardwick, L & Corio, A 2014, 'Race, violence and biopolitics in Francophone postcolonial contexts', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3-4, pp. 285-303. <https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.17.3&4.285-2>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

***IJFS* Themed Issue:**  
**Race, Violence and Biopolitics in Francophone Postcolonial Studies**

**Editorial Introduction:**

**Race, Violence and Biopolitics in Francophone Postcolonial Contexts**

Co-Authors: Louise Hardwick and Alessandro Corio

Genocide, ethnic cleansing, biopolitics, necropolitics, ethnopolitics, *métissage*, ethnoclass, pigmentocracy: the postcolonial vocabulary of race is multiple and can only be understood with due attention to the historical and contemporary relationships and tensions, both overt and concealed, which construct frameworks for the exercise of violence and power. An overriding interest in the physical body and how it is interpreted and represented within a given situation raises questions of individual identity, aesthetics and affiliation, which in turn have collective significance for the understanding of broader questions of ethics, nationality and governance. Indeed, the myriad intersections between race, violence and power are at the heart of postcolonial literature, politics and thought. If the colonial project is initially framed by a dichotomy of racial curiosity/fear brought about by the encounter with other ethnic groups, this quickly gives way to the violence of conquest and the development of power structures with which domination could be established, maintained and expanded. Long after decolonization, the legacies of colonialism endure in the structures, hierarchies and social orders which have arisen in the post-colonial era. In this special issue, as each article develops its own original perspective, a common methodological denominator begins to emerge: what is the

function of colonial and postcolonial literary creation in relation to the violence exercised by the apparatuses of discipline and normalization of bodies and populations?

Connections between race, violence, the body and power cannot be adequately explored without situating them in the material, political and cultural contexts in which they originated and, in many cases, continue to operate and evolve. Benita Parry has criticized the oblique tendencies of certain areas of contemporary postcolonial criticism, tendencies which have led to a failure to adopt a critical theoretical methodology capable of confronting and interrogating 'the material impulses to colonialism, its appropriation of physical resources, exploitation of human labour and institutional repression' (Parry 2004: 3). By insisting throughout on situating discussions of race and violence within the power networks which they challenge or uphold, this special journal issue intends to privilege a robust examination of the material and political stakes invoked in a range of Francophone postcolonial contexts.

Through a series of thematically-linked articles, which consider African, American, Caribbean and European contexts, this volume critically analyses configurations of race, violence and power and their representations in colonial history and postcolonial theory, literature and culture. Drawing on recent critical interventions on biopolitics, genocide and ethnoclass hierarchies, by thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Roberto Esposito, Edouard Glissant, Achille Mbembe and Giorgio Agamben, these articles question, complicate and explore the legacies of conquest and demonstrate their urgency for contemporary society. Although many articles in this special issue are informed by an interest in explaining the potential of biopolitics, the aim is to offer a broader exegesis of how race and violence intersect in the cultural, social and political spheres. Several articles, including those by Charlotte Baker, Alessandro Corio, Louise Hardwick and Judith Misrahi-Barak, explicitly engage with biopolitics to investigate manifestations of race and violence, while others, by Dominic Thomas, Michael Wiedorn, and C. J. Bretillon, analyse other postcolonial aspects of race and violence, in contexts which include Creole culture in the Caribbean basin, immigration in Europe, and constructions of race in French rap music.

## What is biopolitics?

Biopolitics offers a set of theories with which to study the new forms and ideologies of community in an increasingly interconnected and complex world, looking specifically at cultural identity, relation and hybridity, and the politics of migration, immigration, indentureship and diaspora. Investigating the complexities of the links between life and its governance, biopolitics offers considerable innovative potential for literary theory, suggesting new criteria and methodologies for reading the relations between texts and the world in an increasingly complex and challenging global society. This is an extension of what Michel Foucault terms the ‘critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings’ in his influential essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’ (Foucault 1984: 47). Indeed, language, representation and imagination work as devices to control and imprison life – or to historicise it – *and* as instruments to explore new configurations of the self and society in our present.

This introduction draws a concise conceptual map of biopolitics and its links with race and violence in postcolonial contexts, with the aim of illustrating connections between biopolitical theory and literary creation. In recent years, the concepts of biopolitics and biopower have circulated widely in the fields of political philosophy, anthropology and cultural studies, offering innovative perspectives for the study of the relationships between power, forms of life and processes of subjectification. Nevertheless, their application to the literatures that are considered within the complex nexus of postcolonial globalization raises a number of problems, mainly due to the Eurocentric limitations of Foucault’s seminal analysis in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1976, published posthumously with the title *Il faut défendre la société* (1997), and the subsequent Eurocentric developments in the field of critical theory.

