



Poetry After Gaza Editors' Introduction

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In his oft-quoted statement about poetry after Auschwitz, Theodor Adorno (1967) writes that:

cultural criticism finds itself confronted with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism: writing a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that also eats into the knowledge that explains why it became impossible to write poems today. (P. 19)

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno (1990) clarifies his remark:

Perennial suffering has as much right to express as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question of whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz.



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Bourgeois coldness, Adorno suggests, is the defining principle of modern subjectivity. This subjectivity, we should add, has further been shaped by the cold hand of the image-event. Indeed, when we turn on the television, we are confronted with images of the ethnic cleansing and destruction of Gaza unfolding in real time with the extreme degree of global connection across the space of social networks. Our university emails are inundated by the news of cancelations and firings of our colleagues who dared use the word genocide to describe the Palestinian suffering. As we were putting together this issue, our colleague Ghassan Hage, author of one of the most incisive recent books on racism, has been fired from once well-regarded Max Planck Institute. As we are putting the finishing touches on this introduction, the news arrived from the University of Cologne where another colleague, Nancy Frazer, had been “cancelled” (what a ghastly word!) for daring to sign a letter in support of Palestine. The lifeless bright sameness is freezing. As we return to the screen, to the field of the image, the outsider’s experience and understanding of genocide becomes intimate, as Gazans whose names and faces are now recognized around the world invite viewers in to see directly through their eyes. Evil passes through a filter of a far-off banality when IOF soldiers post videos of themselves singing and dancing while bombing neighborhoods and looting homes that Gazan refugees are forced to flee. The cold academic landscape of the United States eats into knowledge by literally making it impossible to write or discuss poems, as academic managers cancel Palestinian literary conferences. While the cold hand of the academic bureaucrat signs these cancelations with labored indifference, the frosty silence of the academic public has been deafening. Coldness is not a category that lends itself easily to the language of the international political economy, but it is rather difficult to miss the cold, cynical, and coordinated complicity of the core states of the world economy—cooperating in the destruction of the Palestinian life. Is this, as one sociologist put it, the first advanced genocide of late capitalism? It is true, there were no cameras in Hiroshima. It is also true that the Israeli state behaves like a maddened beast and still gets its way. This is, indeed, the point we would like to make. One of the structural features that make this particular instance of the “perennial suffering” unprecedented, is the “advanced” complicitness of the world-systems core powers, including the United States and most of the EU members, all feverishly sending arms, diplomats, New York Times pundits and assorted image-life experts. To put matters somewhat more crudely, the colonial powers are involved in a concerted effort to normalize the tortured screams and, indeed, extermination of people in Gaza. The State of Israel does get its way, but the madness is singular. It is cold, disinterested. It enjoys enthusiastic (if “concerned”) support. The state of Israel is now committing the worst crime known to humanity, in front of television cameras and smart telephones, with necropolitical indifference. But this indifference is also, as a sort of a painfully convoluted political exercise, one that transforms coldness into a form of superior morality, or even an ethical imperative, as to speak or act against genocide is equivalent to supporting Hamas. The main task of the academic intellectual, against and in an opposition to the labor of indifference, is the partisan labor of constructing oppositional academic culture that refuses to be managed, complicit, and silent. So “we may go on living,” and writing, after Gaza.

Readers will forgive us, we hope, for the coldness of this introduction. It is painful to write under and against “deadlines” (yet another ghastly word) while genocide is being televised, legitimized, and normalized, and when, we feel, no single concept can get the measure of the horror of the past year. The present dark circumstances call for fresh political thought. This is why we have invited the inimitable **Peter Linebaugh** to write a commentary about the commons and commoning in Palestine. Other commentaries in this issue include crucial interventions by **William I. Robinson**, and **Jonas Van Vossle** and **Marcela Uchôa**. The four authors provide historical analyses that should be considered necessary reading as they bring horrific global events into the view of world-systems analysis. This Special Issue on “Women in World-Literature: A Woman’s Work,” compiled and edited by **Roxanne Douglas**, is a project that has been developed out of the “Women in World-Literature” conference in 2022 (organized by Douglas and Dr. Fiona Farnsworth). It centers on a single facet of women’s involvement within what she and her fellow authors refer to as a “world-literature system”: women’s work. Motherhood, sex work, affective labor, storytelling and knowledge production, consumption itself—these topics are at the core of the discussions developed by the articles in this issue. It includes contributions from **Bushra Mahzabeen**, **Charlotte Spear**, **Hendrikje Kaube**, **Madeleine Sinclair**, **Federica Lupati**, and **Hannah Gillman**, in addition to Douglas’ own contributions introducing and concluding the section.

