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État présent.
Francophone Postcolonial Studies With(out) Ecocriticism

In an essay from a few years ago, Dominique Chancé took Patrick Chamoiseau's 2002 novel *Biblique des derniers gestes* to task for not being, as she characterized it, sufficiently baroque. The critique was founded on the notion that for all of the linguistic and thematic 'foisonnement' over the course of its 786 pages, the novel remained binaristic, agonistic, and resolutely self-assured in its ideological orientation.¹ Chamoiseau's novel displayed, to her way of thinking, none of the taste for narrative aporia of Édouard Glissant's fiction, none of the detours and returns of the work of Alejo Carpentier, none of the ideological ambiguity of the work of Daniel Maximin. While partly conceding the point, I had questioned at the time if the frame of analysis wasn't too narrow; if, in fact, what Chamoiseau was now trying to craft might require a different way of reading.² Representations of global environmental crisis, which Chamoiseau foregrounds in the last part of *Biblique des derniers gestes* but to which Chancé paid no attention, seem to make it difficult to remain wholly in the sphere of cultural politics and to avoid an intervention in environmental politics. Part of Chamoiseau's passage from 'marqueur de paroles' (a kind of participant/observer on the fringes of the narrative's diegesis) in his earlier novels to his current incarnation as 'guerrier de l'imaginaire' (a more politically committed—albeit largely extradiegetic—positioning) is at least partly a response to the perceived necessity to abandon prevailing forms of representational undecidability in the face of the threat that rapid environmental degradation presents. Chancé, in her privileging of aesthetics and cultural politics, left little place for politics proper and was therefore not attuned to that aspect of *Biblique des derniers gestes*. The novel is marked by its own form of thematic indeterminacy—e.g., what is the proper response to the threat of environmental degradation?—just not the kind that interests Chancé.

What, then, might Chancé make of Chamoiseau's latest novel, *Les neuf consciences du malfini* (2009)? Here, Chamoiseau eschews the baroque poetics that were visible in his early novels and the few traces of which one could still find in *Biblique des derniers gestes*, by Chancé's reckoning, and produces an eco-fable that presents in very stark terms a choice between current environmental practices that the novel bluntly asserts will lead to ecosystemic collapse and an ethic of local stewardship coupled with a global consciousness, which together may stem the tide of global environmental change. Even though this allegorical fable is told from the point of view of the malfini or menfénil, the Caribbean bird of prey that heralded the narrator's return to Martinique in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and that is, more broadly, an important figure in the Martinican oral tradition, it avoids positing 'nature' as a sphere external to man. Rather, it is centrally concerned with the imbrication of the human and the non-human worlds, on one hand, and of local environmental practices and planetary ecological cycles, on the other. In its antagonistic, politically explicit mode of narration, though, it does not lend itself to the 'postcolonial baroque' readings that Chancé and the field of francophone postcolonial studies as a whole privileged for so long. Chancé's critique of Chamoiseau's waning status as creator of baroque narratives is internally coherent, but perhaps we must read differently in a time of accelerating global environmental change. Perhaps the increasingly explicit environmental rhetoric of recent works by Chamoiseau and others (Nan Bessora, Véronique Tadjo, Édouard Glissant, and J. M. G. Le Clézio, to cite just a few writers in the 'francophone postcolonial studies' purview) demands a different hermeneutic.

¹ Dominique Chancé, 'De *Chronique des sept misères* à *Biblique des derniers gestes*, Patrick Chamoiseau est-il baroque?', *Modern Language Notes*, 118 (2003), 867–94 (p. 869 and pp. 870–71).

² Richard Watts, "'Toutes ces eaux!': Ecology and Empire in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Biblique des derniers gestes*", *Modern Language Notes*, 118 (2003), 895–910 (pp. 898–99).

This *état présent* is concerned, then, with a metadisciplinary question that Chamoiseau's recent novels and Chancé's symptomatic essay on *Biblique des derniers gestes* force us to ask: why is there so little scholarship in *francophone* postcolonial studies that has an explicitly environmental or, more properly, 'ecocritical' orientation? The question takes on added poignancy, if not urgency, when one acknowledges, first, the accumulation of evidence of anthropogenic environmental change whose effects are tending for the moment to be most acute in the so-called Global South and, second—contrary to Dipesh Chakrabarty's recent assertion that 'postcolonialism is environmentally blind'³—the sophisticated work coming from scholars in *anglophone* postcolonial studies, such as Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Rob Nixon, Pablo Mukherjee, and others, that has a stated ecocritical orientation. In fact, anglophone postcolonial studies has not only set the terms of *ecocritical* postcolonial studies but had arrived at the state of an internal questioning nearly ten years ago.⁴ Why is French Studies once again 'en retard d'une guerre,' as Françoise Lionnet put it?⁵ There are a number of possible responses to this question of hermeneutic lag. It seems likely, in a first instance, that this paucity of ecocritical work in francophone studies exists at least in part for the same reasons that Charles Forsdick and David Murphy cited in their 2003 volume *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* to explain the resistance of French Studies to the postcolonial turn taking place in English departments: namely, a post-1968 hesitancy regarding the 'properly political'.⁶ Pursuing the analogy, the current hesitancy regarding ecocriticism contains a confounding irony similar to one identified by Forsdick and Murphy: just as they pointed out that this refusal of the category of the postcolonial in many sectors of French Studies was not for a lack of francophone thought on the postcolonial condition (they cited Sartre, Fanon, Memmi, and Césaire as important foundational figures for postcolonial studies), so too is it possible to identify a number of French-speaking thinkers whose work is important in the field of ecocriticism: Bruno Latour, Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (separately and together), Jacques Derrida, and, more recently, Édouard Glissant.

Another possible reason that an ecocritically informed francophone postcolonial studies has remained a virtual dead letter while scholars working in English and anglophone postcolonial studies have managed to produce a compelling body of ecocritical scholarship is that the latter more fully integrated the insights of cultural studies. While not neglecting literature as such—far from it—ecocritical anglophone postcolonial studies has widened its purview to take on the cultural politics of oil in Nigeria, the environmental philosophies of Rastafarians in Jamaica, and other 'non-literary' concerns. Chris Bongie, in the recent *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (2008), critiques the unreflexively literature-centred approach of francophone postcolonial studies and argues 'that the way "forward" for scholars who have self-identified with those fields [that is to say, postcolonial and francophone studies] must entail a more self-aware dialogue with that other discipline which has for almost half a century now devoted much of its attention to interrogating and arguing for the value of the popular: namely, cultural studies'.⁷ Without ever directly stating it, Bongie suggests that francophone postcolonial studies, which is often viewed as the most forward-looking area of French Studies (at least by its practitioners), is deeply imbued with the traditionalism of the discipline as a whole.

It may be too that a suspicion of 'environmentalism' as yet another form of discursive con-

³ Public lecture at University of Washington, Seattle, 17 November 2009.

⁴ William Slaymaker, 'Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 116 (2001), 129–44 (p. 135).

⁵ Cited in Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, 'Situating Francophone Postcolonial Thought', in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, Postcolonialism across the Disciplines, 4 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), pp. 1–27 (p. 13).

⁶ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, 'Introduction: the case for Francophone Postcolonial Studies', in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 1–14 (p. 8).

