

**Salhia Ben-Messahel and Vanessa Castejon,  
eds. *Colonial Extensions, Postcolonial  
Decentrings: Cultures and Discourses on the  
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Salhia Ben-Messahel and Vanessa Castejon's edited volume *Colonial Extensions, Postcolonial Decentrings: Cultures and Discourses on the Edge* brings together ten essays as varied in their readings of the term "postcolonial" as they are well assorted in their questioning of traditional and historical discourses. Divided into four sections, the volume proposes an internal layout based on geographical rapprochements, colonial-historical resemblances, thematic analogies, and methodological proceedings to deal with multicultural issues in a globalised world.

The first section is entitled "Colonial and Postcolonial Localities" and draws patterns of interaction between hybridity (of identity politics, culture, language) and storytelling.

Paolo De Meideros's comparative article "Postcolonial Memories and the Shattered Self" begins with a famous quotation from Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. The quotation goes: "Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark. [...] One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?" (21). The quote, De Meideros argues, exemplifies the need of postcolonial identities not only to testify but also to seek out responsibility, therewith allegorically summoning the United States and Europe to confront their colonial ghosts. Morrison's novel as a whole serves as starting point for De Meideros's examination of the various ways in which the shattering of the postcolonial self between places that simultaneously claim and reject allegiance is represented (in literature and film). For the purpose at hand, De Meideros investigates various forms of colonial violence, as well as the negative inheritance (mainly through the indictment of the father figure) they brought on, in works by Tony Morrison, Lída Jorge, Isabela Figueiredo, J. M. G. Le Clézio and J. M. Coetzee. In spite of the variety of representations these works offer of postcolonial selves, De Meideros

insists on the importance of “shar[ing] a common refusal to indulge in nostalgia or to remain silent” (35). In so doing, he then ends up reversing Morisson’s quotation, asserting that “the telling does, and should, hurt” (35). The title of Elisabeth Bouzonviller’s article, “Doris and Erdrich’s *The Crown of Columbus*, or Building Up a Hybrid Version of 1492 for a New, Mixed-Blood America,” is already quite informative. Published in 1991 conjointly by mixed-raced Native American novelists Louise Erdrich and her former and late husband Michael Dorris, *The Crown of Columbus* is a novel which offers a Bhabhaian “third space” of hybridity beyond stereotypes. Indeed, as Bouzonviller superbly illustrates, the novel forms a space where genderless homodiegetic narrative perspectives alternate through a unique collaborative writing technique, where the dominating Western culture and the more peripheral Native American one merge, and where history and fiction, the political and the personal, interweave in an unchronological structure, thereby echoing the Native oral tradition of storytelling. Throughout her article, Bouzonviller highlights the metafictional reference to the art and power of storytelling contained in the novel and shows how the novelists’ activist imagination reverses history to fight against stereotypes and offers an alternative discourse, celebrating memory and envisaging a hybrid future. In the last part, Bouzonviller clearly exemplifies how Dorris and Erdrich use teasing and self-deprecation to undermine stereotypes and build a strong sense of community in the face of a hostile American environment, thus creating a “Third Space of enunciation,” in which what Erdrich has termed “survival humour” (51) operates next to storytelling as a metafictional process of voice liberation.

In his article, “Alistair MacLeod’s Engagement with the Modern World in *No Great Mischief* (1999) and *Island* (2001),” André Dodeman examines works by a Canadian writer of Scottish descent through a postcolonial lens. Despite the daring and even disputable choice of such a committed perspective to deal with Cape Breton’s Gaelic subjection to Canadian national rule, Dodeman brilliantly conveys MacLeod’s attempts to challenge the threatening temporality and encompassing discourse of globalized modernity, fashioned by imperialism. MacLeod’s merging of Gaelic tradition, language, and superstition with national and globalized discourses, Dodeman argues, downplays the dominance of Western historiography, epistemology and empiricism, while at the same time “highlighting the heteroglossic nature of the world” (63) and therefore challenging the Western liberal humanist belief in “the

monoglossic nature of the politics of assimilation and cultural uniformity” (65). In short, while MacLeod’s short story collection and only novel (written from the margin of national discourse) attempt to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the world, Dodeman’s postcolonial reading of MacLeod’s work (written from the margin of postcolonial discourse) seems to call for a highly comprehensive understanding of postcolonialism.

