

FPS

Volume 1, Number 2

Opinion Pieces

A. James Arnold

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Book Review

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**SOCIETY FOR FRANCOPHONE
POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES**

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**FRANCOPHONE
POSTCOLONIAL
STUDIES**

Francophone Postcolonial Studies

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Editorial

Despite the impact of postcolonial theory on different academic disciplines over recent decades, the insight it can provide with regard to Francophone studies has yet to be fully assessed. Equally, the contribution that French and Francophone studies can make, and indeed have made, to a postcolonial theory largely perceived as Anglophone frequently remains unexplored.

By providing a forum for postcolonial perspectives, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* aims to promote theoretically driven, analytical studies of the Francophone world, which both question and reinvigorate the more established fields of French and postcolonial studies. The privileging of the postcolonial is in no way intended to imply that Francophone cultural production will be approached according to a single theoretical framework. On the contrary, *FPS* acknowledges the different theoretical trends within this multidisciplinary field, and believes that the complexity of postcolonial theory is best served by encouraging a variety of approaches. This theoretical complexity and multidisciplinaryity is, in turn, ideally suited to studying Francophone cultural production, which is frequently situated at the intersection of different historical, linguistic and social phenomena where synthesis is neither desirable nor possible.

As outlined in the first number, *FPS* envisages an approach that highlights a distinctive but reciprocal relationship between Francophone studies and postcolonial studies. In the first three numbers of the journal, contributors have been invited to write short opinion pieces, laying out their vision of the issues facing the emerging field of Francophone postcolonial studies. Whilst we had originally envisaged only two special issues devoted specifically to this critical debate, the response was so overwhelming that we have taken the decision to produce a third volume of opinion pieces (issue 2.1) in Spring/Summer 2004.

Finally, we would like to invite contributions on any topic related to Francophone postcolonial studies for inclusion in future issues (beginning with issue 2.2 in 2004). Suggestions for themed issues to be co-ordinated by guest editors are also welcome. Authors should submit two copies of their article, of 6,000 words maximum, in English or in French, to a member of the editorial team (full contact details are given below). 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 *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from our advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked to ensure that the manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. The editorial team will endeavour to inform contributors of the decision regarding the publication of their articles within 12-15 weeks of receiving the piece. Book reviews, conference reports (700-800 words max.), calls for papers, should also be sent to the editorial team.

Editorial Team

- Dr Sam Haigh, Dept of French Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK.
E-mail: samantha.haigh@warwick.ac.uk
- Dr Nicki Hitchcott, Dept of French, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK.
E-mail: nicki.hitchcott@nottingham.ac.uk
- Dr David Murphy, French Section, School of Modern Languages, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, UK.
E-Mail: d.f.murphy@stir.ac.uk
- Dr Aedin Ní Loingsigh, Dept of French, University of Edinburgh, 60 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JU, UK.
E-mail: a.niloingsigh@ed.ac.uk

Francophone Postcolonial Studies

The Field: Regional vs. Global Models

Since the late 1980s the general tendency in postcolonial studies has been to adopt a unified field theory that can be applied, presumably with equal felicity, to all areas of the postcolonial world. The most frequently cited text is *The Empire Writes Back* (1989).¹ Throughout the English-speaking world, proponents of high theory have rung variations on the seminal texts of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak or, to a lesser extent, Edward Said. Work that has proceeded from these theoretical positions has tended to force literatures of French-speaking regions into a mould designed to account for colonization of the Indian sub-continent, Africa, or the Near East by the British Empire. There are numerous problems with this model: 1) the French practiced a policy of cultural assimilation of colonial elites very different from British policy; 2) the 'old colonies' of the French West Indies as well as French Canada were settler colonies constructed on a quite different model from either British India or, indeed, French West or Central Africa; 3) the plantation in the French West Indies was a fairly autonomous microcosm in which a complex system of social relations (linguistic, musical, religious, oraliterary, sexual) were established by the eighteenth century.

Throughout the 1970s Edouard Glissant addressed these questions in a series of essays and lectures that he published in Paris under the title *Le Discours antillais* (1981).² With the

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

² Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

English-language edition I edited in 1989, *Caribbean Discourse* entered the arena of theory; over the next decade Glissant's vision of plantation America made considerable headway and established him in the English-speaking world as a major voice in postcolonial studies. J. Michael Dash, who translated *Caribbean Discourse* for our CARAF Books series at the University Press of Virginia, contributed a major essay entitled *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* to the New World Studies series at the same press in 1998.³ Glissant's regional approach to postcolonial theory has been well received and is frequently cited in contemporary literary scholarship on the region. In the same year I edited a special issue of the journal *Plantation Society in the Americas* which addressed the question 'Who/What Is Creole?'⁴ Contributions were broadly interdisciplinary. Michel-Rolph Trouillot offered an anthropological analysis that reviewed the major theories of the plantation as a societal model; Ellen Schnepel examined the emergence of the Creole language in the Lesser Antilles; Michèle Baj Strobel demonstrated that a Creole mindset acquired decades earlier in St. Lucia contributed to a gold prospector's understanding of the physical and spiritual environment in the interior of French Guiana; Silvio Torres Saillant demonstrated that the question of colour in the literature of the Dominican Republic is inextricably linked to that nation's painful relations with Haiti, with which it shares the island of Hispaniola. In 1999 Celia Britton's *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*, also published in the New World Studies series, made a number of the points I am

highlighting here and in particular drew attention to the fact that Glissant's essay *Poétique de la relation* (1990),⁵ his most closely reasoned contribution to our subject, at several junctures intersects with the pan-Caribbean discourse Antonio Benítez-Rojo elaborated quite independently in *The Repeating Island* (1992; 1996). These two books, along with our American reprint of Richard Burton's edited volume *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today* (1995),⁶ demonstrated that the New World Studies series intended to reposition the French West Indies in their regional sociocultural context. The overall lesson of these advances in criticism and theory has been to convince literary specialists that a regional model must take precedence over global models if we are to understand the functioning of literature in the colonial and postcolonial setting. This was indeed the position adopted by the editorial team of *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, which began twenty years ago to map a strategy for presenting a parallel, contrastive history of the region's literatures. The French West Indies shared with the Spanish-speaking region volume one of the three-volume series published by Benjamins in Amsterdam (1994).⁷ By the end of the 1990s the stage was set for a new departure in postcolonial French studies that would examine literature in a broader societal context, including contributions from historians, cultural anthropologists, and linguists.

³ A. James Arnold (ed.), *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. and with an introduction by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University Press of Virginia, 1989); J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University Press of America, 1998).

⁴ A. James Arnold (ed.), 'Who/What Is Creole?', *Plantation Society in the Americas*, 1 (1998).

⁵ Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory* (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

⁶ Richard D. E. Burton and Fred Reno, (eds), *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana Today*. New World Studies. (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

⁷ A. James Arnold (ed.), *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1994-2001). Vol. 1: *Hispanic and Francophone Regions*; vol. 2: *English-and Dutch-speaking Regions*; vol. 3: *Cross-Cultural Studies*.

Black French Literature?

For decades now a Black British literature has been recognized, described, and discussed. No such phenomenon yet exists in the Francophone world. The reason is easy enough to locate. Literary-critical discourse within France, aside from the efforts of Jean-Marc Moura and a few other scholars, has been loath to recognize the claims of postcolonial studies.⁸ In a symmetrical way, writing by the descendants of colonials who are French citizens and who write in metropolitan France find themselves in an awkward position, neither 'Us' nor precisely 'Them'. Descendants of North African immigrants have been labeled 'Beurs', a designation that seems intended to marginalize rather than incorporate them within the larger culture. French West Indians remain 'Antillais' just as their 'home' islands remain DOMs or extensions of the metropole in tropical waters. African writers resident in France for decades continue to be associated with their countries of origin, although the connection may be tenuous at best. Collectively these phenomena are part and parcel of France's inability to come to terms with the end of its colonial empire. The ambiguous term 'Francophone' is itself a symptom of the overarching problem, which needs to be addressed systematically. The Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies would appear to be the ideal forum in which to begin the debate, which promises to be long and spirited.

A. James Arnold
University of Virginia

⁸ Jean-Marc Moura and Jean Bessière (eds), *Littératures postcoloniales et représentations de l'ailleurs* (Paris: Champion, 1999); and Jean-Marc Moura and Jean Bessière (eds), *Littératures postcoloniales et francophonie* (Paris: Champion, 2001).

Belated Liaisons: Writing Between the Margins of Literary and Cultural Studies

Nous n'en finissons pas de disparaître, victimes d'un frottement de mondes. Tassés sur la ligne d'émergence des volcans. Exemple banal de liquidation par l'absurde, dans l'horrible sans horreurs d'une colonisation réussie. Qu'y peut l'écriture? Elle ne rattrape jamais.¹

In an article entitled 'Teaching for the Times' – first published in 1992 and subsequently collected, in revised form, in the 1997 anthology *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation & Postcolonial Perspectives* – Gayatri Spivak witheringly noted that, in the United States, 'there is a mad scramble on among highly placed intellectuals to establish their 'colonial origins' these days'.² According to Spivak, this frantic insistence by 'Eurocentric well-placed migrants' such as herself on their 'cultural identity' (a phrase she rewrites in less flattering terms as 'national-origin validation') disregards, and even militates against, their true responsibilities as teachers, doing little more than promoting a 'nostalgic culturalism'.³ Reserving the label 'postcolonial' in a U.S. context for Afro- and Native-Americans, Spivak chided her fellow 'new immigrant academics' not only for placing a navel-gazing 'emphasis upon our contingent histories,' but for failing to register the extent to which 'we are not oppositional any more' and have emerged, albeit precariously, into what she calls 'the

¹ Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 15.

² Gayatri Spivak, 'Teaching for the Times', in Anne McClintock, Amir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (eds), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 468-90 (p. 484).

³ Ibid., p. 475.

dominant'.⁴ Only by acknowledging this 'possibility of our swing into power',⁵ as well as 'our part and hope in capitalism,' she argued, can that hope be brought to a 'persistent and principled crisis' that will serve the ends of 'progressivist socialism'.⁶ Teaching for these times, when 'we are not merely the opposition any more',⁷ involves acquiring and disseminating the knowledge – 'transnational literacy' – that will allow 'radical humanist teachers' to situate both themselves and their students in the context of a global capitalism that 'we are imprisoned in and habituated to'.⁸ To insist upon such literacy, she concluded, is the best way of keeping open the impossible possibility of 'the push from democratic capitalism into a globally responsible democratic socialism, the only struggle that fits the post-Soviet scene'.⁹

Spivak's polemics in this article, and in subsequent work over the past decade dedicated to the premise that 'much of U.S. academic postcolonialism is bogus', provide a good deal of food for thought, much of it (for obvious self-protective reasons) as yet undigested by the producers and consumers of what she calls 'academico-cultural "postcolonialism"'.¹⁰ A new journal entitled *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, committed to the 'much-needed' task of establishing a dialogue between Francophone studies and the predominantly Anglophone field that has come to be known as postcolonial studies, could certainly do worse than take Spivak's critique of the latter to heart: for instance, by having the honesty to locate its *raison d'être* within, rather than outside of, the mad scramble – or what Bourdieu would term the

'continual outbidding inherent to the dialectic of cultural distinction',¹¹ – in which intellectuals zealously seize upon the latest forms of cultural capital; by subjecting the often facile rhetoric of marginality and oppositionality to rigorous interrogation; by distinguishing between Eurocentric pronouncements about the postcolonial (taking the differences between, say, US and UK criticism into account), as well as between any and all such pronouncements emanating from the 'academic enclosure' and what is being produced in the 'actual postcolonial areas';¹² by avoiding giving in (too easily) to the (perhaps necessary) fiction that there 'is' any such thing as the postcolonial (or the Francophone, for that matter); and, finally, by pursuing a politics that is based not on the designer-label contingency of ethnic distinction, but on the 'hunger for a world that is undivided by the petty differences we retain and inflate by calling them racial'.¹³

However, if I have chosen to highlight this particular article of Spivak's here, it is not simply to reiterate the core elements of her explicit critique of postcolonialism but, rather, to isolate one dimension of her argument that displays in a symptomatic manner what I see as a blind spot of both postcolonial and Francophone studies: namely, its (lack of a) relation to cultural studies – or more specifically, to the urgent engagement with the realm of popular mass culture that, to my mind, gives cultural studies whatever disciplinary specificity it can be said to possess. In a recent article, I examine at length the under-theorized (dis)connection between cultural studies and both postcolonial and Francophone studies: there, dismissing the truistic claim that postcolonial or Francophone studies are, by definition, forms of cultural studies, I

⁴ Ibid., p. 470.

⁵ Ibid., p. 472.

⁶ Ibid., p. 474, p. 475.

⁷ Ibid., p. 472.

⁸ Ibid., p. 483.

⁹ Ibid., p. 476.

¹⁰ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 1999), p. 358.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), p. 115.

¹² Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 362, p. 361.

¹³ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 2000), p. 356.

not only argue the empirically verifiable point that postcolonial theory has rarely followed the lead of cultural studies in attending seriously to popular mass culture, but put forward a counter-intuitive hypothesis that the reason for this absence of dialogue is the existence of a 'foundational bias' in postcolonial and Francophone studies against the realm of the "inauthentically" popular.' A 'deep-rooted sense of distinction from the "coarse and vulgar" world of mass consumption', I argue, has generated these ostensibly anti-hierarchical offshoots of traditional literary studies, which are actually informed by a surreptitiously elitist (and modernist) perspective with which neither Adorno nor the Leavises would be particularly uncomfortable.¹⁴

In 'Teaching for the Times', Spivak vacillates between putting her finger on this bias and embodying it in her critical practice. On one hand, she precisely locates the presence of this bias when she explains that 'you will hardly ever find an entry from Bangladesh in a course on postcolonial or Third World literature' for the simple reason that 'its literature is stylistically noncompetitive on the international market'.¹⁵ Here, in no uncertain terms, she draws attention to the unavowed reliance of academic postcolonial studies on stylistic evaluations and the exigencies of global marketing (this last point being one that Graham Huggan has lately explored in his groundbreaking study, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*).¹⁶ While there are no end of critics and teachers prepared to 'admire the sophistication of Indian writing in English'¹⁷ – or, in a Francophone context, the sophistication of,

say, African writing in French – what gets overlooked in that process is 'all stylistically noncompetitive literature.'¹⁸

Having put her finger on this bias, Spivak then draws an appropriate cultural studies conclusion from the absence of 'unsophisticated' literature on course syllabi and in postcolonial primers: we need to 'expand the definition of literature' so that 'we might read sectors that are stylistically noncompetitive with the spectacular experimental fiction of certain sections of hybridity or postcoloniality with a disarticulating rather than a comparative point of view'.¹⁹ Of the many conclusions that can be drawn from this sweeping statement, the most obvious for our purposes is that acknowledging the importance of stylistically noncompetitive texts will allow us to encounter a diversity of literary worlds, putting into question the homogenizing imperatives around which postcolonial and Francophone canons have been traditionally constructed, with their bias toward 'spectacular experimental fiction' (or, the flip side of the same modernist evaluative coin, their insistence upon politically 'resistant' realist fiction). In place of a predictable comparative approach to such literature – e.g., 'it is bad compared to the good stuff, which is the only stuff that counts'; or, 'it does the same thing, albeit badly, as what the good stuff does well' – Spivak stresses the possibility of using stylistically noncompetitive literature to disarticulate comfortably generalizing 'commonsensical' claims about what postcolonial or Francophone texts necessarily do (of the sort one finds, for instance, in an exemplary Francophone critic's assertion that, since 'colonialism entailed not only the power to annex and exploit other

¹⁴ Chris Bongie, 'Exiles on Mainstream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature', *Postmodern Culture*, 14.1 (2003): forthcoming.

