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Decolonisation and Performance Studies: Questions from the Border^[1]

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The present still carries the spectres of the past hiding behind it. (Hall, *Familiar Stranger* 24)

In the summer of 2020, when I was first invited by the journals' co-editors to be the lead editor of a special issue, my heart was in turmoil, caught in multiple intersecting crises on personal, professional, and global scales. The invitation arrived during a global pandemic, at a time that coincided with a series of events in Europe, the US, and Occupied Palestine. Events such as the violent military attacks by the US-supported Israeli occupation forces in Jerusalem and Gaza, the murder of George Floyd in the hands of a police officer in the US and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement across the globe, a growing anti-migrant sentiment, and the climate crisis, all highlighting a rise in state violence and racial injustices, and an increasingly divisive hostile climate.^[2] Together, these events revived wider debates on colonialism, White supremacy, the legacy of imperialism, institutional racism, and structural inequalities in the English-Speaking world and Western Europe. The violence to people, to the environment, and to the planet, experienced and witnessed, carry the echoes of a European imperial project that rests on the myth of its own supremacy. These were also what became the last few months of my mother's life.

Fuelled by my anger and grief, and the impulse to actively respond to such a critical time of collective undoing, at a time where demands for paradigm shifts in education, scholarship, institutional structures, and academic disciplines remain urgent, the inquiry underlining this issue's theme revealed itself as pressing and

urgent. The continued injustices and institutional violence is a result of the historical forces of colonialism, capitalism, and racism, which are part and parcel of the legacy of the European imperial project, since “[i]mperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today,” as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o argued almost forty years ago (2). Therefore, addressing legacies and structures of oppression needs to start with the critical untangling of the history of colonialism and the afterlives of the imperial project, reassessing the ongoing damage it inflicted to the resources, cultures, and epistemologies of the colonised communities and peoples. Such untangling is fundamental to acts and processes of reparation and change necessary in the current moment, and so the question of “decolonisation,” no matter how contested, poses itself as an invocation of a different future, with a promise of repair; as a self-reflexive iterative process that is necessary, difficult, and generative.

Global Performance Studies (GPS), an open-access peer-reviewed journal committed to cultural and scholarly activism, and that approaches digital publishing as a method for “disrupting and intervening in centralized, culturally specific discourses” (“About”), offers a pertinent platform for an issue that wants to reassess our understanding of “decolonisation” in the field of performance studies. Indeed, the journal was founded in 2017 with the impetus of making performance studies scholarship open access and free. Since then, the journal has been committed to coalitional management, written and media-based scholarship, as well as to the promotion of next generation researchers and graduate students. It is only logical that, precisely in the climate we face, this journal and its editorial team are the ones that publish this issue, where we have been keen on framing and rethinking histories and discourses of a field rooted in Western systems of knowledge production and communication that may be linked to forms of cultural and political imperialism. This is a pressing endeavour that is integral to the broader question on decolonisation, since performance studies’ emergence as a relatively young interdisciplinary field of enquiry, originating in the convergence of theatre studies and anthropology, implicates it in anthropology’s violent legacy of colonialism. The field’s imperialist underpinnings and the roles dominant knowledge systems play in marginalising “non-Western” epistemologies have been acknowledged as subjects of scrutiny in the past two decades by a number of scholars and publications that critiqued the dominance of the Euro-American performance paradigm. These forms of reassessment opened up debates and important self-reflection that drove attempts to explore different genealogies of performance research in search for “alternative,” counter-hegemonic ways of defining and studying performance. Jon McKenzie’s provocation “Is Performance

Studies Imperialist?," prompted by conversations during Performance Studies international (PSi) conference #10 in Singapore in 2004, and published in 2006 in *The Drama Review* journal, generated a range of responses from scholars that critically interrogated the state of the field, recognising an imperialist history that casts its shadow across a discipline marked by North American and British dominance (McKenzie 7). In reflecting on the PSi#10 conversations, Felipe Cervera, in "Planetary Performance Studies" (2017), argues that "[f]or performance studies (and research) to remain politically potent, we need to move away from reinforcing the US as the original site of performance studies; and we need to do so not least because the socio-political circumstances globally (including within the US) have changed, but more crucially because it is high time to let go of any imperialistic self-reflexivity." That is to say that the narrative and histories of performance studies need to be rewritten. This issue, thus, builds on the commitment of *GPS*, and offers possibilities to continue doing so.

In considering the decolonisation of the field, however, one must be careful not to perpetuate colonial violence. Attempts to undo hierarchical structures and unsettle centres of power in performance studies pedagogy and scholarship, often adopted in the Euro-American academy, still maintain the risk of reinforcing power formations and imperialist epistemologies, when debating the decolonisation of a field that is primarily rooted in the Euro-American academy, and that adopts systems of communication, circulation, and funding regimes located in Europe and North America. The search for "alternatives" in response to an urgent need to decentre the field's Euro-American emphasis, to "diversify" its systems of knowledge formation and promote other ways of being, thinking, and doing can turn into a gesture of inclusion that results in "distancing non-Western cultural production as radically other" (Taylor 11). Such gestures of inclusion are problematic when carried out without challenging engrained inequalities and epistemic privileges, and without consideration of the intersectionality of race, class, caste, gender, sexuality, ability, and global asymmetries. Sruti Bala argues, drawing on Roderick Ferguson in *The Reorder of Things*, "one must be wary of the academy's claims to affirm and include minoritarian or marginalised subjectivities." For while inclusion is important in the fight for justice and equality, we must not assume that inclusion is sufficient or emancipatory in itself (Bala 339). Well-meaning acts of selection and inclusion that attempt to diversify and decolonise pedagogical practices and scholarship in the academy can be reductive and exclusionary, maintain the status quo, and perpetuate epistemic violence and systematic erasure against the labour, knowledge, and experience of Black, Global Majority, and Indigenous scholars and practitioners.

