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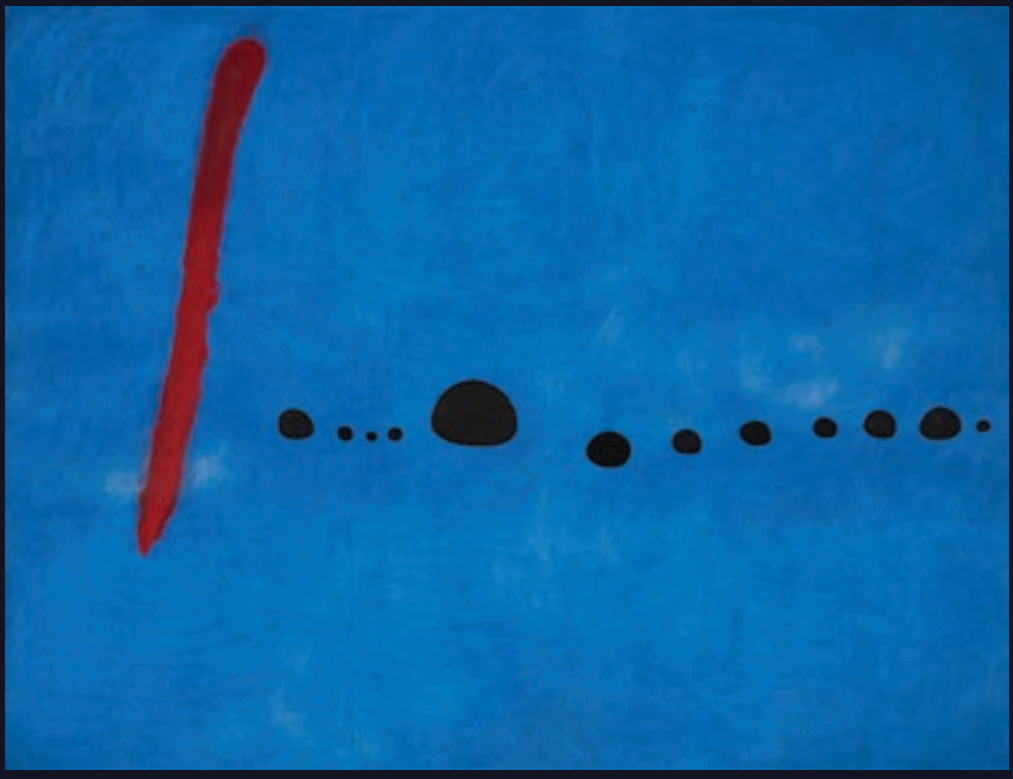

WORDS AND WORLDS

A LEXICON FOR DARK TIMES

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EDITED BY VEENA DAS AND DIDIER FASSIN

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INTRODUCTION
FROM WORDS TO WORLDS

DIDIER FASSIN AND VEENA DAS

The idea of this intellectual enterprise came out of a conversation in the gloomy context of the spring of 2017. As we were evoking our perplexity and dismay with respect to the ongoing political crisis in the United States, we realized that we had both commented on it in earlier public interventions using the figure of the return of the "grotesque" in politics (Das 2017; Fassin 2017). Like many others, we had been deeply troubled by the election of the new president, against the background of the rise of populist, nationalist, and xenophobic parties in Europe and beyond, but we were in addition disappointed with most of the hastily elaborated and often contradictory analyses made of it, whether in terms of discontent with globalization, racist backlash, cultural war, identity politics, economic protectionism, nationalism, or fascism. Our parallel discussions of the grotesque, based on both Michel Foucault's ([1999] 2003: 11) reading of it as "the fact that, by virtue of their status, a discourse or an individual can have effects of power that their intrinsic qualities should disqualify them from having," and on Alfred Jarry's ([1894] 2003) disruptive character Ubu, tried to unsettle our habitual understanding of politics in a time when the ridiculous and the odious were simultaneously legitimized as forms of governing through the person of the sovereign, to whom they paradoxically gave more power. But rather than formulating a definitive interpretation, which we did not have anyway, we used this troubling figure as a pretext to question the contemporary moment in a different way and destabilize the categories that we use to contemplate the world. As our conversation went on over several weeks, we thought that there might be some merit in extending and deepening our reflection so as to avoid the dual problem of Eurocentrism, since the debate tended to be exclusively focused on the West, and presentism,

since it seemed frozen by the fascination of current events. There was certainly something unique about what was happening here and now, and it was essential to recognize it as such. But this uniqueness, full of sound and fury, could also serve as a spark to initiate a broader undertaking, imagine other geographies, and provide alternative genealogies. This is how the project of *Words and Worlds* came into being.