⁷ Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 10.

trol emanating from the former colonial centre has kept us from working this terrain. Édouard Glissant expressed this suspicion in the form of a definition of 'écologie' in the glossary to *Le discours antillais* (1981): 'Écologie (environnement, « parc naturel »): Une mode récente, héritée comme les autres. Sera-t-elle plus « opératoire »? Les organismes directeurs ou moteurs en sont à Paris'.⁸ Of course, Glissant himself had got over his scepticism of 'écologie' by the late 1990s, as his earnest proposal for a 'Martinique pays biologique', in *Traité du Tout-monde*, seems to indicate.⁹

What appears most plausible, though, is that this lack of critical interest in environmental concerns in French and Francophone Studies can be traced to the circuits of intellectual capital. Each of the terms 'ecocritical', 'francophone', and 'postcolonial' has a different provenance, which makes it easier for the circuit to be broken, and this situation is further complicated by the fact that each term is deeply contested in its own right. The problem for many with the term 'francophone' stems from its use in all manner of neo-colonial governmental and non-governmental projects, and 'postcolonial' is seen by some as enacting a historical rupture which may not have occurred and can be seen as prolonging an obsessive and harmful relationship between centre and periphery.¹⁰ As far as the term 'ecocritical' is concerned, it is not so much that it has a politically dubious provenance as that it has a distant one. Ecocriticism as a sub-discipline and a self-conscious set of interpretative practices coalesced around the study of North American nature writers, and often western United States ones at that. It should not be surprising that the leading ecocriticism programmes are in English departments at institutions such as University of California Santa Barbara, University of California Davis, University of Oregon, and, most notably, University of Nevada, Reno, where the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* is edited. There has been a transatlantic dialogue regarding ecocritical practices and theories, but largely with other anglophone sites, such as the English Department at Bath Spa University (home to Greg Garrard and Richard Kerridge, both of whom have published widely in the field of ecocriticism). It is easy to see, then, how anglophone postcolonial studies might have integrated the insights and practices of ecocriticism and vice-versa in the context of English departments with specialists in both of those fields. Still, there is something to be said regarding the problematic and not just distant provenance of ecocriticism as it concerns our resistance to it: what one might call first-generation ecocriticism had on occasion a white-man-surveying-his-realm cant to it. Some suggest that this is still the case: Timothy Morton recently went so far as to state that ecocriticism 'consciously blocks its ears to all intellectual developments of the last thirty years, notably [...] feminism, anti-racism, anti-homophobia, deconstruction'.¹¹ This, though, ignores the changes that have taken place in the field in at least the last ten years. The critique of the original tenets of ecocriticism, which began in the 1990s and led, eventually, to a much more compelling and self-questioning ecocritical practice, came in fact largely from the minority studies and postcolonial studies wings of English departments.¹² In any case, given the lack of a concerted critique coming from French Studies, the contested origins of ecocriticism do not explain the resistance to it in francophone postcolonial studies.

Needless to say, the productive cross-pollination that resulted from these arguments was taking place neither in French departments nor in French and Francophone Studies as a whole. But

⁸ Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 826.

⁹ Édouard Glissant, *Traité du tout-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 226–33.

¹⁰ For a fuller discussion, see Bongie's *Friends and Enemies* (pp. 5–14), and Forsdick and Murphy's introductions to the 2003 volume *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* and the 2009 volume *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*.

¹¹ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 20.

¹² A notable exception to this is Louisa Mackenzie's article on teaching Don DeLillo's *White Noise* from an ecocritical perspective, which effectively punctures some of 'first-wave' ecocriticism's most closely held beliefs. Mackenzie, as it happens, is primarily a scholar of the French Renaissance. See Louisa Mackenzie, 'An Ecocritical Approach to Teaching *White Noise*', in *Approaches to Teaching DeLillo's White Noise*, ed. by Tim Engles and John N. Duvall (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006), pp. 50–62.

in the manner of *le bourgeois gentilhomme*, perhaps we have been practising ecocriticism all along without being aware of it. Michael Dash's introduction to his 1985 translation of Édouard Glissant's *La Lézarde* (*The Ripening*) is a remarkable piece of ecologically oriented criticism, as is Régis Antoine's article from 1998 on the 'esthétique de la flaque' in contemporary Haitian literature. (It is probably not coincidental that both critics have Haiti, a site that demands attention to environmental degradation, at the centre of their concerns.) Eric Prieto's more recent but regrettably intermittent ecocritical readings of francophone Caribbean literature respond to ecocritical concerns in a more explicit fashion; likewise Stephanie Posthumus's work in contemporary French Studies.¹³ Otherwise, there is not much to cite in the way of antecedents, and it is precisely the isolated, episodic, and un-self-reflexive quality of the practice of ecocriticism in francophone postcolonial studies that leads to problems. For example, a 1999 special issue of the now-defunct bilingual online journal *Mots Pluriels* devoted quite promisingly to 'Ecologie, Ecocritique et Littérature' (though less promisingly translated as 'Ecology, Ecocritic [*sic*], and Literature') contains two articles on francophone postcolonial literature: one by Guy Ossito Midiohouan entitled 'Le créateur négro-africain et l'environnement: de la contemplation à l'engagement' and another by Kwaku Asante-Darko entitled 'The flora and fauna of negritude poetry: an ecocritical re-reading'. Midiohouan presents a survey of representations of the environment in francophone African literature, and therein lies the problem: in a discourse that should be particularly attentive to culturally specific senses of place, it subsumes everything under a very broad heading (Africa) and jumps without remarking from the Islamic/Sahelian context of Senegal to the Bantu/equatorial rainforest context of Cameroon. Midiohouan is, of course, intimately familiar with these cultural and environmental differences, but does not choose to underscore them. More troubling is Asante-Darko's essay, which repeats, in however well intentioned a fashion, the colonial trope of the colonized being closer to nature: 'Negritude is aesthetically attached to the rural, pre-colonial African society and its values' is a typical assertion of this essay.¹⁴ This is not a critique of the Western instrumentalization of 'nature' that one finds, for instance, in Suzanne Césaire's self-consciously contrapuntal and adversarial concept of the 'homme-plante' of Negritude.¹⁵ It is, rather, the expression of an internalized narrative that the West has consistently used to argue that Africa is outside of History.¹⁶

In light of these shortcomings, what might be a more productive way of getting francophone postcolonial studies and ecocriticism to converge? A novel such as Chamoiseau's *Les neuf consciences du malfini* suggests that francophone postcolonial studies needs to integrate the insights of recent ecocritical theory emanating from anglophone contexts while maintaining its focus on the specificity of the legacies of French imperialism. Chamoiseau's eco-fable, in which the author-narrator makes a very brief appearance in footnotes at the beginning and end but from whose diegesis he is atypically absent, is told in the first-person voice of the malfini, a type of hawk, and is focused on his encounter with a colibri or hummingbird. As such, the narrative is concerned with power dynamics and with the malfini's coming to consciousness of the necessity of abandoning his

¹³ See, for example, Eric Prieto, 'The Uses of Landscape: Ecocriticism and Martinican Cultural Theory', in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, ed. by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 236–46, and Stephanie Posthumus, 'L'exception écologiste française: *Globalia* de Jean-Christophe Rufin', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 12 (2008), 445–53.

¹⁴ Kwaku Asante-Darko, 'The flora and fauna of negritude poetry: an ecocritical re-reading', *Mots pluriels*, 11 (1999); <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1199kad.html>.

¹⁵ Suzanne Césaire, 'Malaise d'une civilisation', in *Tropiques: 1941–1945, Collection complète* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1978), p. 45.

¹⁶ It is in almost these very terms that Nicolas Sarkozy consigned Africa to irrelevancy in his 2007 speech in Dakar, Senegal: 'Le drame de l'Afrique, c'est que l'homme africain n'est pas assez entré dans l'histoire. Le paysan africain, qui depuis des millénaires, vit avec les saisons, dont l'idéal de vie est d'être en harmonie avec la nature, ne connaît que l'éternel recommencement du temps rythmé par la répétition sans fin des mêmes gestes et des mêmes paroles. Dans cet imaginaire où tout recommence toujours, il n'y a de place ni pour l'aventure humaine, ni pour l'idée de progrès'; http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/2007/juillet/allocation_a-1_universite_de_dakar.79184.html.

haughty self-regard, territorializing impulses, and abuse of hierarchical power in order to be like the hummingbird—promiscuous, non-violent, ecologically aware; in a word, minor—in something very much like a Deleuzian becoming-hummingbird. And ‘consciousness’ is indeed the word: as the novel’s title suggests, the text has a strong and arguably over-determined Buddhist orientation, with the Malfini’s Alaya or eighth consciousness, a kind of evolutionary instinct for violence, yielding over time to the Amala or ninth consciousness, a transcendence of that instinct and an embrace of the ‘diversalité’ of life, from microscopic dust to the so-called higher order creatures.

