

reviews

BOOKS

Review Forum

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Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor. By Rob Nixon. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. 370. ISBN 9780674 049307. £33.95 (hbk).

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It's no surprise that neoliberalism's predatory project failed to generate a telos, relying instead on fake alibis like 'development' and 'growth.' Greed has no internal endgame, even an imagined one. A crisis of futurity, I believe, has been neoliberalism's Achilles heel – it creates huge swaths of organized humanity who know themselves to be entirely superfluous and dispensable to any of the narratives the paradigm can generate (Pratt, 2004, 2005). More puzzling, perhaps, was the long confinement of environmental and ecological thought in negative dystopic teleologies of irreversible loss, destruction, decay, extinction, threats to be feared, catastrophes to be

fended off, nightmare scenarios that will happen if we fail to do a, b, and c. It's difficult to mobilize mass desire in these terms – such bandwagons can't gleefully be jumped on. Gradually, 'antiglobalization,' 'environmental justice,' and 'sustainability' have emerged to fill the gap, and a heroics of resistance and rebellion drives groups and communities defending their living places against the expansionist predations of multinationals in the global south. As Rob Nixon argues, ecologism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism have conjugated into a significant political force that he calls the environmentalism of the poor. How, he wants to know, can this force multiply?

Slow Violence will, I think, become what it aspires to be: a foundational text of an 'environmental humanities' that also conjugates ecologism, anti-imperialism and

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anti-capitalism, to be achieved through a ‘creative alliance’ between environmental and postcolonial studies, two protagonists accustomed to ignoring each other. The book is built around 1) a corpus of transnational environmental writing, 2) a gallery of writer-activists from the global south, and 3) a central problem in politics and poetics: ‘How can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?’ (3). Nixon answers with eloquence, lucidity, erudition, political passion.

One of the book’s lasting achievements is to firmly establish slow violence as an object of study and an analytic lens indispensable to any political or ethical grasp. As Nixon shows so well, the term instantly marks the ‘fastness’ of the episodic violence that fuels storytelling machines, old and new, a fastness the cybernetic revolution has made addictive. Slow violence opens a category with enormous intuitive force – a box into which readers will immediately begin placing one example after another. ‘Ah yes, *that* kind of violence!’ The concept resonates with Jean Franco’s recent proposal that the object of diagnosis should shift from violence to cruelty, a far less nebulous concept (Franco, forthcoming). Nixon brilliantly uses modern weaponry to draw the most trenchant contrast between fast and slow violence—the long afterlives of Agent Orange in Vietnam, of recycled uranium in the shells flying now in Iraq and Afghanistan, of land mines littering fields in poor countries.

How, then, to narrativize slow violence? How to address the fact that it can’t fuel the episodic meaning machines driven by individual human agency – from gossip and news to exemplum and anecdote to epic and tragedy.

His project is retooling both narrative modes and imaginations so they can grasp slow violence and find vivid, unforgettable ways of expressing it—sensationalize it, in the sense of making it sensate. Al Gore’s ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ was an early exercise in this quest for sensationalizing environmental time. Its toolkit included before and after scenarios (the now canonical glacier photos), time lapse photography, graphs so steep they require a ladder.

Nixon’s toolkit is verbal – *Slow Violence* is a gold mine (forgive the metaphor) of eloquent, evocative phraseology and terminology, a founding lexicon for a new field of inquiry: ‘highway of harm’ (231), ‘petrodespotism’ (68), ‘outsourced suffering’ (22), the ‘invisibility industry’ (161), the ‘vertigo of the virtual’ (203), the metropole’s ‘unsustainable condition of contorted innocence’ (187), tourism’s ‘stage-managed amnesia’ (184), ‘attritional lethality’ (8), ‘inhabited risks’ (4) ‘socioenvironmental memory’ (25) and of course, ‘ecological time.’ His gorgeous style is itself an intervention. New academic projects and objects of study light up: literatures of resource extraction (260), environmental criticism – characterized by the worldliness Said so fiercely insisted on.

Writer-activists, and activist-writers, are Nixon’s heroes here, the players who bring slow violence to a world stage, giving urgency, visibility, and passion to demands for interruption and redress: Arundhati Roy, Ken Saro Wiwa, Wangari Maathai, Abdelrahman Munif, Njabulo Ndebele, June Jordan, Indra Sinha, and others. Writer activists can spectacularize slow violence, the ‘disasters that star nobody’ on a world stage. They can become stars, can be made into stars by Nixon’s metropolitan readers, and they can bring their creative powers to the work of developing environmental poetics. Language is a

privileged medium because of its easy ability to represent things that cannot be seen. Writing, in Nixon’s view, has the ability to retool imaginations, especially, today, nonfiction, memoir, the picaresque, the ‘agile personal essay’. Visual and performance art are also present – a simulated underwater cabinet meeting in the threatened Marshall Islands; Keith Morris Washington’s paintings of ‘ghost habitats’ (250) where lynchings once took place; Maathai’s theater of the tree as a consciously developed *performative* strategy.

Here are my questions:

Slow violence cohabits, does it not, with equally unspectacular forms of slow resistance that also star nobody? Survivals, refusals, persistences of the ‘we’ have also made the world as it is. Such ontologically fragile yet powerful elements constitute what we call the indigenous – another category postcolonial criticism bypasses.

Have the cruelties that provoked *Slow Violence* in fact been so slow? The operative time frames are post WWII developmentalism, and its accelerated epidemic form, the neoliberal rampage of the last three decades.

Nixon’s call for engagement with ‘ecological time’ and ‘environmental humanities’ is bounded by a premise that this is all about the well being of humans. In *Slow Violence*, proposals decentering humans are equated with the environmentalism of the rich – American wilderness crusaders (254), African game parks. ‘Deep time’ here (as also in Dimock) is only as deep as the human presence. Yet why not imagine the exponential multiplication of humans as a form of slow violence inflicted upon the other species, plant and animal, that inhabit the planet? On the earth itself? Such imaginings exist, often as part of the environmentalism of land-dwelling peoples (for example, de la Cadena 2010). The possibility of a human presence desiringly committed to scaling itself

down seems to have no imaginative appeal here; there are no nonhuman entitlements, no other power-bearing or sentient beings. This feels like unfinished business. Nature, many land dwellers say, will take revenge.

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A Response to Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.
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Rob Nixon’s monumental new book opens with dueling epigraphs from Arundhati Roy and Lawrence Summers which point to the problem of visibility and belief, of how to see the effects of globalization when its violence is often occluded through media spectacle, the tactics of so-called precision warfare, and managerial rhetoric. Roy speaks of globalization as a beam of light that shines on a small cadre of elites while rendering most people and

places invisible. Summers, in a now infamous World Bank memo, explains the efficiency of exporting ‘dirty industries’ to African nations, which he characterizes as ‘vastly under polluted’ given their level of development. These twinned quotations make for a chilling gateway into Rob Nixon’s timely critical project.

The epigraphs call up a recent historical moment, the 1980s and 1990s, in which the United States was confident in its ‘superpower parochialism,’ to use Nixon’s apt phrase. They also indicate the vastness of Nixon’s critical endeavor. The book creates an archive of globalization’s casualties, some of whom are still alive and whose fatal, creeping wounds remain unacknowledged—from the Ukrainian ‘bio-robots’ who cleaned up Chernobyl to the Kenyan farmers whose subsistence dwindles in topsoil erosion to the Maldiveans whose nation-state even now sinks into the ocean as a result of global climate change. Nixon’s accounting of ecological and somatic injuries (eg. territorial loss, cancers) which go under-reported in corporate media complements his effort to describe how globalization’s injured have fought back, through transnational coalitions, iconic symbols, symbolic performance, and imaginative writing. One of the great gifts of this book is its breadth of reference, its fortuitous detours into activist projects like Keith Morris Washington’s anti-pastoral paintings of US lynching sites and Ellen Driscoll’s *Fast Forward Fossil*, a sculptural evocation of our increasingly violent hydrocarbon economy. Contemplating the ‘future of dissent’ at a time when futurity sags even in privileged nations, Nixon offers up contemporary arts practice alongside iconic struggles for resource sovereignty, like Ken Saro-Wiwa’s campaign against Shell Oil and Chevron’s poisoning of the Niger delta, as exempla for ‘new ways’—in a digital age—of telling the ‘slow-moving stories about the long dying.’ If this book could be said to have an over-arching

ethical goal, it is to insure that our foreknowledge of our long dying isn’t wasted.

The book’s central concept of ‘slow violence’ expands upon Johan Galtung’s mid-twentieth-century discussion of indirect or structural violence, with the difference that ‘slow’ foregrounds the dimension of time and indicates the possibility of change, whereas Galtung’s ‘structures’ suggest a static determinism. ‘The templates of our spectacle-driven, 24/7 media life have shifted massively since Galtung first advanced his theory of structural violence some forty years ago,’ Nixon avers, noting the misfit between speeded up communications technologies or media frames and the attritional, exponential violence that results from neoliberal practices like the privatization of a developing nation’s mineral assets or the use of high-tech weaponry like depleted uranium. As a concept, ‘slow violence’ has enough traction to invigorate critical conversation for years to come. The problem of representing it raises an even richer set of narrative concerns, not only for the writer-activists whom Nixon studies, like Saro-Wiwa or Abdelrahman Munif, an incisive critic of the Saudi petrostate, but also for academic writers such as Nixon.