¹⁵ Spivak, 'Teaching for the Times', p. 483.

¹⁶ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁷ Spivak, 'Teaching for the Times', p. 483.

¹⁸ In 'Exiles on Mainstream' I provide a specific analysis of how this exclusionary preoccupation with stylistically competitive literature has resulted in the complete occlusion from academic Francophone criticism of the most popular Franco-Caribbean novelist in the Antilles, the journalist Tony Delsham.

¹⁹ Ibid.

racess, but also to textualize the racial Other, it is this textualization against which Francophone narratives must always work'.²⁰

But if Spivak's insistence on the disarticulating potential of stylistically noncompetitive literature appears to open a space for thinking about what the people in Bangladesh or Martinique might actually be consuming (as opposed to what 'denunciatory' First World critics would like them to be reading), she immediately veers away from describing and valorizing this space. It becomes clear that she has something rather more elevated in mind than, say, 'trashy' fiction, when speaking of the virtues of stylistically non-competitive literature, as can be ascertained from her deterministic account of the reasons why no experimental literature has surfaced in Bangladesh. Throwing an array of 'transnationally literate' facts at her reader (Bangladesh's double decolonization under England and Pakistan, the neo-colonial influence of multinational pharmaceuticals and international monetary organizations at work in this country and their key role in the transition from feudalism to capitalism), Spivak asserts that 'in this situation, the most dynamic minds are engaged in alternative development work, not literary production'.²¹ Now, from one point of view, with this assertion Spivak is moving in a decidedly cultural studies direction, away from a fetishistic insistence on fiction or poetry, whether highbrow or lowbrow, as the privileged metonym for culture and toward an expansion of 'the definition of literature to include social inscription' (the specific example she cites of the 'literature' that has come out of alternative development work is a document drawn up in Bangladesh by the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering). And yet, liberating as her claim regarding the value of such non-fictional documents

undoubtedly is, one cannot help but notice the inseparability of that claim from an elitist appeal to Bangladesh's 'most dynamic minds': those Bangladeshis who do toil in locally consumed 'literary production' must, by her account, be presumed to possess less dynamic minds than those engaged in cutting-edge 'social inscription,' and with this presumption the cultural studies question par excellence as regards literary production – the question of the creation and consumption of popular Bangladeshi literature – is foreclosed, in a way that testifies to Spivak's complicity with an elitist bias that her championing of stylistically noncompetitive manifestoes about reproductive and genetic engineering appears to be, and in many ways is, deconstructing.

The elitist turn evident in Spivak's appeal to 'dynamic minds' is reinforced in the final section of her article, which has a special resonance in the context of this new journal's project of exploring possible liaisons between postcolonial and Francophone studies. Immediately following upon her discussion of 'the absence of classy postcolonial women's literary texts from Bangladesh on the U.S. curriculum', Spivak concludes her article with a reading of two passages from the undeniably 'classy' Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Among the benefits of acquiring transnational literacy, she argues, is that now, when the 'old modes of decolonization at the time of national liberation are crumbling' in places like India and Algeria, such literacy 'allows us to recognize that we hear a different kind of voice from these countries, especially from singular women, from Mahasweta Devi, from Assia Djebar'.²² In an article that takes so many pot shots at the 'superindividualist faith' undergirding both 'left'-wing multiculturalism (tacitly) and the ill-mannered counter-arguments of its right-wing critics (explicitly), Spivak's appeal here to singular women is highly ironic; more to the point, it dramatically reinscribes the foundational bias that she seemed on the point of

²⁰ Keith Walker, *Countermodernism and Francophone Literary Culture: The Game of Slipknot* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999), p. 13.

²¹ Spivak, 'Teaching for the Times', p. 484.

²² Ibid., p. 485.

undermining in her sympathetic reference to stylistically noncompetitive Bangladeshi literature.

The concluding section of Spivak's article establishes a transferential (or, less politely, narcissistic) relationship between Spivak and her 'classy' Franco-Maghrebian literary double, Djébar. Listening to Djébar's singular voice, Spivak hears her making a version of the exact same argument that she, Spivak, has been leading up to in her article: in *L'Amour, la fantasia* Djébar, according to Spivak, is supplying her readers with a model for an alternative approach to autobiography that would evade the 'national-origin validation' trap into which she claims new immigrant academics have fallen. While stressing their obvious differences, Spivak nonetheless confidently reads Djébar as teaching a variant of the same lesson that she, Spivak, has been conveying in her article: both Spivak and (Spivak's) Djébar have realized that, 'to achieve autobiography in the double bind of the practice of the conqueror's writing,' the challenge facing the 'well-placed marginal [is not] to "tell her own story," but to learn, to learn to be taken seriously by the gendered subaltern'.²³ Djébar's stylistically competitive fiction allows us to discern autobiography not as the story of the self but as 'the possibility of writing or giving writing to the other identifiable only as a mutilated metonym of violence, as part object'.²⁴ The deconstructionist subtleties of this ethical lesson may cause some readers to go into appreciative spasms, while others, following Terry Eagleton's lead, will find it 'pretentiously opaque';²⁵ either way, though, the crucial thing to register here is that the enunciation of this lesson depends upon a symptomatic recourse to an indisputably 'great' literary text and that this recourse effectively blocks from view

²³ Ibid., p. 486.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Terry Eagleton, 'In the Gaudy Supermarket', *London Review of Books*, 21.10 (13 May 1999).

whatever other lessons might be gleaned from less 'singular' stories and less flattering intellectual liaisons.

The above discussion of 'Teaching for the Times' is by no means an exhaustive account of the article's ambivalent relation to popular mass culture (for instance, Spivak's elliptical discussion of Amy Tan's *Joy-Luck Club*, the article's only other literary point of reference, vividly testifies to her reluctance to grapple with the troubling mixture of readerly pleasure and writerly ambition that I have dubbed the 'postcolonial middlebrow': for Spivak, Tan's bestselling novel is purely a 'risk-taking book';²⁶ she makes no effort at factoring its massive popularity into her account of the novel nor at formally differentiating it from a work like Djébar's). However, preliminary as this mapping of Spivak's symptomatic hovering between uncovering and drawing a veil over the 'foundational bias' of postcolonial and Francophone studies may be, it will certainly have clarified why it is I believe that the way 'forward' for scholars who have self-identified with those disciplines must entail a more self-aware dialogue with, a turning toward and even translation into, that other discipline which has for almost half a century now devoted so much of its attention to interrogating and arguing for the value of the popular: cultural studies.

Although they would not necessarily agree with my counter-intuitive argument about the elitist bias and modernist genealogy of postcolonial studies, a number of critics (foremost among them, Spivak herself) have begun to stress this need for a transformative dialogue with cultural studies, sensing that the decades-old project of postcolonialism might not be up to grappling with the complex realities of a transnational world and addressing 'the dominant project of the financialization of the globe' that is engaged in (new) ordering this world.²⁷ Two rather differing takes on this

²⁶ Spivak, 'Teaching for the Times', p. 477.

²⁷ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 397.

newly emergent argument for a strengthened relation between postcolonial and cultural studies can be usefully cited here. In the 1999 introduction to the second edition of his influential *Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon During argued that “transnational cultural studies” [is] eroding so-called “postcolonialism”, first nurtured in literary studies, which was so important a feature of the late 1980s and early 1990s intellectual landscape’.²⁸ During here offers a narrative of disappearance in which postcolonialism (seemingly tainted by its having been ‘nurtured in literary studies’) dies a quick death but is happily reborn again as a form of cultural studies. In the same year, Francophone critic Emily Apter, by contrast, argued that, in order to survive, postcolonial studies would need to take the contemporary world and popular forms of cultural expression more fully into account: ‘postcolonial theory’s resistance to injecting itself with contemporaneity,’ its tendency toward ‘retroversion’,²⁹ are problems that, for Apter, can be remedied by a timely turn to the sort of subject matter with which cultural studies has made us all familiar. Waxing enthusiastic about ‘postcolonial cyberpunk,’ ‘dirty nationalism,’ and ‘terminal identities,’ appealing ardently to the ‘nomadologies of tomorrow,’ Apter optimistically augurs (albeit without any explicit appeal to the ‘clearly articulated, left-wing values’ that During insists must be at the core of cultural studies³⁰) that ‘postcolonial theory and aesthetic practice will “cyberize” themselves quite soon (if they haven’t already), pushing the envelope of the politics of global subjectivity as they place the diaspora on-line’.³¹ Regardless of the differences between During and Apter’s approaches, what they both share is a sense of the belatedness of postcolonial studies, its

²⁸ Simon During, ‘Introduction’, in During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–28 (p. 23).

²⁹ Emily Apter, *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 213.

³⁰ During, ‘Introduction’, p. 27.

³¹ Apter, *Continental Drift*, p. 223.

affinities – be they fatal (During) or remediable (Apter) – with an older world order that has yet to be transnationalized (or for that matter cyberized!)

Postcolonial studies can, then, be viewed as an already belated enterprise, in need of a Viagra-like infusion of transnational, cyberized contemporaneity if it is to catch up to the vanishing present and shake off its ‘retroversion’ affinities with the colonial past (and, if one buys into my argument about its foundational bias against popular mass culture, its modernist genealogy). But if postcolonial studies is itself now playing a game of catch-up with cultural studies, any journal marketing itself under the name of *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* will have to play a double version of this game, for (although its editors will hardly agree with me on this point) it seems patently obvious that the very idea of linking the fortunes of the Francophone to a word that, pace During, still retains an aura of intellectual novelty and institutional cachet is symptomatic of an urge to give new life to la francophonie, a concept that is so evidently entangled in the sort of colonial genealogies that Anglophone critics attempted to disavow when they jettisoned the term ‘Commonwealth studies’ in favour of ‘postcolonial studies’.³² Uncharitably, the emergence of a journal entitled *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* could be seen as a case of the doubly belated embracing the belated in the mistaken belief that the latter is still as fashionable and urgent an enterprise as it was ten years ago.

Describing the current enthusiasm for Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* and its canny invocation of the latest academic buzzword, ‘globalization’, Jean-Michel Rabaté recently noted that ‘theory in the United States progresses by jumps and starts, gathering momentum only once it has found a key term, a master signifier; then everything is organized as a commercial promotion of a

³² On this point, see Chris Bongie, ‘Francophone Conjunctures’, *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 71.3–4 (1997), 291–307.

floating and more and more empty word, until it is discarded for another'.³³ Perhaps theory progresses somewhat differently in the United Kingdom (one can always hope!); be that as it may, if one accepts Rabaté's description of this process, then it should be clear that the coupling of Francophone and postcolonial studies runs the risk, in a world where academics have already started grazing upon the greener intellectual pastures offered by words like 'globalization' and 'transnational cultural studies,' of being a significantly belated gesture, the liaison of two 'more and more empty' signifiers that have lost a great deal of their former mastery (and institutional marketability).

The process of promoting and discarding academic buzzwords that Rabaté has described can be looked upon with cynicism, or viewed more encouragingly as forming part of the inevitable dialectic through which, in Stuart Hall's words, 'new metaphors of cultural change' are constantly emerging to 'allow us to imagine what it would be like when prevailing cultural values are challenged and transformed'.³⁴ If a mixture of cynicism and encouragement seems like the most measured response to this process, however, I would like to conclude this opinion piece on a somewhat different and more affirmative note, by returning to the question of literary studies and the decidedly unfashionable emphasis upon hierarchies of aesthetic value that has traditionally defined it as a discipline. If the complicity of postcolonial and Francophone studies with the biases of literary studies can only be an object of critique and censure from the perspective of today (and tomorrow's) 'master signifiers,' there is nonetheless another way – albeit a decidedly untimely way – of perceiving that complicity, one of which Spivak herself would perhaps not entirely disapprove, given that she has so often explicitly

³³ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Theory 911', *PMLA*, 118.2 (2003), 331-35 (333-34).

³⁴ Quoted in Kwesi Owusu, 'Introduction', in Owusu (ed.), *Black British Culture and Society: a Text Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-18 (p. 5).

acknowledged the sort of biases that I have shown to be symptomatically present in 'Teaching for the Times' (as when she states in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* that 'the author of this book is literary by inclination, drawn to the singular and unverifiable text').³⁵

As I argue in the final pages of 'Exiles on Mainstream,' while it is unquestionably necessary for postcolonial and Francophone studies to move 'forward' by engaging more explicitly with the insights of (transnational) cultural studies, and specifically its insights into the importance of the 'stylistically noncompetitive' texts that are actually consumed in postcolonial locations, it is also vital to retain 'a measure of belief in the value of literature... as the troubling other of contemporary (and self-evidently "progressive") disciplines such as postcolonial and cultural studies.' Vigilantly, we as literary critics, must not be afraid to look 'back' and reinscribe the contingent hierarchies of aesthetic value without which our untimely discipline would be unthinkable, reinvest in the myths of mental dynamism and singular vision upon which literary studies has traditionally relied and that, I have argued, remain nestled at the heart of its ostensibly non-hierarchical Francophone and postcolonial spawn. We must resign ourselves to accepting that such myths are a fundamental part of our legacy (inasmuch) as (we are) literary critics, and embrace what we do and what we believe in, albeit with a self-conscious awareness of the self-evidently belated nature of those actions and beliefs. We must not be afraid of (what is for us) the overwhelming truth that 'literature' has a value that other texts (be they pulp fiction or manifestoes about reproductive and genetic engineering) quite simply do not possess, and that this value will not always, and perhaps even seldom, be compatible with the politically 'oppositional' values that (we as) postcolonial and Francophone critics are committed to uncovering. (Inasmuch) as (we are)

³⁵ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 242.

literary critics, we must, in short, not fail to remember that the object of our concern is other than, if tangentially related to, the more timely concerns of emerging fields like transnational cultural studies.

Between the timely and the untimely, then, between cultural and literary studies, is where I have attempted to situate postcolonial and Francophone studies, and where I would hope *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* would situate itself: seriously engaged with the cultural studies project of charting the global(ized) realities of the geopolitical present (and those of popular mass culture in particular), but self-consciously aware of its belated relation to this project and of the cause for that belatedness—namely, a no longer disavowed complicity with, and a newly vigilant commitment to, the untimely study of a literary writing that, in Glissant's words, 'never catches up,' and from which, for that very reason, we still have a great deal of value to learn.

Chris Bongie
Queen's University (Canada)

La France et les théories postcoloniales: quelques observations à propos d'un rapprochement timide

Si — presque un quart de siècle après la 'naissance' des post-colonial studies avec *Orientalism* d'Edward Said — on fait le bilan des études postcoloniales en France, on ne peut pas nier que les théories postcoloniales telles qu'elles ont été formulées par leurs principaux représentants, Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha et Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, sont restées presque sans écho en France. Cela se reflète par exemple dans la traduction tardive d'un des ouvrages-clé de Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), dont la version française n'a paru que sept ans après l'original.¹ Les chefs-d'oeuvres de Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*, 1994)² et de Spivak (*In Other Worlds*, 1987) n'ont pas été traduits en français jusqu'à nos jours. La réception hésitante du projet postcolonial se manifeste non seulement au niveau des théories littéraires et des positions philosophiques, mais également au niveau des textes littéraires francophones (non-hexagonaux) en France, au moins dans le cadre académique. On ne trouve que très peu de chaires dédiées explicitement aux Etudes Francophones et il est significatif que Léopold Sédar Senghor est le seul auteur francophone qui a figuré sur la liste d'ouvrages à préparer pour l'agrégation de 1980 à 2003. Il est pourtant important de signaler que quelques-uns des plus grands prix littéraires français ont été décernés à des auteurs francophones ces dernières années; citons

¹ La traduction allemande par contre a été publiée seulement un an après l'original anglais.

