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When discussing Postcolonial Studies, it is commonplace to recall that from its infancy the discipline has systematically been decreed as being at a dead end. Yet the capacity of Postcolonial Studies to absorb criticism from both within and without has proved astonishing. Probably, such severe criticism has even strengthened the area, to the point that in the twenty-first century Postcolonialism turns out to be one of the most solid philosophies in Western academia, both as a political perspective and as a critical practice. The release of essay collections like *Literature for Our Times: Postcolonial Studies in the Twenty-first Century* testifies to renewal within the discipline, while it also illustrates the basic idea that there is life beyond the classic *noeuds* of colonialism and the post-colony.

This collection of thirty-five essays results from the largest ACLALS conference in its thirty-five-year history, held in Vancouver in 2007. In the introduction, Bill Ashcroft redefines the discipline in both a new and a traditional sense. He points out that Postcolonialism is not a chronology or a specific ontology but a way of reading; a centrifugal rather than centripetal energy. It comes as no surprise that he should praise the virtues of a discipline whose foundations he heavily contributed to cementing. Revising its traditional concerns, he mentions “a vast array of cultural developments: race and racism; expressions of anticolonial nationalism; the paradoxical dissolution of the idea of nation along with the continuous persistence of national concerns; the question of language and appropriation; of the transformation of literary genres, the question of ethnicity and its relation to the state; the growing mobility of formerly colonized populations” (xvi). The field refuses to be contained. Understandably, then, rather than a Grand Theory, for Ashcroft, Postcolonial Studies amounts to a “convivial critical democracy” (xvii). The key idea is cohabitation: of cultures, of arguments, of worldviews. As he contends, cohabitation and transdisciplinarity inform contemporary knowledge production (xviii), a knowledge where, it is crucial to remark, boundaries are “to become increasingly fuzzy” (xix).

The first chapter includes five articles intended to foreground conceptual and methodological issues. In ‘The Commonwealth Legacy: Towards a Decentred Reading of World Literature’ and ‘Global Literary Refractions: Reading Pascale Casanova’s *The*

*World Republic of Letters* in the Post-Cold War Era,' Franz Schulze-Engler and Debjani Ganguly, respectively, effect severe critiques of Casanova's controversial study. They criticize her narrowing of literature to the scope of the nation, precisely when she claims to go beyond it, and her setting of Europe at the centre of what purports to be a global approach. Schulze-Engler, who, echoing Ashcroft, equates Postcolonial Studies to "a loose alliance . . . of approaches" (7), deplores the fact that a specific methodology "for a transcultural comparative study of English-language literatures" (7) that would allow "an alternative perspective of 'world literature'" (11) has not been created thus far. He and Ganguly review alternative energetic paradigms to Casanova's that will find echo later on, in the papers devoted to different takes on the postcolonial. In 'Frailty and Feeling: Literature for Our Times', Paul Sharrad complements their suggestions by incorporating the theory of affect, arguing that affect takes us away from either/or dualities, a persistent ambition among postcolonial scholars, and that it integrates, pace the translation of feeling into affect, the private and the public sphere — a virtue of the discipline noted by Ashcroft and Robert Young, among others. Nela Bureu adds desire to this methodological layout in her nuanced approach to prairie writing in 'Spaces of Desire: A Pleasant Séjour in Robert Kroetsch's *The Hornbooks of Rita K.*'

Race and ethnicity, and the attention to the colonial discourses pervading nineteenth-century culture and literature, have not ceased to be an issue, as the brief chapter 'After Said: Imperial Scholarship, Race and Ethnicity' demonstrates. Another relatively short chapter on a classic matter is 'Gendered Bodies', where Feroza Jussawalla's article 'To Veil or not to Veil: Muslim Women Writers Speak Their Rights' stands out in its treatment of a burning question. Jussawalla reminds us that Muslim women need to struggle to free themselves of oppression from different sides: both fundamentalist Islam and homogenizing Western paternalism. Through discussion of works by several Muslim women she proposes that we learn about and respect Muslim women's plurality and their right to choose their own ways, enacting culture as they desire and practicing religion if and how they wish.