Faced with this turn in Chamoiseau’s thematic concerns, how do we address what is new in his work without putting aside what we already know about it? In other words, how do we read it from both ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives? One could subject the broad thematic orientation of the novel to an ecocritical reading by arguing, for instance, that Chamoiseau aims to break down the nature/culture distinction and acknowledge our ecological embeddedness in the mode of deep-ecological holism. Such a reading, however, would neglect the narrative’s franco-phone postcolonial specificity. In order to acknowledge this specificity, it is necessary to consider the interrelation of two other thematic preoccupations of the text: the first is the representation of anthropogenic environmental change taking place on a planetary level and the second is the staging by the novel of a local ecological calamity. The first appears in several brief episodes in the novel where the malfini and colibri, who are on a long-distance journey that is more peregrination than migration, encounter migratory birds in a state of great agitation. The birds describe disrupted seasons, extreme weather events, intermittent food supplies, and other climate-related difficulties. The second is the slow death of the bit of forest in Martinique where the malfini and the hummingbird live, a phenomenon linked to its proximity to banana plantations. Although not explicitly named in the novel, Chamoiseau is clearly evoking the widely recognized poisoning of soil and groundwater in Martinique with *chlordécone*, a synthetic chlorinated insecticide similar to DDT and known as kepone in English that was used by Martinican landowners—significantly, most of them descendants of slave owners from the *béké* ethnosocial class—on banana plantations allegedly as late 2002, even though its use had been outlawed in France in 1993.¹⁷

Both of these textual episodes operate according to the laws of what Lawrence Buell calls toxic discourse, though certainly the second more than the first: ‘Although [toxic discourse] rests on anxieties about environmental poisoning for which there is often strong evidence, it is a discourse of allegation or insinuation rather than of proof.’¹⁸ More than that, they complicate Ursula Heise’s contention that, in understandings of the environment, the ‘sense of planet’ must supersede the ‘sense of place’.¹⁹ Martinique, as Chamoiseau has been arguing at least since 1997 in his *Ecrire en pays dominé*, is in a double configuration whereby relations to its colonial past and its departmental present are overlaid with and sometimes indistinguishable from its exposure to global flows of all kinds, from the flood of culturally and geographically detached consumer goods (e.g., hot dogs, ketchup, and pasta in *Biblique des derniers gestes*) to the negative environmental externalities of global capitalism in *Les neuf consciences du malfini*. More to the point of this *état présent*, the work of ecocritics like Buell and Heise, widely cited in anglophone literary studies, can help us form the questions that will enable the effective integration of ecocriticism and francophone post-colonial studies.

If the field of postcolonial studies is primarily concerned with the problem of representation in the context of imperial injustice, then it needs to widen its remit to include more than injustice to humans. As I noted above, this point has been amply made by ecocritically oriented anglophone

¹⁷ The ‘Plan d’action chlordécone en Martinique et en Guadeloupe 2008–2010’ (June 2008), produced by the French Government, details (belatedly) the extent of the problem.

¹⁸ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 48.

¹⁹ As she asserts, ‘The challenge for environmentalist thinking, then, is to shift the core of its cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systemic sense of planet’; Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 56.

postcolonial scholars. The necessity of a *francophone* postcolonial ecocriticism resides in the fact that, as Chamoiseau's novel asserts, environmental harm is distributed both in a global fashion and local ways that can be tied to the legacies of particular colonialisms (i.e., the way in which overdevelopment in Martinique is a function of its elevated place in the hierarchy of overseas departments and territories). *Les neuf consciences du malfini*, unlike some of Chamoiseau's earlier novels, does not fold in on itself in its cultivation of the local. It avoids what Timothy Morton characterizes as the trap of place: 'Simply lauding location in the abstract or in the aesthetic [...] is in greater measure part of the problem than part of the solution'.²⁰ But the text does not submit to the potentially universalizing impulses of the rhetoric of global environmental change either. Ulrich Beck's oft-cited aphorism that '*poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic*' is elegant but wrong, as scholars of localized environmental racism have shown and as *Les neuf consciences du malfini*, in its own way, strongly suggests. Chamoiseau's works may no longer lend themselves to readings of the postcolonial baroque, but they do figure what we might characterize as the baroque configuration and the maddening indeterminacy that stems from needing to represent its sense of place and sense of planet—that is to say, its consciousness of local environmental harm and global environmental change—in the same narrative breath. Francophone postcolonial studies would do well to account for this shift, not just in Chamoiseau's exemplary production, but across the francophone literary field.

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²⁰ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 11.

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Ferdinand Léopold Oyono (1929–2010)

The question of how to mark the passing of Ferdinand Oyono, who died at the age of 80 earlier this year, is a complex one. His distinguished career as a diplomat and high-ranking politician in the service of the Republic of Cameroon is undoubtedly worthy of recognition but it must be for his activity as a writer that he deserves special mention and for which he will be remembered. It is tempting to suggest that his life can be divided neatly into two sections: the first, that of his youth and his student days in Paris during which he wrote the three novels that had a major impact on the emerging African literary scene: *Une vie de Boy* (1956), *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* (1956) and *Chemin d'Europe* (1960); the second, following his return to Cameroon in 1959 and lasting until his death, was that of a career diplomat and politician with the acumen and flexibility to hold high office and ministerial portfolios in the successive regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya. Precisely because the division between these two phases of his life is so clear-cut, Oyono's 'rejection' of literature around the watershed date of 1960 perhaps poses more questions than it resolves. Certainly, over the years, both in his native land and beyond, there have been frequent comparisons, not always favourable, with the stance of Cameroon's other great contemporary writer, Mongo Beti. Whereas Beti believed that writers should acknowledge the political context in which they work, and indeed should directly engage with political issues in their writings, Oyono's approach to his craft was far more nuanced. There is a clear political dimension to his novels, particularly *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille*, but it is expressed through a satirical critique of social relations rather than in a directly political way.

The critique of colonial rule in *Une vie de Boy*, for example, is implied rather than expressed through the personal story of the young narrator, Toundi, and the gradual erosion of his faith in the superiority of the colonial masters. Toundi's role as houseboy allows him access to the inner workings of colonial society: he is a privileged witness to the hypocrisy and immorality of the Whites but his own gullibility and naivety prevent him from extrapolating from his own observations and formulating a critique of the system as a whole. In *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* Oyono again uses an 'unreliable' narrator, Meka, whose experience of close contact with the colonial masters illustrates the gulf between the rhetoric of colonial discourse and the realities of colonial rule. Like Toundi, Meka is an unreliable narrator because he maintains a belief in the good faith of the colonial rulers. Like Toundi, he takes at face value the promise that colonialism offers the prospect of assimilation to French culture and society and views this as a benefit to be embraced. Both novels highlight the fact that colonial rule was not only based on a lie, it was also ultimately founded on violence. When Toundi and Meka eventually 'see' the Whites for what they are and realize that the discursive infrastructure upon which the colonial enterprise was ideologically constructed is nothing more than a device for asserting power, the consequences are brutal and directly visited upon their bodies in the form of beatings. Yet in both novels too, Oyono softens his critique by his use of comic effects: poking fun at the harmless African characters is a way of deflecting attention from the real butt of his satire: the vicious and violent Whites. His final novel, *Chemin d'Europe*, was far less successful. The protagonist, Barnabas, displays the same 'assimilationist' fascination for French culture and French life as Toundi and Meka, but lacks the naivety that made these earlier characters attractive and comic.

From 1960 onwards Oyono's commitment to literature apparently waned before fading completely. It is claimed that a fourth novel (*Le Pandémonium*) was written but never published. The vague sense of unease generated by Oyono's 'sudden' switch to a diplomatic career is perhaps nothing more than a romantic view that his decision and subsequent career amount to a self-serving 'betrayal' of literature. Whatever the view taken, his service to the state certainly placed him in some rather compromising positions. In 1972 when the French authorities imposed a ban on Mongo Beti's controversial book *Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation manquée* (1972)

it did so following a request from the Cameroonian Government, transmitted to the Ministry of the Interior by its representative in Paris, Ferdinand Oyono. Perhaps such switches, from author to censor, are simply the realities of political life.

