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Editor's note

In respect of the ongoing industrial action of the University and College Union (UCU) in the UK, the current issue of the *Bulletin* is slimmer than usual and will be published with a slight delay. We are, however, introducing/reviving the format of the review essay to give more space to the nuanced reflection on scholarly works in the field that have triggered responses from beyond the academy. For this issue, Dr Kaya Davies Hayon, an expert in Francophone postcolonial cinema and visual culture, contextualizes the French media reactions to the 2018 publication of *Sexe, race et colonies: La domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours* within the heated discussion of how to represent and use colonial photography (and visual culture) in an ethically responsible way. The idea of both format and topic of this piece were the *Bulletin*'s founding editor Professor Kate Marsh's last editorial contribution and I think that Dr Davies Hayon has done a great job in response to this commission.

Bonne lecture,

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Sexe, race et colonies and the Aesthetics-Ethics Debate in the Francophone Postcolonial Visual Field

How should we engage with images of (colonial) violence or suffering, and do we do more harm than good when we reproduce them in educational or artistic forums? These are just some of the questions that were raised by the recent publication of *Sexe, race et colonies: La domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours* in France. The 548-page book — published by Éditions La Découverte and edited by Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, Christelle Taraud and Dominic Thomas — examines the domination of bodies from the fifteenth century right through to the present day. The collection provides a wide-ranging overview of the relationship between sex and race in (colonial and imperial) contexts of domination, by charting the representation of the body in visual cultural forms from the medieval period onwards. However, it has been criticized in the French left-wing and radical press for its seemingly uncritical reproduction of images of sexualized and racialized subjects who have been denigrated and disempowered throughout history. The debate that has ensued has raised questions about the role of images of human suffering and colonial subjugation and has (re)ignited discussions in France around the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in the postcolonial visual field.[1]

Released in 2018 in France, *Sexe, race et colonies* is the result of around four years of work, including extensive archival research in 300 private and public collections worldwide (p. 16).[2] It features contributions from nearly 100 renowned postcolonial scholars and cultural figures, including a preface by Achille Mbembe and Jacques Martial and a postface by literary celebrity Leïla Slimani. As an edited collection, *Sexe, race et colonies* makes the argument that forms of domination and oppression have operated not just through the control of territories and bodies, but also through sexual dominance and psychological control (p. 12). The scope of the collection is huge: it spans six centuries and draws on the expertise of a global network of academics with specialisms in a wealth of different contexts, including the Francophone world, the United States, and East Asia. The main focus is France's colonial past and the slave trade to and within the United States, but the editors also take into consideration countries colonized by Japan, China, and other European powers. The structure of the book is thematic and chronological, with four large sections focusing on a) the fascination with 'the other' between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, b) the domination of the other in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, c) the period of decolonization in the twentieth century, and d) the cultural *métissage* of the contemporary era. The four major sections are then divided up into chapters written by the aforementioned specialists and also include short single-page *interventions* spotlighting subjects, ranging from colonial cartographies and the *conquistadors* in the Americas to U.S.-American soldiers in the Pacific and contemporary feminist anti-orientalist art.

Sexe, race et colonies is certainly comprehensive in its attempts to show how sexuality, race, and domination have been interlinked throughout history and how the legacies of the past continue to shape our thinking about bodies in the present. While the editors acknowledge that colonial sexual histories have been well researched and documented, they seek to demonstrate how regimes of dominance have resulted in a proliferation of images of colonized, enslaved and otherwise oppressed subjects that have objectified them, and that continue to define and determine our collective imaginaries today. As the editors write, '[p]artout, la domination a produit des images et des imaginaires essentialisant et objectivant des corps "indigènes" presents comme

[1] I am thinking here of high-profile debates, referred to rather unreflexively in *Sexe, race et colonies*, around Malek Alloula's *Le Harem colonial* (1986). As has been well-documented, Alloula's reproduction of colonial postcards of Algerian women was taken to task by critics like Mieke Bal for what she viewed as his complicity with the colonial male gaze he was ostensibly trying to critique. Cf. Mieke Bal, 'The Politics of Citation: Review of *The Colonial Harem, Wildheid en Beschaving, Difference and Pathology*', *Diacritics*, 21.1, (1991): pp. 25–45.

[2] Priscille Lafitte, 'Sex, Race & Colonies' book hits nerve in post-colonial France', *France 24* (2018) <https://www.france24.com/en/20181022-france-controversial-book-sex-race-colonies-hits-sensitive-nerve-post-colonial-power> [accessed 20 January 2020].