The chapter devoted to 'Translations and Transformations' underscores the outstanding role of translation in Postcolonial Studies. The title of Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o's contribution, 'A Multi-Centred Globe: Translation as the Language of Languages', is eloquent in its account of the demise of outdated Europe-centred theories such as Casanova's. Ngūgĩ elaborates on his classic *Moving the Centre* (1993), where he advocated a move away from nation-centric conceptions of culture, and incorporates the idea of translation as the signifier most capable of linking words and worlds, peoples and languages in the modern day. Following this, several pieces explore Ngūgĩ's work and the problematics of translation. Most remarkable in this chapter is the closing article, by Robert Young, where he assesses English as a world language, a language of hybridity prone to change through "rhizomatic contact" (169). To put it in a nutshell, English, according to Young's provocative essay, has turned into a "cosmopolitan vernacular" (181). This is an invaluable piece for those interested in the close-knit connection between languages and postcolonial cultures.

Diasporas and migratory movements could not be absent from such an ambitious collection. The chapter 'Literatures of Diaspora and Migrancy' contains five articles dealing with issues as varied as Jamaica Kincaid's *Mr Potter*, Bhangra or contemporary pilgrimage narratives. A remarkable theoretical ground wherefrom to tackle the complexity of the moving world we inhabit today is laid by Sissy Helff in 'The Missing Link: Transculturation, Hybridity, and/or Transculturality?' which opens this block. Profusely informed by Migration Studies theory, Helff's article is unusually structured in that, after a short introduction, it analyses a case study before extending to a longer theoretical argument. The core of this significant excursus is the proposal of the concept of transculturality as a possible way forward for Postcolonial Studies. She suggests that transculturality takes stock of the complexity of contemporary cultural exchanges, paying attention to power imbalances and the subversive possibilities implicit in artistic products that are often neglected by useful yet sometimes insufficient concepts such as hybridity. Notwithstanding, she also warns that socially marginal groups, such as unsuccessful migrants detained in camps or airports, run the risk of exclusion (as well) at a theoretical level if tackled from such a supposedly encompassing perspective. Therefore, Helff concludes, an alliance of postcolonial criticism (with its attention to otherness and exclusion) and transcultural studies (with its focus on cultural transactions and moves) is needed as of today. This could change in a not-so-distant future, as one of the most crucial ideas exposed in this piece is that, like critical approaches, theories also need to be connected to their specific locations. To conclude this chapter, Kavita Ivy Nandan's 'Writing as Healing: Fijindians – The Twice Banished?' illustrates the convenience of complementing transcultural concepts ('Fijindians') with a more traditional postcolonial approach, revising the calamities which Fijians of Indian origin have suffered and continue to go through on a nation island where their distressing story has barely entered the national narrative. In this context, writing becomes a healing power. Nandan signals how, out of scraps of a nearly lost memory, Fijindian authors are creating a past and a history, and thus a present, because, as this critic remarks, memory is a dynamic, empowering force.

It may seem paradoxical that, next to the necessary attention paid to displaced and hybrid peoples, another rich source of 'literature for our times' should be indigenous cultures. The title of the chapter devoted to this field, again comprising five papers, is borrowed from that of Jeannette Armstrong's opening article, 'Literature of the Land: An Ethos for These Times', where she develops a theory on the connection between orality and the land in the Syilx culture (whose territories refuse to abide by European-imposed borders, spreading into the neighbouring states of British Columbia and Washington). Its language, as the author explains, is an "orality-based schema, organized in a way that facilitates collective memory transmitted through story and as an ethics arising out of a long association with one place" (348). After a fascinating illustration of this lead, Armstrong makes the call that we pay heed to our connections to the land, as these are days when "ecological illiteracy" is causing havoc in our essential humanity. It is time for us to react, like Turtle in one of the Syilx stories that Armstrong decodes for us, "with

