Published in: *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls: Under Construction*, ed. by Daria Tunca & Janet Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. ix-xviii.
Status: Postprint (Authors' version)

Introduction

Gateways and Walls, or the Power and Pitfalls of Postcolonial Metaphors

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For centuries or, indeed, millennia, scholars in the humanities have based some of their most elaborate theoretical thinking on the use of seemingly simple but evocative metaphors. Most notable in contemporary times are notions such as postcolonial 'hybridity' or the poststructuralist 'rhizome', which find their roots in the scientific discipline of biology and its subfield of botany. This type of conceptual cross-fertilization has also occurred in the arts themselves – think, for instance, of how literary criticism has turned the musical and visual techniques of 'polyphony' and 'collage' (i.e. the concrete superposition of, respectively, voices and images) into flexible interpretative tools.

This constant recourse to the metaphorical is hardly surprising. As the cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have famously argued, metaphors not only pervade everyday language but they are essential components of our systems of thought, allowing us, as they do, to conceive of complex, abstract domains in terms of more familiar, concrete ones.[1] Importantly, Lakoff and Johnson indicate that the correspondences established between different domains of experience within metaphorical mappings are always partial.[2] For example, in the case of the 'collage' mentioned above, the analogy established rests mainly on the idea of superposed surfaces, but it leaves aside the fact that a visual collage, unlike a literary one, uses materials such as glue to effect the new structure. Interestingly, however, these conceptual blind spots are precisely what allows metaphors to be creatively extended, and therefore be used in such flexible, fertile ways in philosophical, sociological, and literary thought.

If this malleability of metaphors is one of their main strengths in intellectual discourse, it is, paradoxically, also one of their potential weaknesses. If metaphors originally bring the

[1] See George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980): e.g., 3 & 115.
[2] Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors WeLiveBy*, e.g., 13 & 52.

tangibility of the concrete to the elaboration of abstract thought, the flexibility of the figure also means that the analogy that initially motivated a metaphoric mapping may rapidly become obscured by disincarnated rhetorical acrobatics. This danger is exacerbated in postcolonial studies, which by definition must navigate the murky waters between tangible (economic, racial) inequalities and the slippery ideological legacies of empire that precipitated these disparities. On more than one occasion, the concrete anchoring of metaphors such as 'hybridity' has not been able to prevent the lapse into a well-meaning but homogenizing discourse that all but ignores the realities of formerly colonized peoples and eventually perpetuates the neo-colonial agenda that postcolonial criticism purportedly sought to denounce.

This is precisely the issue addressed by Norbert Bugeja in his recent discussion of the concept of 'liminality', another metaphoric buzzword in postcolonial studies, mainly popularized by Homi K. Bhabha in his *Location of Culture.*[3] As Bugeja reminds us, the term 'liminality' derives from the Latin *limen*, meaning 'threshold', and it is used metaphorically to refer to "a state of existing on the threshold of experiential or discursive conditions, or in the interstices and peripheries of social, political, and cultural normative structures."[4] The liminal, Bugeja continues, "has proved to be a fertile grounding concept for the projection of political, historical, and social positionings both within the humanities and the social sciences"; yet, as the critic cogently observes, "the 'in-between' has very often come to exist as [...] a magic password by which subaltern ontologies come to be 'empowered' by being artificially depicted as participants or stakeholders in the theoretical deconstruction of imperialist texts."[5]

In short, Bugeja identifies the liminal as a positivist, disincarnated, and potentially neo-imperialistic construct.[6] Nevertheless, rather than abandoning the notion altogether, Bugeja exposes how it can surreptitiously be put in the service of reactionary ideologies, in particular in memoirs from the Mashriq, the focus of his study. This critical endeavour partly rests on the reinvestment of the liminal (and the attendant notion of the "Third Space of enunciation," also theorized in Bhabha's *Location of Culture*) with the original concrete,

[3] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).
[4] Norbert Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East: Rethinking the Liminal in Mashriqi Writing* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2012): 2.
[5] Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East*, 2 & 3.
[6] In all fairness to Bhabha, it must be added that Bugeja's pertinent criticism of the 'in-between' stems as much from other scholars' celebratory readings of Bhabha's notion of the liminal as from the Harvard scholar's own words – indeed, the latter merely states that the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the *possibility* of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4, our italics). In other words, Bhabha does not present liminality as subversive in essence.

spatial dimensions of the *limen.*[7] Central to Bugeja's enterprise is thus a back-and-forth movement between the literal and the metaphorical, the material and the theoretical, and, ultimately – with reference to the memoirs examined in his book – the personal and the political.