"naturellement" offerts aux explorateurs, aux voyageurs et aux colonisateurs' (p. 12). Rather than describing these images, the editors reproduce over a thousand of them in high-quality, high-definition format, positioned either alongside the text, or on their own as full- or half-page spreads, such that they adorn the pages of the book. These reproduced paintings, photographs, posters, drawings, postcards, and sculptures contain often shocking and, in some cases, violent sights of subjugated and highly sexualized subjects, many of whom are women. Early on, the editors acknowledge that the images they show embody a sort of 'violence intrinsèque' (p. 16). However, they justify their decision to reproduce them here as necessary if they are to neutralise the images' potency and deconstruct their not always implicit connotations. '*De facto*, nous pensons qu'il est impossible de déconstruire ce qui a été si minutieusement et si massivement fabriqué, pendant près de six siècles, sans montrer "les objets du délit"', they argue (pp. 16–19).

It is the editors' reproduction of these so-called 'objets du délit' that has provoked the ire of the press and cultural commentators in France. Writing in *Libération*, the journalist Philippe Artières acknowledges the importance of deconstructing the role of images in colonial conquests, but criticizes *Sexe, race et colonies* for its lack of critical engagement with its own potentially problematic material status. If we reproduce images of this sort, he asks, should we not be concerned about 'la matérialité de l'objet d'histoire que l'on fabrique'?[3] He goes on to argue that the format of the book — with its arresting black cover and bold neon title that prioritizes the word 'sexe' by centring it and printing it in a larger format than the words 'race' and 'colonies' — aligns it with the depoliticized coffee-table aesthetic favoured by certain photo books.[4] Indeed, for Artières, '[l]a découverte de la maquette intérieure, le papier choisi, glacé à outrance, la reproduction des images, l'agrandissement de certains détails, leur mise en page, leur articulation au textes dans l'espace de la page viennent contredire le projet des auteurs'.[5]

Meanwhile, *Cases rebelles*, a feminist activist collective in France, has argued that the images should not have been displayed in this manner as they do violence not just to those they represent, but also to their postcolonial descendants. They reject

> the idea that due to historical colonial barbarity, these people would have lost their right to the image, their right to respect and dignity. That they would be condemned for eternity, to be displayed in the barbarian countries that colonized them.[6]

They believe that reproducing images like these fixes their subjects in an eternally disempowered and objectified position, and accuse the editors of 'disseminating images of non-white women being humiliated, assaulted […] as if they no longer affect the descendants and the heirs of the victims of this colonial violence'.[7] The reactions of *Cases rebelles* form part of a broader shift in attitudes in France and beyond towards colonial violence and its long-term consequences. Moves to decolonize museum and gallery spaces have gained traction, as have calls for greater reflection on the role of the colonial past in shaping contemporary French culture. Following Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy's *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain* in 2018, the French president Emmanuel Macron committed to restoring items of cultural heritage from France's former colonies to their rightful owners.[8] Outside of official spheres of jurisdiction, associations

[3] Philippe Artières, "Sexe, race et colonies': livre d'histoire ou beau livre?', *Libération* (2018) <https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2018/09/30/sexe-race-et-colonies-livre-d-histoire-ou-beau-livre_1682243> [accessed 20 January 2020].
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] *Cases rebelles*, quoted in Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 281.
[7] *Cases rebelles*, quoted in Lafitte.
[8] It should be noted that Macron has faced criticisms for the slow progress his government has made in putting these promises into action, cf. Naomi Rea, 'France Released a Groundbreaking Report on the Restitution of African Art One Year Ago. Has Anything Actually Changed?', *artnetnews* (2019), <https://www.google.com/amp/s/news.artnet.com/art-world/french-restitution-report-global-1728216/amp-page> [accessed 19 February 2020].

like *Décoloniser les arts* and *Camp décolonial* have called for greater diversity in the arts, and for non-white voices to be heard in French educational spaces. While these initiatives are often countered by fierce defence of liberal French universalist values, the fact that they are gaining ground suggests a desire in parts of French society to engage with questions of difference, to reflect on wider global debates around the decolonisation of education and the arts, and to call lingering neo-colonial power imbalances to account.[9]

Given the above, it is telling that the overwhelming response to *Sexe, race et colonies* in the French press has been one of cautious reservation, if not outright critique. Reviews of the book highlight its breadth and topicality but return time and again to its problematic material status and to its colonial iconography of sexualized and racialized bodies. There is no denying that *Sexe, race et colonies* is a visually arresting book, but can we accuse it of mobilizing a coffee-table aesthetic, which, as Patrizia di Bello, Colette Wilson and Shamoon Zamir argue, 'may foster a cultural or ideological conservatism'.[10] In what remains, I consider whether the editors, together with their publisher, do a disservice to those represented, as well as to their descendants, by foregrounding images that aestheticize the text and contain content that can justifiably be seen to reiterate forms of colonial violence and re-expose postcolonial descendants to harm. At the same time, I analyse if the editors' inclusion of a critical text that seeks to deconstruct the relationship between power, domination, sexuality, and race offers a degree of salvation by contextualizing the images and going some way to neutralizing their destructive power.