The word ‘biopolitics’ was first used at the beginning of the twentieth century by Swedish political scientist and politician Rudolf Kjellén in *Världskrigets politiska problem* (1915), which translates as ‘the political problems of World Wars’. Kjellén’s

work received most attention in Germany, and this important text was immediately translated into German as *Die politischen Probleme des Weltkrieges* (1916) to express a way of understanding the state as a living body or *Lebensform*, an idea which would have a huge impact for twentieth-century political ideologies. This representation of the community as a living body, which has to be protected and immunized from internal and external threats of contamination, displays evident links with the racist ideologies and taxonomies which were generated inside colonial and other totalitarian regimes and which found their apogee under Hitler's National Socialism. Colonialism, however, plays only a marginal role in the analysis of biopolitics developed by Foucault from 1976. His published works, and the seminars he gave at the Collège de France over the same period, form the basis for the subsequent development of biopolitics. It is in the last chapter of the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976), entitled 'Droit de mort et pouvoir sur la vie', that Foucault introduces the topic of the 'seuil de modernité biologique' (Foucault 1976: 188), in order to define the fundamental shift in Western modernity which occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Foucault, it was in this era that the old forms of the sovereign power 'de faire mourir ou de laisser vivre' were supplanted by a new kind of power: 'un pouvoir de faire vivre ou de rejeter dans la mort' (Foucault 1976: 181). What happens in this shift, and what Foucault wishes to signify by the term 'biopolitics', is 'ce qui fait entrer la vie et ses mécanismes dans le domaine des calculs explicites et fait du pouvoir-savoir un agent de transformation de la vie humaine' (Foucault 1976: 188). For the first time, life itself 'passe pour une part dans le champ du contrôle du savoir et d'intervention du pouvoir' (Foucault 1976: 187); life itself becomes the object of political technologies and disciplinary apparatuses and life itself is shaped, developed or reduced through regulatory and normalizing procedures. In short, power becomes the agent for the management and government of the living, for productive (economic) purposes as well as for increasing health and wellness. Through this analysis of power as the agent for the management and government of the living to maximise production and economic growth, the connection between biopolitics and capitalism emerges as implicit, gesturing towards links with the capitalistic ventures of colonialism and imperialism which, nonetheless, remain

unexplored by Foucault. It is precisely this inadequately explored territory which this special issue addresses.

In Foucault's analysis, power's grip on life has been practised in two main forms since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These two poles of development are intertwined and 'reliés par tout un faisceau intermédiaire de relations' (Foucault 1976: 183). The first is the disciplinary power that is wielded over 'docile bodies', which are shaped, controlled and used for productive ends: '*une anatomo-politique du corps humain*' [original emphasis] (Foucault 1976: 183). The second, which developed later, corresponds to the focusing of power on the body-species, that is to say on the regulatory control of populations: '*une biopolitique de la population*' [original emphasis] (Foucault 1976: 183). This can be understood as a kind of social medicine, administered to the population with the aim of governing its biological life. In this project, the control and regulation of sexuality play an important role, not only through a continuation of the marriage alliances which are an established socio-historical feature of western societies, but also with the production of knowledge, through pedagogy, medicine and demography, which intervene in an all-pervasive manner in the biological processes of birth, reproduction, disease, longevity and death. This double technology of disciplining individual bodies and regulating the biological processes of the human species – a new technology of power, with life itself at its centre – produces a normalised society and, consubstantial with it, a new form of normalised racism. The relationship between what Foucault terms the *statalisation* of biological science, that is to say the use of the sciences of life in order to govern the State, and the birth of modern racism was explored during his 1976 Collège de France lectures.

A key aspect of Foucault's biopolitics, which will return in the analysis of Agamben, Esposito and Mbembe, in particular, is its fundamental ambivalence. The relationship between knowledge-power devices, on the one hand, and bodies and populations, on the other, can bring about a change in perspective which moves away from repressive potential, and instead focuses increasingly on productive potential. This can be understood in its broadest sense as the potential to produce subjects. The conditions that Foucault repeatedly terms 'regimes of truth' are able to produce concrete lives and

processes of subject formation (*subjectivation* in Foucauldian analysis). However, they also show a negative and necropolitical aspect – necropolitics being that aspect of biopolitics which is concerned with the politics of death (also termed thanatopolitics) – consisting in the exclusion of that which is not deemed worthy of life and which consequently can be abandoned to death.

This paradoxical feature emerges when Foucault deals with the issue of racism in his 1976 lectures, wondering how it is possible that a form of power whose aim is to enhance life, is also capable of legitimizing the killing of its own citizens. Indeed, biopolitical enhancement and genocidal racism work as two complementary faces of the same kind of power, which tends to ‘défendre la société’ through the discursive production of an internal threat: ‘la mise à mort, l’impératif de mort, n’est recevable, dans le système de bio-pouvoir, que s’il tend non pas à la victoire sur les adversaires politiques, mais à l’élimination du danger biologique et au renforcement, directement lié à cette élimination, de l’espèce elle-même ou de la race’ (Foucault 1997: 228). Power’s ability to seize hold of life operates through a thanatological vice, and is implemented by a knowledge of the Other – an ‘epistemic violence’, to use Spivak’s formula (Spivak 1999: 266) – which is expressed in the language of race, and is capable of producing devastating effects. Racist discourse, for Foucault, is ‘le moyen d’introduire enfin, dans ce domaine de la vie que le pouvoir a pris en charge, une coupure: la coupure entre ce qui doit vivre et ce qui doit mourir’ (Foucault 1997: 227). Genocide thus becomes a vital function of the State conceived as a biopolitical body, in which the exclusion or the elimination of certain people or groups of people guarantees the protection of others and upholds the very exercise of sovereign power.

