

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

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Chantal Zabus, ed. *The Future of Postcolonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Pp. 265. ISBN: 9780415714266.

In spite of its decidedly future-oriented title, *The Future of Postcolonial Studies* is also about looking back in order to better move forward. The outcome of “Future Postcolonialisms/ Le postcolonialisme-en-devenir,” an international conference that was held at the Parisian sanctum of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in 2011, Chantal Zabus’s edited volume celebrates the twentieth-fifth anniversary of the publication of the now classic *The Empire Writes Back* with a view to reassessing its pertinence and legacy in the present. A tribute to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s extraordinary achievement, back in 1989, of highlighting the production of authors hailing from the former European colonies as well as evolving new modes of reading that challenged Eurocentric rationalities, *The Future of Postcolonial Studies* builds upon the troika’s earlier interests in gender, indigeneity, ecocriticism, and linguistic creolization, among other topics, to structure its fifteen chapters around five trends: namely “comparing,” “converting,” “greening,” “queering,” and “utopia.”

Since the late 1980s, the understanding of the category of the post-colonial has changed tremendously. At the same time as the term shifted from a hyphenated to a “graphically whole status,” it stopped being understood as a “periodizing term” and gestured towards “a textual philosophy” (Zabus 1), indeed “a way of reading” (Ashcroft 235). As Zabus reminds us, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin already paved the way for such an extended usage of the term by broadening the time frame implied by the (then-hyphenated) category of the ‘post-colonial’ from a ‘postindependence’ to a ‘postinvasion’ period, in ways that made it clear that postcolonialism did not signal the end of colonisation, but was, as Hall

writes, “after a certain *kind* of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation—in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it” (Drew 189). The suggestion that Zabus similarly views postcolonialism as an “anticipatory discourse” that reaches back to colonial times but is still pertinent in the present is evidenced by the historical range of the fifteen chapters of the volume, which span from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Geographically and linguistically speaking, *The Future of Postcolonial Studies* distinguishes itself by a determination to venture outside what Graham Huggan calls “the postcolonial mainstream” (131). For one, the volume resolutely draws postcolonial studies outside of its Anglophone “comfort zone” by shifting the terrain of analysis to lesser-examined postcolonial territories such as North Africa, the Middle East and the Arabic peninsula, the Horn of Africa, the Arctic, Mauritius, and China. In line with Huggan, who argues elsewhere that “multi-sited, multi-lingual and multi-disciplinary” (20) approaches to the postcolonial currently invalidate turn-of-the-millennium gloomy predictions on the obsolescence of the field, Zabus remarks that postcolonial studies has now “entered a convalescing period of recovery” (5) during which a third generation of postcolonialists is building upon the intersectional legacy of second-generation scholars such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. It is not only that, by embracing new cross-disciplinary horizons, postcolonial studies is transforming itself into a “centrifugal force” able to “energize globalization, transnational, diaspora, and queer studies.” Appropriating the neologism “intra-act,” which was first coined by the feminist physicist Karen Barrad, Zabus contends instead that postcolonial studies interpenetrates other fields in ways that enable two-way processes of epistemological transformation. In that sense, the above-mentioned five “trends” around which this volume is structured operate less along thematic than along (cross-) disciplinary lines. Indeed, these trends all bear witness to current “intra-actions” between postcolonial studies and fields such as comparative literature, religion studies, ecocriticism, queer theory, transgender theory and the new technologies.

“Comparing,” the first section of the volume, gathers contributions committed to complicating the assumption that postcolonial literature only boils down to a branch of English literature. Unpacking the ideological implications of the institution of “Francophonie” through, and beyond, Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud’s famous Manifesto, “*Pour une littérature monde*” (2007), Moura, who was one of the very first French

scholars to take postcolonial theory seriously, analyses the reasons why the field is now gaining increasing relevance for literary studies in France after having been mostly consigned to the Social Sciences. Ironically, Albertazzi shows that the situation is almost reversed in Italy, where the study of English-language postcolonial literatures got a very early start, but where the media's uncritical celebration of stereotypical fiction by young "postcolonial" authors (including Italophone writers) has perversely become an "instrument of exclusion" (41), with the consequence that the best of these writers are now prevented from entering the Italian canon. Highlighting the polyglossic context of South Africa and the ways in which the hegemony of English is "directly linked to the neo-colonial/neoliberal economic policies of globalization" (62), Briault-Manus's chapter makes a vibrant plea towards postcolonialists, inviting them to lay claim to African-language literatures and fully take on board the ways in which African literatures in English and French "indigenize" European languages.