I should state from the outset that my reflections on these questions and on the material dimensions of the book are, to a degree, speculative. I have not actually seen this book in print as the publisher sent me a PDF file to review, rather than a physical copy. While this has made it difficult to comment on the materiality of the book, it has not stopped me from concluding that the printed version would live up to its reputation as a lavish text. From my digitized copy, it seems clear that the publisher has invested in this book. As mentioned above, the images seem to have been reproduced in high-definition colour and to a very high quality. By contrast, the written text is relatively small and plain, meaning that the reader can quite easily flick through from page to page, consuming the book visually, instead of reading its content. More problematically, the text describing the images themselves is tiny and gives little more than bibliographical details. This means that the relationship between text and image becomes disconnected and that the images themselves often take on a decorative function. It is only very rarely that the editors or contributors refer to specific images or attempt to conduct a close textual analysis of their content. Furthermore, some extremely disturbing images appear to have been included for a purely ornamental purpose. Take, for instance, the sepia image of an unnamed naked woman's backside that accompanies the editorial information towards the front of the book and is also reproduced on the book's back cover. Or, the reproduction of an offensive cartoon of an African American field worker on a William Gribble tobacco packet that is inserted randomly into the bibliographical entries. These exoticizing, clichéd images are not commented upon or deconstructed, and appear to have been included merely as decoration for the front and back matter, making it difficult to disagree with Artières's assessment that the book mobilizes a coffee-table aesthetic or that its layout seems wholly at odds with its editors' stated agenda.

It is quite surprising that a book that seems so keenly aware of — and indeed is premised upon an analysis of — the relationship between images and the perpetuation of damaging ideas about sexualized and racialized bodies should show so little critical awareness of its own format and material status. In response to Artières's criticisms, Pascal Blanchard has argued that it is the researcher's responsibility to take an objective distance from the material examined, and that the images needed to be included not as peripheral material, but as 'des sources informatives centrales

[9] For an example of a critique of decolonial movements in France, see: 'Le "décolonialisme": une stratégie hégémonique: l'appel de 80 intellectuels', *Le Point* (2019), <https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/le-decolonialisme-une-strategie-hegemonique-l-appel-de-80-intellectuels-28-11-2018-2275104_20.php> [accessed 18 February 2020].
[10] Patricia di Bello, Colette Wilson and Shamoon Zamir (eds.), *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 2.

pour la comprehension du système colonial'.[11] It is perhaps easier to have a distance from images like these if you are not a descendant of colonial violence. However, this justification does not really explain why the critical text does not, for the most part, engage with the individual images. It also does not deal adequately with the issue of who — in a moral and ethical sense — can claim ownership to these images and thereby has the right to decide how and when they should be reproduced. Copyright permissions will, of course, have been sought from archives and individual collectors, but, as the comments of *Cases rebelles* show us, many readers — especially those who are the descendants of colonial and imperial violence — will feel affronted and violated by the images in this book, despite the presence of an overarching argument criticizing colonial power structures. The editors may have consulted the descendants of the people and communities represented on the layout of the book, but their apparent reluctance to engage in public debate on this issue with vocal critics is telling.[12]

It is worth noting here that the editors of *Sexe, race et colonies* have been instrumental in addressing France's relatively slow and reluctant uptake of postcolonial scholarship, and this book makes no exception. There is no doubt that the book is the result of extensive research and an enormous amount of careful editorial work. However, its layout is undoubtedly problematic and seems to contradict the overall aim. Though the text itself has not been the subject of much criticism, and is laudable in its attempts to render relatively dense academic arguments about colonial and imperial sexual histories accessible to a general public readership, its coverage is so broad that it at times risks makes generalizing claims or simplifying extremely complex issues. Furthermore, though rooted in an anti-colonial approach, the text remains almost wholly focused on the colonizer's perspective and does not really challenge the reader to consider the experience of the colonized subjects the images represent. As Laurent Fouchard argues in his review of the book, 'le lecteur n'apprend rien ni sur la position des hommes et des femmes colonisés face à ces images érotiques, violentes ou pornographiques, ni plus généralement sur la position des hommes et des femmes colonisés face à la domination sexuelle et coloniale'.[13] This disparity is articulated clearly in the fact that the names and identities of the people included in the images are very rarely present, which effectively silences and anonymizes them (again), and adds further justification to the concerns of activist groups like *Cases rebelles* that the editors are complicit in some of the colonial processes they seek to critique.