The dystopian transformation of contemporary societies, of which we had caught a glimpse, has now expanded to various parts of the planet and to diverse domains of human activities. What seemed to be an aberration has become a new norm. The delusional politics of a Trump is echoed by the delirious spectacle of a Bolsonaro and a Duterte. Nationalism becomes exacerbated as the former's "America First," Modi's chants, and Orbán's slogans aggressively resound. Religious discrimination serves as a trivialized mode of governing, from the Muslim ban in the United States to the persecutions against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the oppression of the Uighurs in China, and the wily judicial tactics of amendments to the Citizenship Act in India that would disqualify Muslims from taking their rights as citizens for granted. White supremacy finds increasingly overt expressions in Charlottesville, Virginia, as well as in Christchurch, New Zealand, and Halle, Germany. The lives of migrants and refugees do not seem to have more worth at the border with Mexico than they have in the Mediterranean Sea and on Nauru Island. Neoliberal polities abandon political liberalism to privilege authoritarian policing and repress opposition. With capitalism unleashed, inequalities reach new heights and climate change threatens the future of the planet. On a daily basis, forged news and alternative facts promoted by state leaders and disseminated via social media supplant the traditional relation to authenticity and actuality. We acknowledge that not all these transformations appeared all at once, but they became increasingly visible and unrestrained: the ordinary spectacle of politics across the globe. To apprehend this dystopia, we do not need to invent neologisms but simply to vet our old vocabulary. This is what *Words and Worlds* is about.

Each chapter of the book is organized around a term that we take as part of a political lexicon. Since the idea of a lexicon is sometimes collapsed with that of a keyword format, it might be helpful to spell out the differences in the ways these ideas have come to be used in recent years to delineate different features of social life and its representation. Although there were classic precedents of using words strategically to specify a domain of life for analysis, especially in Germany with the Schlagwortforschung, research on buzzwords, initiated by Richard Meyer, and the Begriffsgeschichte, history

of concepts, developed by Reinhart Koselleck (Bondi and Scott 2010), the keyword approach is most closely associated with the work of Raymond Williams. His enterprise had started with a list of sixty words that was to be an index to his book *Culture and Society*, but the proposal had to be dropped for reasons of space. As he recalls in the preface to his later book on keywords, he expanded the list over the next twenty years and wrote short entries against each word so that the 60 words grew to 127 and included both words in common use, such as *family* and *culture*, and words more specialized, such as *hegemony* and *dialectics* (Williams [1976] 2014). In a fascinating discussion about what he means by a vocabulary, he recalls that on his return to Cambridge after the war, he had the uncanny feeling, shared by many others, that something in the use of language had shifted: "We just don't speak the same language" (11). It was not simply that some new words had entered people's vocabularies but that the weight of different words had shifted. For instance, he evokes how earlier the word *culture* was not used very often in Britain and was reserved for discussing questions of aesthetic taste and judgment. After the war, perhaps due to the exposure to North American ways of talking, people in England had begun to refer to culture as a quotidian term; today it is not uncommon to hear such expressions as *the culture of parking* or *the culture of corruption*.

Do these words then circulate in different discourse communities? Is the increasing resort to such platforms as Twitter or Facebook by authors to promote their own work an indication of the democratization of knowledge, or is this an indication of the grotesque—the Ubu-esque as it seeps into disciplinary discourses similar to the processes described by Foucault ([2003] 2006) for nineteenth-century psychiatry in France, when tokens of power came to stand for disciplinary authority? These are vexing questions, and we argue that one of the ways to address them is through careful attention to the formation of concepts and their political plenitude. We use the notion of a lexicon to indicate that words are not sovereigns to parse out separate regions of the real as much as they are nodes crisscrossing each other through which flux and movements in highly volatile milieus such as that of our contemporary world might be given expression.

To return to the keyword approach, it is clear from Williams's writing that he was himself uncertain as to whether the keywords he identified were separable semantic units—pivotal words, which had distinct boundaries though they might spill over different domains of social life—or whether it would be more useful to construe larger units such as catchphrases or whole sentences. For instance, one could think of the way J. L. Austin

([1962] 1975) uses phrases such as "I pronounce thee" or "Enough is enough" to argue that words have force, wield effects, and are thus forms of action. The growth of web semantics as a field in its own right has brought forward new questions in the way words come to be treated as keys to unraveling important social processes. Here, too, it is not easy to decipher whether the appropriate units of analysis should be keywords identified as those which are statistically determined to be frequently used and whose rise or decline would indicate changes in social domains, or should one look at longer recurrent expressions or lexical grammatical patterns, since meanings of words could vary depending on the pattern identified? For instance, the term *democracy* might appear within different clusters across regions or in different periods of time. When paired with rights, consent, voting, minorities, it points to possibly, albeit not inevitably, an aspirational politics, but when occurring within darker constellations such as those of corruption, deals, torture, and populism, it might point to a different set of anxieties. It would be the work of social analysis to lay bare the processes through which words and worlds come to be articulated by filling up the picture through a robust attention to context, so as to avoid sheer nominalism.

