

Introduction: Postcolonial Cultural Studies

The title of the present special issue, "Postcolonial Cultural Studies," hardly describes a burgeoning trend. Emphasizing the tentative search for a shared scholarly venture, the question mark in the title of Bernhard Klein and Jürgen Kramer's edited collection *Common Ground?* (2001) has meanwhile proven unnecessary. Crossovers between postcolonial and cultural studies have come to be integral to the academic landscape, as evident in the continuously growing number of research positions, teaching modules and international publications. Contrary to the experimental exploration of disciplinary boundaries almost twenty years ago, these are challenging times for postcolonial cultural studies, ranging from the field's institutional establishment to the broader realms of politics and the economy. Sharing a "foundational resistance to the power of the discipline" (Turner 2012, 46), postcolonial and cultural studies are regularly attacked for their "inflated popularity" (Chibber 2013, 4) or yet another "round of enforced depoliticisation" (Taylor 2018, 235). Recurring debates about the alleged loss of academic rigour and political thrust compromise the potential of a common research endeavour. Writing during the lockdown caused by the Corona pandemic, a joint scholarly project seems ever more pertinent because it fosters reflection on and intervention into the multidimensional imbalances of capital, power and knowledge production in a globalized world. Drawing on and adding to existing excursions into the thematic, theoretical and methodological territory of the two research areas, it is the aim of this special issue to demonstrate the reach and diversity of current work in postcolonial cultural studies. Instead of looking back with "nostalgia or romanticism" at the politicized beginnings of the fields, the contributions to this special issue retain "a sense of the distinctiveness" (McRobbie 2017) of the former 'undisciplines' (Turner 2012, 40-69) to approach the practices of power and resistance that inform some of the most pressing problems and flourishing phenomena in today's world.

Needless to say, such an endeavour builds on the remarkable openness and flexibility that has rendered cultural studies an influential conceptual framework for the analysis of all kinds of cultural manifestations in their varying temporal and spatial contexts early on. Redefining the critical vocabulary of male colleagues, for instance, critics like Angela McRobbie have illustrated the field's capacity to reach beyond the initial "commitment to understanding and expanding the political potential of working-class culture" (McRobbie 2017) and include the investigation of women's everyday lives. Scholars with an interest in the legacies of colonialism and issues of race have equally adapted the Birmingham agenda for their own purposes, from the pioneering work of Stuart Hall (1992), Paul Gilroy (1993) and Kobena Mercer (2010) to more recent studies of cultural practices such as rap and dancehall (Atia and Houlden 2019, 6). As these and other examples suggest, the relation between postcolonial and cultural studies is marked by mutual influences and modifications. Indicating a particular kind of cultural studies, the adjective 'postcolonial' in 'postcolonial cultural studies' similarly underscores the extent to which the current phase of postcolonial studies has been shaped by cultural studies approaches. The proliferation of publications like Simon

Featherstone's *Postcolonial Cultures* (2005), which engages with areas as diverse as music, dance and sports and thereby challenges postcolonialists' elitist focus on 'high' cultural production, reinforces the observation that "the status of literature and the literary has shifted with the move to a more culturally oriented analysis" (Huggan 2008, 12).

Postcolonial criticism has long been concerned with the analysis of literature, not least because fiction constitutes a significant medium of "appropriating, inverting or challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies" (Loomba 2005, 63). However, the privileging of textual and other aesthetic phenomena tends to neglect the socio-economic contexts of production, distribution and reception and thereby renders cultural practices of inclusion and exclusion primarily textual. As the world-leading series "Postcolonialism Across the Disciplines" published by Liverpool University Press highlights, the interdisciplinarity of postcolonial studies does not exhaust itself in the inclusion of "film, food, sport, dance, music" (McLeod 2010, 37). Despite "counteract[ing] the dominance [...] of one particular discipline," i.e. literary studies, it entails the "combination of disciplinary knowledges as the basis for contemporary postcolonial critique" ("Postcolonialism"). Attesting to the cultural studies orientation of many postcolonial practitioners, Graham Huggan, one of the series editors and author of the first volume *Interdisciplinary Measures* (2008), exceeds the narrow focus on literary texts by further developing his influential notion of the 'postcolonial exotic' (Huggan 2001) and thus shifts attention to the power structures informing postcolonial consumption. Other contributions to the series work along the same redefined lines. The concerted efforts of the Warwick Research Collective, published as *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Warwick Research Collective 2015), or the edited volume *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies* (Dalleo 2016) unearth the various inequalities that characterize postcolonial (literary) cultures by framing them as sites of neocolonial power relations.