In Part 2, "Converting," Griffiths's chapter analyses the rhetoric and structure of the writings of the Rev. Tiyo Soga with a view to showing how this early Christian South African convert, who cannot be characterized by the "simplistic labels" (81) of "resistance" or "complicity" with colonialism in spite of his European-style education and conversion to Christianity, utilizes "shrouding personae" (79) and various narrative strategies to "articulat[e] the complex multiple voices that [he had] to contain and unify" (77). While Klaus Stierstorfer's essay makes a strong case for bringing postcolonialism and religious issues into a culture-specific "dialogue" within which fundamentalism should not always be tied to Islamic contexts in addition to being explained away as a result of modernity and the postcolonial situation, in her chapter on Mauritius Srilata Ravi similarly complicates "mainstream" postcolonial theory by exposing the "peripheral imperialism" (90) that now frames the relationships between India and Mauritius. As Ravi lucidly shows, the diaspora-oriented politics of post-liberalization India has promoted a "Hindu ethos" confusing religion, economic development, and ancestral ties to the homeland so that French-language literature is now (deceptively?) perceived by Mauritian intellectuals as one of the privileged spaces "to confront the hegemony of an imagined Indo-Hindu centre in the Indian Ocean" (90).

The three chapters of Part 3, "Greening," are concerned with opening new postcolonial lines of research related to environmental issues and

to the relationship between the human and non-human worlds. While Helen Tiffin's reading of selected texts by South African, Caribbean, Canadian, and Indian authors raise the subject of competing human, animal, and environmental claims in today's world, Ferial Ghazoul unearths numerous instances of "greening discourse" in contemporary Arabic literature. Huggan's chapter, "Notes on the Postcolonial Arctic" is especially compelling in its exploration of the ways in which issues about "the mixed ethnic contexts" of the European Arctic, the complexity of decolonization processes there, and the local subsistence-based nature practices of its populations operate in conjunction with each other with the consequence that the "technocratic governance of nature" (138) can be seen to simultaneously figure *decolonizing* trends (from an ethnicity-based point of view) and *recolonizing* ones (from an environmental perspective).

Part 4, "Queering," bears witness to the increasing prominence of queer theory in new understandings of the postcolonial mantra of "writing back to the centre." Joan Hambidge offers a psychoanalytic reading of the poetry of Johann de Lange, a major self-identified gay Afrikaans poet "writing back" to "the state of heteronormativity" during the Apartheid years in South Africa through intertextual links with the poetry of gay figures such as W.H. Auden and Thom Gunn. Looking at new forms of queer writing in the Maghreb and in post-apartheid South Africa, William Spurlin redirects our attention to the ways in which sexuality in postcolonial contexts still operates as "a shifting site of signification" that both challenges "the discursive heteronormative legacies imposed by a history of colonialism in Africa" (162) and African nationalist discourses condemning homosexuality as a sign of Western decadence. Turning to an Australian context, David Coad engages with recent literary works about gender transition that have played a significant role in "bringing [the queer] out in the [Australian] public domain" (185), thus paving the way for the passing of antidiscrimination legislation in today's Australia.

Zabus's chapter "The Transgendered Nation" builds a bridge between Part 4 and Part 5, "Utopia," in that it analyses how transgendered characters signify on nascent nation-building in Algerian, Jamaican, and South African contexts, as reflected respectively in the two memoirs by the *piéd-noir* writer Marie-Pierre Pruvot, in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*, and in Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's *Black Bull: Ancestors and Me*. The utopian script of transformation at play in Zabus's contribution

is given a dystopian twist in Mike Hill's chapter, which offers a fascinating account of the ways in which the computational and aerial practices of the US war machine might compel us to move beyond anthropocentric accounts of conflict. In "Future Thinking," Bill Ashcroft returns to issues of nation-building and draws on Ernst Bloch's important distinction between utopia as "a parody of hope" (241) and utopianism as "a constant reminder of a future horizon" (245) to show how postcolonial utopianism reveals itself in "anticipatory illuminations" (242) and in "a developing attitude of separation from the nation-state" (239) that finds expression, today, in texts by African, Caribbean, Indian, and Chinese writers.

In a contemporary context within which the perceived obsolescence of postcolonial studies is generally pitted against the increased visibility of other related fields—namely globalization studies during the 2000s and more recently, world literature—it has become vital to show how postcolonial studies has resolutely moved from an earlier text-based model to a cross-disciplinary approach that can integrate and enrich the insights from many other disciplines. Although it fails to include important "intra-actions" such as the current ones between translation and postcolonial studies and between postcolonial and media studies, *The Future of Postcolonial Studies* makes a timely and important contribution to the field by pointing towards new cross-disciplinary avenues of investigation that extend beyond the linguistic, geographical, and conceptual purview of "mainstream" postcolonial theory.

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DELPHINE MUNOS
Delphine.Munos@ulg.ac.be
University of Liège (Belgium)