There is a danger in decolonisation becoming an empty signifier or a metaphor that recentres Whiteness. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that decolonisation loses its revolutionary potential when its language is superficially adopted, replacing prior ways of talking about social justice or decentring hegemonic perspectives, and gets appropriated as a strategy to evade settler guilt and complicity, and as a premature attempt at reconciliation (Tuck and Yang). Drawing on Frantz Fanon, they assert that decolonisation specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life, and until that occurs, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler-colonialism. Decolonisation is necessarily unsettling, and demands the dismantling and relinquishing of colonial power and privilege. This means that current understanding and engagements with decolonisation continue to be fundamentally flawed as long as the sovereignty of Palestinian land and Indigenous peoples around the world is not upheld, and as long as the settlers' possession of stolen land is not relinquished. Swati Arora, in "A Manifesto to Decentre Theatre and Performance Studies" (2021), argues that "[t]he project of decolonisation requires an ethics and an imagination that is rooted in an ongoing care work and whose freedom narratives leak into every aspect of the lives of precarious bodies—a solidarity that persists beyond the fulfilling of cursory institutional agendas" (17). Arora's expansive understanding of decolonisation that is tied to the ethics of solidarity and care suggests that debates on decolonisation must go hand in hand with debates on Palestine and indigeneity.

The Euro-American academy is not an abstract place, but one that is deeply entrenched in broader politics and economy, and cannot be decolonised independently from them. The university is "built on land, and especially in the North American context, upon occupied Indigenous lands" (la paperson). However, it is also a site where these important debates and processes can be foregrounded in view of transforming structural inequalities. As Priyamvada Gopal puts it, "[i]f we take the production of knowledge seriously as a vital contributor to systemic transformation, then it would be equally perverse, indeed, harmful to leave the university out of endeavours to 'decolonise'" (11). Decolonisation is not a singular action or a linear process, and it is certainly not yet accomplished. "Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process" (Fanon 35), and a long-term commitment that demands a great deal of reflexivity and consistent active learning and unlearning.

To this end, we need critical vocabularies and frameworks that articulate processes of decolonisation. Marilena Zaroulia and Glenn Odom, co-editors of the special issue of *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, "Towards Decentring Theatre and Performance Studies" (2021), opted to use the term "decentring" for the subject of the issue that aims to explore the potential intersections between various

methodological approaches toward anti-racist, social-justice or decolonising aims. As noted in their open call, they were interested in “exploring conceptions of ‘centre’ and ‘margins,’ opening up the terms to plural and diverse understandings” (2). While in “Outing Archives, Archives Outing” (2021), a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review*, co-editors Melissa Blanco Borelli, Bryce Lease, and Royona Mitra critique the dominant understanding of the archives as White, Western, heteronormative gendered endeavours, and the property of caste privilege in the context of South Asia. They propose “outing” as a decolonial tactic and methodology that, “through a challenge to varied prevalent hegemonies, opens up alternate and embodied possibilities through which histories can be (re)examined” (4–5).

Extending these, and similar efforts to articulate the decolonial project in theatre and performance studies, by revisiting the terminologies and thinking around “border epistemology,” this issue contributes to the urgent calls, debates, and reassessments of this current moment by inviting its authors and readers to consider a future for performance studies that is more challenging to hegemonic configurations of power and epistemic privilege that place particular narratives, methodologies, and epistemologies at the “centre.” It is an invitation to unsettle notions of “centre” and “periphery,” critique, and explore understandings, methodologies, and epistemes towards decolonisation. Given the flaws in institutional understanding and practices around decolonisation, the authors featured here, myself included, ask if it is possible to imagine a “decolonised” performance studies, or a performance studies (and scholars) that hold the capacity to decolonise the field and its institutional practices. In a field of pedagogy and scholarship whose hybrid formation and transnational situatedness potentially make it a fertile ground for activism, politicised practices, and solidarity movements, how can performance studies actively and meaningfully offer critical methodologies and frameworks as part of a broader process that can enable the making of just futures? How can the field contribute to undoing the implications of colonial violence, and dismantling systems of domination still prevalent today? Is there a “border” performance studies?

In writing this editorial, and indeed, editing this special issue, I do not claim an authorial fixed answer to an ongoing discursive process that has been the subject of an enormous body of work that emerged in the past few decades. I approach the enquiry underlining the issue with humility, thinking through, and thinking with, the authors and voices I share this journey with. My impulse is to start by investing in the powers embodied within ourselves and our lived experiences as performance studies scholars and educators, in a space for learning and critique, to gesture

towards an engagement with decolonisation that is reflective of the broader socio-political conditions collectively, but also differently, lived today. I draw in this instance on Edward Said's notion of "return," as a "return to oneself" and to history, "so that we understand what exactly happened, why it happened, and who we are" (Said and Rose 86).^[3]

In the following, I open the issue with an articulation of the positionality and intention guiding this publication. I start with a reflection on my experience as a racialised migrant educator and scholar operating in the British academe, occupying a "borderlands existence" (Anzaldúa, et al. 15) inhabited as a lens to critique institutional hegemony and the decolonisation of the field. Living "inside the gaze of Western eyes," no longer simply under it (Mohanty 530), invites (re)thinking the project of decolonisation, and (re)imagining its political and ethical potentials when it means the active centring of border voices in the colonial spaces of the white Euro-American academe. In writing from an embodied, experiential form of "knowing otherwise," I take inspiration from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), which considers "border thinking" as an epistemic position, a space for resistance, and "as an embodied consciousness in which dualities and vulnerability are central for a decolonization of how we think about the geo and body politics of knowledge" (Icaza). It is a space "where critique, rupture, and hybridization take place" (Lugones 35). Following Anzaldúa's notion of "mestizo consciousness"—born from the interplay between oppression and resistance—or the "consciousness of the Borderlands" (Anzaldúa 77), I consider the self in-between, in the borderlands, crossing cultures and navigating the contradictions and ambiguity this crossing brings, which, although troubling, transgresses rigid boundaries, and destabilises universalist ideas and hegemonic paradigms. Stradling borders necessitates a willingness to let go of safety; to leave a "home" behind and make another in a new territory. It demands openness to vulnerability and not knowing, and to learning different ways of seeing and thinking, which enables a space for the production of "worlds and knowledges otherwise" (Escobar 179). "Knowing otherwise," or engaging in border thinking, is not just a matter of changing the content, but the very terms of the conversation (Mignolo, et al. 11), which activates a move towards political and ethical transformation.