² Bien que la traduction allemande de *The Location of Culture* date seulement de l'an 2000, les articles les plus importants qui s'y trouvent avaient déjà paru dans *Hybride Kulturen. Beiträge zur anglo-amerikanischen Multikulturalismusdebatte*, édité par Elisabeth Bronfen — Benjamin Marius — Therese Steffen (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag) en 1997.

par exemple les Prix Goncourt décernés à Tahar Ben Jelloun (1987), Patrick Chamoiseau (1992), Amin Maalouf (1993); les Prix Renaudot attribués à René Depestre (1988) et à Ahmadou Kourouma (2000); ou le Prix Fémina décerné à Marie Ndiaye (2001).

D'un point de vue général, la 'résistance française' au projet francophone et postcolonial s'explique, en partie, par des faits socio-culturels qui ont profondément marqué le développement de la France. Comparée à d'autres pays, la France dispose d'une conscience linguistique aiguë fondée sur les idées de pureté et de clarté véhiculées au moins depuis la fondation de l'Académie Française en 1635. Veillée et surveillée, la langue française constitue un des piliers forts de l'identité nationale de manière telle que Bernard Cerquiglini, linguiste et Délégué général à la langue française et aux langues de France depuis 2001,³ parle métaphoriquement de 'noces de l'Etat et de la langue'.⁴ Les idées d'homogénéité et de norme qui se reflètent dans la conscience linguistique française dominent également l'organisation de l'Etat à tous les niveaux. Les institutions politiques, l'administration, la justice, mais aussi l'enseignement et les transports sont organisés selon la tradition centraliste, selon une 'logique unificatrice' qui parfois bascule, comme l'exprime l'historien Michel de Certeau, dans une 'obsession de l'unité'.⁵ Deux exemples liés à la question

³ Il nous paraît significatif que 'et aux langues de France' n'ait été ajouté à la désignation du poste qu'en 2001 pour enfin tenir compte du plurilinguisme du pays.

⁴ Cf. l'entretien avec Bernard Cerquiglini dans: www.culture.fr/culture/dg1f/entretien-BC.htm ainsi que 'Les nouvelles missions du Ministère de la Culture en matière de langues de France', dans: *Lettre d'information du Ministère de la culture et de la communication* (15 mars 2002).

⁵ Michel de Certeau, 'Idéologie et diversité culturelle', dans: Gilles Verbunt (éd.), *Diversité culturelle. Société industrielle. Etat national* (Paris: L'Harmattan 1984), p. 232.

qui nous intéresse dans le cadre de cette contribution peuvent illustrer cette 'logique unificatrice':

- La politique coloniale de la France se distinguait nettement de celle de la Grande Bretagne par exemple et se caractérisait avant tout par l'idée de l'assimilation totale, de la 'francisation' des pays colonisés et de la réduction de l'Autre au même.

- Depuis l'époque de la décolonisation et les vagues d'immigration massive provenant des anciennes colonies, la société française devient indéniablement multiculturelle, mais continue obstinément à conserver son auto-image unitaire.⁶

Les grandes villes françaises en sont le miroir: l'Autre est généralement banni du centre, son lieu est la périphérie.

Ces quelques réflexions démontrent déjà que la France représente et soutient toute une série de valeurs et de concepts – comme l'unité, la pureté, l'homogénéité et le centralisme – qui sont remis en question par les théories postcoloniales. Celles-ci détruisent le mythe d'une identité personnelle, culturelle et nationale unie, homogène et définitive qu'elles considèrent comme une construction purement discursive et artificielle; elles y opposent leur concept d'une identité hybride, hétérogène, impure et éternellement inachevée.

L'évolution timide vers les théories postcoloniales est pourtant étonnante si l'on prend en considération que ces théories sont largement fondées sur les réflexions structuralistes et poststructuralistes originellement françaises. Pensons par exemple à Edward Said et ses références explicites à l'analyse du discours de Michel Foucault ou à Homi Bhabha dont la définition du 'Third Space' et le concept de la 'DissemiNation', pour ne citer que deux exemples, reprennent des idées de Jacques Derrida. Mais, à

⁶ 'La réalité du brassage socio-culturel et des différences ethniques en France est encore globalement occultée. En ce qui concerne les cultures dites régionales, elle commence à peine à être reconnue' (De Certeau, p. 231).

nouveau, on peut objecter que Foucault ainsi que Derrida ont, eux aussi, d'abord réussi aux Etats-Unis et que leurs idées sont passées presque inaperçues en France au moment de leur apparition. Après avoir perdu ses dernières grandes colonies aux débuts des années 60, la France se voit obligée de se redéfinir et de se re-construire une identité forte, stable et centralisée; à ce moment historique, elle n'est pas prête à écouter des voix comme celles de Foucault et Derrida qui dévoilent les mécanismes d'exclusion dont se servent les discours dominants afin d'établir et de stabiliser leur pouvoir, et à penser la dé(con)struction du centre et le libre jeu des différences.

Les théories postcoloniales qui s'inspirent des idées principales (post)structuralistes et défendent, elles aussi, la différence, l'hétérogène et l'hybride, arrivent en France à un moment historique autre, et pourtant comparable: le moment douloureux de la décolonisation appartient au passé, la France semble avoir trouvé sa place dans une Europe unie, le métissage culturel est devenu une réalité socio-politique évidente. On pourrait donc faire l'hypothèse que les idées postcoloniales tombent sur un terrain fructueux. Et pourtant un certain nombre d'événements ont de nouveau ébranlé l'identité de la Grande Nation dans les années 90: la chute du mur de Berlin et la position renforcée de l'Allemagne réunifiée, l'affaiblissement de la langue française dans un monde de plus en plus anglophone, l'élargissement de l'Union européenne qui attribuera à la France une position périphérique inaccoutumée. On peut se demander si la nouvelle déstabilisation de l'identité française – une identité que la France s'est forgée discursivement pendant des siècles, mais qu'elle considère être essentielle – serait la raison de la résistance française aux théories postcoloniales et expliquerait la décision de jouer la carte du nationalisme à un moment évidemment postnational.

Beate Burtcher-Bechter et Birgit Mertz-Baumgartner
Université d'Innsbruck, Autriche

Francophone Postcolonial Studies

The launching of *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* opens up a new forum for dialogue for those of us who work on Quebec, or more generally on Francophone Canada. I hope that the journal will be a way of cutting across some of those semi-institutionalized boundaries between 'French Studies', 'Canadian studies', 'Quebec studies' and 'Francophone studies'. As someone whose research focus moved from France to Quebec about ten years ago, I was struck by many positive features of the distinctive research culture associated with my new field. Canadian studies, represented by national associations in many countries, tended towards interdisciplinarity. Conferences and publications regularly included and drew, amongst others, on work in the fields of history, geography, social science, media, language, literature, film and the creative arts. As a matter of principle (French and English being the two official languages of Canada), Canadian studies events usually included work on Anglophone and Francophone Canada, and increasingly on Canada's aboriginal population. Yet there was, perhaps inevitably, a certain degree of cultural and geographical compartmentalization evident in the arrangement of parallel sessions, research groupings, etc. Similarly within Francophone studies and postcolonial studies we will doubtless continue to use geographical space as one way of labelling and subdividing our work. Yet numerous thematic and theoretical concerns can link different geographical areas and/or different disciplines within the rich framework of postcolonial theoretical approaches – language, relationship to space (mapping/travel/exile/centre-periphery), racial and sexual difference or education, for example.

The tradition of interdisciplinarity and the complexity of the relationships with the two former colonial powers make Canada both an obvious case for treatment in the light of postcolonial

theory and a distinctive case. Linda Hutcheon's reflection on the term post-colonialism makes the general case clear: 'just as the word post-colonialism holds within its own 'contamination' by colonialism, so too does the culture itself and its various artistic manifestations, in Canada as elsewhere'.¹ The particular dynamics of the 'contamination' to which Hutcheon refers is complex. In terms of its colonial experience Canada does not correspond to the pattern of most other former French colonies, of course, as not only was it a settler-invader colony, not a colony of occupation, but also the French colonizers were themselves colonized by the British in the aftermath of the defeat of 1759.² However the distinctiveness of Canada's place is perhaps not so much to do with the applicability of the term 'postcolonial' as with the specific connotations of the term 'Francophone'. For, as the designation of two official languages suggests, in Canada the word *francophone* suggests not so much inclusion in *la francophonie*, however defined, as an immediate opposition with *anglophone* or, indeed, *allophone*. In the 1960s the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism exposed the economic and other inequalities between Anglophones and Francophones, an economic reality which inspired the adoption of the term 'Nègres blancs d'Amérique' by Pierre Vallières to denounce the situation of his fellow Québécois within English Canada. But more recently this model of the Francophones as *colons/colonisés*, defined in terms of their relationship to English Canada/Britain has been complicated. The unsettling of the rigid divide between Anglophone and Francophone Canada which can flow from the disassociation of Canada from its two colonizing

¹ Linda Hutcheon, 'Circling the Downspout of Empire', in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 135.

² On the definition of these terms see Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, 'Settler Colonies', in Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 360-376.

nations – France and Britain – opens up a range of new perspectives. Since the 1980s the outcome of the two referenda on sovereignty (1980 and 1995) – both of which rejected separation from Canada – together with the increasing importance of ethnic minorities in Quebec's political and cultural life (both the First Nations indigenous population and the immigrant *néo-Québécois*) have given Quebec the impetus to reconsider its place in Canada and in the (post-colonial) world. Nor are all Canadian Francophones Québécois. While Québécois sovereignty might have empowered a large sector of Canada's Francophones, those minority Francophone populations elsewhere in Canada (Fransaskois, Acadiens, etc) might have been all the more relegated to a peripheral position in North America. The relative status of Francophone populations and of the French language and the strategies adopted in these different contexts lend themselves to being studied in the field of Francophone Postcolonial Studies.

One of the stated aims of the new journal is: 'exploring ways in which a genuine dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone postcolonial scholars might serve to create a more solid basis for intercultural comparison'. One might have expected this exchange, this comparison 'across Empires' to be the norm in Canadian Studies. Yet what Patricia Smart wrote in 1984 concerning the study of literature(s) is still partly true: 'An astonishingly small amount of work has been done in the area of comparative Quebec and English-Canadian literature'.³ However, in the last two decades anyone approaching Francophone Canadian material from the perspective of postcolonialism has necessarily drawn on a range of work from Anglophone Canada (Mukherjee, Brydon, Hutcheon), from Australia, the US and UK. To discuss Canada in the context of *Francophone Postcolonial*

³ Patricia Smart, 'Our Two Cultures', *Canadian Forum* (December 1984), pp.14-19, reprinted in Eli Mandel and David Taras (eds), *A Passion for Identity* (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson, 1988), p. 197.

Studies seems like a natural step and very much in keeping with some strands of recent work on Canada.⁴ In turn this may allow new ways of appreciating the complex interrelations, oppositions and contacts between different groups of Francophones, between Anglophones, Allophones and Francophones (the linguistic and cultural boundaries between these being far from watertight), or, indeed, between the Second and Fourth world.

Rosemary Chapman
University of Nottingham

⁴ See, for example, the forthcoming special issue of the US-based journal *Québec Studies* which addresses the issue 'Is Quebec postcolonial?'

Postcolonial Theories and Colonial Microhistories

Once colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial 'theory' came into being.¹

No site is discrete, disciplinary boundaries appear to have collapsed, positions are mobile. In November 2002, the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French (ASCALF) changed its name to the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS). The change was an acknowledgment that the name no longer accurately represented the intellectual pursuits of the Association or that it did so only in part. The shift in name unmoored ASCALF from the study of a specific cultural practice in specified parts of the French-speaking world. Flagged by the new name is a closer engagement with a set of theoretical positions that are drawn together by the metanarrative of postcolonialism. But the new designator raises questions and invites an appraisal of the alignment of Francophone studies within postcolonial studies. One question is whether the change in name advocates a transcendence of location in favour of a theoretical practice. And if such is the case then what of location, where is the place of local experience which Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin suggest was critical to the emergence of postcolonial studies?

Postcolonialism functions as an overarching category that draws within itself a varied set of approaches which reveal the diversity of methodologies, the multiplicity of objects, and, on occasion, the ideological tensions which exist between each of us who attempts

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.

to find a position within its broad church. Postcolonial studies offer rich interpretative perspectives and yet postcolonialism as a specific type of discourse, seems in some sense to have already begun to age, like last year's fashion, and to produce an essentialist variant of itself resulting in academic papers offering a 'postcolonial reading' of a text that threatens to shape that same text in the image and likeness of the theory. Already a number of commonplaces have begun to take shape such as the near orthodoxy of 'hybridity' as celebratory conclusion rather than object of critical assessment.

That postcolonial readings risk being domesticated or reduced to the shorthand of 'poco' terminology happens in varying forms to all literary theories. But the risk is greater when so much of what is powerful within postcolonial studies has resulted from theoretical engagements with the referents of local, colonial experiences. Dialogue needs to be extended to historians who work with the archives (both oral and written) of the colonial period so as to better understand the complexity of events and societal formations of the past. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* signals the range of methodological and theoretical approaches to themes such as language, education and history.² The emphasis is generally upon the theoretical and discursive dimension of postcolonialism and this is essential for any critique of ideology and for any understanding of the referent as always already constituted through ideology. Postcolonialism needs constantly to reframe its theoretical positions in order to avoid

² Along with the previously cited work by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, other publications of a similar nature have since appeared such as *Postcolonial Discourses: an anthology*, edited by Gregory Castle, (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); *Postcolonial African Philosophy: a Critical Reader*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997); *Postcolonial Criticism*, edited and introduced by Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton, and Willy Maley (London; New York: Longman, 1997).

intellectual sclerosis but it needs too to test theory and literary texts against histories, folk traditions, local experience.