The recent turn from textual to materialist and sociological approaches demonstrates in particular that postcolonial cultural studies no longer demarcates an "emerging field" (McLeod 2010, 37) but, rather, an established one. Starting with Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), a significant number of postcolonial scholars have explored the commodification of the postcolonial (see e.g. Brouillette 2007, 2014; Koegler 2018; Ponzanesi 2014; Saha 2018). Focusing on the "deliberate self-construction" (Brouillette 2007, 1) of postcolonial authors or investigating postcolonial film adaptations (Ponzanesi 2014, 109-155), these materialist perspectives on a 'global marketplace' testify to an increasing "interest in the economics, management, or social structures that control, produce and profit" (Brydon 2005, 760) from postcolonial commodities. The emergence of this critical strand within postcolonial studies is significant because it shifts focus from representations to the material conditions of postcolonial cultures. Emphasizing the postcolonial studies paradigm of difference, however, the market narrative tends to repeat and exhaust itself in the uncertain interstices between "the West and the Rest" (Appiah 2006, xix), between complicity with and resistance to neocolonial market structures. Against this backdrop, it does not come as a surprise that the critical voices that have accompanied postcolonial and cultural studies from their inception prove persistent.

The insight that the institutionalization of ideas and thoughts evokes critical interventions is as new as the title of this special issue. Writing in 2005, when

postcolonial criticism was still defining its 'interdisciplinary measures,' Featherstone calls the opening chapter of his book "The Nervous Conditions of Postcolonial Studies" to signal that the field's growth (beyond its conceptual borders) causes tensions and uncertainties. The same intertextual reference to Tsitsi Dangarembga's coming-of-age novel (1988) appears in Chantal Zabus's introduction to the edited collection *The Future of Postcolonial Studies* (2015), which takes the twenty-fifth anniversary of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) as an occasion to reflect on the discipline's developments. Charting the field's shifts from "its early avatar as Commonwealth literature" (2015, 3) to Homi Bhabha's notorious introduction of a 'post-Marxist' phase (2015, 4), Zabus indicates that the excessive self-reflexivity of postcolonial studies constitutes a vital reason for its productivity. Even "signposts point[ing] to the beyond" (2015, 4), such as Jasbir Jain's *Beyond Postcolonialism* (2006), which were followed by a broader reorientation towards the kind of globalization studies outlined in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's controversial *Empire* (2000) at the turn of the century, signalled anything but the end of postcolonial studies. Zabus characterizes postcolonial studies by way of medical metaphors in terms of its "near-death experience" (2015, 4) and "convalescing period of recovery" (2015, 5). Fulfilling a primarily strategic function, the pathologization of the field's various transformations ironically keeps it alive and kicking. Postcolonial studies' capacity to repeatedly rise "from its narrow deathbed" (Zabus 2015, 4) arguably results from the "reluctance to strive for coherence" (Chibber 2013, 3) or, put differently, from its willingness "to interact and even 'intra-act' with other fields" (Zabus 2015, 5). Highlighting the advantages of hybrid and in-between scholarly positions, it continues as a discourse that remains forever "anticipatory" (Zabus 2015, 1) and therefore capable of continually 'reviving' itself.

However, interdisciplinarity also bears some pitfalls, as Christopher Taylor's above reproach of depoliticization suggests. In their introduction to the recent essay collection *Popular Postcolonialisms* (2019), the editors Nadia Atia and Kate Houlden equally caution that the steady extension of disciplinary boundaries blurs postcolonial studies' political profile. Accordingly, they point to an alleged "crisis in the status and direction of the discipline, which is reflected in the proliferation of labels such as 'global fiction' and 'world literature'" (2019, 2). Vivek Chibber argues that this extension results in a "conceptual inflation" (2013, 3) of postcolonial studies which, in turn, affects the research fields it borrows from. Graeme Turner, key representative and ardent critic of cultural studies, warns that cultural studies has lost its earlier energy and political edge. Interrogating *What's Become of Cultural Studies?* (2012), Turner finds that the increasing interdisciplinary outlook of cultural studies practitioners gradually turns the field into one of those "disciplines it was set out to trouble" (2012, 1). In order to illustrate his larger argument about cultural studies' growing participation in capitalist production mechanisms, he begins his stocktaking by describing a peculiar conference experience:

At the third international Crossroads of Cultural Studies conference, hosted at the legendary point of origin, Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in 2000, the Anglo-American expansion of cultural studies was probably at its peak. There were 800 papers organized in 11 parallel sessions across three days. Many of these papers revealed the influence of the key fashion of the day – largely, sophisticated textual analyses in the service of identity politics. An often repeated story [...] has it that one of the founding fathers of cultural studies, when leafing through his copy of the book of

abstracts (a sizeable object) after he arrived at the conference, was heard to ask, sadly: 'Is this what we have become?' (2012, 1)

As Turner's anecdote makes evident, the "warning bells for cultural studies" (2012, 37) are not exclusively activated by the choice of material. They also address substantial questions of methodology and agenda in a cultural studies project. More precisely, Turner takes issue with the prevalent practice in cultural studies of "mistaking any analytical method for a political purpose" (2012, 173) and thereby reducing it to "a genre of academic performance" that is "merely self-serving" (2012, 158).

Angela McRobbie, whose feminist repurposing of cultural studies effectively challenges the above assumptions that interdisciplinarity inevitably compromises the field's political potential, arrives at more ambiguous conclusions. Reflecting on the trajectory of "British Cultural Marxism," her talk at the *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung* in October 2017 poses a research question that remains unanswered. The subtitle of her lecture – "From 'Working-Class Culture' to 'Common-Sense Neoliberalism?'" – may be read as a cautious comment on the development of cultural studies which reiterates Turner's findings about the field's subordination to a market-oriented logic of cultural exploitation. On the other hand, it may reference a broader shift in scholarly focus to the influence of neoliberalism on gender hierarchies (see e.g. McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 2008). While the question mark in the subtitle allows for both readings, McRobbie's ambiguity deliberately unsettles the above allegations and thereby raises more general questions about the functions and effects of meta-critical debates. Providing ample evidence that the institutionalization and resulting interdisciplinarity of research areas does not constitute a problem *per se*, McRobbie's talk insinuates that, in the words of Gesa Stedman, "[t]he hottest phase" of cultural studies "is followed by a cooler one," which is usually the case when "institutions are set up and become part of everyday scholarly practice" (2013, 4). In addition, the 'cooler' phases in the evolution of various disciplines commonly provoke competitions for the *most* political or *most* radical positions among different generations of scholars. Are the reproaches of Taylor, Turner and others justified or ascribable to this dynamic?

In order to prepare this special issue, the editors surveyed approximately 60 pertinent international journals specializing in postcolonial and cultural studies.¹ Finding about 100 immediately relevant articles, we decided to approach them with Franco Moretti's method of 'distant reading' (2013a)² and arrived at the following observations:

- The majority of articles prove that the disciplines are increasingly concerned with their own stocktaking, mainly occasioned by journal anniversaries or the publication of controversial interventions into the fields, which necessarily accompanies the establishment of a discipline in the academy and beyond.

1 We are grateful to our colleague Janna-Lena Neumann who looked at more than 30 cultural studies journals and thus contributed considerably to our findings.

2 Moretti's method mostly accounts for the reorientation of the humanities in an increasingly digitized research landscape. See Moretti (2013b) for an illustration of how the quantitative procedures of the digital humanities can inspire literary analysis.

