

**Jenni Ramone, ed. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 356. ISBN: 978-1-4742-4007-9.**

Edited by Jenni Ramone, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates* makes a valuable and innovative intervention in the field of contemporary postcolonial literary studies. This volume is structured into three thematic sections that cover a variety of geographical areas (involving different linguistic contexts) and emerging narrative (even graphic) forms, even as they open up (or reactivate) a number of timely debates ranging from migration and refugeeism to gender and sexuality, down to the relationship between postcolonial studies and neoliberal economics.

In a first section devoted to “New Contexts,” Wendy Knepper’s “Another World is Possible: Radicalizing World Literature via the Postcolonial” discusses how postcolonial writing may contribute to the emergence of a radical strand of world literature that counters prevailing views of global development. To that effect, Goethe’s construct of *Weltliteratur* needs to be extended to include the voices of the dispossessed, peripheralized people. For instance, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, which blends world literary canons with creolized language forms and indigenous knowledge, so-called “World Bank novel[s]” (22), which address inequalities resulting from neoliberal globalization, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Globaletics*, which draws on Marxist theory to advocate an inclusive form of alterity, gesture towards a “world literature of development and freedom” (26) that aims at being “universal without become universalizing” (27). In “The Global and the Neoliberal: Indra Sinha’s *Animals’s People*, from Human Community to Zones of Indistinction,” Philipp Leonard holds that the inequalities and oppression caused by the belief in free markets as a way to achieve a prosperous world community cannot be fixed, as they are not mere flaws but lie at the very core of this economic tenet. This is illustrated in Sinha’s fictionalization of the 1984 Bhopal tragedy, a case in point exemplifying criminal corporate malpractice and well as the impossibility for local populations to seek redress in the context of transnational trade and production. This finding is further supported by Giorgio Agamben’s concepts of “bare life” (44), i.e. life that can be silenced and brutalized in total impunity, and of “state of exception” (45), referring to a space from which any notion of law has been removed. In “Postcolonial Economics: Literary Critiques of Inequality,” Melissa Kennedy argues that the 2008 financial crisis has lent new currency to the fiction of Dickens and Steinbeck. In the same vein, by looking into the materialist and financial aspects of imperialism that have tended to be neglected by culture-oriented theorists, contemporary postcolonial writers have depicted the processes by which inequality is produced and maintained in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, set in Burma, and Kiana Davenport’s *Shark Dialogues*, set in Hawaii, offer valuable critiques of capitalism in which economic inequality appears as too complex to fit a simple colonizer-colonized binary. In “The Postcolonial Book Market: Reading and the Local Literary Marketplace,” Jenni Ramone highlights the insights that can be gained about postcolonial texts by focusing on local literary marketplaces as an alternative to global approaches that “flatten out and repackage” (72) cultural differences in marketable ways, and stresses the significance of books and “instances of reading” (73) in postcolonial fiction. By way of example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s collection of short stories *The Thing around your Neck* deals with such themes as Western preconceptions of African literature, reading as a tool for educational self-improvement or collaborative reading as an act of resistance to the global literary marketplace. In his chapter, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee revisits the colonial-postcolonial dialectic by discussing the themes of disaster and

governance in (post)colonial India in the work of two seemingly irreconcilable writers from each era: Rudyard Kipling – for whom disasters such as famine can be addressed by effective governance and ultimately lead to romance – and Mahasweta Devi – who points at the impossibility of postcolonial governance resulting from the incomprehension and incommunicability between tribal lore and global modernity. In “Postcolonial Studies in the Digital Age: An Introduction,” Roopika Risam describes the rise of “digital humanities” (105) and explores the numerous fields brought to the fore by a postcolonial perspective on digital tools such as “decolonial computing” (108), participatory cultures of Web 2.0, computer-aided textual analysis, etc. While these developments hold great promise for disseminating and archiving postcolonial knowledge in order to fill the gaps inherited from imperialism, they often also mirror and prolong unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South.