Only a month before his death Oyono had represented his friend, President Paul Biya, at the staging of a theatrical evening to mark fifty years of Independence and the Reunification of Cameroon. The programme for the evening at Yaoundé's *Palais des Sports* involved a representation of the major events marking the country's 'epic' struggle to free itself from colonial rule. There is something deeply ironic about Oyono, the elder statesman, being cast in the role of spectator at such an event. Standing in for the President, and therefore himself very much a symbolic focus of attention, Oyono was witnessing a staged version of the power struggle in which, to an extent at least, his novels (not his political actions) made him an active participant. When history repeats itself, as Marx pointed out, tragedy is re-run as farce. In the final days of Oyono's life, ceremonial and the politics of representation seem to have replaced the representation of politics and the satirizing of self-legitimizing political ceremonies that were key aspects of his writings. In the event, Oyono died as he was leaving yet another state ceremony, a luncheon held in honour of the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, at the presidential palace in Yaoundé. Had Oyono continued writing satires of political power in the vein of his first two novels he might well have found much material to feed his work in his own political career and the manner of his departure from it.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Les Etudes postcoloniales: un carnaval académique. By JEAN-FRANÇOIS BAYART. Paris: Karthala, 2010. 132 pp. 15€. ISBN: 978-2-8111-0323-1

It is now commonly accepted that 2005 marked the entry of the term 'postcolonial' into public and academic debate in France: this *année charnière* saw the launch of the *Appel des Indigènes de la République*, the *loi du 23 février 2005*, the November riots in the suburbs, and the publication of the controversial edited volume, *La Fracture coloniale*. Previously perceived as an alien 'Anglo-Saxon' concept, the 'postcolonial' has, since 2005, become the subject of intense critical scrutiny in France. The basic premise of this short polemical work by the eminent political scientist/historian, Jean-François Bayart, is that, over the past five years, the postcolonial has attained what he terms a 'rente d'éminence' within the French academy, something he seeks to challenge, for he views postcolonial studies as inherently flawed and its practitioners as either deeply misguided or flagrantly opportunistic (or both).

Before engaging with Bayart's critique, I should make it clear that the readers of this Bulletin, and postcolonial scholars from the anglophone world more generally, are most definitely not the target audience for his text. Indeed, scholars based in anglophone contexts may well have difficulty in identifying with the image of postcolonial studies that emerges from it. This is not because Bayart 'gets postcolonial studies wrong' but rather because the emerging postcolonial debate in France has largely been situated within the social sciences and not in the literary sphere that has been its main home in the anglophone academy: Bayart's text can be read as an attempt to reclaim the social sciences from French-language scholars who have called for a postcolonial critique of French colonialism and its aftermath.

Making full use of his hugely impressive erudition from across the social sciences, Bayart marshals together a wide range of material that is deemed to reveal the weakness of postcolonial approaches to the study of the colonial and postcolonial periods: essentially, the postcolonial is cast as an ahistorical concept that seeks to understand colonial and postcolonial populations solely through the prism of a largely short-lived European colonialism. Such critiques should be quite familiar to anglophone postcolonial scholars, for Aijaz Ahmad amongst others made similar points almost two decades ago in articles that have in turn become key anthologized works in what has often appeared to be an endlessly self-critical postcolonial field. This is not to deny the importance of Bayart's critique but rather to signal an already existing self-awareness within the postcolonial field of its own weaknesses. Bayart, however, understands postcolonial studies as a monolithic field and there is absolutely no sense in his text of the rival and often antagonistic approaches that have marked the evolution of the postcolonial as a concept within the anglophone academy.

One might here argue in Bayart's defence that a 'belated' French-language adoption of post-colonial studies has in fact promoted a more unified vision of the field than actually exists, and it is to this version of the postcolonial that he is responding. This may well be the case but Bayart undermines his position by making little reference to specific postcolonial critics working in France; instead, postcolonial studies is largely cast in the role of a straw man who makes a range of unsubstantiated and ill-informed claims about the colonial and postcolonial eras. There is sustained and intelligent engagement by Bayart with the work of some of the subaltern studies authors but to claim that their work represents the bedrock of postcolonial studies is somewhat contentious. When the text does engage with the core postcolonial writings of a Spivak or a Bhabha, it is not at all clear that Bayart fully understands the intellectual framework of their arguments on representation and mimicry respectively: for instance, he appears to argue at one point that postcolonial studies critiques Bhabha's 'mimic men' for their lack of resistance (p. 54) when in fact the opposite is the case. This is a revealing moment for it becomes ever more evident as the text progresses that Bayart views the postcolonial as a largely partisan phenomenon, devoid

of scholarly rigour, as though it constituted the academic front for activist endeavours such as the *Indigènes de la République*. Consequently, he devotes many pages to lambasting what he views (erroneously in my view) as the unscholarly identity politics of postcolonial studies but, curiously, he has almost nothing to say about the strident right-wing defenders of empire who have, in many ways, been responsible for drawing scholars into the public arena.

Despite its occasionally reductive account of postcolonial studies, Bayart's text makes many very astute points, and its highly rigorous exposition of key developments in the historical study of colonialism and its aftermath should be welcomed as a warning against some of the worst generalizing tendencies of postcolonial studies. Regrettably, though, Bayart's text is less interested in making telling points than it is in scoring points against an imagined postcolonial studies devoid of all self-reflection and basking in its current supremacy, and the overall tone is one of scathing reproach. For this is not, for the most part, a calm, measured dissection of the postcolonial: indeed, Bayart often cannot help himself from playing the man rather than the ball in ways that do a great disservice to his overall argument. He is clearly incensed that postcolonial studies in France has, in his view, simply ignored or swept aside the work of scholars (including Bayart himself) who have already done so much work in this area. Consequently, just as the late historian Claude Liauzu dismissed the work of the French postcolonial 'pioneers', ACHAC, as 'barnum history' (due to their work on the phenomenon of 'human zoos'), Bayart condemns postcolonial studies as 'un carnaval académique'. It is the latest trend, a bandwagon on to which misguided scholars have scrambled: 'une stratégie de niche de la part de chercheurs en quête d'une part du marché académique' (p. 37). We are all familiar with such claims and one could even accept that it is 'de bonne guerre' for him to defend his own patch in this way. However, he goes much further than this and makes increasingly snide and unsubstantiated claims about the motivations of French-language scholars who have sought to situate their work within postcolonial studies: 'une manifestation de conformisme de migrant chez des universitaires français ou d'expression française expatriés aux Etats-Unis' (p. 38); 'une façon de se déprendre de l'*alma mater* pour des enseignants africains soucieux de tourner la page du Pacte Colonial' (p. 38). Seeking to defend French academia from claims of insularity, Bayart here paradoxically lapses into the worst form of nationalist academic condemnation.

What I find most dispiriting about this book is the failed opportunity that it represents for collaboration between an established figure such as Bayart, who has for decades been producing work that challenges our understanding of empire and its aftermath, and younger scholars of empire who have chosen to place their work under the banner of the postcolonial. For me, Bayart's work is what postcolonial studies is all about: an attempt to understand the colonial and postcolonial periods in all of their complexity. That he should view the emergence of what has been termed a 'postcolonial' debate in France solely as an example of turf wars between academics is a crying shame.

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Racism, Postcolonialism, Europe. Edited by GRAHAM HUGGAN and IAN LAW. Liverpool University Press, 2009. 213 pp. Hb £65. ISBN: 978-1-84631-219-9

Contemporary European scholars are rushing to keep pace with developments in the history and politics of race and racism. Asylum seekers, the Paris riots of 2005, the controversy over cartoons of the prophet Mohammed published in a Danish newspaper in the same year, and attitudes to Romani people have all been the subject of recent, intensive and often very fierce debate. It is to the credit of the present volume—which originated with a conference held at the University of Leeds in May 2006—that these timely subjects are handled with rigour, sensitivity and judiciousness.