- Concerning the overlaps of the disciplines, there are distinctly more postcolonial contributions to cultural studies journals than vice versa. This finding may attest to postcolonial studies' continued interest in and focus on cultural practices that value resistance and the concomitant reluctance to grapple with "the empirical question of popularity and the ideological stakes that question raises" (Bongie 2008, 283).
- Accordingly, we found a considerable number of cultural studies articles that contribute to postcolonial studies' engagement with race and ethnicity. In postcolonial studies journals, on the other hand, literary analyses (mostly of canonized postcolonial male authors like J.M. Coetzee, Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie) dominate over cultural studies explorations, indicating that the cultural turn is less significant than Huggan suggests.
- The prevalent thematic clusters to be found in both postcolonial and cultural studies journals are: hybrid and/or queer identity and belonging; memory and trauma; world literature and globalization, including digitization. Excessively 'foregrounding' (Nørgaard et al. 2010, 94-96) these fashionable but fuzzy terms and concepts, the postcolonial cultural studies articles do not create a coherent political scale of reference.

Echoing the position of Vivek Chibber, according to whom "a common set of theoretical parameters" is "increasingly hard to discern" (2013, 3) in postcolonial studies, the last observation serves to emphasize that meta-critical interventions into institutionalized fields of research do not only come from established scholars. Internal debates are equally set in motion by newcomers in search of their own position within demarcated boundaries. The 'Chibber Debate,' which was triggered by the sociologist's publication of *Postcolonial Studies and the Specter of Capital* (2013), references one of the most controversial interferences into postcolonial cultural studies of the last years. As Neil Lazarus remarks in his pointed review, "Chibber's book has made quite a splash, and has been widely talked about, debated, reviewed, applauded [...] and reviled, not only in specialist 'postcolonial' circles but also by scholars in the fields of history, sociology, development studies, anthropology, and political economy" (2016, 89). Criticizing postcolonial studies' rejection "to bring together and assess its various strands" (2013, 3), Chibber seeks to demonstrate that the field's emphasis on diversity and hybridity hampers the application of Western concepts to post/colonial contexts, discourages postcolonial class analysis and, in effect, reproduces imperialist thought (2013, 17-27). Not least because his key arguments function as an explicit frame of reference in two of the subsequent contributions (see Berg, Pardey), the introduction focuses on the study's critical reception by Lazarus in order to develop a productive perspective on the current phase of postcolonial cultural studies that underscores the significance of this special issue.

Remarkably, Lazarus begins his review with a discussion of Chibber's tone to stress that his "sheer relentlessness" and "unabating negativity" (2016, 90) not only prevent a fruitful dialogue between the study's key ideas and the materialist approaches delineated by Benita Parry (see e.g. 2004), Sharae Deckard (see e.g. 2016) or himself (see e.g. 2011).³ What Lazarus finds more problematic than being relegated to a

3 Considering the work of the Warwick Research Collective, which includes the above and various other postcolonialists, Lazarus rightly asserts that "we have not of course had to wait

footnote is Chibber's "unsettling – even distasteful [...] register" (2016, 91) which alienates progressive generations of scholars:

One might have anticipated and hoped [...] that a socialist scholar would want to draw out the *collective* nature of his intellectual activity, to make the point that he is articulating, refining and crystallising ideas shared by a *community* of other thinkers with whom he is in broad and solidaristic alliance. Instead, Chibber's register is that of heroic masculine individualism. (2016, 92; original emphases)

Lazarus leaves it open to what extent Chibber's register results from "the market principles of ceaseless turnover and compulsory novelty" (2016, 89) that he notes in view of the study's excessive marketing. However, the structure of his review suggests that Chibber's neglect of postcolonial studies' materialist branch at least partly results from the pressure to produce original and unique scholarly work. Against this backdrop, the sociologist's foray into the postcolonial field reads like a vivid illustration of Turner and McRobbie's arguments because it demonstrates how capitalism produces an academic landscape of lone fighters who sacrifice scholarly exchange for the neoliberal principle of unbridled competition. Deconstructing the originality (and thus the professed radicality) of Chibber's arguments, Lazarus shows that depoliticization reproaches – whether they are voiced by established or emerging scholars – primarily function as marketing devices.