In the final lecture of his 1976 series, Foucault makes occasional reference to colonialism:

Le racisme va se développer *primo* avec la colonisation, c’est-à-dire avec le génocide colonisateur. Quand il va falloir tuer des gens, tuer des populations, tuer des civilisations, comment pourra-t-on le faire si l’on fonctionne sur le

mode du bio-pouvoir? A travers les thèmes de l'évolutionnisme, par un racisme. [...] En gros le racisme, je crois, assure la fonction de mort dans l'économie du bio-pouvoir, selon le principe que la mort des autres, c'est le renforcement biologique de soi-même en tant que l'on est membre d'une race ou d'une population, en tant que l'on est élément dans une pluralité unitaire et vivante. (Foucault 1997: 229-30)

The analytic potential arising from this interpretation of racism is quite evident, moving from the totalitarian and genocidal regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the present forms of exclusion and the new forms of racism which are spreading at a global scale and which are linked with migrations, ethnic minorities and the government of borders, population flows and labour power. However, the Foucauldian genealogy of biopolitics and racism remains almost entirely Eurocentric, leaving colonial racism and its relationships with slavery and wage labour outside its epistemic field and its analytical schema. Foucault ignores the politics of exclusion and the racial taxonomies on which colonial relations were based, and he also neglects to consider the differential construction of the European bourgeois identity and its whiteness. In this regard, Ann Laura Stoler, one of the first critics to consider the relationship between Foucauldian biopolitics and colonialism, writes that:

If race already makes up a part of that 'grid of intelligibility' through which the bourgeoisie came to define themselves, then we need to locate its coordinates in a grid carved through the geographic distributions of 'unfreedoms' that imperial labor systems enforced. These were colonial regimes prior to and coterminous with Europe's liberal bourgeois order. [...] Can we understand these discourses of sexuality and race that fold into one another in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe outside the wide sweep of empire in which biopolitics was registered and racial taxonomies were based? (Stoler 1995: 53)



The limits of Foucauldian analysis have also been commented on by Edward Said (2000), Gayatri Spivak (1988) and James Clifford (1988), amongst others, yet the importance of his theory and particularly of his discourse analysis for the development of postmodern anthropology and postcolonial and subaltern studies is indisputable. More recently, two symposia held in Calcutta (2010) and Bologna (2011) together represented an important milestone for the rethinking of Foucault through ‘studies of the forms of political subjectivity that [colonial and postcolonial] regimes of power incite’ (Mezzadra, Reid, Samaddar 2013: 14), directing attention firmly onto the potential of Foucault’s work for the development of collective agency and resistance in postcolonial contexts broadly conceived. Colonial societies, in particular those based on slavery, as well as the postcolonial contexts that are specifically linked with this traumatic past, have constituted a kind of biopolitical laboratory for capitalist globalization. Here, those apparatuses of discipline, regulation and normalization were tested and developed, and fully intertwined with capitalist accumulation and racist discourse. These strategies were further refined, becoming increasingly subtle and diffuse, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In the present volume, Louise Hardwick’s article analyses the formation and evolution of ethnoclasses in Caribbean society, with careful attention to the intersections between race and socio-economic status.

An established critical current of the imperial genealogy of capitalism and neo-liberalism can be discerned in the work of Eric Williams (1944), Sidney Mintz (1985), Paul Gilroy (1993) and, more recently, Ian Baucom (2005). Moreover, many scholars have focused on how discourses about hygiene, sexuality, education and urbanism contributed to the formation of the social geography of the colonies and to the strategies of government of the colonized. Stoler explores the links between the devices of sexuality and the racialization of bodies which developed in the colonies, through taxonomies and discourses that alternatively praised, or condemned, the different forms of *métissage*. Moreover, Stoler observes how these structures also contributed to the formation of Western bourgeois identity:

[...] we should see race and sexuality as ordering mechanisms that shared their emergence with the bourgeois order of the early nineteenth century, 'that beginning of the modern age'. Such a perspective figures race, racism and its representations as structured entailments of post-enlightenment universals, as formative features of modernity, as deeply embedded in bourgeois liberalism, not as aberrant offshoots of them. (Stoler 1995: 9)

The transatlantic slave trade and the formation of plantation society required a gradual refinement of the regimes of discipline and regulation of bodies, in order firstly to identify those slaves who were more suitable to work, then to increase the likelihood of their survival during the middle passage, and finally to maximize their work and their reproductive performance on the plantation. In his classic *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), Sidney Mintz suggested how the disciplinary strategies of large-scale capitalist industrial production themselves owe a great debt to those developed in the plantation colonies. In a recent publication, *Specters of the Atlantic. Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History* (2005), Ian Baucom explores the development of financial capitalism between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, interrogating the cultural logic of the transatlantic slave economy, with its traumatic and turbulent memories. That moment of the hyper-financial development of capitalism, which we tend to associate with the late twentieth-century, is actually an ideological and epistemological pre-requisite for the eighteenth century circum-Atlantic cycle of capital accumulation: a cycle with the slave trade at its centre. Relying on the tragic and paradigmatic event of the slave ship *Zong*, and the trials that followed, Baucom reconstructs the cultural, economic and biopolitical logic that allowed the development of a system of financial capitalism which was predicated on the reduction of human lives to a mere exchange value. As Baucom emphatically affirms:

The *Zong* trials constitute an event in the history of capital *not* because they treat slaves as commodities but because they treat slaves as commodities that have become the subject of insurance, treat them [...] not as objects to be exchanged but as the 'empty bearers' of an abstract, theoretical, but entirely

real quantum of value [...]. The *Zong* trials constitute an event not because they further subject the world to the principle of exchange but because they subject it to the hegemony of that which superordinates exchange: the general equivalents of finance capital. (Baucom 2005: 139)

The significance of Baucom's ideas for thinking through biopolitics in the Caribbean is analysed by Alessandro Corio in his article for this volume.