Rob Nixon carries his title as the University of Wisconsin’s Rachel Carson Professor of English earnestly, pursuing the question of how, after Carson, to write a politically meaningful scholarly book. The environmental critics whom Nixon recognizes as predecessors, including groundbreaking scholars such as Lawrence Buell and Ursula Heise, created field imaginaries that paved the way for Nixon’s endeavor. However, he allies himself more closely to post-colonial criticism and activist scholarship. Ramachandra Guha’s classic critique of US environmentalism from 1989 serves as inspiration for Nixon’s engagement with US ecocritics and suggests some of the emphases

that distinguish Nixon's work from a relatively new, often US-centered 'global' environmental criticism. For Nixon, imperialism and militarization figure as primary ecological threats, ecology ought to refer to human ecology, and engagement with the social sciences trumps the fascination with science and technology that animates US environmental pragmatism. Like the essayist Peter Sauer, whom he admires, Nixon points up the strange disavowal of environmentalism's human rights agenda in the US, a turn away from social ecology toward biocentrism that tends to marginalize the concerns of have-nots, in North America and abroad. These criticisms of US environmentalism and those environmental critics who fail to see beyond it aren't new, but perhaps they cannot be raised too often. Simply following the global movements of petroleum throughout this book, beginning with a variety of blighted offshore landscapes and always arriving at US pumps, makes clear the imbrication of global ecological injury with the American 'nature' idea, with the pleasures of driving in the US national parks, for instance. By bringing the idea of 'the environmentalism of the poor'—typically mobilized in discussion of the global South—into explicit dialogue with US environmentalism, Nixon attempts to internationalize and normalize the environmental justice concerns which too often appear as minority discourse in US contexts. Moreover, he imagines the future of the environmental humanities within a broad concept of international civil society, urging, if implicitly, that scholars reconceive themselves as writer-activists.

While 'slow violence' serves as Nixon's organizing concept, in this book he performs an argument for what we might call slow writing, by which I mean a meticulously researched, closely argued, intellectually ambitious and readable scholarly prose. Given its large ambitions, this book is necessarily too

long. Its commitment to the materialist specificity that Nixon associates with the best post-colonial criticism also makes it dense, a slow read. Yet Nixon's dual persona, as an academic-journalist, and the influence of his chosen mentors, Carson, Guha, and Edward Said, insure his clarity of expression and his attention to the pleasure of the reader through the kind of details that animate creative non-fiction, for instance his wonderful, if grotesque, portrayal of the Afrikaner 'wildlife entrepreneur' J.P. Kleinhans. If this book does not cross over into the educated public sphere in the way that the non-fiction criticism of Mike Davis or Rebecca Solnit has done, or as have Nixon's own journalistic writings, it still raises strong questions about what I have been thinking of as the ecological value of scholarly writing. At a time when mega-capitalism's disregard for human interdependencies never has been more clear, it may not feel as if we have time for the kind of diligent historicizing that Nixon offers here, scrupulously tracking diverse modes of literary and cultural expression across national and ethnic boundaries. As anyone knows who recently has contacted an embattled academic press, 'big' scholarly books have become untenable. But of course a scholarly archive that is global in scope, anti-imperialist, and ecological in the service of social justice, also never has been more necessary. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* stages an exemplary performance of the fundamental project in the humanities of creating indispensable archives. This project entails not only the compilation of broad and deep bibliographies but also, pace Derrida, the envisioning of futures to frame them.

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Slow Violence Revisited: a Response to Mary Louise Pratt and Stephanie LeMenager

I am keenly grateful to Mary Louise Pratt and Stephanie LeMenager for their generous, astute, and wide-ranging responses to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. I am doubly grateful given the expansive, worldly character of their own work—be it Pratt’s groundbreaking *Imperial Eyes*, her brilliant analyses of the contact zone, of planetary poetics, and of language in the contemporary arts of war or LeMenager’s indispensable transnational rethinking of American Studies together with her exemplary new writing on petrophilia in verbal and visual media.

Pratt and LeMenager have helped crystallize the place within *Slow Violence* of the idea of futures: crucially, the future of neoliberalism and the future of dissent. As Pratt notes, ‘a crisis of futurity has been neoliberalism’s Achilles heel—it creates huge swaths of organized humanity who know themselves to be entirely superfluous and dispensable to any of the narratives the paradigm can generate.’ We hear echoes of this insight in Mike Davis’s *Planet of the Slums* and in the ending of Indra Sinha’s great Bhopal novel, *Animal’s People*: the disposable people are swarming at the gates, and every day their numbers swell.

At the heart of this crisis of futurity—and at the heart of my book—stands a crisis of disparity. The ruinous consequences of that disparity are indissociably social and environmental, while also marking a deep crisis within capitalism itself. As I write this, ethically unacceptable, politically unsustainable levels of disparity have become a major rallying cry for the Occupy/99% movements that have spread to over a thousand cities in some eighty countries.

And so the lost tribes of those with nothing to lose are finding each other—in Egypt and Wisconsin, on Wall Street, in Peru, Spain, Hong Kong, South Africa, and Greece. In these protests, the rhetoric of freedom and democracy—for so long cynically manipulated for neoliberal ends—is less prominent than the rallying cries for justice, fairness, equity, and (a favorite Wisconsin word) decency. These new uprisings—however they turn out—are narrowing the divide between social justice movements in the global North and the global South as people made to feel disposable rally against the fallout from a deepening disparity. Crucially, the cry for justice is being connected to a cry for the greening of justice—for taking earth’s future back from the bankers and the politicians whom they bankroll, people who (in both senses of the phrase) are selling us and the planet short. One recurrent demand among protesters is for greater long-term thinking—through investment in debt relief, education, social safety nets, and in energy alternatives to an ultimately self-immolating hydrocarbon culture.

Across the world, the anti-disparity protests have become intergenerational. But they have been mounted disproportionately by the young who bear in their bodies the slow violence of neoliberalism’s squandered futures—futures that are at once educational, occupational, financial, and environmental. Occupy Wall Street is suitably emblematic of all this, for the wall has become neoliberalism’s symbol and strategy, whether in dealing with dissident indigenistas protesting resource plunder or in trying to wall off wealthy enclaves from the onrushing tides of climate change. Yet architecturally and rhetorically, ‘Keep Out’ is not a sustainable, long-term strategy.

After disaffected youths shook British cities in the summer of 2011, Labour MP, David Lammy, made an observation that has

broad implications for the foreshortened futures created by neoliberalism's walled exclusion zones:

Those lashing out – randomly, cruelly and violently – feel they have nothing to lose. They do not feel bound by the moral code of the rest of society because they do not feel part of the rest of society. We cannot live in a society where the banks are 'too big to fail' but whole neighbourhoods are allowed to sink without a trace. The polarisation is not between black and white. It is between those who have a stake in society and those who do not.

But you don't have to be a radical to reach such conclusions. Let's hear it from Adam Smith: 'No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.'

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I am especially gratified by Pratt and LeMenager's responses to my efforts to generate a lexicon and an archive—a vocabulary and a methodological resource. Hopefully, that lexicon—with 'slow violence' at the center, encircled by certain satellite phrases—will prove intelligible to non-specialists. Perhaps it can contribute to a public rhetoric for better understanding and opposing the temporal outsourcing of violence and suffering.

What, then, is the relation between those public rhetorical ambitions and my book's scholarly methodology? To build bridges between postcolonial (or anti-imperial) studies and the environmental humanities is more than an exercise in interdisciplinary engineering. For the longstanding distance between these two fields is symptomatic of some tenacious assumptions that need to be allayed in the wider world: the assumption that poor people are indifferent to their environments and lack

environmental values; that environmentalism and job creation are incompatible; that green anti-imperialism is a contradiction in terms. James Baldwin once observed that 'anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.' We are beginning to understand more fully how poverty is ecologically expensive—first and foremost for the poor, but ultimately, as a result, for humanity at large, as sustainable ecologies and life prospects get attritionally eroded.

As both LeMenager and Pratt note, I am trying to help develop a different kind of environmental humanities, one more grounded in social justice issues. In part this ambition comes from my sense that too few scholars in the environmental humanities are familiar with the materialist postcolonial scholarship from the 1980s and early 90s—work by Edward Said, Pratt, Anne McClintock, Stuart Hall among others—that could help us radically reconfigure the priorities of the environmental humanities and thereby give the field greater worldly traction.

In writing *Slow Violence* I was aware that during the post-Soviet, pre-9/11 decade—during America's dotcom boom especially—anti-imperial concerns had largely fallen by the wayside in the U.S., intellectually and politically. As a result, a chasm separated emerging scholars, not least in the environmental humanities, from an older radical tradition of analyzing imperial power and anti-imperial resistance. I wanted to write a book that made a case—in the abstract and through detailed readings—for the urgent pertinence of that earlier materialist postcolonial tradition for the greening of the humanities. In short, I was convinced that if the environmental humanities continue to skirt issues of power, empire, neoliberalism, social justice, and resistance in both the global south and impoverished communities within affluent

societies, the field risks becoming little more than another intellectually decorative fad. I believe the environmental humanities have reason to reach, to hope, for higher things.

LeMenager astutely observes a paradoxical dimension to my project. I realized I had to write a book that was ‘necessarily too long.’ On the one hand, I wanted to disseminate a flexible, mobile catch phrase—slow violence—that other activists and scholars could pick up and use adaptively. On the other hand, I felt this need to generate an archive committed to, as LeMenager notes, ‘materialist specificity’ and ‘diligent historicizing.’ I felt a political and methodological obligation to show what readings might look like arising from the poco-eco reconciliation process that I was advocating.