But any engagement with the local raises not only ideological questions but linguistic obstacles. Francophone postcolonial studies operates at the limits of the French language. If the Francophone text is to be examined in relation to European theories of literature or if it is to be viewed as an epigone of French literature or as an example of a contrapuntal site of contestation, then there is the risk that these same texts will be drawn into an oedipal relationship, of symbolic father and castrated/vengeful son. To counterbalance this, what is needed is a greater investigation of the interaction between texts written in French and non-French cultural forms. The relationship between oral traditions and folklore practices needs not only to be restated but to be the object of research and dialogue. In a recent paper Khedidja Khelladi opened up Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* to the figure of Jazia (or Hizia) who is to be found in oral poems and songs in Algeria.³ Her work points to the intertextual and intercultural transpositions operating within Kateb Yacine's text through the incorporation of motifs from Arabic oral literatures. This type of work which reminds us of Kateb Yacine's relationship to Arabic folktales and songs is critical in that it resituates the Francophone text not within the domain of 'authenticity' or 'nativism' but within the site of its non-European cultural production. Comparative and intertextual work is happening but it is uncommon because of the linguistic demands it places on many of us for whom French and English are our only languages. It does, however, open up the possibilities of an engaging dialogue between Francophone postcolonial scholars working in the English

³ Khedidja Kelladi, 'Ancrages et dérivations de thèmes entre l'oral et l'écrit', paper presented at *Paroles déplacées: an international conference on modernity, literature and the relationship between France and Algeria*, in Lyons, 10-13 March, 2003.

speaking world and French-speaking scholars working with texts (oral or otherwise) produced in languages such as Arabic, Wolof, and Creole. In this way we may be able to redress what Dipesh Chakrabarty has referred to as an 'asymmetric ignorance' namely where 'Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; European historians do not feel any need to reciprocate'.⁴ As an organisation composed of French speakers, SFPS is perfectly placed to expand postcolonial studies beyond the confines of European languages and sites of learning (predominantly British and American) and to facilitate the establishment of links with researchers working in regions such as the Caribbean and North Africa.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's article goes on to examine the positioning of Europe as the subject of all histories and the extent to which the discipline of history has been coupled with strategies of state formations in Europe. It is here that postcolonial theory and subaltern studies have drawn attention to the silencing narratives of history which, unconsciously for the most part, subsume local histories within the master narrative of European state formations and modernity. However, though an important critique of the discipline, Chakrabarty's article is not an attack on the historians he names (such as Georges Duby and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie) and whose scholarship he acknowledges. Instead he reminds his readers that local and regional histories remind us of the colonial within the postcolonial. For, whilst postcolonialism is especially alive to the presumptions that underlie a whole range of discursive practices, subaltern studies offers a trenchant critique of the relationship between history and statist ideologies. Critically, in this regard it reiterates the importance of historical material

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?', *Representations*, 37 (Winter 1992), pp. 1-26 (p. 2). Special issue on 'Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories'.

contexts so as to maintain a reading of literature that is informed by an understanding of a local perspective.⁵

This investigation of local history has taken different forms in Europe since the 1970s and one could cite the anthropological turn evident, though with different emphases, in the work of the German historians Jürgen Kocka and Hans Medick as well as the *microstoria* school of Italian historiography brought to prominence by Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi.⁶ This anthropological turn has an even older pedigree amongst oral historians and its current strengths can be traced to the influential publication of Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition*.⁷ Vansina, trained as an anthropologist and medievalist, carried out his fieldwork in Africa and probed the work of memory in oral traditions as a counterweight to colonial archives. Oral traditions carry memories which, along with

⁵ Ranajit Guha's article 'The Small Voice of History', *Subaltern Studies*, 9, ed. by Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1997), pp. 1-12, offers a sharp critique of post-Enlightenment historiography and its relationship to the rise of the modern state. The article concludes 'All one can say at this point is that the overthrow of the regime of bourgeois narratology will be the condition of that new historiography sensitized to the undertones of despair and determination in woman's voice, the voice of a defiant subalternity committed to writing its own history'. Like many critiques of history it too questions a tradition of European historiography while holding faith with the emancipatory possibilities of *writing history*.

⁶ For an overview of different approaches to the history of everyday life see Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), pp. 101-17.

⁷ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. by H.M. Wright. (Chicago and London: Aldine, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965). First published as *De la tradition orale: essai de méthode historique* (Annales du Musée Royal de l'Afrique centrale, Sciences humaines, 36. Tervuren: Musée Royal, 1961). My thanks to Diarmuid O'Giolláin of the Department of Folklore and Ethnology, University College Cork for bringing the work of Vansina to my attention and for his insights into oral historiography.

colonial archives, can bring us closer, perhaps, to the messiness of local experiences sometimes lost in the abstractions of theory.⁸

There are of course historians working in the Francophone world who also draw from literature and oral history. Benjamin Stora, Professor of Contemporary History in Paris VIII-Saint-Denis, has chapters which treat of autobiographical narratives and fictions in *La Grangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (1991) and *La Guerre invisible: Algérie, années 90* (2001). It is within life-stories, testimonies, autobiographies and narratives of experience that Stora seeks to flesh out the impact of history upon the individual and the community. Stora works with a variety of archives (administrative, oral, literary) but his readings of literature could be augmented and enriched by postcolonial literary critics. Such transactions would help to provide us with what Paul Veyne refers to as a 'connaissance mutilée' of the past.⁹ 'Mutilée' because the evidence (the *tekmeria* or concrete traces such as documents and archives) is always incomplete. This notion of a truncated, incomplete history of the past is, for Veyne, based on the incompleteness of documents and the necessary limitations of eye-witness accounts rather than the destruction of traces that informs the opening chapter of Edouard Glissant's *Poétique de la Relation* and its meditation on the middle passage that brought African slaves to the Caribbean and North America. Glissant of necessity writes writing into the absence of what we know was a historical event. Veyne's approach is not to attempt a 'Rankean

⁸ I write 'perhaps' for as Robert Lowie wrote in 1916: 'How can the historian beguile himself into the belief that he need only question the natives of a tribe to get at their history?'. See Lowe, 'Oral Tradition and History', *American Anthropologist*, 17 (1915), 597-99. This extract is cited in David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London, New York and Lagos: Longman, 1982), p. 1. I write 'sometimes' so as not to undervalue the importance of theory and its critique of ideological constructs of various hues including the assumptions that underlie the fieldwork of the anthropologist.

⁹ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 24.

history' that would tell the reader 'how it really happened' but to work with the traces that do exist. And to work with them in a movement that runs from analysis to synthesis.¹⁰ Since the publication of *Comment on écrit l'histoire* the discipline of history has undergone radical questioning and has taken a linguistic turn of its own and yet the specificity of history, its engagement with the archives, remains.¹¹

Drawing a few of these disparate threads together it would seem to me that each should play to his or her disciplinary strengths and that the literary critic should engage with both theorists and historians in attempting to offer nuanced readings of literary texts. Stora's readings of literature can be illustrative rather than probing. Veyne's distinction between history and the novel is stated rather than problematized. Literary critics of postcolonial and colonial works need to test texts against the rough terrain of historical context. Take for example the topos of the school in literary texts from the colonial period: though a recurring theme there are few articles that examine the archives in order to depict a different and no doubt complementary view of the educational practices of the period and place. Antoine Léon's *Colonisation, Enseignement et Éducation* is an historical and analytical account of the thinking behind, and the establishment of, colonial schools.¹² His work draws on primary sources from centres such as the Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence and from journals, such as the *Revue de l'Enseignement Colonial*, available

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For an account which considers the linguistic turn in history and is informed by a healthy postmodern scepticism with regard to the truth-value and representational accuracy of history see Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). For a critical insight into the importance of the archive from a Foucauldian perspective see Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l'archive* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

¹² Antoine Léon, *Colonisation, Enseignement et Éducation* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991).

in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The point is not that postcolonial literary scholars become historians but that we seek them out more than we do and use their work to delineate the complexity of relations between literature and historical context.

In returning to the archive the context of literature is not flattened out by the practice of reading texts through the optics of theoretical constructs, nor is the shaping force of ideology overlooked; instead and without returning to a positivism that would have historical documents as its fetish, we could look to a renewed exploration of oral and written archives viewed through the filter of a critical apparatus that would emphasize local histories, microhistories.¹³ We need to return postcolonialism to the micronarratives of 'local experience' that were critical to its emergence and which continue to inform the constrained narratives of history and the unbridled narratives of fiction.

Patrick Crowley
University College Cork

¹³ This critical apparatus would be one fully informed of the ideological and linguistic issues that have been brought to bear on history as a discipline. For an overview of recent debates see: Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: from Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); Keith Jenkins, *On "What is History?"*: from Carr and Elton to Rorty and White (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

Overlapping Frames: Reconceptualizing Francophone Postcolonial Studies

The process of fleshing out parallels and intersections between Francophone studies and postcolonial studies in order to shape the field of Francophone postcolonial studies arises within a much larger comparative framework. Indeed, what is needed is nothing less than a new cartography, a remapping of academic fields of study that are fluidly connected, yet often kept arbitrarily separate due to disciplinary or linguistic constraints. As Chela Sandoval argues in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, it is crucial to map out 'permeable boundar[ies]',¹ points of intersection and divergence between cognate, yet separate fields that are all motivated by what she calls 'an ethically *democratic imperative*' lest we be faced with constantly having to reinvent the wheel.²

For Sandoval, the recognition of 'connections between seemingly contending intellectual communities that are generating similar models for psychic and social transformation' is necessary to oppose the current 'global forms of *recolonization*' in order to create truly 'postcolonial futures'.³ Both the similarities and the differences between various intellectual projects should be highlighted so as to avoid subsuming one under the other through appropriation and in order to respect their different historical trajectories. As Mae Henderson reminds us in her cautionary words about Black cultural studies, it is crucial not to let new conceptual frameworks occlude the important (and often similar)

¹ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.130.

² *Ibid.*, p.112.

³ *Ibid.*, p.136.

work previously done in fields such as US Black studies.⁴ It is important that postcolonial studies not become the new overarching theoretical framework subsuming and appropriating work done in ethnic studies (or Francophone studies). Rather, each field can and should learn from each other, while at the same time maintaining its own specificity, using the model of overlapping frameworks rather than one of assimilation.

The different fields of study in need of remapping include, but are not limited to: poststructuralist theory, comparative literature, as well as postcolonial, Francophone, feminist, diaspora, ethnic, cultural, border, globalization, transnational, and area studies. The work of bringing together these overlapping frames has already begun. Indeed, some of these fields have a long history of interconnection and cross-pollination: postcolonial studies has been influenced by poststructuralist theory and includes cultural studies as well as globalization and transnational frameworks, and feminist scholarship is a vibrant part of Francophone studies. Since the 1970s, US feminists of colour have wrought in-depth changes to feminist scholarship and to ethnic studies, allowing both fields to effect a paradigm shift toward modes of analysis that take more than one factor into account in the analysis (from race *or* gender to imbrications of race *and* gender). Similarly, postcolonial feminist studies has been a recognized field of study since its inception in the 1980s with work by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Trinh T. Minh-ha.⁵ Intersectional feminist frameworks (based on the interlocking nature of factors such as race, class, gender, and

⁴ Mae G. Henderson, "Where, by the Way, is this Train Going?" A Case for (Black) Cultural Studies', *Callaloo*, 19.1 (1996), 60-67.

⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.51-80; Trinh, T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

colonialism) have had a recognizable impact on the study of literature written by US ethnic women as well as by postcolonial women, regardless of their language of writing.

In the mid-1990s, Charles Bernheimer and his contributors issued a call for comparative literature to become a home for postcolonial and multicultural studies.⁶ More recently, Jenny Sharpe's essay, 'Postcolonial Studies in the House of US Multiculturalism', and Singh and Schmidt's exciting edited collection, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*, are beginning to theorize the overlapping frameworks between postcolonial and US ethnic studies.⁷ The comparative potential between the two fields is intellectually very promising. For instance, there is an interesting critical convergence between my book on postcolonial literature written by Francophone women from Algeria and Ashraf Rushdy's work on African-American literature.⁸ Both authors argue that a defining feature of the literatures under study is their palimpsestic nature (they overwrite histories of racial and colonial injury from radical perspectives committed to social justice). Clearly, more explicitly comparative work such as Françoise Lionnet's is needed in this area.⁹

Since the late 1980s, Françoise Lionnet and Robert Young have worked at the confluence of Francophone-postcolonial-feminist

⁶ Charles Bernheimer (ed.), *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁷ Jenny Sharpe, 'Postcolonial Studies in the House of US Multiculturalism', in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp.112-25; Amritji Singh and Peter Schmidt, eds, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000).

⁸ Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁹ Françoise Lionnet, 'Transnationalism, Postcolonialism or Transcolonialism? Reflections on Los Angeles, Geography and the Uses of Theory', *Emergences*, 10.1 (2000), 25-35.

and Francophone-postcolonial-poststructuralist frame-works, respectively.¹⁰ Although these two scholars have had a major impact on Francophone studies, until recently, few other Francophone studies specialists followed in their footsteps in bridging the gap between postcolonial and Francophone studies. Lately, though, a flurry of much needed theoretical and critical activity has been taking place with the explicit purpose of theorizing Francophone postcolonial studies.

One of the most interesting things about this conjoined desire to create Francophone postcolonial studies has been its transnational nature. At around the same time, scholars originating from all parts of the world and based in France (Moura, Meddeb¹¹), the UK (Murphy, Forsdick, Britton, Syrotinski¹²) and the US (Murdoch, Donadey¹³), have begun fleshing out the parameters of this new field. This theorizing has up to now taken place primarily in books, journal articles, and, especially, special issues of journals (the earliest one being *Dédale* in 1997, followed by *Africultures* in 2000 and *Paragraph* in 2001¹⁴) and recently published or

forthcoming edited book collections (Bessière and Moura, Forsdick and Murphy, Murdoch and Donadey¹⁵). It will be important for this new field of study to ensure that it expands to include scholars working outside Europe and the United States, especially in Francophone postcolonial nations, in order to avoid the dangers of becoming yet another neo-colonial enterprise. The launching of this new journal, entirely dedicated to participating in giving shape to Francophone postcolonial studies, marks a new stage in providing a much needed forum for both established and emergent voices to come together to engage in the process of reconfiguring our field.

Anne Donadey
San Diego State University

¹⁰ Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990).

¹¹ Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures Francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); Abdelwahab Meddeb, 'Ouverture/argument', *Dédale*, 5-6 (Spring 1997), 12-14.

¹² David Murphy, 'De-centring French Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Theory of Francophone Cultures', *French Cultural Studies* 13.2 (June 2002), 165-85; Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003); Celia Britton and Michael Syrotinski, 'Introduction', *Paragraph*, 24.3 (November 2001), 1-11.

¹³ Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001); H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey, eds, *Postcolonial Studies in a Francophone Frame: Intersections and Re-Visions* (manuscript in preparation, 2003).

¹⁴ *Africultures*, 28 (May 2000): special issue on 'Postcolonialisme: inventaire et débats'; *Dédale*, 5-6 (Spring 1997): special issue on 'Postcolonialisme,

décentrement, déplacement, dissémination'; *Paragraph*, 24.3 (November 2001): special issue on 'Francophone Texts and Postcolonial Theory'.

¹⁵ Jean Bessière and Jean-Marc Moura (eds), *Littératures Postcoloniales et Francophonie: Conférences du séminaire de littérature comparée de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle* (Paris: Champion, 2001); Murphy and Forsdick (eds), *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*; Murdoch and Donadey (eds), *Postcolonial Studies in a Francophone Frame*.

Is the French Caribbean Postcolonial?

It is difficult to know how – or whether – to apply the term ‘postcolonial’, and its attendant if divergent implications, to the French Caribbean. The islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, along with French Guiana, remain part of France, as they have been for centuries. The question of whether they are colonies or not is a controversial one: independence activists usually insist they are, while others argue that departmentalization was effectively a form of decolonization, since it (*en principe*) eliminated the distinction between the Caribbean colonies and the metropole. Whatever the case, debates about postcolonial nationalism that have shaped debates in subaltern studies cannot be transferred to these areas without considerable adjustment. In the French Caribbean, as in Puerto Rico, political nationalism remains extremely marginal while cultural nationalism infuses much of public life and even administrative institutions on the island, a situation that requires fresh theorization grounded in the history of Caribbean colonialism.¹

Haiti, founded on the ashes of France’s premier eighteenth-century colony, Saint-Domingue, was ‘postcolonial’ starting in 1804, long before the regions of Africa and Asia, whose histories have dominated the theorization of much of colonial and postcolonial studies, were properly colonial. Comparisons between Haiti’s struggle for independence and twentieth-century anti-colonialism have inspired a series of excellent historical works, most notably those of C. L. R. James and Aimé Césaire.² And

¹ On Puerto Rico see Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

² C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938; New York: Vintage, 1963); Aimé Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture et le problème colonial* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1961).