While *Sexe, race et colonies* is not without problems, it remains an important text, not least because of the stir it has caused in France, or because of the broader questions its publication has raised around how we engage with images of victims of colonial violence, and around the relationship between commercial interests, aesthetics and ethics. Its broad coverage and entry-level discussions mean that it is likely to be most interesting and useful for a public audience or for undergraduate students. It could be a valuable teaching resource, if taught against the backdrop of the debates it has engendered and if used to encourage students to think critically and analytically about how we reproduce and engage with (eroticized) images of suffering and subjugated others from the colonial past and the postcolonial present. In fact, in our image-saturated culture, *Sexe, race et colonies* functions as an important reminder that interrogating and addressing issues such as these is as — if not more — important than ever.

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[11] Artières.

[12] Daniel Scheidermann, '"Sexe, race et colonies": Pascal Blanchard ne veut pas débattre', *Arrêt sur l'images* (2018) < https://www.arretsurimages.net/chroniques/le-matinaute/sexe-race-et-colonies-pascal-blanchard-ne-veut-pas-debattre> [accessed 20 January 2020].

[13] Laurent Fouchard, 'Sur les travers d'une entreprise mémorielle. P. Blanchard, N. Bancel, G Boetsch, D. Thomas et C. Taraud (dir.), *Sexe, race et colonies. La domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours*, Paris, La Découverte, 2018, 544 pages', *Politique Africaine*, 152 (2018): pp. 165–75.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Leopard, The Lion, and The Cock: Colonial Memories and Monuments in Belgium. By MATTHEW G. STANARD. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019. 338 pp. Pb 65€. ISBN: 9789462701793.

In December 2018, the Royal Museum of Central Africa, now rebranded as the 'AfricaMuseum' in Tervuren, a suburb of Brussels, reopened after five years of renovation and a self-proclaimed 'decolonisation' process, which both activists and scholarly communities consider as largely failed (see, for instance, recent articles and blog posts by Charles Forsdick [2019] and Dónal Hassett [2019]. See also Deborah Silverman's comprehensive 2015 article). What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which these debates about Belgium's colonial past and postcolonial present have attracted reactions in both Francophone and Anglophone public and academic spheres. While the analysis of the country's imperial legacy and its post-colonial afterlives still occupies a very minor position in Francophone Postcolonial Studies overall, the current proliferation of press and scholarly attention alike testifies to a sustained interest in the role of visual culture for (public/collective) memories of the colonial past.

The publication of Matthew Stanard's new study could thus not be any more timely: The Leopard, The Lion, and The Cock: Colonial Memories and Monuments in Belgium sets out to investigate 'the colony's consequences for Belgian culture' (p. 27) and to foreground 'the enduring presence of "empire" in everyday life in Belgium in the form of permanent colonial markers in bronze and stone, lieux de mémoire of the country's history of overseas expansion' (32). He adds to the growing body of critical historical studies on Belgian colonialism, following the trailblazing work of Guy Vanthemsche (2012), Idesbald Goddeeris (2016; 2015), Maarten Couttenier (i.e. 2010; 2012; 2014; 2015; 2019) and Bambi Ceuppens (2006; 2009; 2015), to name but a few. Stanard's historical analysis of colonial memories in Belgium is interspersed with an astonishing number of vignettes throughout the book that depict and explain individual pro-colonial statues and busts across the country. In doing so, he states, 'this book reveals the surprising degree to which Belgium had become infused with the colonial spirit during the colonial era as pride in the colony took center stage in many towns and cities while also reaching even remote corners of the country' (34). Stanard's study covers a lot of ground and consists of an introduction and six analytical chapters: 'Belgians and the Colonial Experience before 1960', 'Reminders and Remainders of Empire, 1960–1967', 'Quiescence, 1967–1985', 'Commemoration and Nostalgia, 1985–1994', 'A New Generation, 1994–2010', '2010 and Beyond', as well as an epilogue and an appendix. Stanard thus offers a useful periodization of the post-colonial period, while also providing the reader with a strong and broad contextualisation of contemporary memory debates in Belgium within the broader context of global memory politics (i.e. the ripple effects of the '#RhodesMustFall' movement). Importantly, he highlights the impact of popular history writing on public debates and state-led enquiries — for instance, following the publication of Adam Hochschild's 1998 King Leopold's Ghost or, more recently, David van Reybrouck's Congo (2010) — as well as how scholarly work on Belgian colonialism seems to keep a sensationalist focus on the atrocities committed in the so-called Congo Free State during the period of 1885 to 1908.