Because of this double agenda, parts of the book are quick, parts slow, parts more public, parts more scholarly. *Slow Violence* isn’t a consistently public book in the manner of Mike Davis or Rebecca Solnit—both of whom I admire immensely—for the primary reason that I decided to enfold into the text detailed, historical, materialist literary analyses. If Davis had analyzed favela novels from around the world in *Planet of the Slums* the public reach of his book would have shrunk considerably. But in addition to public writing, I do believe in the value of creating an archive as a pedagogical resource. I also appreciate that, in our cyberspatially scattered, time-scarce lives, big archival books are typically not read from cover to cover but accessed through the index—by someone interested in forests but not in oil, in neoliberalism but less so in postcolonialism. For this reason, I decided to write a large but segmented book that could be read either in its entirety or in micro-units of just a few thematic pages that could be consumed nonsequentially.

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Let me turn to address Pratt’s crucial question about the ‘unfinished business’ of integrating human and non-human perspectives on slow violence. We are witnessing some lively, overdue engagements among fields that have mostly hitherto had little to do with each other: environmental studies, postcolonial studies, native studies, and transnational American studies among them. But some resilient silences remain. Pratt underscores one of them: why in work on the environmentalism of the poor is the focus so squarely on humans? What would it take—and this is surely a critical task—to integrate into such a project non-human life forms?

This is a vital question with implications that reach far beyond the ambitions of any individual book. Relevant here is the largely parallel development of two zones of convergence among the environmental humanities, the social sciences, and the biological sciences: first, the convergent zone around environmental justice, postcolonial studies, and the environmentalism of the poor; second, the convergent zone around Animal Studies, Posthuman Studies, ontology, and bioethics. In anthologies and special journal issues, at conferences, and in the classroom, one witnesses, again and again, these two domains passing each other like ships in the proverbial night.

Let me hazard some broad brush generalizations about the dominant trends in Animal Studies that have kept its methods and concerns distant from those that inform poco-eco and environmental justice scholarship. As the name suggests, Animal Studies exhibits a strong mammalian (and to a lesser extent avian) leaning. Companion species are front and center as are the emotional lives and communicative methods of charismatic megafauna (African elephants, Siberian tigers, grizzly bears, timber wolves, humpback whales). Comparatively little attention is paid to the

vast majority of (in both senses of the phrase) faceless non-human life forms. It is as if mainstream Animal Studies has decided to invert the vegan slogan, ‘Nothing with a Mother, Nothing with a Face.’ In Animal Studies mothered faces rule.

Much of the field appears to revolve around three questions. First, how similar to humans are mammals/birds? Second, and conversely, how animal are humans? And third, what ethical obligations do humans have to sentient, higher order animals? All three questions are salient and potentially profound, yet they risk reverting, under the guise of selflessness, into another kind of human-centered species narcissism.

There are urgent socioenvironmental questions that Animal Studies too seldom addresses. For instance, how far can we push the adaptive capacities of ecosystems, in all their biotic complexity, before they buckle and collapse? It would be reassuring if for every twenty Animal Studies essays on canines or felines there were one essay on the krill-zooplankton-phytoplankton crisis that imperils marine food chains or, for that matter, one essay on the pollination crisis. I would suggest, then, that Animal Studies might benefit from becoming more spineless. Some invertebrate courage could help connect the field to the ecosystemic adaptation and survival questions that are often powerful drivers of the environmentalism of the poor.

Within the literary humanities, Animal Studies has chosen philosophy as its primary interlocutor. Some strong work has emerged from this literary-philosophical dyad, but it has also proven limiting. It has led to certain involuted tendencies, among them, all too often, a closed, self-satisfied language accessible only to initiates. When European philosophers like Agamben, Derrida, and Heidegger emerge (yet again) as a literary

field’s almost obligatory touchstones one senses squandered opportunities. What about the rich, non-European thinking about human-non-human relations? And, within the university, what about all the other expansive, interdisciplinary conversations that might emerge from engagements with, say, rural sociologists, cultural geographers, and limnologists, conversations that might deepen and diversify our understanding of human-non-human entanglements?

So Pratt is exactly right to point to this ‘unfinished business.’ To my knowledge, there is no scholarly work that has successfully bridged the environmental justice-Animal Studies divide as currently constituted. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* situates itself very much in the former camp. In part this was a consciously remedial decision—an attempt to counter some of the blind spots that derive from species thinking, not least a certain kind of panhuman transcendentalism as articulated by the affluent. Rather than species unity I wanted to underscore neoliberal disparity, hoping thereby to render more visible the diverse experiences (and economic underpinnings) of socioenvironmental suffering, survival, creativity, and resistance. Such diverse experiences impact—and are impacted by—the life prospects of all the biota that constitute the ecosystems which poor communities inhabit.

Literature from and about the global South offers lively imaginative alternatives to the methodological impasse that has impeded efforts to connect Animal Studies with environmental justice studies. One thinks, for example, of the Trinidadian-Canadian Shani Mootoo’s gothic Caribbean novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, of Mia Couto’s Mozambican fictions, and of the West African fantasia that is Ben Okri’s *Famished Road*. All these hungry worlds are also species-porous. And all

these writers are alive to the physical and numinous agency exerted by non-human actors, be they animal, vegetable, geological, or ancestral—humanity’s buried but unextinguished, shape shifting dead.

Alongside such novels, we can turn to Anna Tsing’s *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* for her exemplary, creative engagement with non-human forms of environmental agency. Tsing’s book offers a methodologically unclassifiable, makeshift account of a resource frontier; *Friction* jostles with stories and theories about migrations and transmigrations—among continents, islands, species. Through her sensory and narrative immersion in the forest forms of Indonesia’s Kalimantan, Tsing taps the energies moving between human and non-human forces (both animal and botanical). At the same time, though, Tsing remains alive to the social justice stakes, recognizing that ‘frontiers create wildness so that some—and not others—may reap its rewards’ (27). Tsing thereby does something quite rare: she succeeds in thinking through forms of non-human vitality without suppressing questions of socioenvironmental disparity—of the unequal access that different human groups have to the environment, as sustenance and resource.

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Pratt rightly asks whether ‘the cruelties that provoked *Slow Violence* [have] in fact been so slow,’ noting the rampaging destruction wrought by neoliberalism during three quick decades. I would suggest that the perceptual instability of speed is a critical feature of our age—the answer to ‘how fast?’ depends very much on who is doing the measuring. Climate scientists and geologists are generally horrified by the breakneck transformations that hydrocarbon-propelled cultures are wreaking on the planet. To that end, they have tried to generate

a rhetoric that registers their alarm, by coining, for example, the term the Great Acceleration to describe the historically unprecedented, high-speed transformations that humans (especially rich-society humans) have wreaked on the planet’s life-sustaining systems since World War II. Similarly, many scientists now speak not just of species loss, but of ‘accelerated species loss.’ In a kindred spirit, George Monbiot urges us to dump the term ‘climate change’ (too languid, too mild-mannered) and replace it with references to a sudden ‘global climate crash.’

But suddenness is relative. One of the things I grapple with in my book is the paradoxical impact that the digital era is having on environmental thinking and activism. Digitally-linked humans have a great new capacity to connect and organize in the instant, but this technological hegemony of the instant may be debilitating in other ways. In a new media context is it harder or easier to persuade people to perceive—and act upon in a sustained way—slow violence as unacceptably, brutally rapid?

Often our core challenge is how to track and mobilize against multi-speed forms of violence, in complex combinations of slow and rapid. At Bhopal, for instance, some 3,800 died instantly from the spectacular December 2–3, 1984 explosion. Within weeks another estimated 3,000 people had died. In the intervening twenty-seven years, a further 8,000 fatalities have resulted, while between 100,000 and 200,000 people suffer ongoing, debilitating health effects from their exposure. Each year, the monsoon rains flush the heavy metals and toxic compounds that remain on the site into the aquifers, creating a fresh cycle of annually upgraded health hazards. In December 2009, twenty-five years after the explosion, the BBC tested a heavily used hand pump and discovered that the water contained 1,000 times the WHO-recommended safe levels of the

carcinogen carbon tetrachloride. Faced with a multi-speed hazard like this, the Bhopal Survivors' Movement has had to find creative ways of keeping media attention trained on the flaring and ebbing slow burn of the aftermath, rather than the official event, the fiery explosion, that is too easily dismissed as historical.

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Pratt underscores the relationship between slow violence and slow resistance—those 'survivals, refusals, and persistences' that shape our world. She notes, in this context, how postcolonial criticism has tended to bypass 'what we call the indigenous.'

The Mariosol de la Cadena essay to which she refers us is exemplary in thinking through the complex socioenvironmental resistance mounted under the banner of the indigenous in Peru and Ecuador. De la Cadena underscores, in the process, the critical role that indigenous cosmologies play within such sustained refusals.

Postcolonial criticism's shallow engagement with the indigenous as a category is symptomatic of the field's emergence in relation to four principal geographical regions: Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. In none of these regions is the question of the indigenous as front and center as it is in the Americas, south and north. Postcolonialism's regional preoccupations (coupled with its linguistic bias toward the Anglophone and Francophone) have contributed to the continued marginalization of the Americas. There are encouraging signs that this is shifting, ranging from the work of Fernando Coronil to the way Sean Teuton and other Native scholars have begun to engage (and thereby transform) postcolonialism.

That said, most of the writers I discuss in *Slow Violence*—Ken Saro-Wiwa, Wangari, Maathai, Njabulo Ndebele, Abdulrahman Munif among them—are by any standards indigenous. For

Saro-Wiwa, the socioenvironmental conflict in the Niger Delta was not a conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, but between a disempowered indigenous micro-minority and an authoritarian state controlled by Nigeria's dominant indigenous groups, in cahoots with transnational corporations. In a situation like that, the indigenous as a discourse of socioenvironmental resistance cannot assume the charged historical potency that it does across much of the Americas.