In and of the Border

You have to be positioned somewhere in order to speak. Even if you are positioned in order to unposition yourself, even if you want to take it back, you have to come into language to get out of it. There is no other

way. That is the paradox of meaning. (Hall, “Old and New” 51)

I identify as an Egyptian woman educator and scholar (and, at times, artist) currently residing and working in Britain, while insistently connected to Egypt. I arrived in the United Kingdom twenty years ago—much longer than I have ever anticipated—to pursue postgraduate education (MRes and PhD), which led to a career in the British academy. My life has been divided between two geo-political and cultural “spheres” ever since.^[4] At the start of that journey, I did not foresee how deeply my sense of self and understanding of the world would be shaped by that experience, and by the consequence of straddling two different but connected realities; between the so-called global South and North; between the former colony and coloniser; “Third” and “First Worlds;” between the centre and the margin; and between two modes of cultural expression and states of being. My British education was dominated by white Euro-American paradigms and epistemologies; not much else was made available or visible. My subsequent academic practice and teaching, especially in the early years, were largely an extension of those models which formed the basis of the curricula I was expected to teach in predominantly white neoliberal academic institutions, and that my attempts to unsettle were often met with resistance, defensiveness, or lack of interest. As a result of that trajectory and epistemic shift, my intellectual and linguistic sensibilities morphed into hybrid expressions that do not fully or comfortably sit in either of the two worlds; they were something “other;” neither here nor there, but somewhere in between. Ultimately, my identity and sense of belonging gradually transformed. They were in and of the border. And I recognised myself as a “racialised migrant;” a category created through colonial discourse and that I did not hold before relocating to Britain, but conditioned by how the self is inscribed in the gaze of the Other (Hall, “Old and New” 48). That was a turning point that marked fundamental awareness of what that category entails on an existential level, which shed light on the nature of my lived experience, and that of other racialised migrants: experiences of marginalisation, hostility, and misrepresentation in the white European academe, while acknowledging, and strategically employing, the privileges that situatedness afforded. As a response, I consciously claimed the position of a racialised migrant woman as a political category, as a critical personal space, and an intersectional site of resistance and “feminist solidarity across borders” (Mohanty 502), in what Stuart Hall describes as a process of “imaginary political re-territorialization and re-identification” that produces a kind of “counter-politics.” In other words, I was to speak from the margin “the language of that which is home in the genuine sense” (“Old and New” 52–53). This is where much of the force guiding this special issue stems from, which contributes to the commitment to “making space” for

marginalised voices, practices, narratives, and epistemologies that are historically erased or misrepresented in the dominant Euro-American academe (Mitra), including performance studies scholarship.

The critique of performance studies as an imperialist field of scholarship and pedagogy, built through colonial institutional processes, has been expressed during the last decade or so by several Black, Global Majority, and Indigenous theatre, dance, and performance studies scholars from their respective positions in Euro-American academia (Mitra 2016; Bala 2017; Cervera 2017; Teves 2018; Amine 2018; Goddard, et al. 2019; Blu Wakpa and George Blue Bird 2020; Blanco Borelli, et al. 2020; Arora 2021; Sharifi and Skwirblies 2022; among others). Their critique exposes the many ways by which the dominance of white Euro-American epistemology and colonial violence continue to shape scholarly and institutional practices today, in critical, insidious, and often damaging, manifestations. While performance studies may offer useful methodological and theoretical tools, it still perpetuates colonial attitudes, as in the dominance of the English language, and the centrality of American and British performance studies institutions. The publication conventions associated with the field adopt neoliberal Western academic standards, disadvantaging scholars working outside of those norms, or without access to institutional support and the dominant academic culture. In critiquing the misrepresentation of Indigenous performance forms by non-Indigenous performance studies scholars, Stephanie Nohelani Teves writes, “there remains a gap in understanding how settler colonialism has transformed and set the terms of Indigenous performance as well as everyday life for all peoples” (135). Black, Global Majority, and Indigenous peoples and experiences are not only marginalised, but written about and objectified as a source of knowledge, appropriated, and misrepresented by White scholars. Those very White scholars entertain greater visibility and acknowledgement in performance studies conferences and publications, recognised through inequitable funding regimes and awards structures. Performance studies champions its perceived expansion across geopolitical borders and multiple sites of contestation; however, processes of international research collaboration and exchange do not account for global asymmetries across political, economic, cultural, gendered, and racial divides, which reproduces hierarchical, exclusionary, and hollow universalists rhetorics around “internationalisation.” Palestinian scholars and performance makers, in Occupied Palestine and the diaspora, face significant barriers that prevent them from participating in international academic forums, publications, and research and teaching exchange. As Rayya El Zein, Irene Fernández Ramos, George Potter, and Gabriel Varghese write, the basic principles around international exchange and

academic freedom, and freedom of access to information, underlining the governing language of theatre and performance research organisations based in the US and the UK are seriously undermined by “the violations of Palestinian human rights and the inability of international scholars to access colleagues, resources, and information in Palestine today” (410). Such international research communities fall short when it comes to initiating public, deliberate, and collective acts of solidarity that engage with the Palestinian struggle for justice, visibility, and academic freedom. Acts that can be in the form of condemning the ongoing aggressions against Gaza and the occupation of Palestine through petitions, debates, protests, and statements, not to mention refusing to be complicit in the ongoing occupation and apartheid by supporting the cultural and academic boycott of the state of Israel, are all resisted (El Zein, et al. 2018).^[5] Cervera’s review of the operation of PSi conferences across different international sites problematises performance studies’ claims to “going global,” “based on what seems to be a slim multiplication of sites working their way, more or less, around the epicentre of the discipline.” Moreover, the multiplication of sites for performance studies, he argues, remain inexorably linked to globalising processes, so the hegemony of the discipline and its terms of engagement are still firmly in place at the centre, at the risk of reproducing colonial relations. Decolonisation here, writes Bala, “means persistently training ourselves to recognise how such epistemic privileges are ingrained in our disciplinary histories and challenge them on an ongoing basis. At a basic level, it is about learning to imagine the conditions of knowledge formation differently” (340). In other words, it is the “knowing otherwise” (Escobar 2007; Mignolo 2001), the “other thought” (Khatibi 1983), and the finding “something different” (Fanon 1967) we have been collectively and urgently called to imagine and practice daily.