More recent philosophical developments of biopolitics, and in particular the works of Giorgio Agamben, have attracted increasing attention from postcolonial scholars and are highly relevant for the articles we are introducing here. Agamben's analysis distances itself from that of Foucault, although he, too, remains Eurocentric in focus. While for the latter, biopolitics indicates the threshold of a historic transition, revealing a discontinuity between modern sovereignty and contemporary biopolitics, for the Italian philosopher Agamben, the relationship between power and life is, from its very beginnings, inextricably bound up with sovereignty itself. In 1995, Agamben explored these concepts in a major biopolitical text, *Homo Sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, translated into English in 1998 as *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. This work was further developed in numerous conference papers and essays, such as the collection *Mezzi senza fine* (1996), translated into English in 2000 as *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*.

For Agamben, since Greco-Roman times, the living as an object of biopower, exposed without mediation to the exertion of a force of correction and death which may be inflicted on the biological body, has been the very foundation of politics. This is clearly shown in the figure of the *homo sacer*, the man of Roman law 'who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*' (Agamben 1998: 8), which the philosopher argues is a paradigm of the biopolitical nature of sovereignty. This is due to the fact that *homo sacer* is caught in a structure of inclusion which is, paradoxically, predicated on exclusion and abandonment. In fact, such a relationship upholds and promotes power's grip on 'bare life' through a 'relation of exception' and 'banishment', or rather, through an 'extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion' (Agamben 1998: 18):

[...] the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.* [original emphasis] (Agamben 1998: 17-18)

In the state of exception, the law and the carrying out of violence overlap: it becomes lawful to kill. Agamben's argument is that this state of exception, understood as a fundamental political structure of Western society, is at the heart of contemporary society and tends to become, according to Walter Benjamin's famous statement, 'the rule' (Benjamin 1968: 257). For Agamben, the concentration camp is both the veritable paradigm of the state of exception, and the most evident and brutal manifestation of contemporary biopolitical space. It is the most extreme demonstration of the relation of exception, of the deadly crushing of the modern political subject – the citizen – on a biological level: 'its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life', to the extent that 'power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation' (Agamben 1998: 171).

The totalizing genealogical reconstruction of the implications of sovereignty and 'bare life' identified by Agamben seems to leave very little space for affirmative political developments. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the state of exception appears to permeate and seep into the totality of the living, thus becoming the rule for forms of 'democratic' power in the era of globalization. However, Agamben has indicated possible glimmers of hope in a 'minor biopolitics' – in the form of an alternative to and escape from the relation of exception, of a *déprise* in the face of the apparatuses of capture of biopower – to be developed in terms of a detachment or a deviation from the self, becoming, as he comments in an online interview, 'the subject of his own desubjectification' [our translation] (Agamben 2000a: no p.). For the wider political community, this would mean gaining a certain distance from the modern conception of a compact and homogeneous

national space, in order to move towards a ‘perforated and topologically deformed’ political space, in which ‘the citizen has been able to recognize the refugee that he or she is [...]’ (Agamben 2000b: 26).

As Brian Dillon has stressed, Agamben’s philosophy, as expressed in essays from the early work *Infancy and History* (1979), to his more recent works which focus on the camp, the archive and testimony, provides a sustained interrogation of notions of the threshold, or the interim, especially between the voice (*phone*) and language (*logos*): ‘the notion of an interruption, of an “in-between-ness” is crucial to his thought’ (Dillon 2002: 3). This space of indeterminacy, which characterizes both human experience in a biopolitical regime and the stance adopted by critical discourse, is intended to blast wide open ‘the empty, continuous, quantified time of vulgar historicism’ (Agamben 1979: 148) and to point towards a messianic conception of ‘now-time’, inspired by Benjamin’s famous ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (Benjamin 1968). This threshold of indeterminacy between biological life and political life, *zoé* and *bios*, voice and language, which characterizes the state of exception, is also the very location from where the possibilities of a biopolitics of transformation and re-appropriation may emerge. According to Agamben, the most urgent political task of our time is to find new, inventive strategies for survival in the no man’s land of the present, and to articulate new subjectivities, which have the capacity to distance themselves from, and transcend, fixed identities.

### **Race, Biopolitics and Violence**

Francophone postcolonial literatures have produced many instances of fictional tactics of survival and endurance in conditions of violence, domination and alienation. Edouard Glissant, for example, has developed the theoretical concepts of ‘détour’, ‘opacité’ and ‘tremblement’ (Glissant 1981), and his novels offer examples of the tactics of creative subjectification: moments in which characters transcend fixed identities in order to address an increasingly complex and chaotic world situation. To take but one example,