These somewhat lengthy reflections on metaphor and liminality constitute a necessary starting point for outlining the rationale behind the present collection. It will not have escaped the reader that the title of this volume, *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls: Under Construction,* relies precisely on such spatial metaphors as those discussed above. The 'gateway' and the 'wall', in the context of this book, are conceptualized as figures that suggest the practical and piecemeal yet also transitional nature of postcolonial studies, and the way in which knowledge may be constructed to function as both barrier and pathway to further modes of enquiry. Using these metaphors, the volume proposes a series of case studies which, taken collectively, offer a reflection on the current condition of postcolonial criticism, whose founding theories are increasingly used alongside new models taken from migration studies or globalization theory. This expansion offers a 'gateway' to new discourses and disciplines, but, correspondingly, traditional postcolonial frameworks are also inevitably in danger of losing their critical purchase – in other words, one might feel concerned that the founding theories of postcolonialism may eventually act as 'walls' that block understanding of the increasingly complex cultural and political networks that make up the contemporary world. From this observation follows the idea that, to remain relevant in the twenty-first century, the discipline of postcolonialism must necessarily consider itself to be permanently 'under construction'. The readers of this book are, therefore, invited to perform a critical inspection of the postcolonial construction site.

Crucially, however, if the 'gateways' and 'walls' that pervade both the above paragraph and the essays in this collection are to carry any critical weight, their textual occurrence must go hand in hand with a constant re-evaluation of the metaphoric uses to which they are put. One such way of interrogating the nature and pertinence of the 'gateways' and 'walls' metaphors is to examine them, much as Bugeja did with reference to liminality, in the light of their concrete spatial incarnations. Several authors in this volume undertake such a task. For instance, Vera Alexander in her article assesses the symbolic implications behind the 'maze' in the Canadian context, while Claudia Duppé investigates the literary uses made by New Zealand writers of the Berlin Wall. Arguably, the latter construction was a quintessential embodiment of division, both literal and ideological, and its economic and political impact

[7] Bugeja, *Postcolonial Memoir in the Middle East,* 6-9.

can still be felt decades after its fall in 1989. Elsewhere in the world, other such walls and barriers continue to serve similarly divisive and exclusionary functions, whether on the Israeli West Bank or on the shores of the French port town of Calais.

Walls erected against the threat of invasion are also ubiquitous in the South African urban landscapes examined by Carmen Concilio in her essay on the works of Ivan Vladislavić. But, as Concilio shows, walls need not have a divisive function in all cases: they may also unite. Thus, Vladislavić, in his *Portrait with Keys*, evokes an artist's project of erecting a transparent commemorative wall made of resin blocks, each of which would enclose an object donated by an inhabitant of the Johannesburg area.[8] In this instance, the wall becomes an "an explicit sign of communication," as Concilio puts it, epitomizing the exploration of the instability of signs that constitutes the very terrain of art.

If one must consider the 'wall' as a fluid signifier rather than a unidimensional symbol of separation, so one must resist the temptation to celebrate the 'gateway' as having an invariably liberating role in a universally subversive practice of border-crossing. Gateways, indeed, may take the form of the infamous 'Door of No Return' through which enslaved Africans left their continent for the New World – an image invoked in this volume by Elisabeth Bekers, in her essay on the works of Caryl Phillips and Chika Unigwe. Metaphorical gateways, too, can be treacherous, as highlighted by John C. Hawley in his contribution, which focuses on crossings of the *kala pani*, the Indian and Atlantic oceans that represented impoverished Indians' 'gateways' to other lands and a more prosperous future, yet which rapidly became synonymous with uncertainty and disillusion.