Haiti’s post-independence history was eerily prophetic of some aspects of the contemporary order of globalization: in 1825, the nation’s government, seeking to end the economic isolation it suffered at the hands of the slave-owning powers that surrounded it, agreed to pay a large indemnity to France, inciting a spiral of debt that would drain the nation’s treasury into the twentieth century. But analogies between the eighteenth and twentieth century can only take us so far; there is much about the emergence of Haiti that can only be understood by placing it firmly in the context of the eighteenth century revolutionary Atlantic world. The Haitian Revolution, furthermore, shaped ideas about race and empire in ways that influenced colonialism in the nineteenth century, so its history represents a foundation not only for anti-colonial action but for the second stage of European empire itself.

Some Latin Americanists have embraced and effectively deployed the approaches of subaltern studies to the Americas. But to what extent are the paradigms developed in relation to the Anglophone experiences of nineteenth century colonialism and twentieth century decolonization helpful for understanding the French Caribbean? Fernando Coronil has argued for the importance of ‘linking recent work produced with respect to Northern European colonialism in Asia and Africa to a long Caribbean and Latin American tradition of critical reflection concerning colonialism and modern imperialism’. This tradition – which, as he notes, includes not only historians and anthropologists but novelists, artists, and musicians – is ‘informed by a much longer entanglement with European colonialism and imperialism’, and therefore can provide a different perspective on the ‘mutual constitution’ of Europe and its colonies.³ This is a suggestion that is particularly useful, I think, for developing models and approaches in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*.

³ Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 13-14.

At the centre of the debates within postcolonial studies is the vexed and vexing problem of defining the 'West'. At its best, the enterprise of colonial history and postcolonial literary theory is about challenging and reworking traditional understandings of the emergence of Europe; these fields thrive on demonstrating the myriad ways in which the colonial experience shaped the economy, culture, language, art, philosophy, intellectual currents, not to mention political philosophy and political transformation, of European empires. Nevertheless, even in the midst of such demonstrations, the idea that there is something called the 'West', that this is a useful category of analysis, often remains. The trope 'West' may have evolved over time but it nevertheless haunts much of postcolonial studies.

But a simple confrontation with chronology can serve to disturb our confidence in the existence of the 'West', at least as far as it is commonly understood. And this question of chronology brings us back to the Caribbean, and more broadly to the Atlantic world, which was the zone in which European empire initially took form, and out of which the Europe that was to colonize other regions in the nineteenth century emerged. The 'West' that was imagined and imposed through the imperial projects of this period was already a product of over three centuries of colonial expansion, colonial encounters and – and this is particularly important in the French case – colonial disasters. The nineteenth-century 'West' was as much American, an Atlantic, as it was European, and it was profoundly shaped by the actions of Native American, African, and creolized European and African peoples. When Europe expanded in the nineteenth century it carried its long colonial history, it was saturated with the victories, defeats, and stalemates it had experienced in the Americas.

On one level, then, debates about to what extent 'Western' categories can be imported to 'non-Western' contexts is in some sense a *faux problème*. Since it is impossible to untangle what is European about the 'West' from what is American and African,

the problem is both much simpler and infinitely more complicated. The question is not whether and how the West haunts all our efforts to escape it, but rather how to deal with the fact that the West is determinedly haunted by all the influences it sought – and seeks – to exorcize from its constitution.

This is, I think, particularly true for Francophone postcolonial studies because of the unique experience of Haiti. Certainly the British imperial expansion of the nineteenth century was shaped by the loss of some of its North American colonies, as well as by the process of emancipation in the Caribbean. But the challenge posed by the Haitian Revolution to the foundations of colonialism was more significant than the challenges posed by the independence of the United States. The upheaval in Saint-Domingue was the most dramatic social revolution of the age, confronting the economic order and racial logic of the age head-on. It upended the colonial system in the world's most profitable colony, and sent shockwaves throughout the Atlantic world. As a result of the actions of slaves in the Caribbean, ideas of race were challenged and reformulated on both sides of the French Atlantic. Although racist systems of knowledge recovered from the challenge, as they all too often do, and indeed images of the 'barbarism' of Haiti were used by many writers to strengthen their hand, debates about slavery, and about the 'nature' of people of African descent, were permanently transformed. The revolutionary period, furthermore, had provided a dramatic alternative to traditional forms of colonial governance, one in which the colonies had full representation in the nation's government, and in which laws were applied uniformly within the empire.

While the impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic world has garnered increasing and careful attention on the part of scholars, a great deal of work remains to be done before we truly understand how the revolutions in the French Caribbean during the 1790s ultimately impacted the course of French colonialism, and the broader currents of European cultural and intellectual life, in

the nineteenth century.⁴ But in seeking to understand these influences we must simultaneously embark on an attempt to fashion a form of postcolonial studies that is shaped by and responsive to the historical realities of the French colonial experience. This means drawing on the useful theories produced out of an engagement with the Anglophone, but also drawing on the intellectual and cultural forms produced in areas like the French Caribbean, where the problem of how to undo and move beyond the colonial order has been a major preoccupation for – in the case of Haiti – two centuries. Rewriting the history of the French Empire means undoing the ‘West’s self-fashioning as the self-made embodiment of modernity’ by undoing the imperial history that places the French Caribbean on the margins of both historical causation and scholarly theorization, rather than at the centre, where it belongs.⁵

Laurent Dubois
Michigan State University

⁴ See the essays in David Geggus (ed.), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); for one compelling example of the possible impact of the Haitian Revolution in Europe see Susan Buck-Morss, ‘Hegel and Haiti’, *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (Summer 2000), 821–65.

⁵ Coronil, *Magical State*, p. 13.

ASCALF R.I.P.: Some (Mischievous) Thoughts on Postcolonial Studies

In reinventing itself as the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS), ASCALF (the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French) has taken a brave and decisive step, possibly intended – and if so, most effective in its intent – to reflect a paradigm shift in the academy. The epistemic shift in question here would seem to be double: on the one hand, a move away from the ‘belletristic’ resonances associated with the study of ‘literature’; on the other, a widening of perspective that all but does away with the perimeters associated with ‘Area Studies’.

The first of these modulations is probably cosmetic rather than substantive: the object of FPS will most probably continue to be literature ‘writ large’, as it were, (that is, writing, or texts, whether these are performed or not). The second modulation suggests a much more profound change, however, and one that raises a number of extremely important and urgent questions. For that reason alone the society’s reinvention of itself is most worthwhile.

In the Call for Papers for its first conference, the SFPS suggests that postcolonialism does not constitute a ‘distinct theoretical “ism” designed to establish set parameters for the criticism of texts’. It is certainly true that postcolonial studies to date have integrated rather eclectically a number of other, well-established ‘-isms’. However, intellectually and institutionally, few academics working in this area would refuse to answer to the call of postcolonialism. In other words it is far from certain that the methodological and ideological hybridity of the discipline allows the latter to avoid identification as an ‘ism’.

The SFPS seems to see as a major element of its mission a new conjugation or articulation of critical approaches to French

(language) culture, on the one hand, and the discipline of postcolonial studies, on the other. Moreover, it seems to recognize, however implicitly, that steps must be taken if postcolonial studies in the English-speaking world are to enter into dialogue with French scholarship. There is indeed a nice irony in the fact that the culture responsible for many – if not most – of the ‘isms’ of twentieth-century literary criticism has (somewhat sovereignly – or squeamishly?) maintained a certain distance from postcolonialism. For it is quite true to say that not alone have French thinkers been nowhere in evidence in the vanguard of postcolonial theory, but in the academic scramble that usually follows in the wake of such theoretical innovation, the French have shown remarkably little competitive or even ‘acolytic’ interest (with some notable exceptions, such as Jean-Marc Moura, whose essentially descriptive or documentary approach simply proves the point).

This fact begs at least two questions. Firstly, is there or was there something about the French policy, experience, and memory, of colonialism that makes contemporary French critical practice immune to the fascination of postcolonialism or postcolonial studies, and all its pomps and works? And secondly, can we Anglophones with impunity be so complacent about the current (largely Anglophone) orthodoxy of postcolonialism that we may regard this Gallic recalcitrance almost as some sort of deviance to be corrected in a (monodirectionally) re-educational dialogue?

From a second-hand understanding of the French colonial enterprise, one would probably have to allow the possibility of an affirmative response to the first question. The nature of French colonial practice in the New World (in Canada and the Caribbean) does indeed seem to have led to a particular type of relation between colonizer and colonized. The deeply impacted complexity of that connection seems to exceed the complexity of that typical of the Anglo-colonial model. SFPS suggests this,

indeed, in its first Call for Papers by positing Francophone Canada’s status as a ‘unique’ postcolonial space, possibly ‘incomparable’ with any other postcolonial area. It would also seem, however, that, while the often patronizing and frequently smug *langue de bois* of ‘la Francophonie’ presents an at times risible mismatch with the complexity of that arguably ‘special’ cultural relation/equation, it is by no means certain that French criticism is rendered less receptive or less acute by its clear preference for a more empirical, non-programmatic response, and even for a more poetic, writerly response to complex discourses within ex-colonial or neocolonial contexts (I am thinking of the writing of Jeanne Hyvrard, Marguerite Duras, Hélène Cixous, for example).

With regard to the second question, one could proffer a number of more or less provocative observations. First of all, French culture was remarkably infatuated throughout the twentieth century with programmatic and indeed systematic approaches to culture and writing. However effectively these approaches and indeed their spokespersons may have transferred to contexts beyond France, at least across the Channel and across the Atlantic, the French themselves, perhaps in response to the undermining effect of deconstructionism, seem to have lost faith more widely in the value of programmatic orthodoxies. This surely begs the question as to whether French academics and intellectuals are ahead or behind this time around.

Secondly, some might wonder whether or not the semantic content of the suffix ‘post’ is strong and clear enough to nuance or inflect the apparent (or at least implicitly claimed) semantic certainty of the term ‘colonialism’. Indeed, in certain contexts, such as parts of the French-speaking Caribbean and Indian Ocean, the resonances of the suffix seem rather incongruous given the political and cultural reality of the area. Others, however, will want to know when colonialism can be held to have begun?

Thirdly, it would seem reasonable to posit an implicit relation between the visions and practices of colonialism and imperialism. In that context, it must surely appear as an extraordinary paradox that those very countries which appear to have massively mandated recent designs for a neo-imperialist world order are the very ones whose academies accord to post-colonialism a flourishing respectability. It is worth wondering whether that dissonance simply confirms the political irrelevance or at least marginality of the academy, or whether postcolonialism somehow, in some bizarre way, serves as the intellectual or academic *bonne conscience* of contemporary neo-imperial societies.

Finally, and to return to the implications of the move away from area studies to the study instead of the vast question of global connections, differences, and comparisons, it is clear that much (ground?) stands to be gained from this shift. For example, it allows the SFPS to claim metropolitan literatures themselves as an appropriate object of study, since the criterion of appropriateness depends on the recognition that colonialism effectively mapped the entire planet, and that all discussion of the writing or culture that post-dates colonialism can or must be referred to that fact. This is indeed why it is proposed that Postcolonialism may be the new Comparatism. And yet, whispers the Devil's advocate, is there not a risk of reductionism inherent in the act of replacing (as *the object of study*) literature or writing from a specific area, with an 'ism' for which a certain universality is claimed? Does this substitution not suggest at the very least that all cultural production can or should be read within a certain grid? And if so, does this not smack a little disturbingly of a preemptive intellectual strike?

Mary Gallagher
University College Dublin

Haitian Literature at the Crossroad of Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Studies

Recently, students taking a course I teach on authors such as Michael Ondaatje, Maryse Condé, Dany Laferrière and Edwidge Danticat asked me if these authors were postcolonial. In fact, this uneasiness with 'postcolonial(ism)' in Francophone and comparative studies has been noticeable for several years. One might interpret the French and Francophone aversion, and even resistance to postcolonial theories, as a reaction against foreign, imported products. The discomfort with Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American trademarks and concepts, schools and theories sometimes disguises and forecloses attempts to develop a 'cross-cultural' perspective.

Defining 'postcolonial literature' by its content, I argue that 'postcolonial literature' designates literary writing which testifies to politics of domination, and which expresses clear resistance to colonialist and/or imperialist domination. On the other hand, postcolonial theory also implies a particular strategy of reading, a reading 'against the grain', against the traditional 'explication de textes'. The aim of most of the by now numerous postcolonial critics (roughly subdivided into Australians, (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin), Canadians (Hutcheon, Sambourel), Indo-Americans (Bhabha, Spivak), and African-Americans and Africans (JanMohamed, Stuart Hall), is to offer new interpretive frameworks for texts engaged in the radical reassessment of centre-periphery relations, such as John McLeod demonstrates in *Beginning Postcolonialism*.¹ The above mentioned authors clearly destabilize or dismantle boundaries of all kind (linguistic, ethnic,

¹ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

cultural, geographical), and offer in different ways and with variable success writings that characterize the post-colonial as hybrid, counter-hegemonic, enriched with a double (or triple) coding.

North America and more particularly, Canada, is and has always been 'home' to new writers, called postcolonial, ethnic, diasporic, migrant, multicultural. As a 'settler-colony', North America hosts an important West Indian diaspora, which is lined up along the English/French divide. Take for instance Haiti's two most famous young authors, Edwidge Danticat (Haiti, Brooklyn, Miami) and Dany Laferrière (Haiti, Montreal, Miami), who both moved to North America and even to the same city (Miami). Not only are they labeled and listed differently; they are set apart, and rarely compared. What does it mean to be a Haitian Francophone writer in Canada, as opposed to an Anglophone Haitian author in the States.² Does it matter in terms of audience and reception? I believe it does. Does it matter in terms of success? Taking Toni Morrison as an example, Maryse Condé is convinced that African-Americans benefit from better editorial and commercial opportunities than Afro-Caribbeans or certainly French-Caribbean authors (and I agree with Condé entirely). At least in the first years of their success, Danticat and Laferrière had different audiences. Lately discovered in France, both celebrities are now 'recuperated' as 'Francophone voices'. Today, their respective work generates different critical attention (I mean by this, that the literary criticism comes from different viewpoints, and implies different approaches). Even if both authors are translated in the other 'key' language (French, English), even if translation is a crucial issue in the debate of the problematic I address here, I deplore both the 'balkanisation' (as Glissant terms it) of Caribbean literatures and

² We could also mention Nancy Huston (Alberta, Canada, Paris) or Régine Robin (Montreal, Paris).

their respective criticism(s), and the fragmentation of the approaches, or what Dimitriadis and McCarthy call 'disciplinary insulation'.³

Dany Laferrière, because he publishes in French, is rarely called 'postcolonial', and there are indeed good reasons for this.⁴ Postcolonial writing is characterized by 'hybridity, syncretism, multidimensional temporalities, double inscriptions of colonial and metropolitan times, the two-way cultural traffic characteristic of the contact zones of the cities of the "colonizing", [...] the disavowals and in-betweenness, the here-and-there'.⁵ Also, postcolonial authors fill in the 'holes' of (post-/colonial) History, as Danticat so beautifully does with her last novel to date, *The Farming of Bones* (1998), which unravels the massacre or El Corte disaster of 1937 under Trujillo.⁶

To be honest (and critics need courage to measure the value of literature by its 'literariness'), Laferrière's autodidactical experiments do not match the standards of artistically innovative Caribbean writing (such as that of Michelle Cliff, Caryl Phillips or Danticat). If his writing nevertheless encounters major success, especially in Canada, it is down to other 'blatant' reasons: his

³ Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy, *Reading and Teaching the Postcolonial: From Baldwin to Basquiat, and Beyond* (New York and London: NY Teachers' College, College University, 2001), p. 4.