The second section, entitled “Postcolonial Transculturalism,” brings Australian connections to land, Indigenous cultures, its Asian Diaspora and political economy into focus from different, to some extent debatable, perspectives.

Vanessa Castejon, Anna Cole and Oliver Haag’s collaborative research piece “European Views of the Indigenous ‘Other’, A Study of Responses to Warwick Thornton’s *Samson & Delilah*” somewhat jars with the collection’s overarching approach, namely through its take on Warwick Thornton’s film *Samson & Delilah*, released in Australia in 2009, from a European, and one may be – perhaps too easily – tempted to argue Eurocentric, reception-based viewpoint. Positing that histories of colonialism reflect in European audiences’ culturally coded readings of foreign texts, Vanessa Castejon, Anna Cole and Oliver Haag have interviewed audience members after their viewing of *Samson & Delilah*, to learn more about the state of postcolonialism in England, France and Germany. However, while the authors rightly refute the representativeness of “broad national categories” (80) such as “British,” “German,” and “French,” they do not seem to question the Eurocentrism of their own approach sufficiently. In other words, although indisputably critical of Western grids of reading and offering a careful comparison of culturally related reactions, the article’s authors may be walking on a tightrope, but this is perhaps inevitable when dealing with reception theory in a European postcolonial approach to *Samson & Delilah*.

In his article entitled “In Trans/Action: Materialising Cultural Dissent, Activising Asian Australian Communities,” Paul Giffard-Forêt uses Raymond Williams’s concept of “cultural materialism,” which brings together social superstructure (ideology) and economic base, to question hybridity and its “fetishizing of cultural difference” (100). The article opens with a genealogical overview of Asian Australian literature and focuses on the representation of Frantz Fanon’s theory of “national culturalism” in novels by Mena Abdullah, Brian Castro and Simone Lazaroo. Other writers, such as Merlinda Bobis and Siew Sang Tay, are seen to take issue

over Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" and the power-asymmetries inherent in "pan-Asianism" (105). In his study, Giffard-Foret thus brings out literature's transnational and *transactional* (both socio-economic and activist) character, as opposed to its cultural character. He further illustrates this opposition between transnationality/action/activism and culture by means of Asian Australian cultural and artistic politics, namely by contrasting scholar Ien Ang's mitigated, cultural relativist response with writer Roanna Gonsalves's militant, cultural materialist response to the 2009 and 2010 Indian students attacks in Melbourne and Sydney.

In "Australian Spaces, the Reconfiguring of Cultural Maps and Enrootings," an exquisite comparative analysis of Australia novelists David Malouf and Tim Winton's collections of essays *A First Place* (2014) and *Island Home* (2015), Salhia Ben-Messahel reconsiders multiculturalism and identity politics in postcolonial Australia by means of a redefinition of geographic spaces and the sense of belonging. However, her argument that, through their refusal of imposed norms and their deconstruction of existing structures, Malouf and Winton provide a new perspective to reconfigure space and reality might at times prove ambivalent in its non-problematisation of spatial and cultural appropriation by settler Australians. Similarly, Ben-Messahel's reference to Glenda Sluga's article "The Migrant Dreaming," which somewhat controversially establishes a correlation between the experience of migration (a culture creates its own history) and "dreaming" (the created culture surfaces in places and spaces), proves at times contentious. This being said, her reference to Nicolas Bourriaud's "space of the radican," a space "where diversity would become a category of thought, and subjectification the result of multiple enrootings and errantries in mobile environments, in a global space where frontiers and borders never stop shifting" (136), offers a truly original take on the Australian literary canon.

In section three, the editors have assembled two essays dealing with "The Transgression of Cultural Discourse." Indeed, while the first transgresses Sri Lanka's mythical and historical discourses, the second breaks with the tradition of male narratives in Cameroon.