In sum, the images of the 'gateway' and the 'wall' are at once suggestive, slippery, and multifaceted, and they demand to be approached from various conceptual angles. To this end, this collection of essays is divided into four parts. The first section, "Gateways and Walls: Between East and West," evokes the city of Istanbul, the literal subject-matter of some essays and a metaphorical reference point for many others.[9] Istanbul is a city of border-zones that straddles Europe and Asia, and which historically has also been a gateway between North and South, between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, between 'wild Scythia' and the 'civilized' Roman Empire, between orthodox Russia and the Byzantine metropolis of Constantinople. In paying homage to this city, the essays contained in this section take the

[8] Ivan Vladislavić, *Portrait with Keys: The City of Johannesburg Unlocked* (London: Portobello, 2006): 43.
[9] The essays contained in this volume were carefully selected from the papers presented at the 2011 conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) held in Istanbul. A different, thematically coherent cluster of articles deriving from the conference was published in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51.1 (2015), special issue on "Postcolonial Thresholds: Gateways and Walls." The

historical issues inspired by the Turkish location as a point of departure to revisit questions of imperialism, Orientalism, and East-West influences in a decidedly postcolonial and contemporary light.

The opening essay, by Gareth Griffiths, takes up the discussion of 'gateways' and 'walls' where the preceding paragraphs left off. Namely, Griffiths discusses dress – a metaphorical gateway or wall – as a signifier of either belonging or exclusion within specific, bounded space. Focusing on Kemalist reforms of dress codes in Turkey in the 1920s and examples from colonial history, the scholar shows how present-day prohibitions, most notably those linked to the Islamic veil in both Europe and Australia, are part of an evolving discourse in which clothing acts as a feature of border control and national identity-politics. Turning to the links between Turkey and the postcolonial world in the field of literature, Elena Furlanetto investigates the parallels between the works of the British Indian Salman Rushdie and the Turkish American Elif Shafak, arguing that contemporary Turkish American writers appropriate postcolonial themes to reflect Turkey's hybrid position as a former imperial power and a participant in modern neo-colonialism. Through her study of the intertextual connections between Rushdie and Shafak, Furlanetto more generally contributes to the construction of a critical gateway that enables a comparative approach between European and non-European imperial formations – an analytical framework that acknowledges both the commonalities and specificities of these formations' past incarnations and their contemporary legacies. Gerhard Stilz also establishes a link between past and present, more specifically by delving into the history of the gateway city of Istanbul. Using sources ranging from Homer to Edward Said, Stilz explores how notions of East, West, North, and South have developed since antiquity at this geographical crossroads. The critic explores not only how the dichotomies associated with the four cardinal points have shaped the discursive construction of Istanbul, but also how they emerge as variants of what he terms the "Bosphorus syndrome." Cultural crossroads, in the form of influences between East and West, are also at the heart of Padmini Mongia's essay on the literary relationship between Joseph Conrad and Amitav Ghosh. Conrad's influence on Ghosh, Mongia argues, is particularly conspicuous in the Indian writer's reliance on romantically tinted notions of geography discussed by Conrad in a 1924 essay. Ultimately, Mongia's analysis serves to expose the limits of the traditional colonial-postcolonial binary that informed postcolonial studies in its early stages. Marta Dvorak also argues against the existence of a colonial-postcolonial binary, but further contends, with specific reference to the Indian subcontinent, that cross-cultural influences

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present book might be viewed as a companion volume to this journal issue.

between colonizers and colonized were prominent well before the contemporary period, which is marked by globalizing trends. Using Bakhtin's work on linguistic heteroglossia, Dvorak shows how the English language, far from being a subjugating force, is in fact far more flexible – hence, prone to the expression of hybrid identities – than more normative indigenous languages such as Bengali.