Although computational methods have opened up some interesting ways to decipher certain aspects of political ideology from text data using keywords, the impulse to take these findings as more objective or more scientific needs to be treated with caution. As Hao Yan, Allen Lavoie, and Sanmay Das (2017: 1) point out, even when algorithms perform well in data set cross-validation tests, generalizing from different data sets, such as congressional records and conservative or liberal media sites and wikis, is "surprisingly negative" for North American politics. This does not mean that such methods do not have potential to develop but that a robust cross-disciplinary conversation and critique is essential to think of the very meaning of political speech and its relation to both concealing and revealing regions of political life. The history of political talk in North America and elsewhere is not necessarily that of slowly unfolding tradition but of confrontation, argument, and exercise of power. As Daniel Rodgers (1987) observes, political commentators were acutely aware of the function of political rhetoric to cover up the hidden agendas, the secret deals, the hand in the till. The normativity in the usage of words, the use and abuse of language cannot be surmised from statistical frequencies alone until the context in which data are generated in the first place receives close scrutiny. Thus data generated in, say, congressional records that pertain to strategic

use of language might belong to one kind of language game, while the conservative or liberal media websites might be oriented to different modalities of communication and expression.

In a very different but crucial direction, one can explore keywords not within a language but across various languages through the delicate problem of translatability. Such endeavor leads to being attentive to divisions, differences, and transports among same or similar words in related languages, which have a history of overlapping preoccupations and mutual influence. Interestingly this approach often provides a new intelligibility of these words within one's own language. An exemplary text for considering such tensions is the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Cassin et al. 2014), which takes words and concepts to be part of a network within which dislocations, projections, and distortions are the normal fate of words and concepts as they move from one field to another. Such awareness leads to being mindful of the kernel of untranslatability, namely, the fact that our concepts might embody not only what is in circulation but also processes of doubling and mirroring, inflections that have been forgotten, intruders that have generated new connotations, terms that do not have their fields of application anymore—in other words, the whole hurly-burly of what Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009) called forms of life.

So, although we asked each contributor to write on one specific topic, all of them were invited to consider how different topics were interconnected, what kind of life these words acquired as they burrowed their way deep into the fabric of contemporary politics, economics, culture, and more broadly society. Far from seeking a reduction of reality to concepts from which experience has been expunged, we hope that their contributions cut into the many conversations on neoliberalism, authoritarianism, surveillance, disorders of democracy, risks of planetary extinction, and the crisis of trust in the presentation of facts differently than the overdetermined frameworks assuming that some single overarching concept can provide a key to characterize the widespread sense of disquietude or the feeling of business as usual.

Whereas we were propelled into this project by the pressure of the events of 2017, we were acutely aware, having worked in very different regions of the world, of the ludicrous claims that somehow the world had changed now that the United States or Europe felt threatened by unrests, protests, and movements of different kinds within or at their borders. If the timing we chose for this project was driven by the shock expressed all around us, our lexicon did not assume that the contemporary was best sensed in

events occurring in these regions of the world. We understand the emergent character of the contemporary (as distinct from the actual) but do not go along with the conceit that all innovation (for good or bad) would happen in the West while the rest would merely be producing replications of so-called Western innovation.

Our project in this sense was also oriented in a distinct direction, since it did not consist in establishing a dictionary of concepts understood as neutral intellectual tools. Rather, we understood such an approach to be reductionist and potentially dangerous; conversely, we had to start with commonsense terms so as to challenge some of our usual prejudgments. Our sentiment was, indeed, that some of these concepts were perhaps exhausted for having been overused and needed a burst of fresh air in which to flourish again. They had been circulating for a while without being called into question, and the current events suddenly made many of them appear as what they were: obsolete or, at any rate, frozen. If something positive could therefore come out of the present crisis, it might be the endeavor to query what we take for granted. The revisiting of the words that we use to better inhabit our worlds participated in such an endeavor. Scrutinizing the terms that serve to talk about what is going on without our even realizing that they may not express what we try to think and exploring their meanings and histories in various traditions and diverse contexts could give us a chance to refresh our perspective on the most serious issues of our time. If, as W. H. Auden ([1947] 2011: 15–16) writes in *The Age of Anxiety*, "the world needs a good wash and a week's rest," so do perhaps our ways of representing it, and we should not be, in his words, these "near-sighted scholars" who have uncritically "defined their terms." The task is undoubtedly immense, and our modest attempt can be only part of a larger collective effort. Moreover, while it is timely and imperative, it should be conceived of in the *longue durée*. Thus the sense of urgency that was ours when we started this project was converted into what we hope will be a long-lasting and open enterprise.