Stanard describes which particular aspects of the colonial period are commemorated in Belgium, including media and public receptions of these, as well as listing significant commemorative events and exhibitions, which provides a very detailed overview. However, this makes for a rather laborious reading experience. While the book displays an admirable scope and intention, especially concerning the breadth of source material, what the study is lacking is the concerted analytical attention that such a wide range of sources invites. For example, while Stanard contexualizes the 'recycling' of colonial imagery on Belgian television on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Congolese independence in 2010 within the broader political atmosphere of the moment (including the rise in Flemish nationalism), he sums this up rather dissatisfyingly by stating that '[t]he end result was a series of cultural manifestations centered on the country's colonial

experience that manifested confidence, perhaps even some nostalgia, rather than being self-critical or raising unsavory chapters of the past' (p. 234). Surprising, also, is that despite the attention he pays to the complexities of Belgium's postcolonial situation, including the ongoing tensions between the country's French and Flemish language communities, federalism, and Brussels' status as the *de facto* capital of the European Union, what seems to underlie the study is a rather monolithic understanding of 'culture' as something homogeneous. Furthermore, Stanard states that his study is 'aimed primarily at the general reader while also addressing those with a more academic interest in monuments, memories, and empire' (p. 34) and rather 'a thought-provoking reflection' than aiming to 'be encyclopedic' (ibid.). Yet, the book has been published with a university press and is available for the steep price of 65€ (about £56/$73), making it prohibitively expensive for the general reader and undergraduate student alike. Nevertheless, the book does provide a much-needed contribution to scholarship and a comprehensive resource for teaching that clearly demonstrates how, despite having been 'one of Europe's "lesser" imperial powers' (p. 31), the colonial period has had a lasting and pervasive effect on Belgian society and politics.

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Rwanda Since 1994: Stories of Change. Edited by HANNAH GRAYSON and NICKI HITCHCOTT. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019. 264 pp. Hb £80. ISBN: 9781786941992.

The past couple of years have seen the emergence of an array of published works in commemoration of a quarter century of peace in Rwanda since the horrors of 1994. Among these publications is Catherine Gilbert's *From Surviving to Living* (2018) alongside Caroline Williamson Sinalo's *Rwanda after the Genocide* (2018) and *After the Genocide in Rwanda* (2019) by Hannah Grayson, Nicki Hitchcott, Laurie Blackie and Stephen Joseph. Forming part of the AHRC-funded research project 'Rwandan Stories of Change', alongside *After the Genocide in Rwanda*, Grayson and Hitchcott's timely collection of essays, *Rwanda since 1994*, features contributions from an expansive range of disciplines. Distinguishing the changes initiated by the government from those effected by individuals, the editors have divided the eleven essays into two parts entitled 'A Changing Nation' and 'Changing People', allowing the reader a dual perspective of both areas of transformation under discussion.

In their richly contextualized and robust introduction, Grayson and Hitchcott state that the objective of their book is 'to explore from a range of disciplinary perspectives how Rwanda has undergone transformation' (p. 2). Accordingly, the volume's first section offers a balanced range of views on various areas of Rwandan governmental policy as seen through the lens of various academic disciplines. This measured and diverse approach is most apparent in the only two chapters in this section that share the same topic. Applying legal theory to reinforce their argument, Benjamin Thorne and Julia Viebach contend that Human Rights and Amnesty International's criticisms levelled at the use of traditional Rwandan *gacaca* courts are rooted in the dominance of Western legal frameworks in Human Rights legislation. However, Anna Breed and Astrid Jamar present a more negative picture of the *gacaca*, using transcripts from real trials to bolster their argument that these processes were open to manipulation and theatricality. The other four essays are equally diverse in their methodology and theoretical frameworks. Channelling Marianne Hirsch and Michael Rothberg's concepts of 'postmemory' and 'nœuds de mémoire' respectively, Eloïze Brezault's essay examines the criminalization of genocide memories that contradict the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) genocide narrative and how art can create a counter-hegemonic, inclusive memory space, unifying all Rwandans across generations through the adoption of the country's pre-colonial tradition of oral remembrance. Meghan Laws, Richard Ntakirutimana and Bennett Collins communicate a similarly unfavourable view of a governmental

policy area in their welcome essay on the oft-neglected Twa, asserting persuasively that the designation of the Twa as 'historically marginalized people' (p. 128) in the context of the de-ethnicization of Rwanda results in their further societal marginalization. Successfully marrying gender theory with her own fieldwork, Louise Umutoni-Bower provides a useful insight into the factors facilitating the growing presence of women active in Rwandan politics. Drawing from the developing research field of 'nation branding', Georgina Holmes and Ilaria Buscaglia demonstrate how the RPF have remoulded the previously negative image of Rwanda by micromanaging the portrayal of the country and promoting their peacekeeping activities on various media platforms.