⁴ See Kathleen Gyssels, 'How Rare can Cultures Cross? Haitian Migrant Writing and the Perceptions of North America as a Crossroad of Race, Class, Sex, and Language (Dany Laferrière and Edwidge Danticat)', in Jeanette Den Toonde, Jaap Lintvelt and Wim Verhoeven (eds), *Crossing Cultures: Travel and the Frontiers of North-American Identity* (NY and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004).

⁵ Stuart Hall, 'When Was the Post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit', in *The Post-colonial Question*, ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 242.

⁶ For a discussion of this novel, see April Schemak, 'Remembering Hispanolia: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*', *MFS*, 48.1 (Spring 2002), 83-112.

coverage in the media is largely due to his openness to the media, his provocative statements and recycling of interracial and sexual stereotypes. As he admits to Bernard Magnier, he has made an effort to make himself heard and seen in different TV and broadcasts interviews, and yes, he does 'always write about sex', as goes the English title of his counterfeit travelogue, *Cette grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-ce une arme ou un fruit?* (2001).⁷

Danticat, on the other hand, from the same country, origin, and ethnicity, is often labeled 'postcolonial'. Because she is located in New York and publishes in English, Danticat's work is also classified as 'ethnic literature', one of the many strands of minority literatures in the States: together with other West Indian writing (Cristina Garcia, from Cuba), Julia Alvarez (from the Dominican Republic), Native-American (Leslie Marmon Silko), Chicano (Sandra Cisneros), Jewish (Philip Roth) and Asian-American literature. Danticat, who is essentially a Francophone-Caribbean voice writing in English to some critics, has been 'mainstreamed' in the United States. For a long time, however, Danticat encountered resistance from Haitian fellow writers, being excluded for the 'treason' of language. Laferrière, who repeatedly describes himself as an American author, and resists all labels, is not yet incorporated into mainstream literature. The masked envy towards the much younger and successful Danticat, expressed by Laferrière, who considers her a writer who still seeks her voice, vanishes before the evidence of Danticat becoming a major voice of Haitian, American, postcolonial literature.⁸

But let us now turn to the situation in Canada, one of the centres of postcolonial literature and postcolonial studies.

⁷ See Bernard Magnier, *J'écris comme je vis: Entretiens avec Bernard Magnier* (Montreal: VLB; Châteauroux: Editions la passe du vent, 2000).

⁸ Magnier, p. 61.

Claiming to be a multicultural and multiracial society, Canada grows a 'Janus-bifrons' literature, with two literatures, which have developed along linguistic frontiers. On the one side, we have the Anglophone authors, with the growing subgroup of Anglophone authors from ex-colonies Japan-Canadian (Joy Kogawa), Arab-Canadian (Youssef El-Mahl), Dutch-Canadian (Aritha Van Herck), Caribbean-Canadian (Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo). They are called postcolonial, even if their ancestors belong to the two founding nations (Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, for the Anglophone camp; Gaston Miron, Jacques Godbout, Antonine Maillet, and Anne Hébert for the Francophone 'camp'). On the other side, we have the 'migrant authors' in Francophone Quebec, even if their origins are as multiple and different as Italian, Chinese, Lebanese, Haitian and Iraqi.

It seems to me that the whole debate on postcolonial Francophone Canadian literature is biased by the fact that there was an urgent political and socio-cultural battle to fight: the struggle for Francophone literature in Quebec, as part of a Québécois separatism; the attempt to incorporate Francophone migrant authors into the field of 'littérature québécoise', which forms a rampart against the growing importance and power of Anglophone Canada and the Anglophone arts. Opposing the two capitals of Montreal and Toronto, cultural politics sacrificed the similarities between the two groups on the 'altar' of linguistic 'sovereignty'. Francophone Canada has welcomed new migrant voices to make a claim for a vivid, homogenic and blossoming Francophone Quebec (which explains the large subventions Francophone authors can expect in order to compete with a much larger literary Anglophone market), instead of trying to struggle together with English-speaking Canada for a single, crosscultural and crosslinguistic nation. This Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy is further mirrored by the binarism opposing 'Canadian Studies' and 'études québécoises'. In a special issue of *Globe*,

Denis Chartier concludes that 'Canadian studies' are in English, interdisciplinary, and are largely ignored by Francophone scholars while 'les études québécoises', are conducted in French, deal with literature and sociology, and remain largely unexplored by non-Francophone scholars.

Linguistically and ethnically diverse, Canada can be proud of a literature that is not only multiethnic, but also multilingual. While a growing number of Francophone Canadian authors come from elsewhere (Iraq: Naïm Kattan; Italy: Marco Micone; Libanon: Ablah Farhoud; China: Ying Chen), and are labelled 'migrant authors', the focus has too long been put on binary issues ('here' and 'there', 'exile' and 'home'), which of course are central problems of postcolonial theory. Nevertheless, those migrant voices merge into a blended culture, enabling a 'rhizomatic identity', a multiple, hybrid, unpredictable and ever evolving identity in a Glissantian 'Tout-Monde'. This very creolization going on in North-America is what Danticat describes in *Krik? Krak!* (1995).

Two important theoretical innovations have developed in the Canadian field of literary criticism, painfully unaware of each other. Many seminal essays on Canadian 'ethnic' literatures are indeed compartmentalized on the basis of language. Take, for example, the recent books by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond, and Smaro Kamboureli.⁹ Nova Scotian poet and critic George Elliott Clarke, on the other hand, puts Black diasporic writing on the Canadian map.¹⁰ Pierre Nepveu, Lise Gauvin, Jaap Lintvelt (to name just a few Francophone theorists), study migrant authors in complete isolation from what is/was happening in the

⁹ Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond (eds), *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (Oxford: OUP, 1990); Smaro Kamboureli, *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literatures in English Canada* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

¹⁰ George Elliott Clarke, *Other Voices: Writing by Blacks in Canada* (Toronto: Willams-Wallace, 1985).

Anglophone camp, and vice versa. This disconnection also explains why, during the last decade, Canada lost ground as one of the 'centres' of postcolonial theory, together with Great-Britain, as Cynthia Sugars argues.¹¹ The critical borderlands, 'segregated' along linguistic borders, dismantle the myth of the multicultural Canada, as Neil Bissoondath, a Trinidadian novelist and essayist living in Quebec, shows in *Selling Illusions*.¹² If there had been tentative approaches to align each of the 'critical' movements, maybe Canada would suffer less from the crisis of 'canadianité', the doubts around 'national identity'. The 'breakout' of binary thinking developed by Edouard Glissant, who was close to Gaston Miron, gave to Caribbean literatures the concepts of 'métissage' and 'identité rhizomatique', which has been extremely helpful for Canadian (Francophone) migrant writing. One has to recall and recontextualize, as A. James Arnold and Celia Britton do, the importance of Glissant's thinking, long before the famous works by Bhabha and Spivak, whose concepts of 'belated migrants', 'subaltern speech', and the like, can in return be illustrated in Glissant's novels. Caribbean and Canadian migrants do indeed share the double or triple 'appartenance' claimed by different communities in Canadian society; however, the poetics of displacement and dislocation, the politics of acculturation and even Americanization are on the contrary examined separately either for Francophone novels and poetry, or for Anglophone ones.

This 'compartmentalizing' makes a 'global' Canadian multicultural map impossible, and the same occurs for the Caribbean archipelago. I am embarrassed to see how, in spite of the multiple claims for unifying the Caribbean as a cultural region, the language divide keeps the frontiers strong. If the impact of

¹¹ Cynthia Sugars, 'Can the Canadian Speak? Lost in Postcolonial Space', *ARIEL*, 32.3 (July 2002), 115-52.

¹² Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions, Le Marché aux Illusions* (Montréal: Boréal, 1994).

colonialism and slavery, climate, landscape and food unites the Caribbean communities, language still seems to remain the most effective of all barriers. In spite of the many theories and recent developments in Caribbean consciousness, 'balkanization' continues in Caribbean literatures even if the first feature is their dispersion and diasporic character. The growing translation industry cannot remedy the mutually 'scandalous' ignorance of Caribbean literatures (authors, readers and critics) in the different colonial languages which again can be listed in terms of 'dominant' vs 'dominé' (the Dutch coming at the end of the line). French/English Caribbean connections are considered, though, by scholars at the University of the West Indies, by J. Michael Dash (especially in his book, *The Other America*), or in the much welcome 3-volume *History of Literature in the Caribbean*, edited by A. James Arnold, and a growing number of doctoral students who decide to examine parallels between Caribbean cultures and literatures. But much is still to be done to develop a genuine 'pan-Caribbean' approach, to compare Hispanic and Francophone, Anglophone and certainly Dutch-speaking Caribbean literatures.¹³ Is it not paradoxical that the Caribbean archipelago, a region synonymous with mixture, *métissage*, creolization, generates little comparative work, the oldest one being Haitian critic Jean-Claude Bajeux's comparison of three leading figures of *négritude*, *negrismo* and the *Harlem Renaissance*.¹⁴ Essays such as Peter Hallward's study of Glissant, Charles Johnson, Mohammed Dib

¹³ The 23rd Salon du Livre in Paris, March 2003, celebrated the Dutch-speaking authors from Flanders and the Netherlands. See Kathleen Gyssels, 'Le Hollandais hors les digues', supplément à *L'Humanité*, jeudi 20 mars 2003. A (written) literature outside these 'centres' (Antwerp, Amsterdam) is finally getting the critical attention it deserves, and comes from Surinam, Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba.

¹⁴ Jean-Claude Bajeux, *Antilia Retrouvée: Aimé Césaire, Palés Matos, Claude McKay*, (Paris: Ed. Caribéennes, 1983).

and Severo Sardy are therefore welcome and progressive steps.¹⁵ If there are not more essays and PhDs analysing, for instance Kincaid's and Condé's novels, or Glissant's theory on Dutch Caribbean writing, then it is partly because we are more often than not victims of 'le monolinguisme de l'autre' (Derrida), and because we have not been taught to study a global Caribbean world, to try out transdisciplinary interpretations of the Caribbean experience, or to problematize our own pedagogical practices. I take it as a symbolical and most promising 'Relation' that Glissant who (to my mind) writes in the presence of all the languages, addressed the audience at a recent conference in English, in order to render his reflections available for literary critics working in the field of American literatures.¹⁶

In Haiti, as Haitian-American painter and poet Marilene Phipps points out, the crossroad is a holy place, a space of decision and choice, a locus where a new, enriching and forward step is taken.¹⁷ Haitian literature, a 'deriving' yet challenging literature both by its place of origins, destinations, languages, themes and styles, invites us to cross critical roads and to change perspectives.

Kathleen Gyssels
University of Antwerp

¹⁵ Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: MUP, 2001).

¹⁶ Edouard Glissant, 'How Far is America from Here?', keynote address to the IASA Conference, 24 May, 2003, University of Leyde.

¹⁷ Marilene Phipps, *Crossroad and Unholy Water* (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

Ships Passing in the Night? France, Postcolonialism and the Globalization of Literature

It is often said that Britain has always been one step behind in the construction of what is now the European Union. A major reason for this has been the temptation to see in the former colonial empire a more appealing partnership than that afforded by continental Europe. In France, the reverse situation has obtained. Europe has generally been accorded greater priority than more far-flung domains, and France has almost always lagged behind or been superseded by Britain in the colonial sphere.¹ In North America, as in the Indian sub-continent, a weaker France was largely supplanted by British imperialism in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The acquisition of France's second colonial empire in the course of the 19th century was often hampered by political opposition at home, especially among those who, after 1870, had their eyes fixed on the blue line of the Vosges. In the early part of the 20th century, when writers and propagandists such as Marius-Ary Leblond and Roland Lebel began to argue for the creation and/or recognition of French colonial literature, a frequent lament was that no writer associated with the French empire enjoyed a level of prestige comparable with that of Britain's Rudyard Kipling. It is generally agreed among historians that it was not until the inter-war period – marked notably by the 1930 centenary of the French conquest in Algeria and the 1931 Colonial Exhibition at Vincennes – that the overseas empire really ingrained

¹ Tocqueville, who would later become a fervent apologist for French expansion in North Africa, wrote in 1833 that France would never equal England's genius for colonization and would always find in Europe her natural theatre for glory and power: see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, ed. and trans. by Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 1-3.

itself in the popular consciousness of the French. Ironically, even as the French celebrated their newfound imperial pride, the colonial edifice was being rapidly undermined by the growth of nationalist movements overseas. After the Second World War, when the inevitability of decolonization became apparent to many observers, Britain led the way in divesting herself of her colonial empire while France became ensnared in a series of wars (most obviously in Indochina and Algeria) inspired by the desire to resist the rising tide of demands for independence. The pain and humiliation associated with the eventual loss of empire were consequently far greater in France than in Britain.

A widespread desire to obliterate memories of the colonial debacle was no doubt a key factor inhibiting French interest in the postcolonial paradigm when this began to emerge among scholars working on the British Empire and its aftermath.² A decade or more after postcolonialism shot up the intellectual agenda in the Anglophone world, scholars in France and other French-speaking countries have begun to dabble in it.³ Yet even as they dip their toes, it seems that once again they are a step behind and that the waters may now be receding before them, for there are signs that the vogue of postcolonialism may perhaps have crested in the English-speaking world.

² Cf. Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, 'De la mémoire coloniale à l'histoire', *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 1.1 (2003), 8-24. The resistance of French scholars to postcolonial theory is of course richly ironic in view of the seminal influence of earlier generations of French and Francophone thinkers on Anglophone proponents of postcolonialism: cf. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 260.

³ See, for example, 'Postcolonialisme: décentrement, déplacement, dissémination', special issue of *Dédale*, 5-6 (1997); Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); 'Postcolonialisme: inventaire et débats', special issue of *Africultures*, 28 (2000); Charles Bonn, 'La Littérature algérienne francophone serait-elle sortie du face-à-face post-colonial?', in *Modern and Contemporary France*, 10.4 (2002), 483-493.

Three years ago, the English Department in the American university where I now teach advertised a senior position in Postcolonial Literature. When a first trawl failed to yield the type of candidate the university was looking for, the search was renewed the following year, but with a significant difference: now the position was advertised as one in Global Literature. In a new round of campus visits, candidates with distinguished records in postcolonial studies were flown in from distant parts. Perhaps fearing that the change of nomenclature from Postcolonial to Global Literature was unfavorable to his candidacy, one of the applicants delivered a remarkably defensive talk on the merits of the postcolonial paradigm, arguing that its day was not yet done. It reminded me of a lecture I had heard a decade earlier by a British sociologist a few years after the end of the Cold War. Until 1989, Marxism had been a major and in some cases dominant force in many academic disciplines. So extensive was its perceived influence that, soon after Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, Sir Keith Joseph was given the task of neutering Marxism on British university campuses, especially in the social sciences. While Sir Keith's efforts were in the short-term counter-productive, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was rapidly followed by the eclipse of Marxism in academic discourse, to the point where, within a few years, the sociologist mentioned above appeared to fear being literally ridiculed for his Marxist stance. If the job candidate I heard defending postcolonialism ten years later did not appear to fear the same ridicule, he nevertheless displayed an uneasy awareness that a paradigm shift could be underway.