This proposal is all the more necessary since the often-praised instruments supposed to apprehend the present and forecast the future, from big data analysis to algorithm-based predictions, have spectacularly shown their limits. Moreover, they are as subject to ideological manipulations and rhetorical trickeries as old-fashioned rumors were. While recognizing the new avenues that such approaches open up, we are cautious of the overreliance on the assumption that there is one magical key that will open all doors to reality. Critical approaches to the contemporary world and its

problems such as those suggested here have been increasingly under attack or simply deemed passé, but we contend that they are not sedimented ruins of earlier times or simply subjective expressions of longings for days gone by. They are powerful repositories of modes of thinking that are being continuously sharpened by the call to respond to critical developments in the world. In these disquieting circumstances, we considered important that various disciplines engage in a dialogue beyond their epistemological differences so as to enrich our comprehension of the present moment as well as its ramifications in the past.

Thus the contributions to this volume come from anthropology, history, geography, economics, philosophy, political science, legal studies, and public health. Various methods are used, from philology to genealogy, from ethnography to historiography, from statistics to hermeneutics. The spatial decentering involves countries on five continents, from Sudan to Russia, from Colombia to India, from Cameroon to the Netherlands, from Saint Lucia to the United States, several chapters moving beyond national borders across the planet and others being in some way deterritorialized. Each author was instructed to discuss the self-evidence of the term in question and to propose an alternative reading of it—or better said, to put it to work within specific contexts in which it would uncover distinct realities. Rather than rushing in to offer readymade interpretations of contemporary predicaments, our idea was to arrive at different formulations of the issues at stake. Instead of right answers to provide, we looked for better questions to ask. This implied the recognition of points of ignorance, blind spots, and false certainties ensuing from the way we select problems, devise standards of substantiation, or adopt particular styles of reasoning. Ours was definitely not a claim that we would be able to understand the world but that we would be able to approach it otherwise.

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In the opening chapter, Veena Das unexpectedly questions knowledge. More precisely, she is interested in its dark side as it is revealed in catastrophic moments of mass violence. But rather than separating, as is often done, the inordinate knowledge about the traumatic loss and the everyday knowledge related to smaller crises, she affirms the importance of apprehending both as intimately linked. To illustrate her claim, she analyzes two cases in depth. The first one, known as the Jeju incident, concerns massacres perpetrated in 1948 by the military government of South Korea with the support of the military administration of the United States against the

residents of Jeju Island who were protesting the splitting of the country. The second one, during the Partition of India, regards the large-scale brutalization of both Hindu and Muslim women, comprising abductions, conversions, rapes, and murders that took place from 1947 on. In both cases there has been a long period of silence and secrecy with a late official recognition of the facts that had occurred in the form of discourses attempting to legitimize authorized versions, divide victims and traitors, and celebrate heroes and heroines. Contrary to this reification of knowledge through oppositions between truth and falsity and affirmations of certainty and positiveness by the authorities, ethnography uncovers the hesitations and indeterminacies in the production of knowledge within society, especially among those who have suffered from these extreme forms of violence. Investigations into the available archives as well as rituals honoring the dead offer more complex, more sensitive, and more appeasing access to unstable, contested, and often intolerable knowledge.

Discussing in a less tragic context the present fate of *democracy*, Jan-Werner Müller starts with a paradox since democracy seems to be almost universally claimed and at the same time increasingly deemed threatened. According to him, explanations of this paradox generally oscillate between a return of the past and the emergence of novel radicalities, with some searching for historical analogies and others tracking down new political theories. But the anxiety generated by this tension has also called into question the foundations of democracy inasmuch as it empowers the people through the right to vote yet rejects outcomes that might be seen as deleterious to the democratic project itself, such as electing leaders who institute authoritarian measures. Interestingly, such criticism is symmetrical to that of the populists who believe the people are deprived of their power by the elites. Both interpretations therefore give rise to a further interrogation: Who counts for the people? Whereas, from a liberal perspective, democracy formally engulfs the population in its entirety, populism distinguishes the so-called real people from the rest, on the basis of racial, ethnic, religious, or even political criteria. The populist position is contradictory not only with regard to the liberal one but with the very principle of democracy. However, its force, especially when it is in government, is to respect the letter of the democratic law while violating its spirit, thus embarrassing its critics. Many authoritarian and nationalist regimes across the planet can indeed present themselves as democratic, but just as easily, genuine democratic experiments in places outside the West can be excluded from theories of democracy on the grounds that these do not

correspond to the hegemonic paradigm—not only from these theories but also from what counts as facts pertaining to these theories. Consider US projects of destabilizing democratic regimes in order to place authoritarian leaders more open to colonial projects of extraction in new guises, and then ask why these practices, authorized by democratic governments in North America or Europe, are not part of the facts that theories of democracy must account for. More generally, as Müller argues, since liberal democracies are not implementing the values they claim, beginning with the triptych *liberty, equality, and fraternity*, which has been receding in recent decades, it becomes all the more convenient for nondemocratic forms of polities to wear the mantle of democratic honorability. Thus democracy is surely endangered now not only by its populist challengers, as is often thought, but also, and perhaps even more, by its liberal champions.