The liner notes of *Postcolonialism, Racism, Europe* affirm that ‘racism is alive and dangerously well’ in this continent. From this starting point the editors seek to locate contemporary European racism within a familiar conceptual frame by turning ‘the postcolonial critical gaze [...] back onto Europe’. Graham Huggan begins with a deliberately dark vision of a Europe that has strayed far from Enlightenment ideals and continues to labour under the traumatic legacies of colonialism and imperialism. His introduction does a number of important things rather well, revisiting recent work in the field of postcolonial studies and discussing the intricacies and inter-relationships of the various forms of European racism. Huggan describes three key forms of racism that figure prominently in the present volume: a racism of reaction (focused on immigration), a racism of (false) respect (the paradox of multiculturalism), and a racism of surveillance (concerned with the identification and stigmatization of difference).

Postcolonialism, Racism, Europe comprises eleven substantive chapters, grouped around four broad headings of ‘concentrationary legacies’, ‘racisms of migration’, ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘towards the future?’. Together, the authors cover an array of European racisms, discussing France, Spain, Germany, Romania, Denmark, Turkey, the United Kingdom and more. There is a consistent emphasis on processes of defining and re-defining Europe and a powerful case is made that the European ‘periphery’ informs and challenges the perceived ‘centre’ in fundamental and vital ways. Evoking Hannah Arendt’s critique of totalitarian tendencies, Griselda Pollock begins the volume with the compelling argument that historical precedents for contemporary European racism can be identified in the anti-Semitism of the Holocaust. Further ‘concentrationary’ impulses of this kind are located in subsequent chapters on Romania and the Romani movement.

Later sections deal with asylum-seekers, migration and, crucially, with the debates over Turkish accession to the European Union that, as Christoph Ramm suggests, can be considered as harbingers of a new and potent form of Orientalist discourse. Islamophobia and the importance of language return in chapters on the Danish newspaper cartoons and the self-serving and exclusionary nature of discourses of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. In the final section, Michel Wieviorka, Robert Spencer and Ian Law have important things to say about France’s potential to move towards a post-republican acknowledgement of difference, British imperial nostalgia, and ways of engaging with, and combating, what Law freely refers to as ‘Europe’s racial crisis’.

Inevitably some of the volume’s contributions are stronger than others. The international dimension is a real strength although the case for a comparative approach (both within Europe and in the global context) could perhaps have been pushed a little further. These quibbles notwithstanding, I found *Postcolonialism, Racism, Europe* to be theoretically informed, rigorously analytical, rarely pessimistic, at times humorous and always sophisticated. It is a worthy and timely volume that enhances the reader’s understanding of contemporary Europe and suggests new ways of approaching race and racism in both the academic and political realms. It should be of particular value in the undergraduate classroom and of interest to historians, sociologists, political scientists,

and all those with a stake in the difficulties and differences inherent in the European past and future.

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Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France. Edited by CHARLES TSHIMANGA, DIDIER GONDOLA and PETER J. BLOOM. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009. 336 pp. Pb £17.99. ISBN: 9780253221315

This collection of essays by eleven leading international scholars offers a stimulating commentary on recent political, cultural, and historiographic debates surrounding national identity in France. The editors reflect on the terms that now structure 'Frenchness' in light of varied, often conflicting, critical responses to colonial and postcolonial paradigms. The book comprises three sections: Understanding the 2005 Riots; Colonization, Citizenship, and Containment; and, Visions and Tensions of Frenchness. Seven of the twelve chapters are welcome translations from French (by Jane Marie Todd and Naomi Baldinger), including contributions by Ahmed Boubeker, Achille Mbembe, Nicolas Bancel, and Nacira Guénif-Souilamas. The introduction deftly links the essays to existing scholarship on Black France, *banlieue* culture, and the *fracture coloniale*, indicating the importance of transnational intellectual responses to the events of 2005 following conservative reaction in much of the French academy and in public discourse. A thorough bibliography and useful glossary provide readers with tools to access further information on the topics covered.

The 2005 riots, which caused an estimated €200 million of damage and thrust the *banlieues* under a global media spotlight, have been widely interpreted as a violent reaction to long-term social and geographic marginalization. On the left, their fallout has raised widespread critiques of a monolithic model of French universalism and an apparent failure to address deep-seated racial inequality in the Republic. This interpretation and its ramifications are at the core of this book's overall direction. Didier Lapeyronnie places the 2005 events in the historical context of previous uprisings in Paris and Lyon in the 1980s. His argument, based on press comments and interviews with those directly involved, sets out the symbolic importance of such collective action. He suggests there is a disjuncture between the volume of commentary generated by these events and the relative silence, or silencing, of those involved. Achille Mbembe's concise interventions, first printed in 2005 in a Cameroonian newspaper, present a lucid discussion of the conceptual limitations of the French intellectual response to the 'nocturnal face' of the Republic (p. 48). He offers a stringent critique of the 'ideology of integration' and its associated 'state racism', drawing parallels with the American South, the system of apartheid in South Africa, and Palestine, and indicating an urgent need for deeper postcolonial reflection alongside a new civil rights movement in France (p. 69).

The second section explores recent historiographic debates surrounding colonialism and postcolonialism in France. Frederick Cooper's astute discussion of citizenship in the post-war period presents subtle distinctions between the definitions of 'immigrant subject' and 'imperial citizen' in the 1950s and early 1960s. Close analysis of constitutional wrangling suggests that definitions of citizenship were more fluid in this transitional period of uncertainty and possibility. It was only from the 1970s, Cooper argues, that France 'made itself more national' with stricter laws on immigration from former colonies. This serves as a useful warning against over-generalizing the history of 'Frenchness'. Following on, Florence Bernault and Nicolas Bancel explore the deep-seated resistance to colonial and postcolonial paradigms in recent historical debate in France.

Bernault describes successful political and intellectual counter-initiatives through case studies of two associations: the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN), and the more radical Mouvement des Indigènes de la République, whose manifesto is provided as an appendix. Bancel's illuminating analysis of the *loi du 23 février 2005*, on teaching the positive role of French colonization, interrogates the legislation in light of historiographical debates surrounding the appropriate use of memory. Lastly, Didier Gondola's chapter gives further evidence of the social and political marginalization faced by 'Blacks and Beurs' in France as the result of state policies, media representations, and the 'iconization of Blackness' past and present (p. 151). He suggests the need to address the fear of 'communautarisme' and the 'indigenization' of Africans in the French Republic, notably by re-engaging with the concept of whiteness as a powerful, residing, yet 'invisible', indicator of Frenchness.

The third section looks to creative modes in popular culture that position France's African diaspora amid current tensions and thus interrogate the hegemonic discourse of the *République*. Pierre Tévanian's chapter presents a carefully argued exposition of the contradictions of the 2004 'Anti-Headscarf' law within the historical framework of French secularism. Tévanian's polemic argues that the rise of quasi-religious 'securitarian secularism' based on 'totalitarian logic' is contrary to the libertarian foundations of French *laïcité* and marks a conservative revolution in French history. Nacira Guénif-Souilamas turns to Zinédine Zidane's status as avatar and 'object of political morphing' (p. 223). By considering the media's vexed mythologization of the Republic's 'postcolonial president' (p. 209) alongside Zidane's own near-silence and his 'ambivalence and multiplicity', this chapter seeks to untangle the construction of social and political identity as part of a proposed postcolonial project of 'Zidanology'. Following the thread of popular culture, Peter J. Bloom's weaving analysis connects African American and 'non-French French' urban cultural vernacular in parkour and the language of films such as Luc Besson's *District B13* (2004) and Abdellatif Kechiche's *L'Esquive* (2003). Lastly, Charles Tshimanga presents an informative introduction to rap as a site of contestation and dialogue that rejects the homogenization of French identity and culture. Complemented by his interviews with key figures such as Passi, Hamé, Ekoué and Casey, Tshimanga sets rap in a historical and a cultural context as a complex and informed challenge to hegemonic discourse. Frustratingly, the analysis of lyrics is limited to content, rather than language and form, since only the English translations are provided.