his novel *Tout-monde* (1993) traces the politics of exclusion which were at the core of the creation of the triangular slave trade and plantation culture in Martinique, and explores the unpredictable results of this society: one outcome is Mycea's famous descent into madness, but another concerns the emergence of another group who, rather than identifying with any singular concrete identity, instead invents new manners of living, and new languages, as a tactic for survival in the 'chaos-monde'. This group is explored throughout the novel, and in particular in the section 'Nous ne mourions pas tous.' The group possesses multiple names: 'déparleur, romancier, le Mathieu, le chroniqueur, le poète' (Glissant 1993: 483). Mathieu is one of Glissant's pivotal recurring characters, whose progression through the *chaos-monde* is mapped from novel to novel. Fluidity, adaptability and openness to change become the tools for survival in situations of violence and subjugation. This is also exemplified by the recurring character of the 'déparleur', who is located at the blurred threshold between voice and language. His voice is composed of a proliferating plurality of enunciative subjects, none of whom lay claim to any fixed identity. The 'déparleur' relates the voices of 'le sel de la Diversité': those who 'ont dépassé les limites et les frontières, ils mélangent les langues, ils déménagent les langues, ils transbahutent [traipse], ils tombent dans la folie du monde [...] ils vont au-devant de nous, leurs souffrances nous ouvrent des espaces nouveaux, ils sont les prophètes de la Relation, ils vivent le tourbillon, ils voient, loin devant, ce point fixe qu'il faudra dépasser une fois encore' (Glissant 1993: 481-82). The image of life as a 'tourbillon', a key term in the Glissantian lexicon which may be translated as whirlwind, vortex or maelstrom, and of the aim to learn to 'vivre le tourbillon', to 'live the maelstrom' (note the deliberate transitive use of the verb), encapsulates one of the guiding principles of *Tout-Monde*. This signifies that one has recognised the exclusionary politics at work in the world, and come to terms with their historical and contemporary manifestations: not in a manner which categorizes and 'makes sense' of them, but rather, in a manner which shows openness to live in and with the absolute, and often violent, instability of the world.

Violence, both physical and ideological, plays an ongoing role in the colonial and postcolonial condition. In a recent collection of essays on violence in Francophone

postcolonial culture edited by Lorna Milne, Frantz Fanon's comments in *Les Damnés de la terre* form the starting point from which to dissect the ways in which the 'colonial system effectively "creates" a colonizer and a colonized, locked together in a relationship that is essentially violent' (Milne 2007: 9). Milne is careful to point out that 'colonialism is far from being the sole cause of violence in the former colonial territories' and that violence exists 'on both sides of the power structure' (10). The contributions in her volume span literature, photography and film, and encompass Caribbean, African and North African contexts, with particular attention to massacres, trauma and gendered violence. Milne highlights the ethical agency of postcolonial cultural works, which 'display a remarkably strong sense that culture and identity are profoundly linked to ethical considerations, involving moral choices that may be as momentous as the decision to commit or abstain from atrocities or abuse' (27).

In another important recent publication, Nicki Hitchcott presents an *état présent* of ethno-politics in Rwanda, explaining the establishment and evolution of ethnic stereotyping and the creation of racial hierarchies, as well as discussing the horrific, long-term violence to which such stereotypes and hierarchies have led (Hitchcott 2014). The 'Hamitic hypothesis' introduced by the former Belgian colonial powers 'led to the division of people in the Great Lakes into two main groups: the Hamites and the Bantu or, in the case of Rwanda and Burundi, the Tutsi and the Hutu' (Hitchcott 2014: 2). These divisions positioned the Hutu as inferior, and the Tutsi as superior, a hierarchy which was reinforced by administrative reforms in the areas of schooling and politics. Since the 1994 genocide carried out by the Hutu on the Tutsi 'cockroaches', new laws on discrimination and genocide ideology have been introduced, and 'the crime of ethnic divisionism is now included in the Rwandan penal code' (Hitchcott 2014: 4). In a discussion of Gilbert Gatore's *Le Passé devant soi*, Hitchcott draws attention to the paradoxical status of the text, which, although avoiding racial, ethnic or national labels in its prose, has met with a difficult reception due to the author's own position (some critics claim that his father is an exiled Hutu living in France who is charged with crimes of genocide): a development which Hitchcott suggests 'impos[es] an ethno-political reading on both Gatore and his text [...]' (Hitchcott 2014: 6), which only serves to underscore

‘just how difficult it is to think about Rwanda beyond polarized, ethnopolitical lines’ (Hitchcott 2014: 7) in the present era. In a separate but related article in this volume, Charlotte Baker explores necropolitics in Francophone African novels, examining the relationships between violence, power and modes of writing.

Racial programmes of control and extermination have underwritten a multiplicity of thanatopolitical regimes, which brought about either social or actual death, as well as regimes of value extraction, including Empire, colonialism, slavery and genocide. A biopolitical reading of violence draws attention to the violence which underpins colonial states of exception, where inclusion is, paradoxically, predicated on exclusion and abandonment. This paradigm of inclusive exclusion has been examined by postcolonial critics, including Achille Mbembe and Sidi Mohammed Barkat – as well as in essays by Aimé Césaire and C.L.R. James. These thinkers have highlighted the relevance of a politics of exception for the colonies and the post-colonies, where it takes on a quasi-experimental feature: the colonised are a segment of humanity *hors la loi*, included in the modern political space only through their exclusion from the constitutional order and the rule of law. Mbembe turns to the colonial space and investigates the most negative aspect of biopolitics through his concept of ‘necropolitics’, the politics of death, to pinpoint ‘*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*’ (Mbembe 2003: 14). The Cameroonian philosopher traces a wider genealogy of the power to dispose of human life, including the power wielded by colonial regimes and their relation with capitalist societies. It is in the colonies and apartheid regimes, he finds, that the connections between biopower, exception, war without end and racism assume their most flagrant form: ‘the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended – the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of civilization’ (24). In particular, slavery represents a key step in this genealogy of the politics of terror:

Any historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address slavery, which could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical



experimentation. In many respects, the very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath manifests the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception. This figure is paradoxical here for two reasons. First, in the context of the plantation, the humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of a shadow. Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a 'home', loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether). [...] As an instrument of labor, the slave has a price. As a property, he or she has a value. His or her labor is needed and used. The slave is therefore kept alive but in a *state of injury*, in a phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity. (Mbembe 2003: 21)

In another essay, Mbembe conducts a close reading of *La Polka* by Togolese author Kossi Efoui, looking in particular at its depiction of the repercussions of violence on African populations. Mbembe finds that the novelist pays particular attention to 'the face and form of the human body, emphasizing that they have been redrawn "by a certain brutality introduced into their gaze"' (Mbembe 2010: 39). In a state of colonial exception, slavery, colonial repression and brutality transform the human body, leaving inevitable traces.