In her article "What sort of world would they build on our remains: Postcolonial Anxiety in Romesh Gunesekeera's *Reef*," Sabine Lauret cleverly observes a correlation between *Reef's* first-person narrator-protagonist, or "I-postcolonial," who is haunted by the colonial ghosts and divided between the colonial past and postcolonial present, and Sri Lanka's split identity. The novel thus encapsulates postcolonial

anxiety (“the torments suffered by both the individual and the nation/community in a post-independence era” (142)) not only on an individual but also on a political-allegorical level. In her article, Lauret proceeds with an investigation of the political unrest that lies at the heart of the narrative and exacerbates postcolonial anxiety. To do so, she first examines the breaches in the child narrator’s memory, thus exposing the haunting nature of the past and, by allegorical extension, the aesthetic allusiveness of history’s partial reflection of the past; she then investigates how violence surfaces in the intersection of the domestic with the universal; eventually, she demonstrates that postcolonial anxiety in *Reef* is an anxiety of origins, as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka not only results from but also dangerously feeds on the historical disagreement on the original myth (Tamil or Sinhalese?), before wisely concluding her article with the following words: “The cure of postcolonial anxiety is then not in a narrative but in the control of this narrative” (151).

In her article “Calixthe Beyala’s Fiction: Disguised Writing?” Laurence Randall sets out to provide her readership with a remarkable insight into Beyala’s literary oeuvre by comparing the reception of her work in the West, where it is acclaimed for its provocative and destabilizing nature, and its critical reception in Cameroon, where it is qualified as erotic or pornographic. After looking at the historical difference between the man’s narrative voice (celebrated in the written tradition) and the woman’s narrative voice (confined to the oral tradition) in African societies, Randall notes that “this barrier is still felt in the marginalization of women’s writing by the patriarchal African critics” (156). Sadly, however, Randall does not give voice to female African critics either. She nonetheless contests the masculine African critics’ reproaches on the masculinity and brutality of Beyala’s writing, as well as their accusation of plagiarism. For her, what these attacks truly demonstrate is “Beyala’s ability to disguise her writing” (158), be it by appropriating the African male writer’s sexual topics and speech, by employing vernacular language as well as Africanisms to reflect an effort to retain the Cameroonian linguistic tradition against the language of the coloniser, or else by using African humour as an element of parody and satire to undermine the usual/masculine order of things.

The last section is given the revealing title “Legacies of the Empire and Postcolonial Politics.” It differs from the previous sections in its political-historical approach of post-imperialism and postcolonialism.

As the title suggests, Sharon Baptiste's article, "The Evolution of the Black Cultural Archives: 1981–2015," traces the evolution of the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), Britain's first museum and archive dedicated to the African and African-Caribbean Diasporas, since its beginnings in 1981 as a cultural and educational grassroots organisation. To do so, Baptiste lays out the major causes and consequences which led the BCA's founding members to establish strategies that would compensate for the observed underachievement and underperformance of schoolchildren of African and African-Caribbean descent living in London. She then expounds the strategies initiated by three of the BCA's directors (Len Garrison, Sam Walker, and Paul Reid) to allow the African and African-Caribbean communities to tell their own history. Eventually, her article focuses on the BCA's achievements (the recognition and inclusion of black British history in the national historical narrative), while also acknowledging the existence of some "naysayers' criticism" (200), whose virulence Baptiste nonetheless views "in a positive light" (199–200), for such criticism "raises general awareness – a small yet significant step towards recognition and ultimately perhaps inclusion in the wider historical narrative" (200).

In "Arab Post-colonial Ideologies versus Colonial Political Legacy: The Case of Arab Nationalism," Fouad Nohra discusses the post colonial nature of Arab nationalism. The scepticism, among Arab people, about the authenticity and legitimacy of the new Arab states, drafted when the European military occupation of the region started in the early 20th century, forms the backdrop of this highly informative and well-researched article. Divided into three main parts, the article first considers the competition between the five national paradigms (sectarian, provincial, regional, Arab, and pan-Islamic) offering a post-colonial alternative to the colonial paradigm. For illustrative purposes, Nohra uses Syria, the geographic region where the anti-colonial process started, as an example. He then sets out to explain how the Arab national paradigm gradually became "the doctrinal frame of a serious and deeply rooted post-colonial process" (206), before the pan-Islamic doctrines took over and rehabilitated the vested colonial state structure. Last but not least, against the failure of the post-colonial Arab national paradigm, Nohra questions the possibility of an appropriate post-colonial paradigm, one that would lead to a unification process rather than to fragmentation, and wonders whether, "the unsustainability of such a political fragmentation

will again result in a new form of post-colonial and reformist pan-Arab awakening” (229).

What this interdisciplinary volume of *Comparatism and Society* then has to offer is a unique take on multiculturalism and globalization through its in-depth examination of postcolonial discourses as the extensions and decentrings of the home-territories.

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