Refusing to enter the competition that Chibber opens up, Lazarus's review serves as a key inspiration for the editors' assessment of postcolonial cultural studies' present state. His dialogic approach allows him to disclose the compatibility of Chibber's study with world-systems theory that, having a long tradition in the social sciences, provides a fruitful framework for the investigation of postcolonial cultures under the conditions of global capitalism. Similar to Lazarus, we do not suggest a return to Marxist ideology but moreover stress the epistemological advantages of looking at contemporary cultural production and consumption in terms of a combined but fundamentally uneven world-system. The initial reference to the Corona pandemic illustrates that we do not have to "reinvent the wheel" (Lazarus 2016, 92) but can draw on and appropriate existing models of thought to tackle pressing questions of the 21st century. World-systems theory helps to unearth that, instead of functioning as "some great leveller" (Jones 2020) which creates "sameness everywhere" (Lazarus 2016, 98), the global spread of COVID-19 fosters inequality on the interrelated levels of class, race and gender (see e.g. McGreal 2020; Ryan 2020). In the latest issue of *Jacobin* on "Pandemic Politics," Meagan Day classifies Corona as "The Neoliberal Virus" (2020, 34), arguing – specifically for the US-American context but no less relevant for Britain, Germany and elsewhere:

[T]he coronavirus can't accurately be said to have caused the upheaval happening around us. A virus can make a person sick enough to need a ventilator – but it can't create a shortage of ventilators. That's not the result of nature but of medical device companies promising to build them – [...] then failing to deliver, with zero consequences, leaving executives richer and the public in peril. The coronavirus didn't cause our understaffed

until 2013," i.e. the publication of Chibber's study, to recognize the merits of "a materialist critique of 'postcolonial theory' in its dominant aspects" (2016, 91).

and under-resourced hospitals – 'lean production' in hospital management did that. It didn't cause an unemployment rate that rivals the Great Depression – the United States' unwillingness to protect workers' jobs did that. (2020, 34)

The political, economic and social processes that have facilitated the pandemic therefore call for critical attention. Enabling a back and forth between national and global perspectives, world-systems theory also proves productive in making sense of current calls for national isolation or the impending power shifts in global hierarchies (see e.g. Cohen 2020), most threateningly fuelled by the US president's recent charges against China (see e.g. Rourke 2020).

Keeping in mind the agenda and audiences of *Anglistik*, it is the aim of this special issue to demonstrate the scope of contemporary work in postcolonial cultural studies that, in different ways and to varying degrees, negotiates the combined unevenness of literary and cultural world-systems. Accordingly, the subsequent contributions cover much 'common ground' – in historical, geographical, material, textual and/or aesthetic terms – and thereby invite critical reflection on today's manifold imbalances.

The first section illustrates how ecological issues relate to questions of economic power on both national and global scales. Pointing to cultural studies' "reductive concept of power" and biased selection of research objects, SEBASTIAN BERG combines indigenous studies and political economy to investigate postcolonial conflict. His article focuses on the practices of resistance that have accompanied the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a 1,200 miles pipeline that transports crude oil from North Dakota to Illinoisan refineries. Locating the conflict in a capitalist world system, he offers a materialist perspective on power, oppression and exploitation to engender "reflections on the conditions for global environmental justice." Adopting a similar interventionist perspective, KYLIE CRANE offers the tomato as a test case for postcolonial and ecological critique. Tracing the tomato's complex colonial, economic and cultural formations, she reads the production, preparation and consumption of tomatoes against the realities of exploitative labour, industrialized agriculture and environmental consequences of cultivation, packaging and transport, and then moves on to study quotidian culinary practices preserved as memories in cooking books.

Presenting different corpus-linguistic case studies, the second section focuses on the impact of digitization on methodology. The article by MICHAEL WESTPHAL and GUYANNE WILSON challenges what the authors refer to as "a Western bias in corpus-linguistic research on New Englishes." In order to develop a distinctly postcolonial method of studying World Englishes, they present a corpus-linguistic examination of question tags in the Philippine and Trinidadian components of the International Corpus of English (ICE). Emphasizing the merits of broadening the canon of corpus-linguistic variables, they "show how methods can be altered and improved to fit the sociolinguistic settings of New Englishes." Proceeding from recent trends in postcolonial and cultural studies with a special interest in Vivek Chibber, HANNAH PARDEY develops a "theoretical frame for analysing middlebrow strategies of consuming the postcolonial in the digital age." She applies the tools of corpus-assisted discourse studies and presents a linguistic keyword analysis of online reviews published on Amazon, Goodreads and YouTube. The case study covers responses to eight Nigerian novels and demonstrates how the readers' empathy with the postcolonial Other serves to construct the 'digital affect,' an emotionally constituted online community.