In *Le corps d'exception. Les artifices du pouvoir colonial et la destruction de la vie* (2005), Sidi Mohammed Barkat uses the concept of exception to account for the extreme violence exerted on the colonial body in the Algerian colonial context and during the massacres of 1945 and 1961. The colonised body is, according to him, a 'corps d'exception', unworthy of being a citizen, but still a member of the French nation: 'inclus en tant que non compté, inclus en tant qu'exclu' (Barkat 2005: 72). The undeniable potential of Agambenian critical theory for the study of colonial and postcolonial forms of political exclusion and abandonment has been recently stressed by Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall in their collection of essays *Agamben and Colonialism*: 'the biopolitical themes he investigates are not considered outside of the circumscribed arena

of “Western” politics, as if the “West” can be thought of as sealed off from its defining globalising processes’ (Svirsky & Bignall 2012: 2). This current gap in the genealogy of biopower and violence also inhibits the analysis of the forms of criticism, agency and resistance, as well as the potential for transformation and liberation, which were and continue to be articulated in (post-)colonial contexts and their literatures. Some scholars, such as Simone Bignall in her article ‘Potential Postcoloniality’, have started to read Agamben in a manner which attempts ‘to discern the potential for a more positive, transformative and future-oriented political sensibility within his work’ and to use some of his concepts to theorize ‘the postcolonial as a potential form of political community’ (Bignall 2012: 262). In this manner, a critical shift can be enacted: the quest for and the creation of anti-foundational models of subjectivity and community, that move in the direction of immanence and potentiality, of a ‘whatever being’ and ‘a community without presuppositions and without subjects’ (Agamben 1990: 65), thus stressing the subversive aspect of the postcolonial:

The contingent and exemplary nature of ‘whatever’ being underscores a determined identity’s permanent potential for transformation and its radical openness to alterity, attributes that may also be considered relevant in thinking the postcolonial as that which resists permanent capture by a dominant order of signification. (Bignall 2012: 279)

In addition to the suggestions offered by Agamben and other scholars of biopolitics, certain patterns of intersection between literary analysis, postcolonial biopolitics, racism and violence can be identified. Recently, Arne De Boever’s *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel* (2013), has explored aspects of the relationships between the novel, care and governmental biopolitics. Relying on work on the theory of the novel by critics such as Ian Watt and Edward Said, De Boever lays the foundations for a biopolitical history of the novel, considering that ‘the rise of the novel coincides with the rise of what Foucault calls governmentality and biopower’ (De Boever 2013: 9). Both governmental biopolitics and the novel, he argues, are strictly linked with the fundamental ambivalence of care, conceived as *pharmakon* in the Platonic-Derridian sense: both poison and remedy. This

leads the scholar to consider contemporary fictional narratives and storytelling as not only complicit with the governance of our biological and psychic lives, but also as a 'critical aesthetics of existence: a practice that would resist, precisely, the governance in which storytelling *also* participates' (De Boever 2013: 7). The novel, and aesthetic practices in general, can be considered as a place of experimentation for the care of the self and for the care of the other, and as a means to struggle to escape from the hold of biopower. De Boever's essay does not take into account the potentially numerous connections between literature and postcolonial biopolitics. Nevertheless, the aspect of care is certainly essential in postcolonial governmentality, too, and can be discerned in the intersections between war, humanitarian intervention, developmental policies and neoliberal economies.

\*\*\*

Let us now return to the question posed at the beginning of this introduction, which set out to explore the function of colonial and postcolonial literary creation in relation to the violence exercised by the apparatuses of discipline and normalization of bodies and populations. To answer this question, we have to consider two different but inseparable dimensions of literary writing: its representational and its performative functions. As becomes clear in every single article, by looking for a form that is capable of representing the extreme and sometimes unspeakable reality of biopolitical violence and racism, different writing practices can also disturb and unsettle those apparatuses, thereby opening new spaces of liberation and political activism. The overlap between representation, performativity and agency becomes particularly evident in the field of memory and trauma studies. The act of writing or transcribing traumatic memories, for instance, is not just a matter of representing painful events which happened in the past, but 'is always a story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (Caruth 1996: 4). The representation of traumatic memories and post-memories, of their margins, voids and silences, inevitably plays a performative role in the sense that, as Misrahi-Barak stresses in her article in this volume, 'a narrative of suffering [can] be transformed into one of