As I write this, indigenistas in Bolivia have just won a socioenvironmental victory—major in itself and as a symbolic spur to others. After a 65-day hike to La Paz from the TIPNIS region, the protesters secured from President Evo Morales a signed agreement banning a Brazilian-funded highway through their Amazonian homeland. A recent study had projected that over the next eighteen years the highway would have resulted in the deforestation of 64% of the region. The protesters' victory is doubly heartening because of the conjoined terms in which they mounted their resistance. The indigenistas insisted that the road—touted as 'development'—would render their culture vulnerable to colonization through illegal settlement, while also insisting that it would compromise the region's vulnerable biodiversity through incremental deforestation. And thus these once-marginalized indigenistas have fortified their cause by invoking the interconnected values of cultural survival and ecological sustainability. In preempting a grandiose project that would have set in motion a corrosive slow violence, they have thwarted what would have become, in physical and temporal terms, a long highway of harm.

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Reviews



The Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence. By Randall Williams. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Pp 158. ISBN 9780816665419. \$60.00 (hbk). ISBN 9780816665426 \$20.00 (pbk).



The effects of decolonization, US foreign intervention, and nongovernmental human rights activism on international politics have spurred critics in recent years to examine the frames through which these political events and practices have been interpreted. By focusing on how violence and justice are portrayed in political practices and recorded in history, Randall Williams’ book declares the importance of historicizing and contextualizing the development of postwar human rights discourse. Wil-

liams’ energetic introduction not only maps the structure of his argument and the materials he engages, which are wide ranging—from films and plays to court and NGO documents—but also clearly lays out the historical and philosophical theories of his analysis. Historicizing the development of idealized concepts of global civil society and post-Cold War militarization, Williams contends that imperialist interests have always been intertwined with international justice. Examining imperialist power and human rights ‘ideological affinity’ provides the foundation for Williams to deploy the second part of his argument, which promotes the potential of counter-narratives and archives to engage more effectively with justice and solidarity (xxiv).

Central to Williams’ project is an interrogation of the privileging of an ahistorical, transcendental principle of nonviolence. In his first and second chapters, he critiques human rights organizations with an absolute commitment to nonviolence such as Amnesty International (AI). Such commitment resulted in AI removing Nelson Mandela from its list of ‘Prisoners of Conscience’ in 1964, just a few years after the organization was founded. The African National Congress (ANC) had ‘be-grudgingly decided to advocate the careful use of violence’ despite the fact that nonviolence was an ‘integral part of the organization’ (8), a decision that Mandela affirmed in his public court defense that year. Williams argues that the central debate in this situation was not, fundamentally, one of violence versus nonviolence, but rather that Amnesty International’s decision reflected an unwillingness to consider ‘historical conditions that might come to serve as a justification – political and moral – for the taking up of arms’ (11). Furthermore, this stance is one that is shared by other international human rights NGOs and is symptomatic of a widespread resistance by these

organizations to give aid to those who may find themselves unable to resist in any other way. Ultimately, Williams argues, the principle of nonviolence neglects the fact that legal means are often an untenable resistance or revolutionary tactic.

In his second chapter, Williams extends his critique of NGOs to organizations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Commission (ILGHRC) that did not address the murder of more than 15 lower-class *travesti* in Mexico until a ‘prominent gay activist and wealthy doctor’ was added to their number. In this example, the initial murders became a ‘narrative supplement to the murder of the cosmopolitan middle/upper class gay subjects’ (34). Williams reads into this a class politics imbedded in international gay rights that devalues certain lives in favor of others that will generate more sympathy and funding from their ‘largely white and middle class’ American base, a base largely affected by an ‘(inter)national ideological framework that . . . devalues certain lives south of the border’ (38). Together, chapters one and two provide compelling insights into the ways in which international human rights organizations reinforce an ‘imaginary geopolitical divide between first and third worlds, democratic and barbaric nations’ (29).

Williams remains unclear on the persistence of the problematics of this divide in Chapter Three, but does so while turning toward an interrogation of official US foreign intervention. Through a reading of the films *Hotel Rwanda* and *Caché*, he examines how shame operates within the discourse of human rights. By shaming Western viewers into an acknowledgement of their own responsibility and accountability in regards to human rights violations (the narrative of ‘we should have done something’ [49]), these films elide the significant ways in which the US *was* involved

in, and in fact at times enabled, these violations. The ‘shame,’ therefore, relies on an ahistorical vision of the US as non-complicit in the majority of twentieth-century genocides. This analysis leads to Williams’ assertion that ‘Western humanitarian intervention is guided by a brute calculus of power’ (68). Williams follows up on the critique of the US that emerges in this chapter in his Coda, extending his indictment of the Bush administration’s crude and blatant imperialist strategies with a discussion of the Obama administration’s ‘preferred cloak of the neoimperial state’ (114).

In Chapter Four, Williams focuses on truth commissions, which he describes in his introduction as human rights’ most ‘crowning achievement’ (xxvi). Human rights juridical procedures like these, he argues, try to ‘convert violence into nonviolence’ (71). The two literary texts he examines demonstrates, however, that in moments of radical crisis like apartheid or totalitarianism, the state fails to maintain the ‘necessary fictions of Law,’ and thus produces ‘signs of nonconvertibility’ (70). Nonconvertibility always exists, but is not always apparent, but when the state attempts to revise past acts of violence through commissions, nonconvertibility appears because extreme violence cannot be converted to nonviolence. Ariel Dorfman’s play *Death and the Maiden* and Darwin Flakoll and Claribel Alegría’s *Death of Somoza*, both in less and more effective ways, show that nonviolence cannot ‘disinstall violence from history’ (74). Instead, they illustrate that there can be no absolute choices in politics. Reading the ‘non-convertibility’ in these texts, Williams urges other literary critics to examine these works and others as a ‘counterarchive.’ This archive works to imagine ‘possibilities beyond what is sanctioned [...] beyond the juridical instance’ and, also importantly, represents a ‘manifestation of solidarity’ (91).



The final chapter turns to Fanon’s theory of liberation and violence—the seeming foundation of most of Williams’ analyses. Williams characterizes Fanon’s theory, against critics like Hannah Arendt and Homi Bhabha, as a strategic, historicized and ‘politico-epistemological project attempt[ing] to articulate a different kind of international urgency and solidarity’ (105). Arendt and Bhabha are critical of Fanon’s concept that ‘violence is the form of relationality itself’ because they view it as untenable and problematically inexhaustible (Williams 99). Also, Fanon’s theory appears contradictory to liberal humanism (Williams xxviii). Yet productively read, anticolonial violence, according to Williams and Fanon, possesses the potential to imagine ‘possibilities beyond what is sanctioned, beyond what it is possible to say out loud publicly’ or even in the juridical instance (Williams 91). Overall, this final chapter points to postcolonial and decolonization theorists from Fanon to Pheng Cheah to show nonjuridical counter-discourses of solidarity in opposition to ‘idealizations that persistently obscure the law-making and law-preserving function of international institutions’ like cosmopolitanism (106). Thus, this chapter helpfully contextualizes Williams’ analysis of human rights within the larger field of postcolonial studies.

Williams makes a good case for reinterpreting decolonization violence and its productive capacity to ‘articulate a different kind of international urgency and solidarity,’ which has far reaching impacts on the tasks of postcolonial literary and cultural theorists. However, we wonder if his articulation of human rights discourse, as having an absolute relationship with imperialism, might cover over the ways that human rights discourse has been creatively and effectively appropriated, translated, ‘indigenized’ and/or rede-

ployed in some neocolonial and decolonized settings. What can be most productive is not choosing a term such as ‘nonviolence’ in an attempt to encompass and predetermine all responses to human rights violations, but rather finding terms that incite dialectical discussions. ‘Vulnerability,’ for example, has the potential to cover over the singularity of the victim, but it simultaneously enables the victim to enter into social networks on the local and global level. Though individuals will have to communicate their experience through the Western dominated discourse of human rights, this discourse nevertheless enables a powerful space for their own response to vulnerability.

Overall, Williams’ theoretical rigour and impassioned engagement can serve as a model for those dissatisfied with the ways in which human rights discourse has been used and manipulated to serve opposing goals. His work reminds critics of the importance of interrogating any framework that offers an easy answer and we hope that others will engage with the critique that he has begun in these pages.

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Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War. By Charles Piot. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Pp. 216. ISBN 978-0-226-66965-6



‘The future’ has captured the contemporary anthropological imagination, and nowhere more so than in Africa. Unmoored from a Cold War teleology that seemed to hold in

place both Eyadéma's repressive dictatorship and Togolese expectations of modernity, Togo, as described by Charles Piot in *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War*, is a place that fuses possibility and despair in every gesture. Even as many Togolese strive to dismiss their past (construed as 'tradition' and 'culture,' located in villages, chieftaincies, and witches), a future seems to elude their grasp. The title, Piot writes, 'indexes Togolese longing for a future that replaces untoward pasts, both political and cultural' (20). This longing is made manifest in Christian narratives about the end of the world, and in the rejection of village 'traditions' and the elders that uphold them as satanic, as well as the efforts of Togolese to escape Togo altogether. *Nostalgia for the Future* 'attends to the inventions of everyday Togolese under crisis' by tracking those who 'jettison their past and commit themselves to a future without a telos and . . . evacuate a space they call home' (20).

The book's first section provides an overview of Piot's argument, and a political history of postcolonial Togo focused around Eyadéma's cult of personality. The second section consists of a chapter on the emergence of Pentecostalism in Lomé and along the coast, and a chapter on the playful ways Togolese manipulate the lottery for green cards enabling emigration to the United States. In the third section of the book, Piot returns to the site of his long-term fieldwork among the Kabre in the hills of northern Togo. The fourth chapter describes tensions between charismatic Christian churches and the village-based 'ritual/authority system' (104), while the fifth explores transformations in village-level development initiatives. Through these, Piot traces the reconfigurations of temporality and spatiality that accompany the deterioration of the relations of ritual

and state authority that once connected village to metropole, 'the demise,' he attests 'of an entire cultural system, and the political culture that patronized it' (163).