A second section dedicated to “New Narratives” addresses a wide array of genres that have tended to be regarded as ‘minor’ in the postcolonial field, which has often given pride of place to the novel. Through a discussion of several contemporary Indian poets including Arun Kolatkar, Nissim Ezekiel, Eunice de Souza and Meena Alexander, Emma Bird argues that “Postcolonial Poetry” has been marginalized by literary scholars, whose readings have frequently privileged content over form. Instead, Bird contends that far from being any more depoliticized than prose, postcolonial poetry has been equally “informed by the violence, ruptures and historical legacies of colonialism” (128). In her chapter, she insists that approaches to this increasingly cosmopolitan form, which she considers “as a palimpsest, shaped by the simultaneous accumulation of regional, colonial and world histories” (133), should attempt to rearticulate aesthetics and politics. In “Postcolonial Citizenship in Australian Theatre and Performance: Twenty-First-Century Paradigms,” Emma Cox examines the ways in which three modern-day types of theatrical performance, namely verbatim theatre (based on the testimonies of refugees and asylum-seekers), dramatic productions involving refugee performers and site responsive live art and protest, seek to question Australia’s current asylum policies centred on the detention, harsh treatment and/or repudiation of all noncitizens whose presence on the nation’s territory has been deemed illegal. Cox demonstrates that as it “challenges prevailing political and media-related discourses surrounding the asylum-seeker and/or refugee” (142), Australia’s postcolonial theatre of non-citizenship provides a humanizing space for resistance where the dynamics of racialized belonging and the effects of territorial exclusion can be adequately faced. In “Graphic History: Postcolonial Texts and Contexts,” Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji focus on how the experience of modernity was appropriated in both the Francophone and Anglophone contexts by engaging with two different graphic fictions: Olivia Burton’s *L’Algérie c’est beau comme l’Amérique* sheds light on their author of pied-noir descent’s successive feelings of nostalgia, historical guilt and acceptance as she explores “her family’s background and role during France’s colonization of Algeria” (163), while *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (edited by Vishwajyoti Ghosh) strives to set the historical record straight and, in particular, to recollect women’s histories obliterated from the 1947 South Asian Partition’s official narrative. Not only do these multimodal texts illustrate forms of past imperial violence that have long remained incommunicable; they also testify to the “vivid persistence of collective trauma in postcolonial testimony and public history” (173). Deploring, like Bird, that “postcolonial critics’ privileging of cultural identity as expressed within the novel has resulted in a lack of attention to issues of aesthetics and formal choices” (183), Jocelyn Stitt offers an ambitious overview of postcolonial and, more particularly, Caribbean life-writing in which the notion of genre is a central focus. As she points out, the crucial generic features characterizing these postcolonial autobiographies contribute, in their own way, to

documenting the cultural specificities and local subjectivities produced by European colonialism. Kerstin Knopf's "Decolonization and Postcolonial Cinema" shows, through four distinct case studies, how Canadian, Brazilian, Australian and Nigerian filmmakers reject the hegemony of Eurocentric film discourses and deconstruct "the neo-colonial Western gaze" (192) in order to present, instead, "an Indigenous perspective" (195). While Shirley Cheechoo (Cree) and Marco Bechis (Chilean-Italian) are both concerned with Indigenous land reclamation movements that aim at denouncing territorial appropriation by white settlers in Canada and Brazil respectively, the Aboriginal director Richard J. Frankland humorously debunks white myths founded on the exoticizing misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures. Similarly, Nigeria's Nollywood deploys decolonizing strategies which clearly criticize the Western film industry's unmodern depictions of Nigerian identities. As for Jenni Ramone's interview with Seth Alter, it takes issue with the widespread societal perception that all computer games are necessarily anecdotal. Inasmuch as "Neocolonialism: Ruin Everything" (Alter's first video creation) forces players to rethink the extent to which their own uncontrolled capitalism may contribute to the ruination of the world, it indeed suggests that while postcolonial gaming "can't change the world any more than books or movies can [...], it] can change how someone perceives the world" (212).