It is no surprise that much of the piercing critique addressed at institutional and disciplinary colonial exploitation and epistemic violence has been articulated and practiced largely through the voices of racialised scholars inside the Euro-American academy: those who transgress boundaries and straddle borders. There is much potency and power in border positions as a catalyst for intervention and transformation from inside, or the fringes, which suggests how performance studies scholars of the border can activate decolonising processes, individually and personally, and also relationally, with and for each other. They have the capacity to engage in border ethics: inside the institution, but operating outside of institutional norms and terms of engagement. I extend Arora’s call for imagining and building alternate spaces for coalitional learning and thinking, since “the university as a structure in Europe and North America is incapable of a radical

structural change [...]. But, with the structures that exist now, we—by which I mean the precarious, Black, Global Majority, Indigenous scholars—can be together in the brokenness” (18).

I take the opportunity to hold this space, as Lead Editor of the special issue, as well as Co-Editor of *GPS*, to foreground the power of the border, and to extend an invitation to consciously occupy it as a counter-space, as an intervention, and a site of subversive praxis. It is through claiming that border position, and from carving out a space for my voice in Anglophone academic culture—in co-existence with other racialised voices—that I consider an engagement with decolonisation and its potential manifestations today.

Decolonisation at the “Border”

The approach to decolonisation, in the ways proposed here, is extensive to how the editorial process of this special issue was navigated. To begin with, as Co-Editor of *GPS*—an open-access journal run by an international editorial team, two of which, Felipe Cervera and myself, are Global Majority scholars—I occupy the journal itself as a border site. On *GPS*, Cervera writes that “there is a double gesture within the name of this journal: as if it was indeed located in the limits of Earth’s stratosphere, the name places the journal’s gaze both inwards and outwards looking: global and orbital, at the same time.” The name (and its ethos) reflects the journal’s potential to occupy a contrapuntal position with its capacity to operate across geo-political, cultural, and epistemic borders, which is a claim that necessitates ongoing commitment and constant practice. It makes the journal, however, a fertile platform that can support multiple and pluri-versal articulations to coexist. This position is necessarily conditioned by how the broader discipline itself can be re-thought in order to enable different epistemes and practices to coexist. In the following, I unpack a critical understanding of decolonisation “at the border,” and its possible inflection in the editorial practice adopted here.

Fanon’s decolonisation as a form of revolutionary undoing and as a radical reordering of the entire structure of society in material terms, “the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men” (27), is necessary for thinking through decoloniality as praxis, especially in relationship to land, and in the context of settler-colonialism. My lived and political identification with the experience of racialised (border) subjects in the British academy, which I have inhabited as a vehicle for critique, reinforced the need to consider the condition of people’s migration under twenty first century’s global capitalism for an understanding of decolonisation in the current moment. The condition in which

“people of and from the Third World live not only under Western eyes but also within them” (Mohanty 516), further complicates the interweaving of histories within hegemonic colonial spaces, where the labour, agency, and “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) of racialised migrants is part of what constitutes the “West.” By implication, the project of decolonisation is problematised. This is not to renounce the project of decolonisation, but it is an invitation to redefine it by tapping into the power and politics of in-betweenness, as in centring the experiences and voices of border subjects; those who are “in but not of Europe” (C.L.R. James, qtd. in Hall, “In but Not” 58). In other words, to borrow from Khalid Amine, “[t]he Europe that we want to redeem ourselves from has become part of our past, memory and history; a part that we cannot erase” (“Performance Research in the Maghreb”). It has also become part of our present and future as racialised subjects involved in the making of Europe.

In setting the intellectual agenda for this issue, I find refuge in Stuart Hall’s writing. Hall’s work has been influential in helping me make sense of my evolving position in Britain, specifically in academic spaces. I have been conversing with his spirit and ideas in recent years, which I found a deep sense of affinity and comfort with on various levels, and so he became one of my intellectual companions. In spite of our many differences, certain key aspects of Hall’s life trajectory resonate with my lived experience and history, as we share the story of being products of the colonial afterlife, and of navigating a life through multiple spheres of being, as both postcolonial subjects from the former colony, and racialised migrant academics in the former (British) metropole. His affective language and personal recollections, merged with his fierce critique, bring his thoughts close to home. In reflecting on his paradoxical and fluid sense of belonging that shaped his understanding of himself and the world, Hall writes in his memoir *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (2017) in ways that I intimately recognise: “I experience my life as sharply divided into two unequal but entangled, disproportionate halves. You could say I have lived, metaphorically speaking, on the hinge between the colonial and post-colonial worlds; because of radically changing locations, I have belonged, in different ways, to both at different times of my life, without ever being fully of either” (11). This passage uncannily speaks of the hinge that my life has pivoted on in the past two decades. Hall’s discourse goes further, as he weaves his personal narrative with an extensive critique of the role of the empire and colonisation in the foundation of Europe, its identity, and its histories, which are closely intertwined with other identities and histories in the world. That is to say that the existence of border subjects, and the lived experiences and histories they embody, problematise the idea of a “Europe” that is built, in material and cultural terms, on

their land, labour, resources, and epistemologies, but that is also built through their migrating bodies. Fanon's famous assertion that "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World" (81) needs to be revived and reiterated when engaging with the afterlives, and the undoing of colonialism, not only in the colonies, but also within the land of the coloniser.