Looking back, it could be argued that the end of the Cold War was crucial both in taking postcolonial studies from an embryonic field of study to the forefront of debate in the humanities and social sciences and in laying the foundations for its possible dissolution at a later stage. While the founding texts of postcolonialism had been conceived and in some cases published up to a decade or more before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the

sudden collapse of the global antagonism between the communist East and the capitalist West opened a space onto which a new global division could be projected: that between the dominant North and the formally decolonized South, the fundamental division on which postcolonial studies was built. At the same time, the end of the Cold War brought the rise of a new buzzword: globalization. This was a more slippery term, which in some contexts evoked the notion of an increasingly multi-polar, inter-connected world while in others it was more or less synonymous with the global domination of a single power, namely the United States. For a time, scholars of postcolonialism and globalization seemed to co-exist without any great rivalry, but with the dawn of the 21st century the former now appears to be threatened by a new imperialism associated with the latter, the very name of which could be read as a sign of monopolistic aspirations.

One of many straws in the wind was a special issue of *PMLA* published in January 2001 on the theme of 'Globalizing Literary Studies'. If it included a piece by David Chioni Moore arguing that the postcolonial paradigm could be successfully exported from its traditional locus of application in the South to the newly independent states of the former Soviet bloc,⁴ and another by Rey Chow describing globalization as merely a new set of clothes for old-fashioned Western imperialism,⁵ most of the articles – including that of Edward Said, traditionally regarded as a key forerunner of postcolonial studies – assumed that while postcolonialism had made many contributions of enduring value to literary studies, a new dynamic was now at work. It seems probable that the events of September 11, 2001 and those which have followed in its wake will strengthen that dynamic. This is

⁴ David Chioni Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', *PMLA*, 116.1 (2001), 111-128.

⁵ Rey Chow, 'How (the) Inscrutable Chinese Led to Globalized Theory', *PMLA*, 116.1 (2001), 69-74.

partly because they have laid bare the truly unique status of the United States as the world's only superpower and partly because, in ushering in a new global war declared by the US on an adversary labeled as 'terrorism', they have shifted the spotlight away from the relationship between Europe and her former colonies, which was at the heart of postcolonialism, to a new alignment of forces in which 'old' Europe now appears as a relatively marginal player.

An intriguing aspect of the fall-out from the American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of September 11 is the debate which it has kindled within the US over the lessons (if any) which might usefully be learnt from the European experience of empire. This debate – pursued, for example, in a series of programmes broadcast by National Public Radio – is premised on the assumption that American power now places the nation at the head of a de facto global empire. This stands in stark contrast with the traditional self-view of Americans as anti-imperialist, a notion rooted in the American War of Independence and reflected in the generally unsympathetic attitude taken by US policy-makers towards European colonial wars, exemplified fifty years ago in the Suez debacle. Will this newfound clarity about American global dominance stimulate a renewal of interest in the postcolonial problematic, or might this be felt to raise too many awkward questions too close to home at what is widely portrayed as a time of national emergency? If it is too soon to answer this question, one thing is clear. Because of the global domination of the US in the academic market place, the future of postcolonial studies will be to a large extent determined by its fate in North America. This was, of course, already true where the rise of postcolonialism was concerned. If most of the key thinkers who shaped it had their origins outside the US, postcolonial studies could not have gained such global prominence during the 1990s had it not been for the platform which they acquired on American university campuses and through the US publishing industry. For

many French intellectuals, reared in a tradition of anti-Americanism, this was a powerful reason for resisting the postcolonial paradigm. It remains to be seen whether recent signs of French engagement with that paradigm will prove little more than a tardy and fleeting encounter between ships passing in the night.

Alec G Hargreaves
Florida State University

The Death of the Native

In 1953, Camara Laye published *L'Enfant noir*, a novel that has widely been regarded as one of the seminal works of African literature. Almost half a century later, in 2002, US-based critic Adele King provides compelling – and convincing – evidence that both *L'Enfant noir* and Laye's controversial second novel, *Le Regard du roi*, were not solely the work of Laye. She concludes: 'If teachers are going to have problems fitting *L'Enfant noir* and *Le Regard du roi* into their courses, it is additional evidence that we now need some way to structure the study of literature other than by nations or "race"'.¹

Of course, King is right. In a post-national world, the study of ethnic, national or even continental literatures can be misleading. Consider the number of critics who have identified the influences of an 'African world-view' in *Le Regard du roi*, a text we now know to have been written by an unknown Belgian author, Francis Soulié. Consider also the 'authentically' *beur* novels of Paul Smaïl, pseudonym of majority ethnic French writer, Jack Alain Leger.² What both these recent controversies reveal is Western readers' continued attempts to locate 'the native', and their disappointment when they discover that s/he does not, in fact, exist. In our attempts to avoid Orientalism, we sometimes fall into the trap of what Rey Chow describes as 'scholarly nativism that functions squarely within the Orientalist dynamic and that continues to imprison "other cultures" within entirely conventional disciplinary boundaries'.³

¹ Adele King, *Rereading Camara Laye* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p.173.

² Leger disclosed his pseudonym in his novel, *On en est là* (Paris: Denoël, 2003).

³ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 6.

Whether or not Laye is the sole author of his novels is on one level largely irrelevant, as is the question of where to place these novels in the emerging francophone canon. Laye's texts, as King concedes, will still be read as 'classics'.⁴ However, the exposure of a Belgian ghostwriter as the principal author of *Le Regard du roi* and co-writer of *L'Enfant noir* forces us to reassess our position as critics of 'African literature in French', just as the unmasking of Paul Smaïl reopens the discussion on what is 'la littérature "beur"'. We need to ask ourselves whether these categories are still useful or whether they simply lure us back into the nativist trap. For the moment, the beginnings of this necessary shift in critical thinking are reflected in the renaming of the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French (ASCALF) as the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies. Having pushed away the conventional academic boundaries of geography and literature, SFPS will, I hope, become a forum for interdisciplinary dialogues on all types of cultural production in the post-national French-speaking world.

Nicki Hitchcott
University of Nottingham

⁴ King, *Rereading Camara Laye*, p. 174.

Francophone Postcolonial studies and New Historiographies of the Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters

Although I work within a French Department (University of Leeds), my research interests are not primarily cultural, and I approach the debate on the Francophone dimensions of postcolonial studies from the perspective of interdisciplinary work in history, politics and sociology. Francophone studies have emerged as an important element of French studies since the 1990s. However, this emergence of Francophone studies has not necessarily brought to an end the previous marginalization within French studies of non-metropolitan, non-canonical cultural production (although progress has undoubtedly been made in this direction).¹ While the field of Francophone studies (indeed French studies) may concentrate on literary and wider cultural analysis, it covers further areas. At Leeds, for example, there has been a blending of the cultural, historical and sociological approaches to the Francophone due to colleagues' respective specialisms (aided by the previous development of area studies and its subsequent incorporation into French studies). Indeed, in order to explain the cultural dynamics of the colonial and the postcolonial encounters, the recourse to history, politics and sociology is inevitable (one of Frantz Fanon's many legacies is to remind us of the inter-relatedness of culture, politics and history). Similarly, those working within an historical framework cannot afford to ignore the specifically cultural expression of the colonial and

¹ See David Murphy, 'De-centring French Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Theory of Francophone cultures', *French Cultural studies*, 13. 2 (2002), 165-85, and Kamal Salhi, 'Approaches to Francophone studies', in Salhi (ed). *Francophone studies: Discourse and Identity*, (Exeter: Elm Bank, 2000), pp.1-17.

postcolonial worlds. Certain themes within Francophone postcolonial studies appear to lend themselves well to such interdisciplinarity, such as the analysis of social memories of colonial and postcolonial governance, migrations, diasporas and the memories of the many and varying traumatic processes of decolonization.

This dialogue between cultural and historical analyses within French departments where Francophone studies are taught might be but one of a series of fruitful dialogues and engagements. The call for contributions to this journal mentions the need to establish a dialogue between Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial studies, a dialogue arguably facilitated by their interdisciplinary nature (although the primary focus up to now within both Anglophone and Francophone studies has been cultural production, understood in an increasingly inclusive sense). The forms and spaces for such academic dialogue remain in their infancy but can only enrich the work currently undertaken within both Francophone and Anglophone postcolonial studies. For, at present, Francophone postcolonial dynamics often remain marginal to the preoccupations of Anglophone postcolonial studies, notwithstanding the fact that Edward Said's *Orientalism* attempted a resolutely cross-imperial comparison, and, as Robert Young has pointed out, much Anglophone postcolonial critical theory stems from French critical theory.²

Anglophone postcolonial studies arguably have much to offer historians of the late colonial and postcolonial periods. In particular, the interdisciplinary Subaltern Studies group has studied and theorized notions of resistance to colonialism on the level of micro-resistance as well as the organized, collective levels, and has made gender a key factor in colonial power

² Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

relations more generally.³ The Subaltern Studies group has also underlined the need to examine oral as well as textual sources and hence experiences, thus responding to a real problem for historians of the colonial period, since the official archives view the colonized through the highly deforming lens of the colonial civil servant. Furthermore, official archives tend to concentrate on organized forms of resistance that often have a male bias. More generally, the close articulation between 'race', gender and class in the colonial contexts arguably needs to be brought out further within Francophone postcolonial studies. There are therefore many elements within areas of Anglophone postcolonial studies that can be drawn upon by those of us working on the history of anti-colonialism, anti-racism and migration, and the memories of colonial repression within Francophone contexts.

For example, a book-length comparative study of colonial and contemporary Algeria and India has yet to be written, but might provide much to question generalizations about specific British or French 'models' of colonialism and colonial governance, and how these policies were experienced, challenged and subverted. More generally, and for obvious reasons, Anglophone postcolonial studies engage less directly with the Algerian colonial and postcolonial question, one that often appears dominant within the Francophone context. The interest of the Black Atlantic paradigm – now in the process of being incorporated into Francophone studies subsequent to Paul Gilroy's highly stimulating but none the less very Anglophone reading – lies not only in the Black Atlantic's heuristic usefulness for understanding diasporic forms of counter-modernity; the concept of the Black Atlantic also moves us away from an often Algerian-dominated to a potentially

³ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

more inclusive Francophone perspective.⁴ From an historical viewpoint, we should also look to the Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish colonial and postcolonial examples.

In addition to this necessary dialogue with and beyond Anglophone postcolonial studies, there is also a need for Francophone postcolonial studies to engage with political science, social anthropology, and, in particular, with language departments where the languages and cultures indigenous to the specific former colonised areas are studied. Specialists in these language departments can teach us much about the political and cultural dynamics of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial encounters and can help us interpret experiences that are expressed in languages that scholars in French studies often cannot read or speak. We need to be mindful that French remains an imperial language in many parts of the globe (albeit one fighting a losing battle with English) and in few places in Africa (for example) does French represent the everyday language of communication for a majority of the population.

Before trying to outline in more detail how and why Francophone postcolonial studies can arguably engage constructively with further elements of Anglophone postcolonial historiography, I would briefly like to discuss the idea of French 'resistance' to postcolonialism mentioned in the call for contributions to this journal. The notion that within France the social sciences and humanities have not engaged with the continuing forms of discourse and practice profoundly informed by the France's colonial past, appears to be a position increasingly difficult to uphold, at least within studies of anti-racism, racism, colonial and postcolonial migrations and colonial governance. We can quote the respective work of Jean-Loup Amselle, Étienne Balibar, Azouz Begag, René Gallissot, Colette Guillaumin, Pascal

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

Le Pautremat, Gilles Manceron, Benjamin Stora and Vincent Viet. Their work has sought to understand, in particular, the legacy of colonialism on the hexagonal French context. (Assuredly, definitions of the 'postcolonial' do not stop there, but these are major authors in their respective disciplines.). Outside of academia (and some of the authors listed above work on several fronts, ensuring their ideas gain a wider audience), we cannot ignore the many other voices in civil society – in particular the multitude of associations – promoting (for example) the history and memory of colonial and postcolonial migrations. Conversely, it would be false to paint an overly rosy picture of attitudes towards postcolonialism in France, given the simultaneously difference-creating and difference-denying discourses and practices inherited from the colonial era and that remain hegemonic in hexagonal France and which permeate academia.

Whilst we see in the work of many of the historians, sociologists and political theorists listed above a recognition on a general level of the colonial legacy in the shaping of the present, it is true that the colonial studies advocated, for example, by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler go somewhat further and are an indispensable introduction to understanding the 'postcolonial'.⁵ Cooper and Stoler's suggested historiography of empire recognizes the specificity of each colonial and postcolonial context, whilst seeing these contexts as part of a wider whole (the colonial project of the specific French, Dutch, British empires, etc.). Cooper and Stoler underline the extent to which the colonies contained within them power relations of 'race', class, and gender

⁵ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a research Agenda', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-56. See also Ann Laura Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002).

that were closely linked to the former imperial 'centre'. These historians point to the transfer and circulation of personnel, ideas and practices within and across different imperial settings and the need to see the colonial period itself as culturally hybrid, and where forms of power relations were irreducible to a monolithic 'colonizer'/'colonized' relationship. Alice Conklin's work constitutes a model in this respect.⁶

Research I am currently undertaking – and which attempts to draw on such perspectives – looks at the way in which forms of surveillance and repression of pro-independence nationalisms in Morocco and then Algeria were then practiced on colonial and postcolonial migrants in hexagonal France. Those colonial functionaries brought to the suburbs of Paris and Lyons to ensure the breaking up of Algerian nationalist 'enclaves' had honed their skills in the *bidonvilles* of Casablanca and Algiers. Remaining in their posts after 1962, these administrators oversaw the surveillance and eventual destruction of the *bidonvilles* and were partly responsible for applying the policy of *triage* of the (mostly North African) inhabitants of the *bidonvilles*, dividing them into the three categories of the 'assimilating', the potentially 'assimilable' and the 'inassimilable'. This classification determined the public housing they may or may not accede to, a classification underscored by essentialized gendered and cultural assumptions inherited from the colonies. Thus the prehistory of the ethnic segregation characteristic of today's poor French *banlieues* dates back to official housing policies since the 1950s that cannot be understood without recourse to the conflictual decolonizing processes underway in both the colonies and hexagonal France. These former colonial functionaries had their remit extended in the 1960s to cover West African migrants. Yet

⁶ Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

many of the discourses these officials used were not entirely unfamiliar to a metropolitan context where the surveillance of working-class populations was well embedded within state practices, and where the newly postcolonial migrants could, legally speaking, increasingly be treated like 'foreigners'. Such practices remind us of the close articulation between state, nation and empire within the republican colonial and postcolonial contexts, as well also suggesting a fluid temporal distinction between colonial and post-colonial.

Francophone postcolonial studies would be particularly well placed to trace this continual re-drawing of the boundaries of 'Self' and 'Other' in the French hexagonal context. Whilst superficially similar, and marked by often striking continuities from the colonial to postcolonial contexts, such reformulations never operate identically, and serve different social, political and economic functions from one period and context to the next. postcolonial studies – both Anglophone and Francophone – allow us to better understand the genealogies of such discourses and practices.

To summarize, I would certainly advocate an engagement of Francophone postcolonial studies with but also beyond Anglophone postcolonial studies, as part of a wider interdisciplinary dialogue, in order to further our understanding of both the colonial and the postcolonial, of culture, history and politics.

Jim House
University of Leeds

The Good Cause?