possibility, or rather of possibilities since the text ceases to be written in the singular and becomes multi-voiced instead, shared by many, now part of our collective consciousness'. When a text directly confronts the possibilities and the impossibilities of the representation of violence and exception, through creative work on language, rhetoric, genres, focalization, space and time, translation, polyphony and fragmentation, and through a variety of tones and stylistic registers, it builds a different visibility and intelligibility of the real, acting as a subversive counter-device against the languages and logics that subjugate and imprison life. In the words of Agamben, the textual work functions as an instrument of 'profanation of apparatuses – that is to say, the restitution to common use of what has been captured and separated in them' (Agamben 2009: 24). Literature actively takes part in the reconfiguration of what Jacques Rancière has called 'le partage du sensible' (Rancière 2000): the distribution, inside the community, of spaces and times, places and identities, the visible and the invisible, of those who have the right to speak and those who are disposable and not counted as parts of the political community. According to Rancière, the 'politics of literature' consists in 'une certaine manière d'intervenir dans le partage du sensible qui définit le monde que nous habitons: la façon dont il est pour nous visible, et dont ce visible se laisse dire, et les capacités et incapacités qui se manifestent par là' (Rancière 2007: 15). Both literary and political *dissensus* are thus activities that cut across forms of cultural belonging and hierarchies, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception, as well as new forms of collective enunciation.

In the opening article of this journal, Charlotte Baker explores the relationship between violence and authority that characterised the regime of Ahmed Sékou Touré in Guinea, drawing on Hannah Arendt's understanding of the relationship between violence and power and Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics. In particular, she examines the significance of the various narrative strategies – the literary and political *dissensus* – adopted by Guinean writers such as Camara Laye, Alioum Fantouré, Tierno Monémbo and Williams Sassine, with a focus on writing about the infliction of bodily violence. Baker's analysis considers how the novels themselves are shaped by the traumatic necropolitical violence of the regime, and how the writers have responded to the violence

of Touré's regime by challenging genres, disrupting the linear progression of narratives, playing with language, and representing a series of broken and merging characters in their literary work.

In his article, which turns from Africa to the Caribbean context, Alessandro Corio focuses on the black Atlantic dimension to analyse how an event such as the Zong massacre and its uncomfortable traumatic memories can unlock the biopolitical nature of the transatlantic slave system and economy. Beyond its historical significance, the Zong case stands out as a paradigm for the biopolitical nature of the legal, economical and racist apparatus structuring the rise of the Western capitalist economy. As in Baker's article, violence against the human body underpins the analysis. The author interprets the paradigmatic figure of the drowning human body as the absolute zero point in the commodification of the human within modernity's capitalist order. He questions why and how recent theories of biopolitics have avoided examining this figure and, more generally, slavery and the plantation system as pivotal aspects in the genealogy of the contemporary forms of sovereignty and governance. Through a stylistic and thematic analysis of the literary work of the Caribbean writers NourbeSe Philip and Edouard Glissant, Corio focuses on how their engagement with the unspeakable core of dehumanisation and silencing produced by slavery is capable of developing effective responses to those overwhelming structures of biopower. In particular, he argues that the epistemic dimension of Glissant's writing operates as a kind of creative reversal of the sublime dimension of slavery, moving from the unspeakable to the polyphonic, and pointing out possible alternatives for rethinking the biopolitical abyss of modernity in an *affirmative* manner, drawing on the affirmative biopolitics advanced by Roberto Esposito.

Post-traumatic memories, biopolitical violence and the necessity to counteract them through artistic creation, writing and translation, also constitute the core of Judith Misrahi-Barak's article, which focuses on the 1937 genocide of Haitian immigrants by Dominicans, once more bringing the representation of bodily violence to the fore. In her novel *The Farming of Bones*, Edwidge Danticat takes as her epigraph the famous Biblical passage about the *Shibboleth*, where the right of passage is reserved for people who can

be identified as belonging to a certain social and ethnic group because they speak in a certain way. The way a word is pronounced determines whether one lives or dies. From ancient times to 1937, when Dominicans put Haitians to the Parsley test, having them say *perejil* in the ‘proper’ Dominican way and then massacring them if they proved unable to do so, such violence is on-going. This is another paradigmatic example of how racial and linguistic signifiers can function together as agents of the biopolitical ‘droit de mort et pouvoir sur la vie’, separating what is considered to be a human life worthy of protection from an abandoned and killable bare life. Misrahi-Barak’s reading makes connections between biopolitics, trauma studies, literature and translation, in order to understand the relationship between the physical translation of bodies across the river between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and back, and the aesthetic translation(s) that are at work in Danticat’s and other Haitian writers’ texts. An investigation of the biopolitical dimensions of the massacre helps uncover the foundations which allowed it to occur, while an analysis of the ongoing translation processes at work enhances the resistance running through the very body of the text, furthering its resilience.

The following article remains, geographically speaking, in the pan-Caribbean basin, and directs the analytical focus onto questions of race and its construction. Through a close reading of Lafcadio Hearn’s novels *Chita* (1889) and *Youma* (1890), Michael Wiedorn argues that although Hearn’s conception of the creole inspired the rather optimistic late twentieth-century proponents of the term, it was nonetheless haunted by suffering and death. Hearn’s fascination with exotic racial miscegenation, especially in its feminine and more threatened manifestations, becomes a manner with which to perform the unveiling of all the ambivalences of more recent debates around the Creole and creolisation. In *Chita*, which casts the Creole as representing a harmonious world marked by multiplicity, a cataclysmic storm wipes that very same world – in the form of a fragile Gulf Coast community – clean away. In *Youma*, a young woman torn between two worlds tragically chooses to end her own life. In both texts it becomes clear that for Hearn, the Creole is precisely that which is disappearing, moribund. Wiedorn connects Hearn to the *créolistes*, who claim him as a source of inspiration, and to Edouard Glissant, who rejects Hearn. He argues that while the *créolistes*’ conceptions of the Creole are more optimistic, concerned

more with the future and less so with death, the term ‘creole’ remains fraught and undecided in their work, as in Hearn’s. In so doing, he also suggests that ‘creoleness’ and ‘creolization’ risk becoming unmoored from the Creole, and that Hearn’s agony-ridden legacy lingers on today.