The book's greatest strengths lie in Piot's depth of knowledge about Togo, the level of detail in his ethnographic data, and the dense relationships and personal histories upon which he draws. The data he presents is clearly that of a seasoned fieldworker. Ambitious in scope, *Nostalgia for the Future* contributes to the study of postcolonial politics by illuminating a political subjectivity that seems to eschew the very realms in which political power has long been constituted in Togo, namely, state institutions and the village chieftaincies through which the state has operated. As he attempts to square these 'desires for displacement' (20) with an everyday liveliness insufficiently captured by terms like 'getting by' or 'making do,' Piot seems to ask: What politics can we see in charismatic Christianity and witch-finding, in bids for child sponsorship and visa lotteries, when the possibilities for effective political change at the level of the state have run dry?

The book's focus on 'changes in the cultural-political terrain of Togo since the end of the Cold War' (5) leads Piot to conclude first, that the end of the Cold War represented a more substantial break from colonial governance than did the end of colonialism itself (5; 13–14), and second, that the 'postcolonial theory' that grounded his earlier work is insufficient to the task of theorizing these changes (7–8; 16). Piot turns to anthropological and theoretical literature that elaborates a neoliberal mode of sovereignty framed as a radical break from past forms of governance. As he examines this singular moment wherein 'the money has dried up, the state has pulled back from

social and developmental fields, and NGOs and churches have... begun to recognize the everyday lives and imaginations of those in city and village' (5), Piot draws on works by Giorgio Agamben, Jean and John Comaroff, James Ferguson, Michal Hardt and Antonio Negri, and Achille Mbembé, emphasizing horizontal and supranational forms of governance, the expansion of biopolitical projects beyond the state, and commodities and self-reliance over gifts and relations of dependence (7–9). With the evacuation of the state, Piot argues, Togo is increasingly a 'necropolitical' site where state institutions prey upon or abandon populations, and where churches and NGOs, stepping into the breach with uneven interventions and distant agendas, neglect the material conditions of life (12).

Yet Piot's data also suggests an analysis that could productively complicate, rather than confirm, the theoretical literature he cites. For example, the state consistently creeps back into the story, if only in the form of salaries paid to civil servants who exert increasing control over village-level politics, troubling a diagnosis of 'bare life' in Kabre villages (cf. chapter 5). In addition, while Togolese are clearly wary of the political and social forms that have characterized the past, they seem far from nostalgic for the state, the regime, and the dictator that were. Rather than nostalgia, a longing for the past that is a commentary upon and critique of the present, Piot articulates the heady mix of desire and despair of Togolese as they face an untenable past and an unattainable future. *Nostalgia for the Future* thus complements recent scholarship on the aftermath of the Cold War, including a substantial literature on the affective and aesthetic dimensions of post-socialist political transitions and the accompanying disruption of people's senses of space, time,

and the political (Boym 2001; Oushakine 2007; Yurchak 2005).

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Neoliberal Frontiers: An Ethnography of Sovereignty in West Africa. By Brenda Chalfin. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010. Pp. 304. ISBN 9780226100616. \$23.00

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When cars roll off cargo ships at Ghana's Tema Port, Customs officers engage in 'conceptual disassembly' (147) to inspect their parts and verify production history. Like the disassembly of these 'whole' cars into constituent 'parts,' this ethnography of Ghana Customs Service (GCS) unpacks the dimensions of the shape-shifting 'whole' of state sovereignty in neoliberal times.

The ethnography poses the conundrum of Customs 'sovereign revival' (27) amid neoliberal reforms that 'weaken' states. While others have explored how state-deployed administrative tactics are experienced by the 'ruled,' Chalfin conceptualizes sovereignty as social-relational, arguing that Customs officers are agents whose multiple interests and intimacies

challenge rule-based conceptions of state power. Spanning ‘frontiers’ ranging from a peripheral border crossing to a commercial port outfitted with cutting edge technology, she foregrounds everyday negotiations that make and contest sovereignty. Coining the term ‘sovereign availability,’ she compares experiments in the ‘selective disaggregation’ (228) of abstractable features of state sovereignty to the ‘bio-availability’ of the late-modern human body to biomedical experimentation.

Neoliberal Frontiers captures the fungibility of infrastructures, affects, hierarchies, practices, objects, and meanings that shape and are shaped by neoliberal reforms targeting GCS. Chalfin’s conceptual disassembly of sovereignty engages territorial, transnational, popular, affective, and technological aspects of state power and probes the ‘human dimensions of [GCS] sovereign restructuring’ (41). Chapter Three argues that the busy Aflao border crossing (Ghana/Togo) is not a space where state authority breaks down and territorial sovereignty attains its limits but a zone where past, current, and future ideals are enacted within cyclical routines. While symbols inherited from the colonial order (uniforms, bugles, and rubber stamps) enable the state to inscribe bodies and parcels with its mark, a sterile white shipping container serves as a ‘hermitically sealed’ duty-free shop and ‘adheres to the far-off standards of an international order’ (85). In contrast to the state’s visual sovereignty enacted in the Arrival Hall by Customs officers standing sentry over a queue of unruly bodies, the duty-free shop symbolizes private interests that infiltrate governing processes and territorial sovereignty.

Chalfin fills a gap in the literature on ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘sovereignty’ by exploring how globally circulating standards and agendas are parasitically intertwined with local

targets. ‘Good governance’ initiatives that seek to ‘correct indiscipline’ (95) and foster transparency within GCS produce unexpected outcomes. Surprise visits by Customs superiors and a dress code for officers cultivate a ‘terror of transparency;’ the rhetoric of self-monitoring ironically legitimates authoritarian intervention into officers’ lives. Under ‘terror’ of good governance, officers turn away from tasks at the periphery of state power and ‘look backwards’ to the state’s ‘center.’ Similarly, Customs demilitarization under World Bank initiatives paradoxically resulted in its ‘remilitarization’ via incorporation of former military personnel and training. Exploring the checkered history of Aflao, Chalfin argues that neoliberal reforms are not simply ‘imported’ but shaped by the human, historical, and infrastructural terrain of ‘living’ frontiers.

The later chapters show that the privileging of global markets as a way to discipline the state calls into question relations between the moral and the material and between experiential and ‘evidence-based’ modes of managing people and objects. Drawing on public debates about seized cars and corruption, Chalfin traces the shift from the previous regime’s distribution of low-priced vehicles through patronage networks to the contemporary regime’s fixation on the full ‘market value’ of vehicles. The changing face of the state from protector of the public to protector of private property manifests in public discourse that disciplines state actors and institutions; ‘transparency’ as moralized public-witnessing co-opts neoliberally inspired calculable evidence. Amid such tensions, Chapter Six hones in on adoption of cutting-edge Customs technologies that mark Tema port as a ‘global stopping place’ (172) but intersect with officers’ accumulated *habitus* and knowledge. Before a giant X-ray scanner arrived, officers staged public, tactile



inspections of goods ('spectacles' of personified state power); now, inspection by 'private' X-ray generates instantaneous knowledge of objects. In officers' critiques of 'partial [X-ray] knowledge' of objects and erosion of their expert domain, Chalfin highlights contradictions inherent in the displacement of the source of sovereign power from national to multinational logics. Yet out-sourced technologies also amplify state power, internationally 'branding' Ghana as logistics model-state: 'A new transnational governance occupies and reproduces the old spaces of the state... each thrives on the borrowed authority of the other' (187).

Chapter Seven analyzes the frictious logics of Customs officers and neoliberal reforms, showing how standards are modified and localized within the affectively charged space of the international airport. Chalfin argues that symbols of sovereign statehood are as much structures of feeling as they are structures of force (199) and explores embodied and affective aspects of 'selectivity' operating under 'risk management' standards. Disciplinary structures meant to manage mobile goods and people are not implemented evenly but draw on 'local knowledge' of officers who 'profile' fellow Ghanaians, give non-citizens a 'green light,' and assume consumption or accumulation of goods based on travelers' declared profession.

With 'sovereignty' and 'neoliberal' in its title, *Neoliberal Frontiers* sets an ambitious agenda. Capitalizing on her proximity to Customs officers who police state borders, Chalfin colorfully fills out her conception of sovereignty as social-relational, arguing that the persistence and expansion of GCS proves that neoliberal reforms do not diminish state sovereignty and authority at territorial frontiers (237). Though Chalfin acknowledges the ethical and other constraints of her GCS

fieldwork, I sought further elaboration of Customs officers' social field as it extends outside of bureaucratic settings; how does professional identity seep into kinship and social networks? What is the nature of officers' professional mobility and social status? I also wonder what unique insights her ethnography of these technical experts brings to ongoing discussions of intermediaries, middle-men, and 'elites' in the contemporary African context. Further, although Chalfin foregrounds the book as comparative, Ghana presents throughout as exceptional. It is likely that dimensions of the story of sovereignty told here align with 'life' at other frontiers. At the crossroads of international political economy, anthropology of the state, and African Studies, this book calls for a 'living' and social-relational concept of sovereignty and state power.

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Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire. By Sukanya Banerjee. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. 272. ISBN 978-0-8223-4608-1. \$23.95



Tracing claims made by British Indians to universalist ideals of citizenship over the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Sukanya Banerjee shows us how we must think of citizenship beyond the bounds of the British nation and of India as nation-to-be. *Becoming Imperial Citizens* highlights how empire, and not the nation, generated a consciousness of formal equality of citizenship. Empire, therefore, provides the ground for claims to citizenship

even as these same claims implicitly critique British colonial practices, which denied these rights to societies deemed not yet ready for political representation. Exposing, then, the logic that allowed discourses of empire to function in the ways that they did, Banerjee demonstrates how British liberalism opens up the site of citizenship as one of ongoing negotiation.