In Hall's article, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" (1997), he writes on the "doubleness of discourse," the inscription of identity in the gaze of the Other, an idea I draw on above in connection to my "becoming" a racialised migrant in Britain. This fundamental notion implies the breaking down of boundaries, between outside and inside, between "those who belong and those who do not, between those whose histories have been written and those whose histories they have depended on but whose histories cannot be spoken" (48). That is to say, it is only in capturing those absences and silences; the voices that have not been heard, in dialogue with those that have been spoken, that understanding the whole history will become tenable. "Everything that can be spoken is on the ground of the enormous voices that have not, or cannot yet be heard," Hall argues (48). The idea of two separate histories, told through separate voices, is not possible anymore in an increasingly globalised world. The dependency of Europe on colonised nations in the construction of its history and its sense of self, symbolically and materially, is expressed through Hall's telling of his own experience of migration:

People like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries; symbolically, we have been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolization of English identity—I mean, what does anybody in the world know about an English person except that they can't get through the day without a cup of tea? Where does it come from? Ceylon—Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history. (48–49)

There is no European history without that other history, including my history, and the many other unspoken histories. So the question of decolonisation needs to also look inwardly, within the former metropole, to unlock, and (re)centre, the silenced, unseen, and untold, as a political and ethical imperative. Gopal argues

that “‘Europe’s’ engagement with decolonisation must begin in the other direction, i.e. with the world, as it undertakes an unflinchingly truthful engagement with the pivotal role of empire and colonialism in its own making.” This means interrogating, not only the impact of Europe’s global expansion projects on the rest of the world, but also how those projects, and the world, made “Europe” and the “West.” I echo Gopal’s pertinent provocation, which resonates truthfully here: “We know about ‘Third World Debt’. What about the debts accrued by the ‘First World’ in making itself this entity? What is the relationship between the two debts?” (7).

Thinking through and re-imagining decolonisation in its particularities, then, necessitates re-examining how the relationship between the geopolitical global South and North is commonly perceived, and how a border intervention can challenge dominant universalist paradigms, and cultivate “pluri-versal” modes of thinking and being in a world marked by multiplicity and interdependence. Consciously inhabiting border spaces can enable subversive reclamation, and can act as strategic subaltern intervention in the experience of empire that unsettles the epistemic violence inherent in dominant systems, while operating from the inside or the fringes. Walter D. Mignolo proposes, after Anzaldúa, that to “de-link” from the colonial matrix of power and the logic of coloniality generates the need to engage in “border thinking,” or “border epistemology,” in the sense that the “Western” foundation of knowledge is unavoidable, but also highly limited and dangerous (“Delinking” 455–6). To dwell in the borders in that sense, is to engage with pluri-versal experiences, histories and epistemologies; in “double consciousness,” as an epistemological position that challenges the illusion of universality and contributes to shifting the centrality of hegemonic forms of knowing. De-linking, for Mignolo, “implies work at the fringes, at the border between hegemonic and dominant forms of knowledge, of economic practices, of political demands. Using the system but doing something else, moving in different directions” (Mignolo, “Introduction” 7).

I find a parallel expression of “pluri-versality” in Edward Said’s notion of “contrapuntal reading” that simultaneously considers the perspectives of both coloniser and colonised as necessary in representing and interpreting the reality and entanglements of the colonial experience. As Said puts it, “a contrapuntal perspective is required in order to see a connection between coronation rituals in England and the Indian durbars of the late nineteenth century. That is, we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others” (Said 36). The notion of a contrapuntal perspective as a

mode of interpretation and representation at the border that separates and connects is extended in Abdelkebir Khatibi's thought. Khatibi—who shares Said's interest in Orientalist discourses (Lyamlahy)—unpacks Europe's deep entanglement in the formation of postcolonial identities and knowledge, disentangling it from the inside. For Khatibi, imperialism, and ethnocentrism, continue to operate in ways that make the Fanonian approach to decolonisation difficult to actualise. He proposes a “double critique” that problematise the “East-West” binary construction: “it calls for a demystification of Western and Arabo-Islamic metaphysical logo-centrism,” and at the same time, “it seeks to deconstruct the structural cohesion of the Western episteme” in its different practices (Hamil 74). Through a tactical dialogue with poststructuralism (notably Derrida's deconstruction and Foucault's discourse analysis), Khatibi reframes decolonisation as “a deconstructive praxis of difference;” as a strategy to empower a different, collective, decentred, multilingual voice (Wolf 58); one that operates from a space of “uncompromising” difference (qtd. in 58). This approach to decolonisation is at the heart of the issue's editorial process, and its guiding principles.

These multiple and overlapping frames of thought and methodological models share an investment in the porousness of boundaries, and the crossing and re-crossing of cultural, political, and social borders, pointing towards an understanding of decolonisation that both exploits and reverses the conditions shaped by the European entanglement. And this is precisely my starting point to think about editorial work, especially in the context of a journal that uses the word “global” in its name. These epistemes signal a decolonial praxis that is pluri-versal and relational, and which demands, once again, a radical re-imagining of what constitutes the “West,” and to unsettle the dynamics governing the relationships between the centre and the margin; the oppressor and the oppressed; global North and South; identities and otherness.

Editing as a Gesture towards a Decolonial Practice

Work to dismantle white gatekeeping. For example, publishers must look at their structures of commissioning and challenge all white editorial teams, projects that do not engage with foundational Black and Global Majority scholarship pertinent to the enquiries being made, and actively seek and support projects from our communities outside of the white networks within which you currently operate. (Revolution or Nothing)

This collection is put forward as a gesture towards an engagement with decolonisation and performance studies, taking the above lines of enquiry as a

point of departure, and by bringing together the personal and the political as a site of contestation and activation. It is a space of “uncompromising difference,” in Khatibi’s terms, held for multiple voices, sometimes individual and personal, and also coalitional and pluri-versal, carrying possibilities for activating decolonising processes in the ways understood here. The multiplicity is in the different voices across various borders; in the diverse range of disciplines, methodologies, and registers; in the different languages, and in the narratives, histories, perspectives, and epistemologies, underrepresented in the predominantly white Anglo-American field of scholarship, thus, bringing forth “a narrative of multiple origins” (Cervera).