The present flourishing of authoritarianism calls for an examination of *authority*, which Banu Bargu commences with a strong claim. For her, the multiplication of forms of authoritarianism in a time when its traditional forms, that of the father and the priest as well as that of elders and corporations, have declined should be regarded neither as a mere excess of authority nor as a nostalgia for past authority but as a consequence of a void of authority. Indeed, for Bargu, modern democracies are characterized by a structural deficit of the authority of the people, which is the corollary of the conflation of authority and power on the side of the state. This argument was already formulated by Hannah Arendt, for whom the erosion of authority, understood as what produces obedience without the exercise of coercion, paves the way to authoritarian regimes. It is also developed in a genealogical perspective by Giorgio Agamben, who affirms that, whereas in ancient Rome the authority of the Senate and the power of the people were distinct, authority and power have converged in modern societies. Such evolution, theorized and defended by Thomas Hobbes, was contested by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl Marx, who viewed it as the usurpation of power by those who govern to the detriment of the people. As Bargu shows, the contemporary appeal of populism relies precisely on its denunciation of this deprivation of the people's power. In its right-wing manifestation, the leader occupies the empty space of lacking authority in the name of the people. In its left-wing expression, political participation is demanded by the people, but the leader often takes over.

The populist call to the people obviously poses the question of *belonging*. The definition or the delimitation of who counts as people is crucial in nation-states, as argued by Peter Geschiere. Remarkably, for him, the

language of autochthony, which presumes that some have a precedence over others, are entitled to special rights, and can exclude those deemed allochthones, is commonly in use in the Netherlands as well as in Cameroon, and we could add in France, Germany, and the United States as well as in India, China, Australia, and South Africa, to name a few countries. This distinction between those who belong and those who do not has its roots, he reminds us, in Greek antiquity. But it also has a more recent history. In the colonial world, in particular in the French colonies, the differentiation between natives and nonnatives became part of the form of government, whether power was preferably delegated to the indigenes or to the immigrants. In Dutch society, it is when the guest workers became unwelcome that the new terminology appeared, being supposedly neutral but actually racialized as it applied essentially to non-Western populations. However, Geschiere affirms, it is at the end of the twentieth century, after the fall of the communist regimes, that the language of autochthony and allochthony decisively prevailed. In Africa it became a way of building constituencies and led to dramatic ethnic conflicts, with a linguistic twist opposing Francophones and Anglophones in Cameroon. In Europe it fueled xenophobic policies and divided the political landscape, with a religious twist as Muslims became the principal object of suspicion. However, this distinction between those who belong and those who do not relies on the construction of imaginary communities that invent false genealogies and build true enmities.

In contrast with such potentially or effectively bellicose attitudes, *toleration* offers a powerful response to the coexistence of differences, be they ethnic or religious. This is Uday Mehta's argument based on his reading of the writings of Gandhi, whose ideas about how to live with differences are nevertheless better thought of as "forbearance." As Mehta notes, following the constitutional settlement in 1950 in India and over the past seventy years, the constitutional norm of secularism, with its own, somewhat idiosyncratic model of religious pluralism, resulted in the relatively stable coexistence of democracy and nationalism, because both were seen as accepting and vouching for the country's prolific religious and cultural diversity. Yet he also alerts us to the disquiet often expressed in India with this model as a "haunting"—the sense that India's secularism and nationalism were not as "pure" as the nationalism based on the ideal of a single language, single religion, or cultural homogeneity seen to be typical of European nationalism. Recently the belligerent claims of a strong Hindu nationalism have weakened the constitutional principles of a democracy

and a secularism that were welcoming of cultural and religious diversity. Violence against Muslim minorities, such as in the growing numbers of crowds lynching Muslims or use of political thugs to silence protests of such violations, has become blatant and open, while the passing of the notorious Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 has put in jeopardy the very idea of India as a constitutional democracy. In this context, Mehta's revisiting of the philosophy of Gandhi, one of the world's major thinkers, is important. To do so, he juxtaposes Gandhi and two European modern philosophers on the question of how to manage religious difference and delineates the profound differences in perspective. In the wake of bloody civil wars based on sectarian distinctions within Christianity, Hobbes considered that only the state could ensure the settlement of such conflicts, while Locke trusted individual respect for such private matters but relied on political mediation in case of tensions. Both therefore connected religion and security, arguing for an external interference when security was threatened by dissensions in the name of religion. Conversely, for Gandhi the coexistence of various religions was a fact that society had to deal with independently of considerations of security, accepting the possibility of conflicts and trying to minimize them without the intervention of a third party, not only because the third party was the British colonizer but also because of his distrust of the state form itself as a guarantor of peace. In his view, toleration was not a value but merely reflected the evidence of the coexistence of religions, and secularism was not inscribed in a teleological narrative but simply manifested through actual facts. Such a radically different view might seem like a form of modest pragmatism. Yet it involves a deeper philosophy that puts its trust on the pull of a spirituality-based forbearance—after all, Gandhi's notions of satyagraha, or insistence on truth, had fortified the most ordinary of people to stand up to British power with no other weapon than a body ready to receive violence. Yet today Gandhi's ideas appear archaic, and an important question is how to understand the difficulties of sustaining such notions of frugality, forbearance, and nonviolence in a context in which the state might perform its secular mandate in the letter of the law, while it is common knowledge that such claims are just smoke and mirrors.