To complicate the picture further, Banerjee reminds us that there was no definitive code of imperial citizenship that Indians could claim. Emphasizing the various articulations of citizenship that were undertaken in absence of such a code, Banerjee draws attention to the extralegal life of citizenship, by which she means the cultural, imaginative and affective registers through which it operates. She takes up four key British Indians and their writings to discuss how these claims were articulated not only in earlier moments, but through other languages of citizenship, focusing specifically on the concepts of the gothic, the spectral, the liminal and of mourning. These British Indians, she notes, illustrate that the relationship between colony and metropole was not based on a simple binary, and as writers, they showcase the different coordinates along which ideas of citizenship, and eventually the nation, were oriented.

In the case of Dadabhai Naoroji, Banerjee illustrates how his figuration of ‘un-British rule’ expresses a concern about the degeneration of Englishness in its economic and political practices in India, tapping into the prevalent metropolitan doubts of self-identity about empire in circulation at the time, which was a feature of the ‘imperial gothic’. His successful election to the British Parliament further underlines the ‘monstrous’ aspect of imperial citizenship since he absorbs the working-class, female, and Irish aspects of that citizenship on his Irish Home Rule ticket, additionally demonstrating the linkages be-

tween colony and metropole as debates about what constitutes citizenship affected British citizens in England as much as they did its imperial citizens. For Mohandas Gandhi, Banerjee showcases how indentured laborers were both indispensable to but unrepresentable within the rhetoric of imperial citizenship he employs. Not qualifying as the ‘ideal citizen’, they highlight what Banerjee refers to as the ‘spectral nature of citizenship’ since it is their absence-presence that constitutes the terms of the citizenship in which they cannot be made to participate. Gandhi therefore ends up articulating a citizenship that privileges educated, middle-class Indians’ right to these claims at the expense of lower class laborers.

With Cornelia Sorabji, the first Indian woman lawyer, Banerjee presents a citizenship that was not so concerned with claiming political rights, but more about an ethos of duty and service. Able to navigate multiple modes of being – Indian, English, woman, professional – Banerjee labels her a liminal figure since she can be all or none of these things. Sorabji, Banerjee argues, rewrites herself as an imperial citizen precisely by writing, and the tension her liminality invokes becomes another mode of articulating imperial citizenship, as one that does not resolve the paradoxes of the category of citizenship but makes it more flexible by highlighting the liminal relation between its constitutive categories. And for Surendranath Banerjea, Indian inclusion in the Indian Civil Service signaled the beginning of nationalist political development. But the moments of ‘mourning’ in his autobiography, highlight, as Banerjee notes, the disjunctions that underlie the principles of rational civil society, which for him can only hail the citizen through multiply refracted temporalities, thereby displacing the implied norms and singularity of liberal citizenship.

All of these writers illustrate, then, how the narrative of imperial citizenship often fails the citizen. Yet it is this failure that drives the insistent questioning of what constitutes citizenship, and what aspects of this citizenship coalesce in the nation-to-be. Where they differ points to a different aspect of anticolonialism, adding conversation to postcolonial studies and another telos for the nation. As Banerjee writes, 'The narratives of imperial citizenship deflect the singularity of nationhood' (17). This other telos, exemplified by Naoroji and Banerjea, is one that is not necessarily based on the ousting of British rule but one that, in articulating a loyalty to the idea of citizenship, demonstrates an anticolonialism predicated on the demands of the Indian people for equal rights against the inequities of a colonial government. Although imperial citizenship becomes crucial to the establishment of a national 'we', it is more ambivalent in its bounded territoriality.

Banerjee encourages us to use the fate of imperial citizenship as a way to ask what the 'success' of citizenship might mean, and what is at stake in such questions. Here it becomes important to remember that the debates about imperial citizenship she presents were ones that took place between Britain and 'politically conscious middle-class Indians' (9), a narrative that reveals how in the search for a composite idea of the term, an uneven class logic was still in operation. This problem is one, we know, that affects India as it transitions into a rights-granting nation-state. We ask, then, what would a universal citizenship look like if those that were absent-present were actually made to participate within it?

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Chutneyfying English: The Phenomenon of Hinglish. Edited by Rita Kothari and Rupert Snell. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011. Pp. 235. ISBN 9780143426395. Rs 299 (pbk).
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Chutneyfying English surveys the wide range of language practices and social processes that exist under the umbrella term 'Hinglish'. In the most general terms, Hinglish denotes not a single language variety but language mixing and hybridization both of English with Hindi words, phrases, calques, and of Hindi with English words, phrases, and calques. While this kind of hybridization occurs between English and almost all Indian languages, Hinglish is more widespread and visible because of its media presence in infotainment and cinema, and also because of the role that Hindi plays within other Indian languages. For the sizeable Tamil diaspora in Delhi, for example, Hinglish becomes a caste-neutral language of interaction (GJV Prasad).

Linguists have long studied code-mixing, i.e. the mixing of languages within a sentence, and code-switching, i.e. language mixing between sentences. But the value of this book is that it seeks to make sense of these linguistic practices in the context of the breath-taking changes and new locations of post-liberalization India. Hinglish emerges as a shorthand for very different social and cultural processes, charted here also thanks to the contributions of media professionals and students.

Hinglish, as Harish Trivedi and Devyani Sharma note, has a history. But whether it is R. Kipling's *Kim* or, more recently, A. Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), mixing English and Hindustani could serve quite different purposes. 'Uniting these diverse language practices under such intractably broad terms as 'mixed code' or 'hybrid identity' runs the risk

of obscuring important differences in the forms and functions of language mixing' (2), Devyani Sharma warns us. Her examples of Anglo-Indian code-mixing in the colonial period (such as 'You *dekkoe*d me *giro* in the *peenika pani* and you *cooch-biwanied*. You *sooned* me *bolo*. *Iswasti* I'll *gurrum* your *peechi*', C. Allen, *Plain Tales of the Raj*, 1975, cit. D. Sharma, 7) show 'widespread and authoritative use of highly inexpert Hindi', with 'spectacular lack of accommodation to the [Hindi] code' in terms of phonology or syntax, with the effect that 'Hindi was used to denigrate a devalued voice of the other, not align it with the self' (11). In the speech acts of contemporary British Hinglish youth, exactly the same linguistic mechanisms of form, context, and inference create the opposite effect of building solidarity and reducing social distance.

This history blurs into the history of Indian Englishes (in the plural, as GJV Prasad reminds us), and of the way English 'translates' and makes space for Indian languages along a continuously moving line of acceptability ('one is never too sure if an Indian word has become acceptable or not', Prasad 149). The history of the 'hidden' and not-so-hidden hand of English loanwords into Indian languages runs parallel (Snell, Prasad).

Coming to our times, Hinglish now covers two (or three) very different phenomena. One is the rise of a speech variety of urban multi-linguals that is mostly associated with metropolitan youth culture. Though it first appeared in parodic guises it has since become hyper-confident and hip. (Trivedi recalls that the first sustained non-parodic use of Hinglish was in Shobhaa Dé's column 'Nita's Natter' in the film magazine *Stardust* in the 1960s.) The other phenomenon is the much greater currency of English words even among mono-linguals who did not study English, the VMTs

(Vernacular-Medium Types), or who did not study at all. In other words, if one Hinglish is the language of infotainment, advertising, chick lit like A. Chauhan's *The Zoya Factor* or P. Kala's *Almost Single*, and metropolitan youth culture, the other Hinglish is the language of the new ambitions of the great upwardly mobile Indian lower-middle class and working class. Lyricist Prasoon Joshi aptly calls these two very different faces of Hinglish 'language of fun' and 'language of survival' (192). One could add a third social space of Hinglish, already evoked by Prasad, the 'Indian cosmopolitanism' of schools or industrial cities where Indians from different parts of the country have to find ways to communicate.

One of the valuable things about this book is that it does not merely celebrate Hinglish as a marker of India's economic and social change, but it raises important questions and presents the different sides in the debate. Is Hinglish a unifying and democratizing force? Is it a good thing? Rupert Snell, for example, expresses very genuine concerns that the appeal of mixed language will impoverish Hindi and other Indian languages, since English loanwords are preferred *anyhow*, so that perfectly good common Hindi words become quaint and obsolete (29). Rita Kothari worries that generations are coming up who cannot speak *any* language properly and cannot finish a sentence in a single language.

Interestingly, it is media professionals like Rahul Kansal (director of *Times of India*), Prashant Panday, and Santosh Desai who affirm in the strongest terms that Hinglish is helping cross or reduce the critical social faultline between EMT and VMT (English-Medium Types and Vernacular-Medium Types). As Santosh Desai puts it, 'Hinglish allows the opening up of the boundaries that



generally separate English from other languages; it allows to loosen the idea of English, especially around the margins; that's how you create a space that allows for the inclusion of a larger number of people' (200). So while language trainers in call-centres sometimes despair of being able to iron out regional accents or MTI (Mother Tongue Influence, another acronym) from candidates who are drawn more and more from the regional hinterland (like the man who introduced himself as 'Myself Ramoji'), these candidates view basic functional communicative English more and more within their reach and value the voice training provided by call centres as their passport to job mobility (Mathangi Krishnamurthy). The same MTI influence and hybridity that is celebrated in Indian writing in English, advertising, and online protest (e.g. the 'pink chaddies' campaign of Pramod Nayar's essay) is stamped out and viewed as a problem in out-facing call centres, where Indian languages live only 'furtive lives' around phone calls.