compassion and courage in the face of the greatest of odds” (355). In the same chapter, Sam McKegney’s ‘Masculindians: The violence and Voyeurism of Male Sibling Relationships in Recent First-Nations Fiction’ and Michaela Moura-Koçoglu’s ‘From Noble Savage to Brave New Warrior? Constructions of a Maori Tradition of Warfare’ explore aboriginal masculinities and their familial and/or social connections in cultures from lands as distant as Canada and Aotearoa-New Zealand, yet reaching analogous conclusions: that reading literary self-representations by aboriginal or native writers is a means to resist the misleading stereotypical essentialisms reproduced for so long. Two articles closing the block introduce an area so far underexplored by Postcolonial Studies: the Philippine Islands. Chelva Kanaganayakam’s ‘*A Native Clearing Revisited: Positioning Philippine Literature*’ claims that there is still “a need for recognizing writing from the Philippines as an important segment of postcolonial writing in English” (383). Stephen Ney, for his part, with ‘Asia’s Christian-Latin Nation? Postcolonial Reconfigurations in the Literature of the Philippines’, begins to fill the gap indicated by Kanaganayakam, but also takes the discussion to a connection which, like the Philippines, is relatively under-researched in Postcolonial Studies to date: that between Christianity and postcolonialism, or, more accurately, ‘the postcolonization of Christianity’, a provocative idea which calls for further explorations, in this as well as in other contexts: Much has been written about colonialism and Christianity, but not so much about the combined ‘post’ of both.

Equally foundational are the three articles compiled under the heading ‘Dalit Literature and Its Criticism’, which explore matters of gender and feminism and the politics of caste, class and representation in Tamil and Telugu Dalit texts. Dalit literature, which has blossomed in different languages since the 1950s, has huge potential, which is still to be fully acknowledged by a discipline often reluctant to tackle works not written in English. This bears relation to international publishing policies, as, quoting Pavithra Narayanan, “when publishing is an economic decision, what defines postcolonial literature in First World institutions is what private capital enterprise makes available” (2012: 7). Hopefully, it is only a matter of time before Dalit and indigenous literatures worldwide (including that of the Adivasis, noticeably absent here) become more accessible for the benefit of all.

I was initially surprised that a very short chapter entitled ‘The City’ should contain, besides an essay on the contemporary multicultural city, which Zadie Smith’s writing epitomizes in London (‘Streets and Transformation in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* and “Stuart”’, by Pamela McCallum), a piece on Harry Potter. However, the inclusion makes sense in so much as in ‘Plotting Hogwarts: Situating the School ideologically and Culturally’, the quintessential contemporary school of magic is read by its authors, Vandana Saxena and Angelie Multani, as an index to the situation “in the cultural space of a heterogeneous and multicultural society” (471). After a detailed analysis revising white and non-white, human and non-human characters, the conclusions are not very optimistic: What Rowling depicts in Hogwarts is what Stanley Fish has termed ‘boutique multiculturalism’, a merely aesthetic acceptance of otherness that screens a once again white-centred, exclusionist ideology. Rowling’s series has thus revived the boarding school

genre, which had been “more or less dead” (483) for many years, but has not significantly challenged its reactionary dogmas and the racist assumptions that so contributed to buttressing the Empire. Having said this, and because the paper does not make an explicit connection between Hogwarts and London—or any other city for that matter—I believe that ‘Multiculturalism’, however loose and overexploited a label, would have been a more fitting title than ‘The City’ (which disowns the conspicuous multiculturalism of small towns and villages) for this brief chapter.