But is the analysis of the state the best way to think about *power*? It is this question that Alex de Waal addresses. Being interested in the various centers of gravity both at a global scale and within national borders, he takes Sudan as an important case study for his analysis. In this country the state is viewed as weak and contested but also as a source of rent and

an object of robbery. Civil war has been raging for most of the sixty years since independence, with the humanitarian crisis in Darfur as the climax, ending with a peace agreement. This, too, though, eventually appeared to be a fool's game and soon broke down. Through a quasi-ethnography of the power relations at play during the negotiations between actors of the conflict, including international ones, de Waal shows how, in such contexts, politics literally becomes a marketplace in which power is a mere commodity. But this marketplace is dark and disorderly, thus generating brokerage, intimidation, and opacity of information. In short, it is a deal-making place—as some leaders elsewhere also define politics—in which transactions over private enrichment can be made to appear like pursuit of public goods. Far from the Weberian interpretation of the state as having the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force, so-called fragile states such as Sudan should be regarded as oligopolistic, with a multiplicity of rivals involved in the exertion of violence and the pillage of public goods. But, according to de Waal, beyond these local games that have ravaged parts of the African continent, such heterodox analysis calls for a revision of most contemporary theories of the state in the so-called Global South. One could, however, wonder whether these neglected dimensions of political theory, such as disorder, lawlessness, or illegibility, should not be extended to Western states, not only for the disruption and chaos that these states create in other parts of the world—think of Iraq or Libya—but also for the various forms of predatory governance encountered in the very metropolitan world.

It is an extreme form of disorder that Julieta Lemaitre explores: *war*. Indeed, the war in Colombia, considered the longest civil conflict of the twentieth century, opposing the government and the paramilitaries to the guerrillas, has devastated the country for more than half a century. However, being described as low intensity, it has not received the international attention that the more than 200,000 casualties and five million internally displaced persons would have deserved. Writing in the aftermath of the conflict that long peace talks finally ended, Lemaitre contrasts the legal discourse of human rights and humanitarianism and the public narrative of suffering and victimhood with the ordinary experience of women who fled their homes and found refuge in the city. Their experience is one of fear of suspicious neighbors and threatening youths as well as of difficult attempts to recover minimal forms of agency, one of previous collaboration with various groups engaged in the civil war as well as of awareness of the persisting role of mafias benefiting from the support of allegedly disarmed

actors of the conflict. Neither international organizations nor national institutions take this into account, as they assume a definite separation between war and peace and a clear distinction between accountable soldiers and innocent civilians, and as they emphasize the return of the rule of law and the need for reconstruction. Such analysis goes beyond the specific case of Colombia and calls for a critical take on the political and moral simplifications at work in processes of postconflict settlements, in which the actors are all too eager to find arrangements at the cost of the complex and disturbing truths they prefer to ignore.

No less complex and disturbing truths may arise from the interpretation of *revolution*, as Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi shows. Establishing a parallel between two almost concomitant facts, namely, the onset of the Iranian Revolution against the shah and his Western supporters and the debate around the French Revolution in Parisian intellectual circles in the background of the discredited communist regimes, he suggests that ironically the real event occurred at the very moment when the historical concept was waning. As the specter of an apparently irremediable ending in terror or totalitarianism loomed, the imaginary of a possibly different world carried by the revolutionary project seemed to dissolve with the discovery of the atrocities perpetrated in its name and the dictatorial regimes to which it led. But this dissolution appeared not to be ineluctable, and the Arab uprisings awakened anew the utopian hope of radical change, soon contradicted by the unfolding of the events, however, at least in Syria and Egypt. Returning to the Iranian Revolution, its ideological project was primarily a religious one, which Foucault describes in terms of political spirituality. The objective of the revolutionaries was not only to transform society, its inequality and its injustices, but also to transform themselves. Yet, Ghamari-Tabrizi argues, their political theology was difficult to apprehend from a Western perspective, as the creative and inspired dimension of the revolt was buried under representations of dogmatic backwardness and refusal of progress. In contrast, the Arab uprisings were almost immediately read on both ends of the global political spectrum in terms of rejection of authoritarianism and a democratic turn toward the liberal values of the West. Hence, the Arab Spring was designated in reference to the 1848 Spring of Nations and the 1968 Prague Spring celebrated by pundits and politicians in Europe and North America, at least until the election of Mohamed Morsi. More generally, the question posed is that of the frequent incapacity of observers to read such events in their own historical context, which leads to the betrayal of their meaning, as the actors' intentions are

lost in translation. Here, too, the question of what constitutes success and what constitutes failure is important to consider, for, if history does not belong to the victors, we might ask what residues these political aspirations leave by way of political sensibilities that might become dormant, waiting for some other occasion or form to be reignited. In other words, we could argue that there is no such thing as dead experience.