Bala argues that “[s]cholars have been all too aware of the dominance of scholarship from Euro-American universities, or the influence of monopolist corporate publishing houses, and how this has served to disadvantage scholars working outside of major European languages, without access to international conference circuits or whose formats of collaborative, practice-led scholarship do not comply with academic journal publishing standards” (338). The editorial process embedded from the outset strategies that disrupt some of the key dominant publishing conventions in Euro-American academic scholarship, or what can be described as “gatekeeping” practices that perpetuate hierarchies of knowledge, language, and methodologies. One of the main intentions was to invite articulations in the journal’s editorial languages, Arabic, English, and Spanish, with an awareness of how these languages may carry colonial legacies, while at the same time, may enable decolonial critique. It makes the issue the first multi-lingual publication in those three languages in the fields of theatre and performance studies to date, continuing the impetus for multilingual publishing that the Hemispheric Institute started with its *Web Cuadernos*.^[6] The call for papers (CFP) was translated into the three languages, but limited time and resources came in the way of translating the whole issue: an ambitious and worthy project for the future. At the same time, the unapologetic co-existence of different languages, without necessarily translating one into the other, reflects one of the conditions of the borderland: “There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born.” Following Anzaldúa, it is to ask to be met halfway (Anzaldúa, preface).

As a coalition, the *GPS* editorial team were intent on inviting and supporting contributions from under-represented and next generation scholars, particularly those that draw on broader knowledge systems, paradigms, and methodologies of understanding, making, and teaching performance, and those who write outside of dominant Euro-American scholarly formats. We aimed to include as many contributions as our time and resources enabled us to support, especially given the

large number of excellent proposals received, and which led to an expanded double-issue. Citation practices, and the peer-review process, drew on a wide range of expertise that extended across diverse disciplines and geo-political borders, especially from Black, Global Majority, and Indigenous artists, scholars, and educators. We were conscious of the specific demands of supporting, reviewing, and editing contributions written in three different languages, which necessitated adapting certain aspects of the process. The commitment to such level of integrity and care, while working with limited resources, and within a rigid neoliberal Anglophone publishing industry, meant that the editorial and production processes were additionally lengthy, labour intensive, and, at times, challenging, which is symptomatic of deeply embedded structural barriers that this issue, and its underlying methods of practice, attempt to dismantle. We are immensely privileged to host two strong contributions in Arabic and Spanish. The total number of proposals received in those languages, however, was limited, which evidences, on the one hand, the dominance of the English language networks in performance studies scholarship, and on the other, the lack of inter-language networks for non-English speaking scholars. This is in stark contrast to the claims to “internationalisation,” as it is evident that the field lacks a multilingual internationalism that enables exchange between paradigms and sites of research. Overall, the entire experience—a profoundly rewarding learning curve—highlighted the urgent and necessary need to put new structures in place to make a new kind of scholarship and publishing cultures possible; to meaningfully change the very terms, not just the content, of the conversation, to echo Mignolo’s provocation.

The twelve articles featured here are the offerings of the authors’ profound thought, at once critical and creative, and their rigour, care, commitment, and solid investment in thinking through the issue’s theme, in view of imagining and creating equitable futures and cultures of practice. All contributions demonstrate firm commitment to centring marginalised, under- or mis-represented narratives, histories, and epistemologies, which is critical to transforming knowledge production in performance studies and other fields. The contributions stem from, or engage with, cultural, historical, and geo-political contexts that span five continents, or that simultaneously cross multiple ones, between: North, Central and South America; South, Southeast and Western Asia; North and East Africa; Europe, and Australia. Coalitional authorship occupies half of the collection. Several multi-authored contributions adopt dialogic or conversational modes of writing that amplify collective voices, and decentre singular authorship. The personal, the poetic, and the political are intimately intertwined, embracing the vulnerability of lived experience as a critical site of embodied knowledge, togetherness, and

resistance.

Anika Marschall, Azadeh Sharifi, Ann-Christine Simke, and Lisa Skwirblies in “Voicing Our Concerns: Attempts at Decentring German Theatre and Performance Studies” engage in a critical conversation that reflects on their respective experiences of training and teaching in the German-speaking academy. The meeting of their multiple voices, and the candid sharing of their lived experiences, each from their respective position in the academy, reverberate with a sharp critique of German theatre and performance studies, particularly its lack of engagement with colonial history and its exclusion of the long tradition of works by feminists, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. The authors importantly propose key methodological strategies to decentre the field, through the consistent unlearning of racist attitudes and approaches to teaching and research. In “Troubling the Training: A Reflexive Dialogue on Decolonizing Performance Pedagogies in the Philippines and Malaysia,” Bryan Levina Viray and Shanny Rann build on their friendship and their ongoing exchange in an intimate dialogue on the possibility of decolonising and reimagining performance pedagogies in the Southeast Asian context. They carefully reflect on their respective training, situating their personal journeys in their socio-political contexts. They argue that the colonial violence exercised on lands and bodies can only be undone through “integration” as a decolonial method, and as a pedagogy of performance that empowers Indigenous and marginalised embodied forms of knowledge, which is integral to a broader social justice agenda.