The second part of the volume is equally strong and diverse in scope. Opening this section is the contribution of Catherine Gilbert, who examines the return to testimony writing of Yolande Mukagasana and Annick Kayitesi-Jozan. Pairing her perspicacious textual analysis with trauma theory, Gilbert underlines how the act of bearing witness to the genocide is therapeutic for the survivors, all the while acknowledging the difficulties associated with transmitting their memories 'faithfully' to the next generations to keep alive the collective memory of the genocide and of those who perished. Looking at the role of children from a different perspective, Richard M. Benda examines the way in which the dialogic activities of the youth project YouthConnekt have empowered the children of perpetrators to influence the genesis and subsequent development of the government's national unity programme, *Ndi umunyarwanda*, through the telling of their own experiences. Underscoring further the importance of young people in effecting durable change in Rwanda, Laura Apol presents her own fieldwork research on writing workshops to assist the healing of genocide survivors and the follow-up six years later. In the course of her extremely insightful essay, Apol expounds the ways in which structured writing of memories can help survivors to take ownership of their traumatic memories of the past and begin to focus on the present and future. Caroline Williamson Sinalo expands further the idea of positive strategies to help trauma victims by highlighting the need for a culturally sensitive approach to trauma therapy. Reinforcing her assertions via the application of postcolonial and trauma theory, Williamson Sinalo advocates the introduction of trauma theory based on the concept of post-traumatic growth, which helps 'individuals [to] establish new beliefs about themselves and the world' (p. 168). Finally, through the optic of English-language Christian testimonies, Madelaine Hron unbraids sensitively the intricacies of the notion of forgiveness, revealing how the Christian idea of absolution may facilitate healing and foster reconciliation in Rwanda as survivors humanize their former demons through the act of forgiving.

By dint of the contributors' multidisciplinary approaches to various topics, the collection of essays in Rwanda since 1994 communicates to the reader the complex and heterogeneous forms of change in Rwanda. A common facet of each essay is the resilience and growing agency of the Rwandan people with the overriding message being that they and future generations are and will be instrumental in effecting meaningful change and lasting stability in their own country. Nevertheless, scholars of French studies may initially be disappointed that Gilbert's excellent chapter on survivor testimonies is the sole essay devoted to French-language texts.

Notwithstanding, the volume's impressive diversity maximizes its reach across an array of academic disciplines. Concentrating solely on readers of this journal, each of the chapters will provide specialists and students of Rwanda with extremely helpful information for their research or studies. Additionally, those researching postcolonialism and post-conflict in other Francophone areas will find this volume a beneficial source of comparative analysis. In sum, Grayson and Hitchcott have produced an impressive work that will be indispensable for many researchers in the field of Francophone Postcolonial Studies.

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Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848–2016. Edited by FÉLIX GERMAIN and SILYANE LARCHER. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. 294 pp. Pb $40. ISBN: 9781496201270.

With the exception of Lilyan Kesteloot, scholarship on black Francophone female writing and activism has only seen serious development in the last two decades; that is, two decades later than respective scholarship on the work of African American women. Important contributions to this growing field include T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (2002) and Jennifer Anne Boittin (2010), both of whom provide endorsements for this volume. More recently, Jennifer Wilks has forged a transnational path to studying black Francophone women in a comparative study of Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire and Dorothy West (2008).

Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848–2016 is an ambitious project that extends further the transnational parameters of Wilks' book. It is the product of an interdisciplinary collaboration which spans the Atlantic, representing institutions in France, America and the Caribbean. The aim of the collection, as editors Félix Germain and Silyane Larcher write in their introduction, is to 'engender the historical record […] mapping the presence, role, contribution, and influence of black women in France and Overseas France' (p. xv).

In many respects, this volume achieves its aims. The women who form the subject of these essays represent actors and associations who remain unjustifiably understudied in Francophone scholarship, exemplifying structures of resistance that too often reside as abstract, aspirational ideas within postcolonial and gender studies. In its intention to 'engender the historical record', *Black French Women* furnishes the postcolonial scholar with names and narratives which render 'intersectionality' tangible, thereby giving a profile to what Joseph Diémé calls the 'esoteric academic language' (p. 205) which can otherwise detract from the lived experience of political activism.

Part One, 'Black Women in Politics and Society', charts the respective histories of female figures persistent in their resistance against the structures seeking to contain them: the Senegalese *originaires* who fought for freedom of the press under the Third Republic; the female members of the Aliker family, whose resistance to the *béké* hegemony in twentieth-century Martinique remains a testimony to their defiance despite the lamentable outcome of a failed lawsuit and the unjust killing of an innocent young man. Christiane Taubira's patient determination in bringing reform to French Guiana and France culminated in what Stephanie Guyon understands in Chapter Two to be Taubira's ultimate act of resistance as a politician in France: to resign her seat, following years of media-led racist and sexist abuse — as Taubira is quoted in a later essay, 'parfois resister c'est rester, parfois c'est partir' (p. 89).