The problem of intelligibility is also at stake in the approach to *corruption*, a morally loaded word omnipresent in the contemporary world. In her study of the practices that are designated as such in Russia, Caroline Humphrey emphasizes that *corruption* refers to both the description of an act and a judgment about it but also that the act itself can receive very different interpretations depending on the perspective adopted. Thus, at a global level, international organizations produce statistics and establish rankings among countries; at a national level, each state develops its specific criteria and prescriptive discourses; and at an intimate level, individuals make evaluations regarding what they deem wrong. These perspectives can radically differ. For instance, as Humphrey explains, civil servants consider that they are entitled to obtain the best possible share of the state's resources in return for their services, and they do so according to their position in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Beyond their salary and their housing, they benefit from various forms of privilege granted by the state and of rent extorted from people situated in a lower estate. From a global perspective, these practices are generally understood as corruption. From the national perspective, they are codified, considered legal while other practices such as bribes or kickbacks are illegal. From an intimate perspective, people produce their own assessment, blaming these acts only when they are not executed according to one's rank or when they are in excess of what is expected. But on the whole, rather than being individually determined, the privileges and rents are part of a system. For example, the sum required to get a job is distributed along the hierarchical chain but also entails the necessity of illicit incomes for the new employee. Such practices reveal an economic system in which values and affects are sufficiently shared within society to allow the reproduction of these practices.

At first sight, one could think of *openness* as inscribed in a symmetrical moral economy that rejects opacity and calls for transparency. It is this widely proclaimed ideal that Todd Sanders and Elizabeth Sanders challenge. While openness seems to work hand in hand with democracy, as whistleblowers lay bare the dangers threatening citizens and journalists correct fake news through their fact-checking, a closer examination of

the implementation of this ideal shows that it has more complicated and more ambiguous implications than one often imagines. The controversies around Wikileaks leave no doubt about the potential political stakes, but it is the domain of science that Sanders and Sanders choose to explore with two interesting case studies. The first one concerns the 2009 Climategate in Britain. This scandal followed the release of thousands of private electronic documents of environment experts discussing their results; used by climate skeptics, the leak became a major contribution to the denial of global warming, but it also served to challenge the traditional scientific norms of confidentiality and secrecy. The second case study pertains to the 2017 HONEST Act, passed by the US Congress, which requires that the Environmental Protection Agency renders all the scientific data and studies on which it makes its decisions publicly available. Deemed dishonest by numerous scientific institutions, the act was regarded as one more example of the war on science, since the legislation implied the release of sensitive information and opened the way to corporate interventions, as had previously been the case for the tobacco industry. In a time when openness is consensually presented as a public good and a democratic practice, these two examples demonstrate its downside and, in the end, the manipulation to which any such supposed ideal can be submitted.

Another success story in the global parlance is *resilience*. Noting the rapid dissemination of the word in environmental debates, Jonathan Pugh inscribes it in a broader evolution of world development policies. After a long period of intervention at the governmental level through structural adjustment and state-building programs, international agencies, notably those of the United Nations, turned to what they referred to as civil society, supporting nongovernmental organizations and developing microfinance projects. The most recent addition of this turn was resilience, defined as the capacity of a community or a society to transform itself to better adapt to new challenges. The term stemmed from physics, later flourished in psychology, and was eventually adopted in policies, in particular around environmental issues. In this last context, small islands and their inhabitants appeared to epitomize the necessity and urgency of contemporary resilience as global warming menaces their very existence, with sea level rising and powerful hurricanes multiplying. But as Pugh shows, the conceptualization of the problem in terms of resilience has come down to transferring the responsibility of the management of these threats from those who produce environmental changes to those who endure them. In the wake of the reception of the so-called ontological turn, it has resonated

with a romanticized version of the noble savage, whose resilient mode of living is presented as an alternative to Western lifestyles and a response to the dangers related to the Anthropocene. Simultaneously every scene of destruction becomes also a scene of possibility within a form of capitalism in which such terms as disruptive technologies are seen as major sources of innovation. In contrast with a real estate market that does not expect to build for the long term in this context but sees natural destruction as an opportunity for short-term gains, we have to rethink the Anthropocene as a context for new forms of production that create value, not destructive consumption.

