

Title: *The Hydra of Conflict: Western Visual Genealogies and Postcolonial Feminist Rewritings*

Abstract:

My paper presents a transhistorical and intermedial investigation into conflict as a generative principle, exploring its metamorphoses from Western visual culture to Anglophone postcolonial feminist reinterpretations. Engaged in dialogue with the EACLALS 2026 theme of 'Multiple Crises: Conflicts, Crossings, and Migrations in Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies', this contribution posits that the arts and humanities are instrumental in understanding and reimagining the plethora of crises – political, ecological, ethical, and gender-based – that have marked both the past and the present. The metaphorical representation that I have employed to better explain conflict is that of the Hydra, the mythological monster which, when one of its heads is severed, regenerates by multiplying. Like the Hydra, conflicts – whether spiritual, colonial or environmental – re-emerge throughout history in ever-new forms, transforming imaginaries and regimes of representation. My contribution re-examines the etymology of the term 'crisis' as a turning point and a moment of judgement, thus offering an alternative to the prevailing view of conflict as a space for trauma. To this end, my analysis builds on Edward Said's concept of critical humanism, proposing a relational interpretation of conflict as an ever-changing intersection of influences and resistances. The first part of my paper delineates a visual genealogy of conflict within the Western artistic tradition. In Giotto's frescoes, moral crisis is inscribed in bodily gestures, while Paolo Uccello's use of geometric perspective attempts to discipline chaos, thereby revealing the ordering ambition of the Renaissance and its inherent fragility. In the nineteenth century, Turner's *The Slave Ship* transformed the violence of the Atlantic slave trade into a sublime catastrophe, while Delacroix's allegories depicted destruction as a possibility for political rebirth. In these works, conflict emerges as an aesthetic arena in which images process collective traumas. The second part of my contribution elaborates on this idea of an artistic visualization of conflict by focusing on postcolonial feminist counter-narratives, in which conflict is actively rewritten to challenge 'totalising practices of dominance', the power structures that shape what Mbembe conceptualizes as the postcolony. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* deconstructs the colonial archive by restoring the voice of the Creole woman. In Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, individual and collective testimonies intertwine to shed light on the gendered violence inherent in colonialism. In Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre is reinterpreted to challenge the intersection of caste and capitalism. Through these writers—and through the intellectual continuity that connects them to other African and South Asian voices engaged in the redefinition of memory, ecology, and social justice—the postcolonial archive emerges as a critical space of resistance to the multiple forms of colonial, economic, and patriarchal domination. In this sense, my contribution enters into dialogue with Homi Bhabha's call for a critical rereading of the West and with Foucault's reflection on the cultural dispositifs that structure systems of knowledge and power.

In accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals on Quality Education (SDG 4) and Peace, and on Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), my analysis combines images and texts in order to show that history is capable of engendering novel forms of agency. As Arjun Appadurai theorises, culture becomes the site where the 'capacity to aspire' is exercised, transforming the narrative of conflict into an essential tool for imagining more inclusive and just societies.

Keywords: Multiple Crises, Postcolonial/Decolonial Studies, Aesthetic Negotiation, Feminist Counter-narratives, Visual Genealogies, Epistemic Dissidence.