Part Two, 'Feminist and Postcolonial Movements for Equality', includes essays by editors Germain and Larcher on contemporary feminist activism in the French Caribbean and the challenge of the Afrofeminist *Mwasi Collective* to second-wave French feminism, respectively. Part Three, 'Respectability, Resistance, and Transnational Identities', develops the theme of subversive strategies by the African-American Jean McNair and Guadeloupian Suzanne Lacascade, along with a host of women interviewed on their experiences growing up in French *départements* during the late twentieth-century. Some of the women interviewed chose to refute notions of respectability explicitly, in word and action, whilst others chose to harness such notions, thereby enacting what Jacqueline Couti describes as a 'politics of propriety' (p. 129).

Part Four, 'The Dialectics Between Body, Nation and Representation', pairs two essays which address the embodied perspectives of black women. The first addresses the 're-presentation' of the black female body in the black feminist press — a concept akin to the 're-signifying' elaborated by Henry Louis Gates Jr in the 1980s, and developed more recently in studies by Deborah Willis and Carla Williams (2002) and Lisa E. Farrington (2005). The second provides a reading of the nineteenth-century French satirist Charles-Joseph Colnet, who assumed the voice of the South African Sarah Baartman. Otherwise known as the 'Hottentot Venus', Baartman featured as one of the spectacles in the colonial exhibitions of nineteenth-century Paris. Author

Robin Mitchell likens Colnet's ventriloquism to an act of 'prostitution' (p. 193), a rhetorical strategy whereby he could indict and humiliate his contemporaries more effectively by assuming the profile of an exoticized and eroticized other.

In Part Five, 'Black Women Critique the "Empire"', Diémé reads *The Belly of the Atlantic* (*Le ventre de l'Atlantique*), the best-selling novel by contemporary Franco-Senegalese author Fatou Diome, against 'growing anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation in Europe' (p. 201); Claire Oberon Garcia provides a comparative reading of Roberte Horth and Paulette Nardal; and the collection closes with a broad overview of the anti-colonial associations led by women in Cameroon during the 1940s and 50s.

This brief survey of the volume's contents demonstrates its thematic and disciplinary reach, the breadth of which is to the credit of the volume, allowing it to lay the groundwork for future interdisciplinary scholarship. Indeed, the main fault of the collection lies not in its content but in its structure and, specifically, the order of its chapters. Given the broad scope of these essays, it is at times disorienting to switch back and forth between late-twentieth, early-twentieth, and late-nineteenth centuries. Ordering the chapters chronologically would have better retained the sense of this volume as an 'historical record' without diminishing its progressive aim to move beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Moreover, I would have liked to have seen contributors engage more explicitly with each other, as does Clare Oberon Garcia in contrasting her reading of Paulette Nardal with that of Jacqueline Couti. Given the differences in methodological approaches between chapters, and the discrepancy in the meaning of terms such as 'tradition', 'hegemony' and 'resistance' when applied to different national contexts, it might have been profitable to interrogate these differences, so as to garner a sense of the incommensurability inherent in transnational, interdisciplinary projects such as this.

Nevertheless, I recognize the editorial limitations involved in compiling volumes like this which, for its length, remains an impressive panorama of black French female activism in *l'Hexagone* and *la France d'outre-mer*. For any undergraduate or postgraduate student seeking to extend their knowledge beyond the prominent male figures in postcolonial history, *Black French Women* incites as much as it informs, prompting its reader to study in greater depth the significant presence, role, contribution, and influence of black women in post/colonial resistance during the long twentieth-century.

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Our Civilizing Mission: The Lessons of Colonial Education. By NICHOLAS HARRISON. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019. 354 pp. Hb £90. Eb £70. ISBN: 9781786941763.

This book is a refreshing take on an age-old question about the relationship between art and politics. Nicholas Harrison addresses it specifically in the context of the literature classroom, arguing that the teacher or scholar of literature who pursues a political agenda through literary works, who seeks confirmation in the literary text of a presupposed political perspective, does a disservice to literary studies. To do so is to ask the text to perform a task that it by definition cannot accomplish since both its aesthetic qualities and the close reading it requires frustrate unequivocal representations of the world — representations of the kind that non-aesthetic texts aim to achieve. This makes literary texts poor candidates for advancing unambiguous political positions.