Overall this wide-ranging collection is a valuable addition to English-language books on French identity and the contemporary position of African diaspora in the Hexagon. The productive critical dialogue evidently at work between French- and English-speaking specialists provides an excellent introduction that contextualizes debates on the meaning of 'Frenchness' in a necessarily transnational framework.

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The Reparative in Narratives: Works of Mourning in Progress. By MIREILLE ROSELLO. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. 246 pp. Pb £19.95. ISBN: 978-184631-221-2

Rosello's search for the reparative in narratives is conditioned by a basic premise: we are living in a culture obsessed by colonial memory, but 'memory fever' has resulted in little more than a sterile debate between the Nation-State and marginalized voices over the question of repentance. For 'non-repentants', amnesia remains preferable to acts of historical disclosure that unlock unsavoury memories of the colonial past; whereas for 'repentants', the act of voicing historical silences is viewed as a necessary part of 'working through', and recovering from, colonial trauma. While the former are accused of engaging with unhealthy forms of silencing and historical revisionism, the latter are criticized for their reactionary retrospection, their engendering of social division and their fixation on colonial guilt. Rosello aims to find a way out of this binary or 'false dilemma' (p. 5), not by seeking to confirm the superiority of one position over the other, but by indentifying the reparative in narratives and, in doing so, offering an alternative to a discursive gridlock.

The quest for the reparative *in* narratives, as opposed to reparative narratives, means engaging with writers that negotiate the colonial past in the present without resorting to either strategies of silencing or acts of condemnation. Instead, the narratives selected are guided by an acute sense that the past can neither be cordoned off nor repaired. Collectively, they recognize the need to renounce denial while understanding that 'working through' colonial trauma will neither cure the past nor guarantee that it will not reoccur (p. 23). Within this theoretical framework, Rosello explores the works of four disparate authors, including the Algerian humorist and actor, Fellag; the novelist and author of *Algérie roman* (2002), Nicolas Ehni; the film director of *Caché* (2006), Michael Haneke; and the defence lawyer and autobiographer, Gisèle Halimi. What connects these four authors is less their national origin, language or participation in a particular historical moment (although the Algerian War forms one possible thematic thread) than their collective response to, and negotiation of, colonial trauma. In each case, the reparative is located in narrative strategies that enable the authors to accept the impossibility of repairing the past while learning to live with it consciously in the present (p. 25).

For Fellag, the reparative is identified in his comedic use of multilingualism and the reciprocal laughter that his comedy generates. Humour and self-mockery permit both the comedian and the audience to confront those uncomfortable traces of the colonial past that are felt in moments of cross-cultural exchange between the once dominant monolingual (French) culture and the formerly colonized multilingual (Arabic) culture. Alternatively, in Ehni's *Algérie roman*, the reparative is identified in the protagonist's (a French conscript) dedicated search for a narrative structure that is capable of formulating and conveying his request for forgiveness for the acts of torture he committed during the Algerian War. This quest is compounded by the imposed silence of post-war amnesty, the fragmentary nature of his memory and the absence of an audience who will receive his entreaty, the time for forgiveness having long since passed (p. 81). Although absolution remains impossible, the reparative is nonetheless retained in his relentless desire to construct such a request in full cognisance that it cannot be granted anymore than the past can be erased (p. 76). In contrast to Ehni's narrator, Haneke's *Caché* explores the question of colonial guilt through a protagonist (Georges) who refuses to accept responsibility for his involvement in colonial violence, in this case, in the massacre of Algerian demonstrators in October 1961. Despite Georges's inability to articulate a link between personal ('my') and collective responsibilities, which he defines as 'theirs' not 'ours', the enforced process of self-reflection that he follows also points to the reparative (p. 122). The bad faith of his self-contemplation reflects back at the audience and forces 'us' to 'rethink our own ethical position' in relation to such histories (p. 140). Finally, the reparative is traced in the works of the defence lawyer and autobiographer, Gisèle Halimi, in relation to her manipulation of language and the narrative techniques she uses to translate legal silences into recognized narratives and, in doing so, to challenge the limits of the Law.

Through these examples, Rosello argues that the act of historical ‘disclosure’, or of unearthing the colonial past and displaying it publically, is not of itself reparative (p. 201). To claim this to be the case is to engage in the sterile debate between disclosure as either promoting national reconciliation or as feeding social fracture (p. 204). At a time when postcolonialism has reached a period of self-reflexivity, its initial hopefulness in its own politically transformative potential having resulted in a vacuous ‘duty to remember’, *The Reparative in Narratives* presents an alternative route through the ‘war between victims’ (Stora). It is the need to bypass this discursive stalemate that constitutes the search for the reparative, be it through laughter, translating silence, challenging ‘moments of memory’ and fracturing the present, or by responsibly and consciously connecting ourselves with the past. The value of this monograph thus lies in the important reminder that the public recognition of a forgotten history is not the endpoint and does not represent the victory of one voice over another, but should rather represent the starting point for self-reflection.

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Voices of Exile in Contemporary Canadian Francophone Literature. By F. ELIZABETH DAHAB. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009. 229 pp. Hb \$60.00. ISBN: 978-0-7391-1878-8

This is the first study anywhere of Arabic-Canadian writers. *Voices of Exile* examines the works of several first-generation Canadian authors born in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and the Maghreb. There is a striking lack of scholarship on authors of Arabic descent in North America and Dahab’s volume fills this lacuna with an in-depth critical study of selected writers and texts. We should note that she prefers the term ‘Arabic’ as an adjective rather than ‘Arab’. Dahab herself is of Egyptian background and has degrees in French and Comparative Literature.

The first chapter in this book is a critical review of Arabic-Canadian writers with a detailed (forty-three-page) study that examines important topics: Québec as the locus of literatures of exile, other minority literatures in Canada, a profile of the Arabic community in Québec, language choice of writers, literary themes, and the literary theory of exile. In addition to extensive notes, this chapter includes a list of twenty-nine selected Arabic-Canadian writers, their genres, locations and literary prizes. The rest of the book has one chapter each devoted to five ‘senior’ authors: Saad Elikhadem, Naim Kattan, Abla Farhoud, Wajdi Mouawad and Hédi Bouraoui. Beginning with the introductory chapter, and continuing throughout the book, Dahab provides a solid theoretical basis for the cultural and literary analysis of Arabic-Canadian literature using these representative francophone authors.

Saad Elikhadem produced books in Arabic, English and French, and some bilingual editions of texts. Dahab describes him as ‘among those Egyptian-Canadian mediators (such as Alonzo and Naaman) who played a significant role in the transmission and diffusion of their own and other writer’s products through the literary reviews and publishing houses they founded’ (p. 46). Dahab’s chapter on Elikhadem examines four of his major works in English—*Wings of Lead* (1971/1994), *The Plague* (1989), *Trilogy of the Flying Egyptian* (1990–92), and *One Night in Cairo* (2001)—, as complex experimental novels which capture political and cultural values as well as the despair of the exile.

One of the best known Canadian writers in this study is Naim Kattan, remembered chiefly for his twenty-four years as an administrator in the Canada Council promoting the development of Canadian literature. For this public service work and for his thirty-four books Kattan has been honoured with many awards from both Québec and English Canada. Dahab’s chapter on Kattan focuses on his early novel, *Adieu Babylone* (1975), then later works, *L’Anniversaire* (2000) and *Le*

Gardien de mon frère (2003) followed by some short story collections.

The only female author who has a chapter devoted to her is Abla Farhoud who was born in Lebanon and is best known for her plays. Dahab identifies her as ‘the first Arabic-Canadian writer to have dramatized the communal experience of exile, and more specifically the horrors of the civil war in Lebanon (1975–1990)’ (p. 99). Farhoud also stands unique in that she uses no fewer than six registers of language in her writings: Québécois slang, standard French, colloquial French, English, colloquial Lebanese-Arabic and classical Arabic. She is the first to have infused her writing with transliterated Arabic phrases in her plays, *Les Filles du 5-10-15 cents* (1986) and *Jeux de patience* (1997), and her novels, *Le Bonheur à la queue glissante* (1998) and *Le Fou d’Omar* (2005).