In most of these discussions, one tends to lose sight of a crucial element: *inequality*. Considering it at a global level, Ravi Kanbur analyzes its evolution from a dual perspective, which, interestingly, provides two sets of symmetrical results. On the one hand, inequality between nations, measured in terms of per capita national income, has declined in the past quarter-century, largely due to spectacular growth rates in countries such as China and India, although even Africa has benefited to a certain degree from the economic boom. On the other hand, inequality within nations, estimated via decile segmentation or Gini index, has increased in many countries, including the United States and most of Europe as well as China and India. But while, on the whole, the diminishing inequality between nations represents three-fourths of the global inequality among human beings, the income gap between rich and poor countries remains formidable. The unequal fortune depending on where one was born, which is called *citizenship rent* on the lucky side and *citizenship penalty* on the unlucky, appears to be a logical incentive for international migration, Kanbur explains. However, migrants making up only 3 percent of the world population implies, first, that the immense majority of people in the world live in the country where they were born and, second, that anti-immigrant angst is partly the result of manipulations of public opinion. Indeed, while economists, using both historical and present data, discuss the consequences of migration for the host country in terms of national income and natives' wages, it is clear that the debates about the opening of borders and the emotions mobilized around immigration have more than economic grounds. The backlash against cross-border migration, particularly in Europe and the United States, is a question of values and affects, of moral sentiments and political imaginaries. Thus the link between inequality and migration concerns not only those who leave their country in search of a better life but also those in the host country who observe with apprehension the growing disparities

that impact their lives as a result of the national policies conducted by their government.

In the end, if one word dominates the vocabulary of current concerns, it is *crisis*. As it serves to name a multiplicity of issues, its ubiquity and polysemy are both striking and problematic, Didier Fassin argues. The term itself originates in ancient Greek, with the dual meaning of a pivotal moment in the evolution of an event and of the evaluation of this event in order to adjudicate it. In other words, it associates an objective and a subjective dimension; a problem can actually exist, but it becomes a crisis only when it is problematized as such. But what happens when the two aspects are disconnected, when a serious issue remains ignored or, on the contrary, when an issue is fabricated or amplified? Such discrepancies call for an analysis in terms of authorship, Fassin argues. In the first case, the question is who has the authority to declare a crisis; the problem of police violence in the United States existed and was recognized as such by the African American populations who were victims of it long before it became a crisis when acknowledged by society at large. In the second case, the question is what the declaration of a crisis authorizes; the problem of the rise in crime was artificially created by conservative politicians in France to generate reactions of fear, justify law-and-order policies, and ultimately obtain electoral gains. A critical approach to crises therefore does not take them for granted but addresses the relations of power as well as the logics of interest at work. But the inflation in the use of the term to describe multiple states of affairs suggests a more general interrogation. Does it signal a mere trivialization of the idea of crisis or, on the contrary, suggest the existence of a world in crisis? These two interpretations are not exclusive. The banality of the term does not preclude deeper anxiety. Whereas it certainly has different meanings in various geographical and social contexts, today's prevalence of the language of crisis should not be overlooked. It certainly characterizes a form of life that involves a particular relation to time and action, a sense of urgency and disempowerment, a perplexity about the present and alienation from the future.

By a remarkable coincidence, as we were making our final revisions to this volume, the world entered an unprecedented moment as the coronavirus pandemic brought most countries on the planet to an almost complete halt. Much to our dismay, many of the disorders of democracy and governance that are discussed in the chapters that follow, including questions of scientific uncertainty and secrecy, the spread of false information, challenges to democracy, calls for resilience, and the unveiling of disparities,

presented themselves now in a vocabulary of unprecedented crises. Ironically, in many places of the world the pandemic came on the heels of other crises and became an opportunity for many governments either to use obsolete legal mechanisms to expand their powers or to create new forms of surveillance, many of which (but not all) received either open or tacit popular support. This is hardly the place to offer a detailed analysis of the global dimensions of the coronavirus pandemic or the very different ways in which measures to deal with it have impacted different kinds of populations. However, the difficult relation between science and politics that it has revealed must surely elicit serious responses from social scientists. First, the dominance of epidemiological models might have hidden from view the fact that these models explicitly excluded any consideration of ethical or economic consequences of policy choices (Das 2020a; Manski 2020). Second, given the disproportionate adverse impact on vulnerable populations such as the poor and migrant communities, one would have expected that discussion of social and economic inequality would move to center stage in public policy, yet there are few signs that such shifts will happen (Fassin 2020; Dorn, Cooney, and Sabin 2020). Finally, one must realize that many uncertainties with regard to the numbers of people infected or infection fatality ratios of COVID-19 are a result of the lack of sufficient testing in nonsymptomatic populations. Thus this uncertainty is itself produced by the shortages of testing kits, of protective equipment for frontline health workers, and failure to plan for keeping supply lines open. Said succinctly, the natural and the social cannot be parsed apart, nor can the devastation of this pandemic be understood without understanding the slow erosion of health infrastructures and the decline of safety networks that had made everyday life itself perilous for the vulnerable groups most affected by the pandemic and the modes of its management. This is the sober note on which the last chapter of this book concludes, as we are thrown into yet more dangers to the social fabric of many societies.