Harrison's book thus lends its support to an increasing call in recent years for a return to more aesthetic treatments of literary texts (see, for example, Marjorie Levinson's 2007 PMLA essay 'What is New Formalism?' or my discussion of this trend in the introduction to *The Pedagogical Imagination* [2014]). He maintains that the survival of literary studies requires a renewed

commitment to what is unique about literary texts and our relationship to them. This unique relationship, he argues, requires that we separate politics from both literature and the classroom. And yet, as Harrison clearly understands and demonstrates in his analysis, there is indirect political payoff from the emancipatory effect that hermetic literary and educational encounters can bring about.

What is new about Harrison's approach is that he comes to it from the perspective of postcolonial studies (with a focus on Algeria) and proposes to examine the awkward relationship between politics and literature through the lens of colonial education. His book thus pursues two distinct yet overlapping lines of inquiry: the first demonstrates how literature, the literary object, is necessarily separable from politics; the second shows how there is an educational core in colonial education that is distinguishable, that can be abstracted, from the specific socio-political context of the (post)colonial experience. Harrison's book examines the ways in which colonial education is typical of all education wherever it may occur. Insofar as teachers must impose norms and require that students grapple with unfamiliar materials as well as question presuppositions inherited from cultural contexts in which they are born, all teachers are engaged to some extent in a 'civilizing mission' (hence the double meaning of the book's title). In other words, all education is in some way colonial — a point Patrick Chamoiseau hints at in the preface to his own school memoir, *Chemin-d'école* (1994).

One of the most illuminating parts of the book is what Harrison does with Edward Said, a prime mover of both postcolonial studies and New Historicism — currents of the early 1990s often seen as driving forces behind a turn to more politically and ideologically motivated treatments of literary theme and historical context at the expense of close reading and attention to aesthetic concerns. Harrison, in contrast, provides a close reading of Said's own work to show that, with respect to the politics-versus-art question, Said himself is a more ambiguous figure than common wisdom would have it. He shows us a Said torn between, on the one hand, his well-known political agenda and, on the other, his commitment to the uniqueness of literary aesthetics and the teaching of literature in a 'sacred' educational space removed from the pull of political goals, however worthy these may be. This is why, according to Harrison, Said cannot charge Nerval and Flaubert with the same kind of shameful Orientalism that one finds in non-aesthetic texts; the literary work, for both Harrison and Said, necessarily misrepresents the world beyond its fictional borders as much or more than it faithfully represents it.

The ambivalence, paradox and inconsistency that Harrison locates in Said he also finds in colonial education and its portrayal in 'pre- and postcolonial' literature. The central chapters of the book examine different angles of colonial education. Chapter Two provides an overview of colonial education that insists above all on the impossibility of establishing a single view of the question. Harrison dismantles the idea that French colonial education was a well-organized and unanimously supported policy for exporting French culture to Algeria and assimilating Algerians to French culture and values. The curriculum was less uniform than is commonly believed, and there was considerable flexibility with respect to the adaptation of materials. Harrison, moreover, presents many examples of anti-colonialists who nevertheless appreciated the intellectual experience and educational opportunities provided by the French school system. Chapter Three is devoted to the writer and teacher Mouloud Feraoun who is presented as being both pro- and anti-colonial education; he admired French universalist values and also saw the colonizer's hypocritical failure to apply them in Algeria. Chapter Four examines literary figures who describe the painful experience of attending French schools that alienated them from their families. Chapter Five is a more sanguine picture of how colonial education contributed to the formation of French writers. For many Algerian-born writers, *laïcité* and the revolutionary spirit discovered in French schooling became a source for their own intellectual and political emancipation. The paradox is that these celebrated critics of colonial education are also evidence of its success.

Harrison is no apologist for colonial education or colonialism; he does not whitewash the injustice and cruelty experienced by Algerian students in French-run schools. He is saying, rather, that a closer look at the literature of colonial education gives us a more complicated picture than

the one typically captured by catchphrases like 'mission civilisatrice' or 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois' — terms that have become shorthand for the evils of a system that was indeed shameful but not systematic or monolithic and that had certain non-negligible benefits for some who experienced it.

The clearest statement of the book's overarching argument (or at least the one that most excited this reader) appears in the conclusion, where Harrison writes that he is trying to establish a 'parallel between a certain idea of education and a certain idea of the literary' (p. 299). These notional spaces are similar insofar as they both require a remove from politics, as evidenced by both Said's own work and the educational experience of (postcolonial) writers in the (colonial) classroom. Despite the fact that we have been taught to see both spaces as permeated by political concerns and unspoken ideological biases, Harrison shows that there is ample evidence that these domains — the political and the literary/educational — are distinct and, for Harrison, should remain so. This book will be of interest not only to students and scholars of postcolonial studies but also to anyone concerned with the future of literary education in the modern university.

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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, 4,000–8,000 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) and conference reports (500 words max.) should also be sent to the editorial team.

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