The other famous author in Dahab’s study is Wajdi Mouawad known for his many plays and international stage productions. Born in Lebanon he later graduated from the École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada, then founded and directed a number of theatre companies in Québec and in France. His published plays include *Littoral* (1999), *Incendies* (2003), and *Forêts* (2006). They deal with his personal and family history of escaping the civil war in Lebanon and with various states of exile which he describes as ‘Non pas... l’exil de la terre d’origine, mais l’exil de soi... l’exil des mots qui nous nomment’ (quoted on p. 160). Dahab refers often to Edward Said’s notion of metaphorical exile and also draws comparisons to Pirandello.

The final chapter is on Hédi Bouraoui, a poet and academic who has been instrumental in promoting French language and culture in Ontario and studies of the Maghreb. Over four decades Bouraoui has produced more than forty volumes including poetry, novels, short stories, and literary criticism. He promoted the idea of transculturalism and his constant experimentation with language and forms places his work in a post-modern framework. While Dahab refers to many of Bouraoui’s works in this chapter her focus is primarily an analysis of the novel *La Femme d’entre les lignes* (2002), a love story between a writer and his female reader who both emerge as doubles by the end of the narrative in the style of self-reflexive metafiction.

In 2002 Elizabeth Dahab published *Voices in the Desert: An Anthology of Arabic-Canadian Women Writers* (Toronto, Guernica Editions), a text now used in many courses on Canadian literature, comparative literature, and women’s studies. This first collection of works by Canadian women of Arabic descent includes texts published in French, English and Arabic and thus epitomizes Deleuze and Guattari’s ideal of minor literatures and deterritorialization. Dahab has followed that seminal anthology with this critical study.

By collecting all these authors together and showcasing their works, Dahab has revealed a critical mass of Arabic-Canadian literature which should be recognized in academic circles and popular culture. She argues that Arabic-Canadian texts constitute a significant literature of exile while at the same time presenting a case for why these, often marginalized, authors should be included into the mainstream culture. *Voices of Exile* is an important contribution to Comparative Literature, not only as an example of the best scholarship, but one that will inspire other studies of Arabic-Canadian and Arabic-American writers.

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Editorial note: A paperback edition of Dahab’s monograph will appear in December 2010.

The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History. By BILL MARSHALL. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009. 375 pp. Pb £19.95. ISBN: 9781846310515

St-Pierre et Miquelon, the sparsely populated *collectivité territoriale* located just south of Newfoundland, is an anomalous space, little known in France, or in the rest of the world. Indeed, as Bill Marshall notes in this engaging and informative Atlantic itinerary, these remote rocky outcrops have often been confused with Caribbean islands (notably the town of St Pierre on Martinique), a mistake ironically compounded by the fact that the islands' inhabitants long used stamps featuring deserts and tropical images and, up to 1976, formed part of the CFA. Chateaubriand, Gobineau and Céline all mention St-Pierre et Miquelon in passing, while fiction originating from the islands falls into two categories: either the 'myth-making' of atavistic, folk portraits, or tales of arrival and departure tied to the memory and reality of these islands' history of mobility. Marshall's study of this cultural output raises the central questions in his book: how does 'Frenchness' function as a 'line of flight' (p. III) untethered from national bearings, and how can such transoceanic routes best be described?

The French Atlantic offers a valuable addition to the more familiar spatial paradigms of 'Francophone' literature. The chapters plot a circum-Atlantic course through six cities and one archipelago: from Nantes and La Rochelle in France, to St-Pierre et Miquelon, Quebec, New Orleans, Cayenne and Montevideo. The structure thus echoes a centre-to-periphery journey, but in doing so raises the reader's awareness of the critical itineraries that the book's project seeks to undermine, acknowledging the paradox of a decentring project that starts from the adjective 'French'. Of particular interest are the 'minor to minor' connections made between chapters, such as the link between Quebecois settlers and New Orleans settlements, and the deliberate focus on coastal cities, as opposed to Paris, as colonial centres. The unusual choices of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon and Montevideo that book-end more familiar material from Canada, Guiana, New Orleans, offer fresh perspectives and original connections that challenge the definition of French and Francophone studies.

Marshall's application of concepts of striated and smooth space, together with those of space and place, and the tools of Cultural Studies provide a theoretical framework and unifying threads between the chapters. The arguments draw on an impressive range of examples in literature, music, film, dance, music, painting, and architecture produced over the past four hundred years. A broadly materialist methodology presents a fluid and enabling mode of reading cultures by identifying their counter-narratives, tracing relationships of borrowing, inheritance, and innovation. The use of Deleuzian metaphors of maps, particles and flows in these cultural and historical analyses enables illuminating connections between the seven carefully chosen sites.

The book begins in Nantes, France's largest Atlantic port, a city defined by departures and arrivals. Jacques Demy's films, in particular *Lola* (1961), are analysed alongside a fascinating discussion of the city's Passage de Pommeraye. This urban landmark forms the hermeneutic anchor for discussion of the 'poetics of place' in works by Flaubert, Jules Verne, Baudelaire, Julien Gracq and the surrealists, suggesting links between artistic creation and the transatlantic commerce in sugar, fish, and in human beings. Moving to La Rochelle, Marshall highlights this maritime city's strong links with Louisiana and Acadia, in particular the migration of fixed-term workers and women, and the various cultural representations of this exodus (and return). The French slave trade comprised 19.2% of the twelve to fourteen million Africans shipped across the Atlantic (p. 46). This traffic and its fall-out maintain an omnipresent sub-tension in *The French Atlantic*, acknowledging Christopher Miller's recent work in this area. The position of both cities as a generators of 'vast realities in the French Atlantic', in particular through the slave trade, suggest the ongoing need to recognize, unpick, and address their complex 'labour of memory' (p. 95).

Chapters four and five discuss the ways in which Quebec City and New Orleans reconfigure connective elements of 'Frenchness' that have not been fully explored up to now. Quebec's identity as both a port and fortress provides a suggestive metaphor for the city's

ambivalent relationship with France, while a comparison with Montreal shows the different strategies of self-definition in each city. In a neat link, New Orleans and Louisiana are explored via their founding by Acadians, followed by a discussion of slavery and abolition and their representations in the region. An insightful comparison of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Charles Testut's *Le Vieux Salomon* (1872, written 1858), for example, juxtaposes each writer's portrayal of American and French republican traditions and the diverse experiences of former slaves in this period. This analysis of nineteenth-century Louisiana literature in French indicates a fascinating area for further research.

The final chapter moves south to Montevideo, a city which has long had an economically and socially significant French-speaking population, following waves of nineteenth-century migration from South West France. French language and French ideas have continued to enjoy a certain prestige in the Southern cone. Francophilia, multilingualism, and the experience of transatlantic travel leave seams in writing in French connected with the region that further test the concept of 'francophonie'. The chapter's overview of French-Uruguayan literary connections focuses on a well-known trio of poets born in the Montevideo: Jules Laforgue, Isidore Ducasse (Lautréamont), and Jules Supervielle, also making stimulating links to writing by Henri Calet and Copi (Raúl Damonte). Marshall builds on the dominant proto-Surrealist interpretations of Lautréamont's work, and argues convincingly for the need to consider more fully the linguistic, material context of his writing, identifying inflections of French, Spanish, and Pyrenean patois in *Les Chants de Maldoror*. The astute and detailed close-readings of Jules Supervielle, a poet whose 'molecular' work speaks of pampas, estancias, and the trappings of bourgeois literary life in Paris, suggest his work is perhaps due for rediscovery.

This book successfully demonstrates the 'French Atlantic' as a receptive and productive critical mode. Developing Paul Gilroy's and Edouard Glissant's theorizing of Atlantic spaces, the project does not seek to homogenize or totalize readings of Atlantic culture, but rather articulates a richly suggestive vocabulary for describing the anti-hierarchical decentralization that French studies continues to undergo. The broad geographic and temporal scope indicates generous avenues for future research that will continue to engage with this rhizomatic reconfiguration.