Some of the authors experiment with form, by weaving different registers and plurivocality, in ways that challenge hierarchical modes of scholarly writing. Hui Niu Wilcox and Melaku Belay in “*Filega*/To Search: Embodying Community in Ethiopia,” offer a decolonial reading of *Filega*, an annual grassroots street performance in Addis Ababa organised by Ethiopian dance artist Melaku Belay in the context of an Orthodox Christian religious festival named Timket. Their sensitive analysis of *Filega* that is rooted in its local context, and the multi-layered mode of collaborative writing, disrupt the theory-practice dichotomy, and deprivilege the voice of the “academic scholar” as the source of knowledge making. Alessandra Montagner and Beth Lopes’ “Manifesto: A *Gambiarra* for Performance” proposes *gambiarra*—a Brazilian Portuguese term with unclear etymology that commonly refers to the makeshift assemblage of tools and utensils—as a local (decolonial) epistemology and a metaphor of the complexity, precarity, but also power underlining performance studies, and performance, in Brazil. Their voices merge in a manifesto that attempts to assemble a *gambiarra* through the form of writing itself.

The “border” emerges through the contributions in different guises, whether in metaphorical, material, or epistemic terms; as a site of critique, as positionality, or as lived experience. Faisal Hamadah and Ella Parry-Davies put forward an urgent critique of higher education as a capitalist industry that attempts to conceal its dependence on racialised division of labour among migrant university workers. Their contribution “Colonialism Reiterated: The Racialised Division of Labour in Higher Education and Beyond,” shifts between Kuwait, Singapore, and the United Kingdom as key sites of enquiry. It argues that to imagine a decolonised performance studies, one must first challenge how colonial histories continue to govern migration laws and border control in ways that undermine scholarly and pedagogical practices in educational institutions today through the political economy, and the material conditions of labour, that shape those institutions. *Performing Statelessness* is a creative, practice-led interdisciplinary research initiative that brought together artists who identify as having a First Peoples, asylum seeker or refugee background to explore what it means to be “stateless” in the context of Australia. Constructed around the experiences of dispossession and displacement enforced by the colonial nation-state, the project was co-facilitated by Tania Cañas, Ruth De Souza, Genevieve Grieves, and Danny Butt, who collectively and critically frame the project in their article. Through their framing, the authors unpack the potential of performance as anti-extractive modality within a collaborative community-led research process, exploring its ability to act as an experimental site to challenge colonial categorisations and terms of enunciation through practice and embodied pluralities.

The border as a material site in which a state defines and governs the division between itself and others is at the heart of Keina Espiñeira’s contribution “Landscapes as Narratives: Decolonising Ceuta’s Contemporary Border through Performative Filmmaking.” The work is based on the experimental film *Tout le monde aime le bord de la mer* [*The Colour of the Sea*] set in the border town of Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in the north of Africa. The territory of transit migrations is depicted in the film as a racialised limbo. Drawing on field diaries from the filming process, the author discusses the border on the symbolic plane, focusing on the implications that filmic counter-representations may have on transgressing the order they impose. The work proposes “performative filmmaking” as a potential transgressive methodology of artistic action to intervene in landscapes and spaces that are heavily loaded with political and cultural conventions. Khalid Amine’s substantial contribution in Arabic, “المسرح العربي في محك التفكير العابر للحدود” [“Arab Theatre at Stake of Border Thinking”], challenges the centrality of Western theatre from the perspective of theatre and performance studies in the Arab context. The author

critically and methodically unpacks the crisis facing Arab theatre, caught between modernity and “tradition,” in the quest for what constitutes the expression of Arab identity in a globalised world: in the face of hegemonic Eurocentric models on the one hand, and essentialist notions of identity on the other. Drawing on Mignolo’s “border thinking,” and Khatibi’s “double critique,” and by closely exploring contemporary performance experimentations by Arab theatre and performance makers (from Kuwait, Iraq, Morocco, and Lebanon), Amine proposes “border epistemology,” or “inhabiting the border,” as a necessary form of epistemological disobedience, and as a decolonial strategy.

Brahma Prakash in “But We Will Not Give Up the Categories! (De)valuing the Categories in South Asian Performance Traditions” challenges the boundaries and divisions of categories largely used in theatre and performance studies in India, and in the broader field of study of cultural performances in South Asia. In a double argument, the author critiques the disciplinary divisions between dance, theatre, and music, or modern and traditional, ritual and theatre, and so on, which continue to perpetuate hierarchical and exclusionary values rooted in colonial epistemology. At the same time, he critiques the language of decolonial scholarship that is dominated by the English language, and the languages of the native elites. He argues that decoloniality in Indian and South Asian Studies is a discourse of the diasporas that privileged, upper-caste scholars, tend to engage with, which reinforces the hierarchies of knowledge. Through exploring the work of two radical cultural organisations that blur categories, Prakash proposes that “devaluing” categories is a step further towards a radical decolonisation of the field. Dominika Laster draws on Indigenous revolutionary action in the Americas as a source of knowledge for a decolonial praxes. In “#Landback, Forced Migration, and Praxes of Hospitality: What Performance Studies Can Learn from Indigenous Revolutionary Action,” the author begins by examining trajectories of theorising and understanding “decolonisation” and “decoloniality” before guiding the reader through an important discussion on the liberation of Native lands, Nations, and peoples. She explores a range of inspirational works by Indigenous activist collectives and artists as instances of Indigenous decolonisation. A compelling example is the notion of “Indigenous hospitality,” seen within broader infrastructures of Indigenous caretaking. Laster explores examples of coalitional solidarities between Indigenous artists, scholars, and activists on the one hand, and (im)migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced persons, on the other.

Marlon Jiménez Oviedo’s contribution draws on the blurring of boundaries between past and present to advance a renewed outlook into the future. In

“Recuperation as Decolonial Practice,” the author proposes the notion of “recuperation” as decolonial performance tactic that reimagines the past, by having the creative freedom to change how it is perceived, or felt, in the present, thus moving away from romanticising that past. The notion emerged through his collaboration with Non Cuanxa, a Boruca Indigenous artistic group in Costa Rica. He shows how the work of this group “recuperates” oral, visual, and spiritual elements from the past to connect present-day Boruca people to their ancestors, and to weave their artistic practice into the communal efforts to strengthen Boruca’s political sovereignty and economic stability. Such process, argues Oviedo, repairs the effects of coloniality by rebuilding and cultivating Boruca Indigenous knowledge and practices, without positing a need to return to, or mimic, pre-colonial times. Cecilia Fiel in her contribution in Spanish proposes the study of the “outcry” as activating of a decolonial epistemic shift. “Sentir el Grito: Escucha situada en la Marcha de las Madres Mexicanas” [“Feeling Shouting: Situated Listening in the Mexican Mothers Protest”], is the result of the author’s experience during the Mexican mothers protest in Mexico City in 2019, particularly, the moment she was caught by an outcry. She describes how her experience in that moment was organised around a semantic field related to grief, rage, and desperation. The experience led her to think about how a society develops knowledge, not only through written forms, but also through sound. Fiel proposes the act of “thinking” as one that is performed through a listening process, as opposed to an intelligible or a theoretical one, the latter, she argues, commonly associated with Western epistemology.