So the answer to the question 'is Hinglish a language constructed through commercial systems or organic processes' (200) seems to be—through both. Certainly Market India with its ads, newspapers, cable TV, cinema (and film songs), Radio Mirchi, internet blogging and chatting, and SMS texting has embraced Hinglish with a vengeance—whether as a strategy of 'localization' for multinational brands or as a language that has its own creativity and aesthetics (Prasoon Joshi, 193-5). Advertising, Harish Trivedi notes, is the one area of life in India where Hinglish is now not the exception but the rule (xviii). In Hindi cinema, whereas English used to mark the exotic, villainous or erotic other who exuded wealth, power, and menace, Hinglish now allows characters and viewers

to be simultaneously Indian-and-global, and embrace *des* and *pardes*, nation and diaspora. And while in *Rangeela* (1995) Hinglish was the language of consumerism and of upward mobility for (lower) middle class and ambitious Milli, in *Jab We Met* (2007) it has become the 'natural' everyday language in which the two Indian cosmopolitan youth connect (R. Kothari, 126). The social stratification that Hinglish carries may also be expressed in spatial terms, with small-town India possibly the only place where an Indian language spoken *without* mixing it with English is considered elegant and worthy of respect (S. Mishra, 162).

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Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier. Homay King. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. 205. ISBN 978-0-8223-4759-0 \$22.95 (pbk.); 978-8223-4743-9 \$79.95 (hb).



Translation is the topic *de rigueur* in transnational cultural studies and Homay King's book takes it on as a concept-metaphor through which to examine representations of East Asia in Western visual art history. Reading visual texts ranging from narrative cinema, experimental films and contemporary art, King examines the persistent stereotype of the inscrutable East in these works. Rather than offering a moral critique, her nuanced readings demonstrate that the deployment of orientalist tropes are not merely regrettable albeit marginal instances in the visual arts

history of the West but a constitutive aspect in fashioning Western identity.

King's argument is made through readings of the visual medium, where psychoanalysis undergoes a process of translation, which it must, she submits, if it is to account for the role of race in subject formation. Aware of the oft cited concern that psychoanalysis presumes a preexistent, self-enclosed subject, King grounds her thinking on Jean Laplanche's 'insistence on an alterity at the very heart of subjectivity and on the absolute primacy of concrete, particular other human beings in the implantation of this alterity and the constitution of the self' (19). Revising Freud's account on psychosexual development, Laplanche posits that the unconscious is not a storehouse of repressed memories or forbidden desires, but of enigmatic signifiers retained by the infant in her interactions with adults. A communicate that fails to communicate, the enigmatic signifier is indecipherable both because the infant lacks the capacity to decode just as they exceed the control and intent of those who transmit the messages. This model of subjectivity is a 'radical decentering of the subject' given that it recognizes the role of 'concrete human others' in constituting the self without reducing the latter to a completely knowable object (31, 33).

King's lucid prose guides readers unfamiliar with Laplanchean thought, her sensitive nuanced readings of the texts are such that they are not merely canvases upon which theory is applied. Rather, they demonstrate psychoanalysis' potential in engaging with race, which King suggests is the structuring absence in Laplanche's work. Chapters 2 and 3 make the case that the persistence of Oriental tropes in Hollywood films throughout the twentieth century—*Broken Blossoms* (1919); *The Shanghai Gesture* (1942);

Chinatown (1974); and *Blade Runner* (1982), to name a few key examples—are manifestations of the East as the enigmatic signifier. These films perform what King calls a 'shanghai gesture,' whereby seemingly inconsequential, passing appearances of the East, whether as *mise en scène*, oriental objects or accented speech, turn out to carry an overdetermined significance in the narrative. The effect is as if one has been shanghaied—tricked, disoriented by Oriental signifiers that bear ambivalent if ultimately inscrutable meanings. Supplemented by historical anecdotes film production history and Hollywood that attest to the politics of representation at stake, King's examination as to how this trope plays out in various films, whether reflecting a paranoid stance toward foreignness or a muted awareness as to its function in self-fashioning, drives home the point that East and West are 'the inextricable alterity of the other' (74).

Instead of offering correctives to damaging stereotypes, King turns to works that grapple with the challenge of representing a cultural other without presuming a fixed essence or authenticity. Eschewing the easy argument of Oriental fetishism, King suggests that the formal innovations in films such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung Kuo: Cina* (1972) and Leslie Thornton's *Adynata* (1983) can be viewed as enacting what Laplanche describes as de-translation. The prefix suggests a double movement—first, an undoing or deconstruction of an existing translation to reveal the myth of the original and, second, a recombination of the deconstructed bits to explore new relations. Yet, the outcome is not immediately restorative. A parallel reading of Sophie Calle's art installation, *Exquisite Pain* (2003) and Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003), Chapter 5 suggests that the orientalist



tropes in the works lead to an undoing of the self, producing the lost girl figure. This melancholic figure is read through Freud's female Oedipal complex to suggest that the 'lostness' inherent in the constitution of gendered subjectivity potentially serves as a model for recognizing how the other constitutes one's self, one that ironically risks its own undoing.

Though the works do not fully explore this possibility, their orientalist tendencies are nonetheless repetitions of a long tradition but with a difference. King's book can be described in a similar manner, a de-translation of psychoanalysis, the visual texts a means through which its inextricable relations with race are foregrounded and made palpable. But perhaps her interpretations also hint at the limits of psychoanalysis in theorizing the politics of cross-cultural representations. Gesturing toward 'global' visual culture at the end, King notes the proliferation of sameness everywhere under the sign of cultural difference, a thought echoed in Wim Wenders' observation in *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) about television culture in Japan, 'in the country that builds [televisions] all for the whole world so that the whole world can watch... American images.' That an image of the world can be had revealed to be a 'ludicrous' idea, the journey undertaken to know the East unravels, blurring the East-West dichotomy begins to blur. So too, through King's readings of visual texts, psychoanalysis' foundational premise of self and other as a means of engaging cultural difference begins to come undone when set to work on analyzing race.

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Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11. By Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp.246. ISBN 978-0-674-04852-2. \$27.95 (hbk).



This long-awaited and distinguished monograph is a critical intervention into the ways in which Muslims are 'framed' in various cultural representations in the contemporary era. *Framing Muslims* is the latest phase in an exciting research project, which has evolved from a series of workshops and seminars since its inauguration in 2008, to a special issue in *Interventions*, edited by Morey and Yaqin, entitled 'Muslims in the Frame.' The authors subject to intense scrutiny the various 'frames' that surround both American and British cultural productions concerning terrorism and the Muslim Other. The strongest sections are those that concern the British context: the book highlights the peculiar position that the Muslim Other occupies in the discourse of liberal multiculturalism (always as a 'problematic presence') and how this manifests itself in political rhetoric, radio and print journalism, realist film and docudrama. The book builds on and interacts with a growing body of scholarship, including the work of Elizabeth Poole, Jack Shaheen, Edward Said, Tim Jon Semmerling and Ziauddin Sardar. Where this study differs, however, is with its impressive scope: it covers a vast range of themes and debates and uses examples from a variety of media and contexts. The risk, though, of widening their research base, is that by covering so many arguments and so many texts, the focus becomes diffused at points.

In the Introduction, the authors begin by outlining the history of the Muslim 'presence'

in Britain and America and the formation of Muslim ‘communities’; and proceed to introduce the ‘roots’ of the (mis)representation of the Muslim Other in Western culture (7). Chapter One uses its first case study, the ‘Islamic Rage Boy,’ to present the theoretical framework of the book. Morey and Amina introduce Bhabha and Freud, and combine the former’s work on the stereotype with the latter’s on the ‘fetish’ to comment on the psychoanalytical impulse inherent in the process of stereotyping. They also draw on Bakhtin to describe the inherent dialogicality of the stereotype, arguing that ‘the “same old stories” are born and reborn from the constructed consensus’ (30); as well as on Bauman, by adapting his concept of the ‘stranger of modernity’ to the ‘supposedly unassimilated interloper’ of the Muslim Other (37). In Chapter Two the authors analyse a series of documentaries – both positive, ‘sympathetic interventions,’ and their more negative, ‘hostile’ counterparts – for the ways in which the Muslim characters are always positioned as a ‘problem’ (57). The chapter moves on to outline how the ‘honor killings’ were reported in the media and how issues of patriarchal brutality and domestic violence were wrongly inscribed as exclusive to Islamic culture and thus positioned as a marker of essentialized difference. In Chapter Three they first deliberate over the role of bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain and the Council of American Islamic Relations and unpick the ‘representative status’ that they are encouraged to occupy (88). They then turn their attention to the notion of ‘authentic spokespersons’, paying particular attention to Muslim radio journalists, for whom there is ‘always the unspoken expectation’ that they will “speak” on behalf of the communities’ (93, 100).

In Chapter Four the focus shifts to realist film and ‘docudrama’. Here they analyse their

(visual) representations in terms of various categories: *performance*, wherein the Muslim characters must ‘perform furiously to communicate their otherness’, as in *Yasmin* (125); *metonymy*, in which visual cues are repeated again and again, such as clothes, skin colour, and ritual, so that Muslims ‘exist as mere traces’ (119); and *framing* (often the literal frame that surrounds the subject). The authors show how cultural representations that appear to be positive, such as the 2008 BBC drama, *White Girl*, still feature Muslim characters as signifiers of difference and a buffer against which a white identity is compared. They then discuss *Dirty War* (a docudrama film that imagines a chemical warfare attack in London) for the ways in which it inherits certain iconographic images from 9/11 and they proffer a comparatively positive review of *The Hamburg Cell* (a drama following the 9/11 suicide bombers in their last twenty-four hours) by highlighting both its more ‘sophisticated narrative’ and the more humanized depictions it offers its Muslim characters (140). This works as a nice segue into the themes of Chapter Five, which features a nuanced comparison and interrogation of contemporary terrorist thrillers. They differentiate between shows such as *24*, which ‘tends ultimately to work at the exalted level of governmental ideology’ (168), and shows like *Sleeper Cell* that are more dialogic and ambivalent in their representation of the terrorist figure. They give a similar review of *Spooks* and suggest a more sympathetic reading to the ‘one-dimensional’ understanding offered by the Muslim Council of Britain (162). They also discuss *The Grid* and demonstrate that whilst the British characters are ‘psychologized’ (through trauma and ‘feelings’), the Muslim characters are ‘pathologized’ (they are seen as ‘inherently predisposed to violence’) (156).