Louise Hardwick’s article also focuses on the Caribbean, and casts a spotlight onto a phenomenon which has been unjustly neglected by literary critics: indentured migration and labour from India to the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery. She examines writing about Indian indentured labourers, a group of people who have become known, not unproblematically, as ‘coolies’, again raising questions about the construction of race and racial signifiers. Significant differences exist between Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean perceptions of indentured labourers. Whereas in the Anglophone world, authors such as V. S. Naipaul have raised the visibility of coolies, in Francophone Caribbean literature, coolie authors, and indeed coolie protagonists, have occupied an ambiguous, subaltern position. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of the relationship between biopolitics, violence and power, and in particular his concepts of *homo sacer*, ‘bare life’ and the ‘state of exception’, this article examines the narrative strategies adopted by Raphaël Confiant and Maurice Virassamy in their contrasting accounts of the coolie experience. Hardwick explores the position of the coolie in the complex French Caribbean ethnoclass hierarchy through a biopolitical reading, reassessing questions of marginalization and exclusion to ask to what extent the coolie may be considered ‘creolized’.

The final two articles presented here move back to the European space – only to expose the heterogeneous and multiple nature of that very space, despite efforts to govern, control and define it. C. J. Bretillon invites us to explore the intricacies of self-representation through racial signifiers in French metropolitan and popular cultures and, in particular, in hip-hop music and body performance. If the meanings of ‘Frenchness’ are highly contested in French culture, then the meanings of whiteness are even more so: France’s ideology of inclusion explicitly rejects racial identifications in favour of the universal notion of ‘Frenchness’. However, whiteness tends to operate as a signifier of

Frenchness, and both colonialism and immigration policies have played a crucial role in the consolidation of this identity. These debates are enriched by the consideration of French popular culture, especially hip-hop, a Black American cultural import. Adding another perspective to the issue of the construction of white identities, an issue which was also raised in Wiedorn's contribution, Bretillon's article demonstrates how scholarship has largely glossed over the question of *whiteness* in hip-hop, and has thus ignored how white rappers negotiate racial privilege while expressing solidarity with their Black and *Arabe* counterparts. The first part of the article provides an overview of discourses surrounding racial authenticity in both American and global hip-hop, to show how French rappers adapted the American racial binary to the multicultural French context. The author then draws upon scholarship in the emerging field of whiteness studies in France to locate white rappers' antiracist stances within the current structure of French racial politics. Her analysis argues that texts and images by some white rap groups give valence to their minority status in hip-hop, as a technique to position themselves outside the privilege they are presumed to enjoy as white French people.

In the final article of this volume, Dominic Thomas examines the implications of exploring definitions of race, identity, belonging and Europeanization today, asking whether it is possible to reconcile the tenuous relationship between the national and the transnational in a context framed by a 'family of democratic European countries' that 'is not a State intended to replace existing States'? His article investigates the economic, political and social asymmetries which account for transitions in migratory patterns within countries and continents and beyond strict nation(continent)al borders. These migratory routes and patterns inscribe themselves alongside a multiplicity of other twenty-first century transnational networks. If migration has emerged as a key geometric coordinate of globalization today, Thomas argues, then so too has the concern with controlling the planetary circulation of human beings (labor, asylum seekers, refugees), particularly when it comes to African continent. More recent transcolonial developments in European Union policy-making are hard to ignore, particularly regarding changes in immigration rules and regulations. Contemporary debates and policy initiatives pertaining to ethnic minorities, immigrants, race relations, and "European" identity are inextricably



connected to a much longer European colonial history, and discussions of European identity have highlighted the growing awareness that Europe itself does not correspond to a homogenous entity. Yet this observation has also yielded two opposing models for defining identity that contrast the inclusionary with the exclusionary, and insiders with outsiders.

All the articles collected in this volume problematize the construction of race and the power hierarchies which depend upon racial constructions, while focusing on the transformative potential of the literary form to perform, disturb and challenge established hierarchies. While focusing on the Caribbean basin, France and Africa, the articles also cast light on other global transnational flows of peoples, such as Indian indenture and Italian migration to France. In so doing, the work presented here gestures towards future avenues of investigation, which might consider the refugee camp, Aboriginal reserves, as well as Chinese indenture – and other South-East Asian, and indeed Middle Eastern, forms of indenture – across the Americas, or the construction of whiteness in other colonial contexts such as India and South Africa. Reading these situations through a biopolitical lens encompasses a broad range of theories: the disciplinary power wielded over bodies in order to shape, control and use them for productive means; the regulatory control of populations; and the state of exception and *homo sacer*, those people who are caught in a structure of inclusive exclusion. Biopolitical readings – which are at once theoretical *and* focused on the ‘material impulses to colonialism’ – can provide new insights into a range of postcolonial situations, and thereby point the way to new investigations into dominant powers’ persistent and insidious grip over life.