I take this opportunity to remember late Gamal Sidki, Egyptian theatre maker and thinker who was working on his proposed article in Arabic “أساليب الأداء المختلفة بين التاريخ والمركزية الأوروبية” [“Different Performance Styles between History and Eurocentrism”]. Sidki’s proposal promised to examine critical perspectives around the evolution of performance forms in Egypt since European hegemony in the early nineteenth century, and in light of twentieth century global capitalism. He intended to ask if there is a need to redefine understandings of postcolonialism and decolonisation in current global conditions, highlighting the urgent role performance can play as a form of resistance. Sidki enthusiastically shared with me his discursive and expanding thoughts in a series of exchanges between September 2021 and January 2022, a few months before he sadly passed away on the 13th of August, 2022. It is a great personal loss, and a loss for the wider Arab theatre community in Egypt and beyond.

Collectively, the featured articles signal possibilities for considering, and acting out, the question of “decolonisation” in relation to performance studies in the present

and into its future. They propose multiple methodologies and epistemes by which the boundaries and the historic violence enacted through colonial systems can be exposed, and challenged, which is a process critical for the epistemic transformation that this issue advocates for. Together, in their pluralities and coexistence in the border space of the journal, the contributions herald a move towards re-imagining the conditions of knowledge formation away from hegemonic performance studies' narratives and histories that still carry imperial residues. Such a move is open-ended and generative of further trajectories of thinking and practice.

“Everything that is worthwhile is done with other people,” writes Mariame Kaba (178). This is how this work can be rallied farther: coalitionally, and relationally, from where and who we are.

Gratitude

This publication could not have been possible without the trust, care, dedication, and generous support of my friends, colleagues, and *GPS* Editorial Team: Founding Editor Kevin Brown, fellow Co-Editors Felipe Cervera and Theron Schmidt, and Editorial Assistant Eilidh Harrower. Their contribution to the entire process unsettles the category of “Lead Editor” given the collaborative nature of the process, and their vital role at every stage. Their insights, expertise, and wisdom were instrumental in thinking through the development of this publication. Above all, their sensitivity to the needs of this work, and the deep care and compassion they showed while holding space for me while I found my voice, and reclaimed my space in moments that felt impossible to navigate or break through, are what I hold most dearly. This attitude to publishing, in my view, comes at the heart of what makes *GPS* a journal that is capable of disrupting corporate publishing cultures, setting a model of practice grounded on ethics of care.

The final shape of the issue is also the result of the copyeditors' meticulous work: Louise Chapman (English language), Hossam Nayel (Arabic language), and Luis Esparza (Spanish language). Producing the CFP in the Arabic language is thanks to Reem Kelani's nuanced and sensitive translation, and Randa Aboubakr's generous advice. I am grateful for Maria Estrada Fuentes' support with the Spanish translation of the CFP, which was carried out by Felipe Cervera. I am grateful for Middlesex University's Faculty Research Fund that supported the issue's professional copy editing and translation. I am privileged to have the opportunity to connect with a large constellation of scholars from across the globe who acted as our brilliant peer-reviewers, generously offering their time and expertise. Their

perceptive readings and pertinent critique were invaluable, not only for strengthening the authors' work, but also for enriching my knowledge and understanding of the field.

bell hooks writes: "Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment" (138). The thinking and concerns driving this work were not formulated in a void. I take inspiration from the many friends, colleagues, students, and family members (many of whom are cited here), who navigate the challenges and powers of a life in-between. They are my "community of interests," sisterhood, and solidarity that I dwell in the border with.

I dedicate this special issue to my mother, Aisha, who still holds me at every crossing.

And I dedicate it to all marginalised and oppressed voices in predominantly White academic spaces.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Felipe Cervera and Theron Schmidt for their continuous support and their feedback in developing this piece.

[2] By listing those specific events, I do not wish to suggest a hierarchy or signal exclusions, but it is an attempt to draw a broad picture of what was occurring at the time of initiating this issue, and that acted as personal triggers.

[3] Said spoke of this notion of "return" in the context of the exiled and dispossessed Palestinians who have important historical roots and claims to land, looking at how the deferred question of an actual return can be extended in metaphorical, but necessary, terms. He also emphasised that it is important to recognise the suffering and terrors of the lived experience of dispossession and exile, which are not just metaphorical (Said and Rose 85-86).

[4] I may add that I was born and have lived as a child for a period of time outside of Egypt, in another Arabic-speaking country, so I am familiar with some dynamics of mobility and migration from a very young age.

[5] la paperson in *A Third University is Possible* (2017) writes how in January 2014, the Executive Committee of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) in the US issued a statement to “strongly oppose the boycott of Israeli academic institutions supported by certain U.S. scholarly organizations,” in direct response to the Association for Asian American Studies’s (AAAS) April 2013 and the American Studies Association’s (ASA) December 2013 resolutions to support the call for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS) by Palestinian civil society. la paperson adds that some of the discourse adopted by the APLU and other academic voices are quick to condemn BDS on the grounds of championing “free speech.” “Ironically,” la paperson adds, “the very ineffability of Palestine reflects a national policy of boycotting open dialogue about Palestine.”

[6] See: <http://archive.hemisphericinstitute.org/web-cuadernos/en>

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