In the book's third part, entitled "New Debates," three scholars broach the prominent postcolonial topic of migration from fresh angles. In "Postcolonial Refugees, Displacement, Dispossession and Economics of Abandonment in the Capitalist World System," Stephen Morton explains how the logic of economic neoliberalism has framed the figure of the postcolonial refugee and made it impossible to distinguish between "the (legitimate) asylum seeker and the (illegitimate) economic migrant" (or 'crimmigrant') – a "false dichotomy" (219) that permeates today's political discourses. In the same way as Mehta and Mukherji, he refers, more specifically, to all the women who were displaced and dispossessed of their bodies and (hi)stories in the wake of India's Partition, maintaining that they were then cast as disposable by a comparable capitalist logic. In her chapter, Subha Xavier first considers some foundational concepts in migration and diaspora studies, before pondering how aspects of these theories may, on the one hand, help reconfigure the postcolonial field and, on the other, be related to two representatives of the contemporary literatures of migration and diaspora. After indicating that the alleged feminization of migration was more likely to derive from an increased concern with gender difference in migration, Xavier sets out to outline the Chinese (but France-based) writer Shan Sa's "migrant feminism" (265), while the writings of Haitian-Canadian author Dany Laferrière are associated with the transnationalism that is said to characterize diasporic (rather than migrant) subjects. As for John Cullen Gruesser, he surveys some of the most seminal works published by scholars of "Postcolonialism and African American Literature" (such as Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back*, Henry Louis Gates Jr's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* or Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*), so as to determine the extent to which these two hitherto distinct fields could benefit from each other's "theoretical terminology" (286) if they were willing to find a common ground collapsing the binarism that has opposed them to this day. Additionally, this section raises the questions of postcolonial sexuality and secularism. In "Postcolonial Sexualities and the Intelligibility of Dissidence," Humaira Saeed shows, through reference to the novels *A Married Woman*, by Manju Kapur, and *Cereus Blooms at Night*, by Shani Mootto, how postcolonial texts can articulate forms of dissident sexuality that take local kinship structures into account and resist Western epistemologies and identity categories, as well as the "universalizing push of global homosexuality" (247) which, she submits, is but yet another form of imperialist capitalism that only allows for the incorporation of "race-, class- and gender-sanitized queers" (243). In

“Faith, Secularism and Community in Womanist Literature from the Neocolonial Caribbean,” Dawn Mirand Sherratt-Bado discusses narrative texts by three Afro-Caribbean woman writers that emerge as alternative womanist forms to the male-centred, Western bildungsroman. In each of them, the young black woman protagonist suffers a moral or physical disease that can only be cured by “obeah” (291), a syncretic form of folk medicine and religion that also morphed into a political tool of postcolonial resistance. Obeah and its derivatives, which are illegal to this day in the Caribbean, are thereby rehabilitated as valid epistemologies. In “Secularism in India: Principles and Policies,” Manav Ratti describes the peculiarities of Indian secularism, as well as the criticisms and challenges it has to face. As a consequence of several factors, among which democracy, India’s colonial history, its huge population and high percentage of believers, Indian secularism has close links with nationalism (as an antidote to sectarianism) but places a special emphasis on religious communities. The controversial concept of “principled distance” (312) allows the state to intervene to various degrees in different religions in the interest of democracy and nationhood, while persisting religious violence between Hindus and Muslims remains a major challenge.

Through its engagement with a range of pressing postcolonial issues, this advanced introduction, which includes a useful glossary of key critical terms, evidences the ongoing relevance, in today’s world, of the postcolonial and its “narratives of resistance” (7) to (neo)colonialism; it will, accordingly, give food for thought to researchers and students, as well as to anyone interested in postcolonial studies and their multifarious subfields of scholarship.

Marie Herbillon  
Université de Liège (Belgium)  
marie.herbillon@uliege.be