The third section turns to the representational and economic power structures governing post/colonial literatures. Drawing on and going beyond materialist approaches to a 'global' book market, BIRGIT NEUMANN and GESA STEDMAN focus on the position of black and Asian authors in the contemporary British literary field. Their article illustrates how marketing strategies and readerly expectations inscribe themselves in the literary texts and thus propose a method of studying postcolonial novels alongside their conditions of production, dissemination and consumption. Taking Zadie Smith's novel *Swing Time* (2016) as an example, their combined literary and socio-economic analyses demonstrate that the text participates in "reinforcing and perpetuating representations as well as structural inequalities within the British national literary field to such an extent that it stultifies innovation and challenge." JESSICA FISCHER investigates the construction of neoliberal subjectivity in two recent cultural productions, a BBC documentary on a Syrian refugee and the memoirs of an alcoholic. She reads the material against the notion of David Cameron's 'Big Society' with which he sold his post-2008 austerity policies as yet another version of middle-class self-help ideology. Fischer argues that, by transforming their abject subjects into model neoliberal subjects who 'have made it,' the documentary and the memoir support the ideology which shifts responsibility away from the state to the individual. In keeping with Lawrence Grossberg's notion of 'conjunctural analysis,' CECILE SANDTEN provides a (con)textual reading of the *Refugee Tales* outreach project which comprises three story collections as well as public readings and walks in solidarity with refugees, asylees and (former) detainees. She argues that, by 'writing back' to the hegemonic state power, these tales and walks offer an innovative, egalitarian mode of literary and political intervention aimed at speaking and acting out against the practice of indefinite detention. Concluding the section, MARIE HOLOGA's analysis of the discursive invention of blackness in the 18th century concentrates on the category of race and provides an inspiring referential frame for the previous articles in this section. Discussing Edward Long's notorious pro-slavery *History of Jamaica* (1774) alongside August von Kotzebue's popular proto-abolitionist drama *The Negro Slaves* (1796), she argues that despite their oppositional intentions both texts "construct Africans as a race apart, essentially different and in need of white support, guidance and control." This shows how "imperial normative whiteness" produces "racial Otherness" to rationalize 18th-century British slave trading activities.

Resuming the current significance of digitization, the final section illustrates the medial scope of studying postcolonial cultures in the new millennium. Focusing on the diverse performance spaces of People Theatre, PEPETUAL MFORBE CHIANGONG investigates the subversive potential of interventionist theatrical practices. Drawing on her experiences as an organizer of and participant in a range of applied theatre workshops, she compares and contrasts various case studies located in the Arts and Crafts Village in Abuja, Nigeria or the Jugendtheaterwerkstatt Spandau in Berlin, Germany to argue that the shifting locales of People Theatre possibly "enliven the ambiguities of cross-cultural interactions" and thus encourage the "development and peaceful co-existences among people." JULIA HOYDIS locates the common analytical ground of postcolonial and cultural studies in the field of contemporary dance, illustrating how critical dance studies invigorate the exploration of postcolonial (online) cultures. Her article provides a comparative analysis of three examples, namely a South

African appropriation of *Swan Lake* (2010), the Bollywood dance spectacle in *Haider* (2014), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and the dance theatre production *Ngurrumilmarrmiriyu – Wrong Skin* (2010) by the indigenous Australian dance group The Djuki Mala. Highlighting their hybrid aesthetics, she demonstrates the performances' potential to blur conventional boundaries between high and low or black and white and thereby emphasizes the capacity of dance to both "decolonize and mobilize monolithic ideas of tradition." Exploring popular cultures in India, APARNA NANDAKUMAR studies ways in which youth appropriate sartorial styles for their own purposes. While scholarship in literary and cultural studies frequently focuses on metropolitan centres, she provides case studies from small towns in Kerala in the South of India. Nandakumar opens by investigating the music video "Native Bapa" in which the band Mappila Lahala fuses local and cosmopolitan elements of language, music and clothing, before she turns to the Malayalam film *Premam* to discuss its cultural repercussions on clothing and gender as well as the moralizing responses among the middle classes.⁴

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4 We would like to thank Liesa Mayerhof for her professional support of the editing process.

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