In the second section, "Under Construction: Nations and Cultures," the nation-state is the major focus, in response to pressing questions that arise about its roles and functionality in a time when global pressures penetrate and undermine national boundaries. Within the new borderless economy where cultures as well as market forces circulate in formations of influence and exchange, nations and their identities are under reconstruction. In this part of the volume, the traditional empire-centre and colonial-periphery binary, already questioned in the opening cluster of articles, is radically challenged, as global flows and transnational and/or multi-directional movements have even more radically overturned these traditional divisions. Marie Herbillon opens this section with her reflections on the importance of the Enlightenment for an Australian philosophy. In examining the role of the hero in Murray Bail's novel *The Pages* (2008), she shows how the universalism associated with Enlightenment thought can be traced through the final textualization of the character's quest for identity. Yet Herbillon also relativizes this position in arguing that Australia's global identity demands greater cultural pluralism: Enlightenment thinking, therefore, is but one of several inherited cultural frames that produce a broader perspective on postcolonialism's traditional theorizations of settler societies and empire. Bronwyn Mills positions her essay in relation to the collision between statist discourse and earlier framings of the 'nation' as a cohesive group of persons bound by language, religion, and culture, known either as 'tribe' or as 'ethnic group'. Drawing on research undertaken in Bénin in 2007-2008, and considering African hybridities rather than authenticities, she employs as an analytical tool the way African 'nations' communicate and interrelate with each other in order to examine the creation of African beliefs and their influences on artistic practice in postcolonial African and Afro-Caribbean communities and cultures in the region and its diaspora respectively. Simran Chadha considers the position of the stateless person, the refugee or asylum seeker, in relation to the destiny of the post-independent nation-state of Sri Lanka. She enquires into the dystopian present moment and the consequence of the civil war between the government and Tamil separatists in creating millions of Internally Displaced People (lDPs) in the nation-state itself. Chadha examines three short stories for what they reveal about agency and ethnic ambiguity, to show how the refugee question marks a shift in articulations of ethnic and

national identity. John C. Hawley, in his essay, examines the Indian ocean as a gateway to new discoveries of land and self in a comparison of two texts, both concerning the island of Mauritius. Focusing on the classic quest journey to destinations both geographical and metaphorical, he finds that the voyage to the island in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) has a metaphorical counterpart in Barlen Pyamootoo's novel *Bénarès* (2004), about the hero's journey across the island in an existential search for roots. In Hawley's reading, the framing metaphor of gateways and walls, in relation to the nation and its cultures, introduces the metaphysical concept of the subject him/herself under construction. In concluding this section, Deepika Marya challenges eurocentric categories in a global era and considers how postcolonial Africa and Asia might mark a theoretical shift that will speak to the master-concept of worlding and its European claiming of the world. She returns to Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* (1800) as defining a post-hegemonic and post-national idea that will embrace universality for all. Marya advocates a literary practice that is spatialized with metaphors of displacement and mobilization, to accommodate the subaltern space rendered invisible by global discourse and to emancipate the disenfranchised. This includes superseding the comparativist frameworks associated with World Literature and exploring unifying methods for lexicalizing the non-European other, such as Said's contrapuntal as a decolonizing tool for recovering suppressed voices, literary frames of reference informed by the temporal and historical rather than categories such as nation-states, and a generative, rather than a prescriptive, lexicon that accommodates non-paradigmatic, more inclusive meanings.

Section III, "The Border: Wall or Gateway?," examines the construction of the border as both a wall, and – when crossed, deconstructed or demolished – a gateway. The essays in this part of the book all deal with manifestations of the border as wall, both literally and figuratively, and they consider points of crossing or moments of transgression. Claudia Duppé's essay is about that icon of Cold-War politics, the Berlin Wall, as represented in the work of two writers from New Zealand: the poet Cilla McQueen, whose *Berlin Diary* (1990) records her stay in the German city in 1988-89, just before the wall came down; and the Bulgarian-born poet and memoirist Kapka Kassabova, who experienced the wall in her teenage years, and returned to Berlin from New Zealand, where the family had settled in the late 1980s, as a writer in residence in 2002. Duppé investigates how both authors use the Berlin Wall as a literary trope and how this use reflects on the negotiation of both the German and the New Zealand cultural environment. Carmen Concilio examines variations on the theme of the wall in South African literature and culture before and after the demise of apartheid, using the narratives of Ivan Vladislavić to focus on the development of the wall as