Following on the tails of this Special Issue, we begin our Research Articles section with two contributions to the conversation that has emerged over the past four years and promises to continue to add to discussions on medicine and health within the world-system—the political, economic, and social not-quite-aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In “The World-System of Vaccine Distribution,” **Köncke** and **Schmalz** introduce the concept of “vaccine worlds,” geopolitical zones that have emerged during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, that they argue closely align with the core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral zones. Their novel approach to health inequalities through a world-systems perspective provides insight into the power dynamics at play in the innovation, production, and dissemination of vaccines on a global, geopolitical level. The article “Global Commodity Chains and the Pandemic” by **Espeter** and **Retamal** takes up a comparative analysis of economic stagnation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring the way the pandemic and responses to the pandemic by state and non-state actors has impacted agricultural labor-power in O’Higgins Region, Chile and Nakuru County, Kenya. Their analysis employs a feminist perspective that highlights the importance of gender and the gendered divisions of labor, the ways in which women in particular are impacted by the expectations of a dual burden (wage labor and reproductive labor) during periods of stagnation such as that which has followed in the wake of the pandemic.

Turning our attention to the environment and world-systems ecology, in “Where are Fossil Fuels Displaced by Alternatives” **Sikirica** pursues the question of whether or not inequality within the world-system impacts the rate at which nations adopt replacements for fossil fuels. Her article employs multilevel modeling techniques to explore the possible influence of world-systems position on variations between fossil fuel displacement between nations. **Fu** and **Balaban’s** article

“Incineration, Urbanization, and Municipal Solid Waste in the World-System” bring together literature on urban nature and scholarship on relationships between the world-economy and the environment to discuss how movement and trade of municipal solid waste is a part of urbanization, the organizing of cities within the world-system. They demonstrate the role that incineration plays in the ever-increasing role of urbanization and the pressure to urbanize, and the expansion of global trade-networks is observably part of geopolitical and economic processes within the world-system.

Changing focus to conversations about history, theory, and culture, **Karataşli** and **Clark** explore pre-capitalist labor theories of value and understandings of race through the work of fourteenth century philosopher Ibn Khaldun, specifically through his work *The Muqaddimah*. Their article, “Ibn Khaldun’s Labor Theory of Value and the Question of Race,” draws Khaldun’s work into conversation with more modern social theory, examining how both his discussions and beliefs about political economy and his expressed understanding of race can bring a much deeper analysis to the role of capitalism and racism in modern society. In “Cultural Seascapes, Regional Connections, and Colonial Powers in the Southwestern Pacific,” **Tiapa** explores colonial encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples, drawing special attention to the definition of space, of landscapes among colonists as opposed to the understanding and experience of space by Indigenous communities. He discusses how cultural seascapes, cultural experiences, and definitions of space, are embroiled in the power relations between European colonizers and those indigenous to the regions. Race, ethnicity, and culture are all imbricated within cultural seascapes; the colonization of space counterposed to culturally embedded relationships to particular spaces. **Demirel**’s article, “Anarchy in the World-System,” argues for the inclusion of a new geopolitical zone, a “semi-core,” into the world-systems perspective’s triadic core - semi-periphery - periphery, in what he refers to as an interregnum period within the world-system. In his analysis, China and Russia have emerged as the “semi-core,” a complication of a world-system already in crisis; disrupting the structure of the world-system and stratifications of power. He leaves open the possibility for the development of an alternative core as opposed to a semi-core and suggests that while it is not possible to predict an outcome, the world-system faces a possible future of chaos and instability or, perhaps, an environment ripe for anti-systemic and revolutionary movements to rise. In “The Mexican Haunting of Venezuela’s Oil Workers (1912–1948),” **Gates** explores the “puzzling” instance of labor movements in among Venezuelan Oil Workers in the first part of the twentieth century through a world-historical approach. This relational (rather than strictly comparative) analysis of oil workers in different space/times examines the history of oil extraction based labor and anticapitalist labor movements in Venezuela as a successor, in some sense, to the history of that in Mexico—an adaptive world-system, one in which capitalist exploitation and anticapitalist resistance shape and re-shape each other throughout instances within the world-system. **Kurti** and **Gönen** offer a contribution and radical intervention to the discussion of carceral power in their article “Carceral Power in the World Historical Context,” facilitating a dialogue between radical criminology, which they argue tends to focus on core countries, and world-systems analysis to bridge the limitations between the two in understandings of carceral power on a global

level. In particular, they are concerned with what they see as a depoliticization of crime and punishment that has been developing throughout the world-system.

In this issue, our Essays section includes two contributions. The first, **Ravi Palat**'s "World-Systems at Fifty" discusses the evolution of world-systems perspective as a political and academic project, situating it within the changing world-system over the course of the same time period. The second is a celebration of Antonio Negri and recognition of his work and contributions to leftist politics and academia, "Empire, Marxism, and Nationalism," by **José Neves** grants us a remarkable image of a no-less remarkable man.

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