To conclude the collection, ‘Terrorism, Trauma, Loss’ incorporates several pungent topics signaling relevant directions of late Postcolonial Studies. ‘Ethics’ could also be a suitable epigraph here, a block where theories of affect return as a haunting presence to round up the deeply emotional breadth which, one states again reading this volume, seldom fails to characterize postcolonial approaches. Despite the composite title, the block is not quite as miscellaneous as one would expect, since the articles are thematically knitted together. Two of the four papers deal with terrorism; Fred Ribkoff writes about the injustices of national memory discussing Bharati Mukherjee’s revision of the 1985 Air India bombing, and Summer Pervez unpacks racial politics as articulated by Hanif Kureishi, and reads his works as warning calls to intercultural understanding prior to London 7/7. The two remaining papers explore vicissitudes of witnessing: Susan Speary’s deals with the thorny contexts of Rwanda and South Africa, while Pilar Somacarrera’s delineates a careful study of Margaret Atwood’s protracted career as a poet, concluding that, contrary to some opinions, Canada’s leading writer has been consistently political throughout her career.

The sections are coherently structured, while of course the contributions could have been organized differently. Not only in the geographical sense (a rather outdated criterion, in any case, in the global dynamics that the book so well represents) but also in its attendance to thematic clusters: the chapters on gender and racial politics could have absorbed several others; a specific block might have been devoted to dealing exclusively with religious matters; indigenous literatures could have been linked or joined together with Dalit writing as, while they are distinct, they have common concerns in denouncing social inequalities and the need for recognition, as well as their youth and their quickly germinating status; ethical matters might have been presented perhaps more creatively. Each article, in short, fits into several niches, and given the scope and significance of the book, which is destined to have a place in any good library concerned with the postcolonial, one interesting possibility would have been to suggest a list of alternative or cross-arrangements. A more practical alternative to this list would have been the inclusion of an index. The lack of either, however, does not diminish the quality of the product in any significant manner.

Attesting to the felicitous “convivial democracy” that Ashcroft announces in the introduction, the collection covers all areas revised by other recent relevant works of its kind (Huggan 2008; Lazarus 2011; Wilson, Sandru and Welsh 2012). To my mind, though, one area is underrepresented. It is old-fashionedly geographical, and unfortunately, as is often the case, I shall refer to its multiplicity through a generalization: Africa. Three papers

are devoted to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (including his own), one to the novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and a third, as was mentioned, to Rwanda and South Africa. Only five in all, against something like twice the number (the count is complicated by diasporic authors, etc.) of articles dealing with India. Of course the collection compiles pieces originating from a conference, therefore the editors should not be blamed for this imbalance. I do think it is worth mentioning, however, because of the agreed need, identified by several authors, for our often intrepid discussions to trespass academic boundaries —the written page, the conference, the classroom— and reach somewhere beyond. While completing this review, I hear on the radio the announcement of a lecture, to be given in a respectable culture hall of a medium-sized Spanish city, “on Africa, to learn about the continent and the situation of the African people” (in the singular in the announcement). An ambitious topic for a single lecture —my point here being that, as postcolonial scholars, we have a duty to denounce such gross generalizations. And in order to create the tools and weapons to do so, we must first turn our attention to places and peoples still greatly disregarded in postcolonial discipline(s).

Indeed, the collection’s most solid binding force is its pedagogical purpose. This idea is confirmed by the inclusion of an Afterword on this matter by Henry Giroux. In ‘Collaterally Damaged: Youth in a Post 9/11 World’, he denounces the harmful educational policies of the Bush period in the US. Then, praising the value of education in democratic societies, and after making a scary analysis of the mercantilized state of US and Canadian universities (which should make us reflect on the recent turn taken by European higher education), Giroux makes a convincing call for the expression of our ethical responsibility as teachers and, therefore, social activists. Taking his cue from Edward Said (and thus unknowingly completing the circle of the collection), Giroux proposes that educators envision “a critical pedagogy” (612): He reminds us of the need “to become provocateurs, . . . fighting against the imposed silence of normalized power, ‘refusing to allow conscience to look away or fall asleep’ [he quotes Said here], and critically engaging all those social relations that promote material and symbolic violence” (614). His ideas encapsulate the philosophy of this major contribution to Postcolonial Studies and of the field itself.

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