a metaphor in relation to history and memory. On the one hand, she examines the wall as a divisive structure, with its attached and implied fortifications (such as iron grids, barbed wire, security systems); on the other, she evokes artistic reconfigurations of the wall as an inclusive symbol of historical memory, as mentioned earlier in this introduction. Vera Alexander investigates the role of the garden as a postcolonial border space where the relationship between human beings and constructions of 'nature' is negotiated. Her text for analysing parallels between anthropomorphization and enclosure is the Canadian writer Carol Shields's *Larry's Party* (1997): in the novel, the hero constructs mazes for a living, and Alexander examines the resulting reconfigurations of his life narrative. This section concludes with Golnar Nabizadeh's study of how the state of loss, as often found in post-national and transnational formations of migration, can be relativized with an "ethics of mourning." Her focus is on Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), a novel which, in dealing with historical events such as the Partition of 1947 and the 1964 Muslim-Sikh riots in Dhaka, privileges the work of mourning in relation to memory, desire, and imagination. Nabizadeh argues that the book's ethical engagement with the productivities of loss confirms recent critical insights into the mourning subject's imbrication in a community of others.

The final section, "Gendered Gateways and Walls," considers, as its title suggests, the book's central metaphors from a gendered perspective. Elisabeth Bekers offers a comparative analysis of Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2003) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), two narratives of illegal migration focusing on the struggle of, respectively, male and female African protagonists. Lured by the prospect of Europe as a 'gateway' to freedom and dignity, the characters, once on the continent, find themselves forced to negotiate a metaphorical 'wall' that prevents them from participating fully in white European society. Devon Campbell-Hall also discusses migrants and gender issues, but in novels by authors of Indian descent. In her analysis of Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Campbell-Hall demonstrates how young women dressing up as crones use their own bodies as 'walls' against the exoticizing male gaze. Central to this study is also the interpretation to be made of the young women's eventual decision to revert to their attractive youthful appearance. In the next essay, Margaret Daymond turns her attention to another manifestation of female agency, as expressed in the correspondence of three well-known South African women writers or activists: Bessie Head, Dora Taylor, and Lilian Ngoyi. Drawing on archival material, Daymond shows how the under-researched genre of the personal letter, often associated with the private sphere, can in fact be used as a critical gateway to the public and the political

realms. In the final essay of the collection, by Sissy Helff, the focus moves from avatars of femininity to constructions of masculinity. Examining Tim Winton's surf novel *Breath* (2008), Helff argues that the writer offers a gateway to a reconceptualization of white Australian masculinity, traditionally characterized as either heroic or carefree, with no interaction between the two. Ultimately, Helff interestingly points out, Winton nonetheless fails to address the important topics of race and ethnicity, making for a project that, particularly in the Australian context, remains partial and incomplete.

Helff's essay illustrates what many of the other essays in this volume also point to: namely, that the attainment of a contemporary postcolonial condition is itself still very much a work-in-progress – or, one might say, that it is still 'under construction'. The metaphors of 'gateways' and 'walls', which are the building blocks of this volume, thus contribute to an imagining of constructedness as consisting of different pathways, barriers, openings, and closures. In the twenty-first century, as the periphery-centre model of empire and colony yields to the overlapping disjunctive order of globalization, there is a need to define and explore more diverse trajectories, and more complex structurations. By tracing arguments and building theoretical paradigms that expand the varied routes into the discipline, over or around the obstacles and apertures of metaphorical walls and gateways, a picture of the evolving field of postcolonial studies emerges.

Admittedly, a project such as that undertaken in this collection requires constant negotiation of the treacherous frontier between, on the one hand, the evocative power and critical potential of metaphors and, on the other, the looming danger of turning the images and analogies at the heart of its conceptualizing enterprise into a stale – and, ironically, static – celebration of border-crossings and of all things 'under construction'. The best way of avoiding this pitfall, it seems, is to engage in a self-reflexive practice that continually questions its own epistemological premises. This much is suggested – in another ironic twist – in Bhabha's discussion of the "Third Space of enunciation," one of those concepts that so rapidly became fossilized in postcolonial criticism. Bhabha's theory, the scholar himself insisted, was originally meant to highlight the fact that "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew."[10] Thus, the notions of hybridity and liminality, as well as the metaphors of gateways and walls used throughout this volume, need to be constantly

[10] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 37.

contextualized, reassessed, reconfigured, so as to help us to soundly reassess the past but also ambitiously build gateways – or was it walls? – to look into the future.

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