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Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World. Edited by NELS PEARSON and MARC SINGER. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. 224 pp. Hb £55. ISBN: 9780754668480

Nels Pearson and Marc Singer remark that as the detective novel developed from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the 'genre has connected the imposition of law and order to colonial, postcolonial, and transnational spaces and communities' (p. 3). They posit, therefore, that 'the study of shifting discourses of detective fiction as dynamically related to the emergence of postcolonial and transnational cultures on a global scale' (p. 8). In more contemporary contexts, they argue that the traditional impetus for a detective novel has deviated from a tale in which reader satisfaction was derived from insight into the machinations of the criminal mind. Instead, the entertainment is generated by the process of 'metaphysical detection' (p. 6), introduced into the genre in the twentieth century. Metaphysical detection, a theory emerging from the literary traditions inspired by Jorges Luis Borges and Alain Robbe-Grillet among others, transforms the seemingly cut-and-dry interpretation of the genre by refocusing plot around insights gained into the psyches of invariably idiosyncratic characters. With this variation to the generic formula

accounted for, the collection of essays ‘encourages serious discussion about how to reconcile the conviction that political identities and methods of deduction are arbitrary, discursive constructs with the conviction that a global code of rights and ethics must believe in the salience of both’ (p. 13).

Probing international and transnational narratives from this approach, the contributors make a case collectively for a study of both personal and public investigations in which the detective characters engage in introspection as much as solving crimes. Through eleven essays, covering areas such as North America and Latin America, the Indian Subcontinent, Sri Lanka and the French Caribbean, the authors in *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* seek to challenge the codification of detective fiction and provide insight into how they perceive the genre changing. Chapters deal with several types of fictional investigations. While Maureen Lauder discusses Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*, a story about the origins of a cure for malaria, Soo Yeon Kim explores Suki Kim’s tale of a second generation migrant’s investigation of the murder of her parents. Wendy Knepper theorizes the ‘case of the latina detective’; Robin Truth Goodman compares journalistic representations of the ‘war on terror’ in Columbia involving clandestine military operations against the syndicates of narcotics kingpin Pablo Escobar. Thus, the corpus of *Detective Fiction* ranges across genres, ethnicities and geographical areas, yet can be unified through its focus on ‘detection’ as an aesthetic of the pursuit of knowledge.

Especially relevant to those interested in French-language Antillean literature, Jason Herbeck suggests that from a perspective of applying the theory of metaphysical detection, narratives in the French Caribbean have no shortage of potential for becoming detective narratives, as notions of crime and criminality often play a central role in storytelling, as in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *L’Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* (1997). Greg Wright’s chapter on Chamoiseau’s *Solibo magnifique* (1988) treats the story as one such metaphysical case to be solved: who is to blame for Solibo’s death? In the magically realistic humour resulting from such a reading—the word which was coming out of Solibo’s mouth and killed him is culpable of a crime—Wright’s interpretation nimbly treats the text within an appropriate framework.

A few elaborations remain desired of *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World*. For example, throughout the volume, decoding of personal and public values becomes paramount, and so the role of language within these narratives could be more thoroughly addressed. Also, examples of commonalities and discrepancies between theories of global human rights would constitute together a further point of scholarly enquiry, with provocative implications for how character dilemmas are detected and investigated between and across borders. Along these lines, a concluding comment by the editors of *Detective Fiction* could have been appropriately placed, even if to justify a preference for the case of the metaphysical detective in literature to remain open.

BART MILLER
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

CONFERENCE REPORTS

New Directions in Francophone Postcolonial Studies: The Challenge of a Materialist Critique

SFPS Postgraduate Workshop
University of Liverpool, 10 June 2010

This postgraduate workshop, organized by Bart Miller for the Society of Francophone Postcolonial Studies, sought to unpick the complex interstitial space between history, politics, literature, and culture occupied by Francophone postcolonial studies. Andy Stafford opened the forum with a stimulating and engaging paper that challenged the problematic compartmentalization and separation of the political and the literary in emerging postcolonial theory. Stafford pointed to a crisis at the heart of Francophone postcolonial studies and Marxist literary criticism, and suggested that it is via a notion of justice and critical praxis—one that necessarily engages the political through the literary—that the discipline can progress. Other approaches to the debate included papers dealing with the contradictions in French and African postcolonial historiographies, and the failure of contemporary Film Studies to address the economic reality of West African financial dependence on France. Additional postgraduate papers on a materialist critique of ethnographic epistemological violence, and a ‘transcolonial’ account of connections between discursive and materialist paradigms in Francophone postcolonial studies, provided further fertile ground for discussion.

Of particular note was David Murphy’s paper addressing the complex relationship between anti-colonial critique and textual analysis within the field. His paper raised questions about the problematic tendency to blur the distinctions between materialist and Marxist critique, leading him to reflect on the evolution—and current shape—of postcolonial studies in the Francophone world. For a non-specialist, the debate raised questions germane to the broader fields of literary, cultural and historical inquiry inviting attendees to reflect on their own approaches in a variety of disciplines. Inescapably shaped by the poststructuralist ‘cultural turn’, and a fascination with textuality, it is easy to forget that the underlying issues relating to power, justice and equality require political activism to be at the heart of a cultural critique. The postcolonial is not primarily a literary experience, but rather a lived reality. Murphy reminded us not to be prematurely self-congratulatory with the work that Postcolonial Studies have ‘done’, as it is only just beginning.

Aimed specifically at early-career academics, the workshop also included two instructive postgraduate skills and training sessions tailored to equip new talent with strategies to deal with the unusual and difficult circumstances of the economic climate in the academic world.

CLAIRE MACLEOD PETERS
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

**Francophone Caribbean Literature and Translation:
Maryse Condé and Richard Philcox**

University of Birmingham, 30 September 2010

Internationally acclaimed Caribbean author Maryse Condé, and her translator Richard Philcox, gave the Jess Banks and Mireille Best Memorial Lectures at the University of Birmingham on 30 September 2010.

The lectures, organized by Dr Louise Hardwick in the Department of French Studies, formed part of the University's programme of events marking Black History Month, and also fell in the same week as the European Day of Languages on 26 September 2010, highlighting the role played by the University's language departments in uncovering the rich and diverse cultures of other nations.

Over one hundred students, staff, alumni and members of the public attended, including representatives of the Honorary Consul for France, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Brasshouse Language Centre, and members of local associations, 'Les Français de Birmingham' and the 'Birmingham Anglo-French Society'. It was particularly pleasing to welcome so many colleagues, graduates and early career researchers from UK universities including Leicester, Liverpool, Nottingham, Reading, St Andrews, Warwick, Queen Mary and Birkbeck, University of London.

Maryse Condé opened proceedings with a moving and thought-provoking account of her literary and personal trajectory from Guadeloupe to Africa, Europe and the United States, and also spoke of her recent role as first president of the French national Committee for the Commemoration of Slavery (2004–2008). This was followed by Richard Philcox's fascinating account of his work as a literary translator, chaired by Dr Claire Bisdorff (Queen Mary). His lecture took the form of an interactive workshop, which gave rise to lively on his translations of Condé and his recent re-translation of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. The visit is also being celebrated by exhibitions of Condé's writing at Birmingham Central Library and the University of Birmingham Library.

To find out more about the visit and forthcoming events, see www.french.bham.ac.uk/research/francopoco.

LOUISE HARDWICK
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Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies

Contributions on any topic related to Francophone Postcolonial Studies are invited for inclusion in future issues. Authors should submit electronically two copies of their article, 4,000 words maximum, in English or French to a member of the editorial team. Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA Stylebook*, providing references in footnotes, rather than the author-date system. All articles submitted to the *BFPS* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from the advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked that their manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. Book reviews (between 600 and 1000 words in length), conference reports (500 words max.), and calls for papers, should also be sent to the editorial team.

The deadline for the receipt of articles to be included in the spring 2011 issue is 31 January 2011.

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The SFPS logo, designed by Caomhán Ó Scolaí, is based on a Téké mask from the Upper Sanga region (Congo-Brazzaville).

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