In Chapter Six the book takes a change in direction. Attention is now on how Muslims can ‘perform...beyond the frame’. The authors take another original angle on their themes of performance, representation and identity by exploring how various Muslim alternatives to the Barbie doll (‘Razanne,’ ‘Dara and Sara’ and ‘Fulla’) were reported by various Western media outlets. Although a fascinating line of enquiry, this section, with its detailed analysis of the way in which these different dolls are marketed and represented, tends to digress from the central concepts and arguments of the book by opening up a plethora of new themes and issues, such as Muslim female identity, Islamic cosmopolitanism and global marketing strategies. Consequently, such statements as ‘[w]omen as always are made to carry the burden for an entire culture’ (192) seem a little out of place, as the book does not elsewhere introduce these discussions of gendered cultural representation. Finally, the chapter ends with a section on comedy, and particularly stand-up comedy, in order to suggest ways in which certain self-referential performances by such comedians as Shazia Mirza, U.S. comedy trio *Allah Made Me Funny*, and comedy films such as *Driving to Zigzagland* and *Planet of the Aliens*, serve to explode and undermine the normalized images and associations in Western culture with the Muslim Other. They offer this as a possible way in which the ‘frame’ can be broken.

In the course of this articulate and sophisticated study, Morey and Yaqin essentially depict the ‘frame’ that surrounds the contemporary representation and coverage of the Muslim Other. They trace its inception (namely Orientalist traditions), describe *what* the frame is (and *how* Muslims are framed), and finally suggest some ways in which Muslims can step *out* of the frame. What is less developed, however, is the *why*. Although

allusion is made to governmental ideology and neo-conservative thought, more attention could have been given to the specific economic and political context from which these images derive. While it is hard to dispute the book’s central arguments (which are convincing), what remains contestable is the periodization chosen by the authors. They rightly emphasise the gravity, the tenacity and the dialogicality of Muslim stereotypes in the contemporary era. However, by specifying a ‘post-9/11’ context, the book (among others in the field) perpetuates (albeit unintentionally) an unhealthy preoccupation with the event, a dwelling that implies that the mis-representation of Islam in its contemporary form began with 9/11. For example, although Morey and Yaqin do concede, in the Introduction, that the stereotypes ‘existed before’, they suggest that it was 9/11 that ‘has thrust a certain type of Orientalist stereotype firmly back onto our cinema and television screens’ (3).

It is undeniable that the post-9/11 context has witnessed a dramatic rise in the scale of stereotypical images circulating in visual media, popular culture, and print journalism. However, the book seems to make a misleading differentiation between the Orientalist past and the post-9/11 present, wherein the images are extrapolated from the older (separate) context and regenerated for the new one. Said tells us that representations operate ‘for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting’ (1978: 273). We also know that there has been a steady rise in the vilification of Muslim characters in Western media, popular culture, and political discourse since World War II and the establishment of the ‘American imperium’ (Said, 1978: 285). In the light of this, the book does not put - for this reader at least - sufficient emphasis on how the dissemination, circulation and affirmation of cultural

stereotypes of the ‘Other’ are directly integrated into the practice of imperialism. This by no means undermines this important study, which is most clearly an invaluable contribution to the field, but it perhaps questions some of the terminology that it uses.

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Reference

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Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality: The Anxiety of Theory. By Jane Hiddleston. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. Pp. 207. ISBN 9781846312304. £65 (hbk).
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An investigation of the interpenetrations of poststructuralist theory and postcolonial thought, the tight and vibrant *Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality* focuses on an ‘anxiety of theory’ that Hiddleston reads across an impressively broad yet concisely articulated range of poststructuralist work. The unifying concern of the slim yet dense volume is an analysis of the critical uncertainty that can be read across attempts to write the theorist’s encounter with colonialism and the postcolonial. Part one, ‘Poststructuralism in Algeria’, provides perceptive and original readings of three Franco-Algerian poststructuralists – Derrida, Cixous, and Lyotard – whose works blend philosophy and autobiography in order to undermine the stability of genre, form and positivist theoretical argument. Part two, ‘The-

ory and Cultural Difference’, presents the reader with detailed and finessed readings of Barthes, Kristeva and Spivak, which discuss the interrelations of literary-theoretical style, self-interrogatory writing, and the negotiation of anxieties about the postcolonial identity of the critic.

The central argumentative thread of the book posits that the writing of each of these famously difficult and prolific thinkers has an inbuilt anxiety towards and critique of the assumed neutrality of critical discourse, and through sustained attention to the mechanics of this particular self-reflexivity Hiddleston argues that this anxiety, though potentially narcissistic, is often highly generative. Hiddleston observes that although many critics of poststructuralist writing reject or dismiss it for its perceived failure to provide adequate political interventions in the concrete reality of colonial domination, poststructuralist theory – a term Hiddleston is careful to distinguish clearly from the broader ‘philosophy’ – and the critique it facilitates nevertheless performs necessary and radical intellectual work in the analysis of the complicity of discourse in colonial oppression. This defence of theory against charges of political inactivity is a manoeuvre that both illustrates the extent to which theory has been assumed to be politically inert and that activates the critique of this volume, which states that theory is not neutral and that in fact in many instances its political relevance emerges from its interrogation of its own idiom. From here Hiddleston proceeds to refocus attention towards the centre of her thesis, which is that the anxiety she diagnoses at the level of praxis – the act of writing and the insistence on an insecure authorial position – allows the work of these theorists to assume an ethical dimension; anxious self-reflexive provisionality is embedded in the

texts in order, Hiddleston contends, to preserve their alterity and to attempt to construct an ethical framework for the writing of the encounter with colonialism and the other. Much poststructuralist writing enacts the critique of colonial discourse for which it calls by refusing to assume a unified or stable subject position, Hiddleston writes: by foregrounding its own potentially compromised and uncertain origins, the refusal of an interior univocality in much poststructuralist writing troubles the notion of unified and stable identity upon which colonialism rests.

This well-argued central thesis is persuasive. The grouping of theorists is perhaps more convincing in the first part of the book, as the Franco-Algerian poststructuralists dialogue more readily than do the theorists of the second half. Nevertheless, the integrity of the argument, supported by the rigorous and perceptive close readings performed in the sustained analytical passages, overcomes this slight structural imbalance and allows the book to feel serious, relevant and authoritative.

Indeed, these close readings are the core of the text. Hiddleston's engagement with each author's self-consciously problematic subject position takes the form of an interrogation of each author's 'je' (Spivak's Anglophone 'I'), or rather, the way in which each author both inhabits and refuses to inhabit their 'je', in whatever register – philosophical, literary, autobiographical – it is used. Through her deft and painstakingly close dissections of the complex theoretical texts, Hiddleston maps the ways that critical uncertainty and a refusal of a potentially totalising authorial position can be read through the author's refusal to adopt a straightforward narrating voice – a constant and unified 'je' – that would imply, in contravention of many a poststructuralist tenet, a stable and clearly defined subjectivity.

There is much to praise in this compact and compelling piece of work, which coherently covers much tough ground in a lucid and readable prose. Hiddleston displays an admirable familiarity with a broad range of related scholarship and (equally important) an ability to deploy it unobtrusively, and her writing consistently remains closely hewn to the focused argumentative heart of the book. The selection of examples is often stimulating, and at times fearless – her reading of Derrida's imposingly elliptical paratactic autobiography 'Circonfession', for example, is particularly interesting. There is much originality too: for example, whilst Barthes is perhaps the most canonical of poststructuralists, his work is less often considered from a postcolonial perspective; whilst not an entirely unique intervention, Hiddleston's critical unpacking of Barthes' account of sexual adventure in Morocco is nuanced and penetrating.

The text itself, then, is tightly constructed and elegantly argued. However, what is perhaps most interesting about the book is Hiddleston's relation of the anxiety she identifies in poststructuralist and postcolonial theorising to the more general malaise that surrounds theoretical writing in the current moment. At a time of intellectual and political upheaval in which the challenges facing engaged critical thought seem ever more pressing (and in which a relevant successor to or reinvigoration of postmodernism does not seem forthcoming), a development of a rigorous critical idiom that is at once intellectually self-aware and ethical seems crucial, and Hiddleston's text provides a timely and relevant intervention into that debate. Whilst the time of poststructuralism's greatest immediacy may have passed, Hiddleston's thorough interrogation of its embedded autocritique demonstrates ways in which its self-reflexivity and (often flawed but nonetheless significant) attempts at ethical

intellectual projects may have much to offer to the uncertainties of 21st century theory.

However, it would be remiss not to observe here that those who do not read French may feel alienated by Hiddleston's insistence on leaving quotations from primary sources untranslated. Whilst this may seem a minor complaint, it could potentially diminish the appeal and reach of the text, which is unfortunate, as in

most other respects the book will speak with authority, urgency and relevance to a broad cross-section of scholars interested in postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and the future direction of politically engaged critical theory.

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