In Pierre Loti's exotic novel of 1906, *Les Désenchantées*, set in Istanbul, the Western protagonist André Lhéry is invited by three veiled Turkish women to write a subversive, campaigning novel that would depict women's lives within the harem as a form of intolerable sequestration and thereby hasten the demise of an Islamic domestic hierarchy. By importing Western ideas about women's independence into the culturally unsettled context of turn-of-the-century Turkey (this is just before the revolution of 1908, with the reforms proposed by Atatürk following somewhat later in 1923), Lhéry becomes the agent for what the novel terms a feminist crusade. Bearing in mind that Loti's earlier trademark, as established a quarter of a century earlier in *Aziyadé*, had been the defence of old Ottoman ways and the dismissal of Western democracy, the incitement in *Les Désenchantées*, ostensibly from within the local culture, to foster Western-style liberalism seems problematic. In a further complication, Loti's biographer Alain Quella-Villéger points out that one of the three veiled women was in fact French, so that the call to westernize comes not from an 'authentic' voice within the harem but rather from the west itself.¹ Loti's tale of Western-delivered liberation has a potentially much wider resonance.

The risk of cultural narcissism and of a unilateral exercising of power that lurks in *Les Désenchantées* might prompt us to reflect briefly on the relationship between power and would-be just or commendable causes in today's neocolonial order. In a recent article, Eric Hobsbawm encourages us to be sceptical about the appeals to human rights made by powerful states whose aim is to

¹ Alain Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti, le pèlerin de la planète* (Bordeaux: Auberon, 1998), pp. 303-17.

camouflage economic, political, or military self-interest.² He sees as dangerous the position of those who, while specifically disapproving of superpower militarism, go along with its manifestations and consequences in order to eliminate local injustices.

Hobsbawm's distrust of what he terms the 'imperialism of human rights' can be related to the scepticism expressed by Jacques Derrida in his 1999 piece, 'Le Siècle et le pardon'.³ In this interview, which was prompted by reflection on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa, Derrida sets the discourse of pardon, and human rights generally, squarely within a geopolitical context. In addition to reflecting on such concepts as the Rights of Man and crimes against humanity, he draws the reader's attention to the question of sovereignty. Whilst he concedes that sovereignty is often associated positively and justifiably with the right to self-determination and the ideal of emancipation, Derrida obliges us to consider how it is the sovereignty of *small* nations that is regularly infringed. He cautions: 'Soyons toujours attentifs, comme Hannah Arendt le rappelle lucidement, au fait que cette limitation de souveraineté n'est jamais imposée que là où c'est "possible" (physiquement, militairement, économiquement), c'est-à-dire toujours imposée à des petits États, relativement faibles, par des États puissants'.⁴

If such imbalances of power induce anxiety in Arendt and Derrida, one might ask if an analogous anxiety needs to inform postcolonial studies. Or to reformulate the question: where does, where might, postcolonial debate as a body of study and knowledge situate itself in relation to the so-called world order. It

² Eric Hobsbawm, 'America's Imperial Delusion', *The Guardian*, 14 June 2003, p. 21.

³ Reproduced in Marc Ferro (ed.), *Le Livre noir du colonialisme* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2003), pp. 764-65.

⁴ Ferro, *Le Livre noir*, p. 764.

is an order in which, as Marc Ferro reminds us in his Introduction to *Le Livre noir du colonialisme*, the impact of neocolonialism in black Africa, for example, is powerfully felt economically, even if the very visible white presence of colonial days is less tangible. Ferro foregrounds many of the facts that are regularly occluded by the West: starvation, with 40,000 black Africans dying each day, the disruption of traditional methods of subsistence farming and the failure of cash crops on the skewed world markets, enforced migration and so on. Faced with these damning symptoms of a partial, dysfunctional application of the discourse of human rights, how should postcolonial studies respond, always assuming of course that it might want or be able to? Or is it a delusion of the liberal intellectual or an aesthetically misguided impulse or even uncomfortably bad taste to think that the cultural production that is academic study might ever exert a tangible, reforming impact? One might counter that if the effect of world war, for example, on twentieth-century Europe was to impact radically on European intellectual life, how might the legacy of flagrant economic injustice in an era of globalization be felt and represented culturally? In his *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Aimé Césaire provokes the Western reader by establishing an unsettling linkage between the effects of Nazi totalitarianism and of colonialism: 'Ce que le très chrétien bourgeois du XXe siècle ne pardonne pas à Hitler, ce n'est pas le crime en soi, ce n'est pas l'humiliation de l'homme en soi, c'est le crime contre l'homme blanc [...] d'avoir appliqué à l'Europe des procédés colonialistes dont ne relevaient jusqu'ici que les Arabes, les coolies de l'Inde et les nègres d'Afrique'.⁵

The aim behind the disjointed hesitations and questions that I raise is not to argue for a disabling state of postcolonial guilt, a consequence of which might be a continuing, frozen dichotomy of hegemony and disempowerment. But rather to ask how forms of

⁵ Quoted in Ferro, *Le Livre noir*, p. 9.

academic enquiry such as postcolonial studies (and one could include many other fields of study besides) might best engage politically and seek to exert influence in the face of the global economic (dis)order that is so regularly masked from view. To return briefly to the case of Loti, the background to his trip to Istanbul in 1903 as the French naval commander, Julien Viaud, entailed a convergence of political power, genocide and exotic fiction. It was no coincidence that *he* should have been sent by the French government to Turkey, the trip that was to spawn *Les Désenchantées*. His Turcophile credentials ensured France's envoy a warm reception at a time when relations between Turkey and the West were under strain in the aftermath of the appalling Armenian massacres and other bloody conflicts and when France was seeking to exert liberalizing influence.⁶ Yet by the time he had finished writing the novel in May 1906, Loti recognized that his 'croisade féministe' would undoubtedly alienate the Turkish authorities: 'Ce soir j'ai fini *Les Désenchantées*. Il me semble aussi que tout lien est brisé [...] avec la Turquie'.⁷ Mindful of the tight link in Loti's case between risk, affairs of state and cultural production, one might ask, in a postcolonial, a neocolonial situation, what risks the field of postcolonial studies (whether Francophone or Anglophone) might or should entail in its relation to cultural and economic power.

Edward Hughes
Royal Holloway, University of London

⁶ See Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti*, pp. 303-17.

⁷ Quoted in Quella-Villéger, *Pierre Loti*, p. 312.

Sur un champ miné de bonnes intentions: Francophone Postcolonial Studies¹

Dans un article récent, 'Sur quelques apports et apories de la théorie postcoloniale pour le domaine francophone', Jean-Marc Moura écrit:

Un ensemble de littératures francophones répond à la notion de postcolonial. À ce titre, il est justiciable des analyses initiées par la critique anglo-saxonne [...]. Il est réconfortant de constater [...] que les études francophones n'ont pas attendu l'avènement des recherches postcoloniales pour se préoccuper de certains aspects et que nombre de leurs analyses rencontrent les préoccupations des chercheurs postcoloniaux [...]. Sans doute est-il de notre intérêt de poursuivre plus systématiquement ces rencontres, de les provoquer afin qu'elles participent d'une volonté délibérée de se nourrir de recherches venues d'horizons différents. Pourrait ainsi se constituer une hybridation études francophones-études anglophones avant d'aborder les champs plus larges, tout aussi passionnants et foisonnants, de la lusophonie et de l'hispanophonie notamment.²

Voilà sans doute l'une des directions que pourrait ou souhaiterait prendre cette nouvelle revue, au titre évocateur, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, puisque, selon l'équipe de rédaction, cette

¹ Pour les formidables étudiants de mon séminaire de 1er cycle de littératures francophones de l'hiver 2003 à Duke University: Jeanne Dewitt, Andrew Furlow, Babz Kariisa, Ji-Myung Kim, Nell Manning, Ljubica Spaskovska, Isabella Stankowski, Katerina Yiannibas

² Jean-Marc Moura, 'Sur quelques apports et apories de la théorie postcoloniale pour le domaine francophone', in Jean Bessière et Jean-Marc Moura (eds), *Littératures postcoloniales et francophonie. Conférence du séminaire de Littérature comparée de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), pp. 149-167 (p. 163).

publication se propose 'd'explorer la dimension francophone des études postcoloniales', et 'd'entamer un dialogue essentiel entre les champs anglophone et francophone des études postcoloniales'. Pourtant aussi attirante ou attrayante que puisse être une telle démarche, elle doit être évitée. Du moins, il ne faudrait pas qu'elle surdétermine les décisions éditoriales de *FPS*.

En effet, la priorité d'un dialogue des pairs anglophones et francophones, avant celui avec les latinités américaines, comme le propose Moura, ne saurait servir les intérêts des littératures francophones. Car, comme il fallait si attendre, pour Moura, la finalité est une quête de soi. Précisant sa pensée (ou son vœu) dans son paragraphe de clôture, il affirme tout bonnement:

L'intérêt pour nous au contraire, est de voir en quoi les procédures d'analyse nouvelles, les pratiques de lecture voire d'écriture inédites que ces littératures nous contraignent à aborder rejaillissent sur nos recherches critiques concernant les lettres occidentales, en quoi par conséquent l'approche neuve de la littérature initiée à propos des littératures postcoloniales peut modifier, enrichir, approfondir en retour notre regard et notre abord des littératures d'Occident.³

Le mot est lâché, là est le piège: le projet ne serait pas tant de promouvoir les littératures francophones et leurs poétiques que de s'en servir pour mieux comprendre les 'littératures d'Occident'. Or, s'il doit avoir un dialogue, et il est important, c'est moins entre critiques ou théoriciens du Centre (anglophones ou francophones) que entre les diverses instances de production/réception des œuvres francophones, d'une part, et des instances du Centre, d'autre part. Il ne faut donc pas parler au nom de..., mais plutôt laisser parler, donner à lire, à voir auteurs, éditeurs, libraires, dramaturges, cinéastes, metteurs en scène, critiques... ceux-là mêmes qui font que ces productions existent, circulent. Sur ce plan, l'entretien véritable avec sa dynamique d'approfondissement

³ Ibid., pp. 166-7.

de l'œuvre dans une confrontation constructive et dialectique des lectures du critique (interviewer) et de l'auteur (interviewé), cette critique dialogique, pour emprunter l'expression de Todorov, dont les *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers*, entre autres, donnent une bonne mesure, pourrait devenir une des formes privilégiées d'intervention dans l'espace d'échange et de change que devrait être une revue d'études francophones.⁴

Par ailleurs, la réflexion sur le colonialisme européen et ses conséquences a une très longue et très vieille histoire en Amérique, notamment dans les langues latines (espagnol, français, portugais). Il serait donc plus approprié de se pencher sur ces corpus critiques des 19e et 20e siècles pour analyser ces propositions d'alors et d'ailleurs, évaluer leur opérationnalité et leur viabilité pour rendre compte ou non, en partie ou entièrement, des productions francophones.

En fait, la proposition de Moura reprend un parti-pris manifeste des études postcoloniales de marginalisation ou de négation des corpus latino-américains même de langue française, et aussi une hiérarchisation, voulue ou non, des champs et du coup des langues, inscrite dans son titre même: théorie postcoloniale/domaine francophone. L'exception que constitue l'œuvre de Fanon, penseur franco-martiniquais (dont les livres ont été traduits en anglais dès les années 1960), l'une des figures de proue du postcolonialisme avec Said, Bhabha, Spivak), ne devrait pas masquer le fait que ce courant critique se reconnaît plutôt dans l'anglophonie, se veut 'anglophone', comme le soulignait avec une pointe d'ironie l'équipe de rédaction de *FPS* dans son courriel d'invitation à participer à ce premier volume, qui du même souffle rappelait la résistance française au postcolonialisme.

Mais cette 'résistance française', si résistance il y a, a aussi son pendant anglophone, la négation (ou presque) d'une pensée

⁴ Voir Francis Ponge et Philippe Sollers, *Entretiens de Francis Ponge avec Philippe Sollers* (Paris: Gallimard et Seuil, 1970).

critique francophone. Et il ne faudrait pas gommer le fait fort évident qu'à l'ancienne division géo-politique du savoir (Nord/Sud, Centre/Périphérie), se greffe de plus en plus une autre linguistique (langue anglaise – autres langues européennes/langues non européennes). Bien sûr dans cette triade, la saxonne se veut hégémonique, et le sujet/objet périphérique refoulé dans la chosification complète, ses langues et poétiques indigènes perçues comme non-savoirs, au mieux de vulgaires intuitions (tribalement marquées), comme le rappelle cette note du catalogue de l'exposition de 1987 du Center for African Art de New York, 'Perspectives: Angles on African Art', cité par Appiah:

Field aesthetics studies, my own and others, have shown that African informants will criticize sculptures from other ethnic groups in terms of their own traditional criteria, often assuming that such works are simply inept carving of their own aesthetic tradition.⁵

Mais il ne faudrait pas penser que c'est là qu'historie ancienne. Encore le 6 novembre 1999, au colloque de Yale University, 'French and Francophone: The Challenge of Expanding Horizons', une jeune universitaire américaine déclarait (en toute bonne foi) qu'il est plus facile d'enseigner le vodou haïtien que Heidegger. Pour parodier Hassan Musa à propos de l'Afrique, faut-il être grand clerc pour comprendre qu'Haïti, comme le vodou, n'échappe pas à la complexité du monde?⁶

D'autre part, cette 'résistance au postcolonialisme' n'est nullement française, elle est plutôt d'ordre intellectuel et assez généralisée. D'ailleurs, elle s'exprime plus fortement en anglais qu'en français. Le refus de l'appellation non contrôlée postcolonial studies ou theories, a été entre autres diversement exprimé, tant

⁵ Anthony Kwame Appiah, 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonialism?', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991), 336-357 (337).

⁶ Hassan Musa, 'Qui a inventé les Africains?', *Les Temps modernes*, 620/621 (2002), 61-100.

dans le contexte des études anglophones qu'hispanophones pour des raisons fort valables que les tenants de la ou des perspectives postcoloniales n'ont pu, à ma connaissance, vraiment réfuter.

En fait, hors du monde strictement anglophone, même les chercheurs qui adoptent la perspective postcoloniale et endossent l'étiquette ont généralement quelques réserves, notamment pour souligner comme le fait Moura que les préoccupations postcoloniales préexistent au terme et au courant dans leur domaine ou leur contexte linguistique. Un autre exemple fort intéressant est la position de Walter Mignolo, éminent intellectuel argentin de l'université anglo-américaine qui, dans un premier temps, reprend les principales critiques faites au postcolonialisme, mais sans les réfuter conclut qu'il convient malgré tout d'utiliser ce concept; puis dans un deuxième temps, dans un mouvement de révision critique (dépassement/déplacement), introduit les notions de 'postoccidental' et 'postoccidentalisme' ('posoccidental', 'posoccidentalismo') emprunté au Cubain Fernando Retamar.⁷ Cette dernière formulation de l'après-colonialisme européen antérieure à postcolonialisme que Mignolo semble trouver plus adéquate pour décrire la situation latino-américaine, nous rappelle du même coup qu'ailleurs et avant on a pensé la question de la (trans)modernité et de la colonialité dans la langue du premier empire colonial européen moderne. Comment pourrait-il en être autrement? Ce vaste sous-continent américain qui a défait le colonialisme européen pour faire face à l'impérialisme états-uniens serait incapable de penser ses rapports au monde, s'il n'avait pas su depuis des lustres se donner un contre-discours politique et culturel qui n'est pas sans rappeler le discours dit postcolonial

⁷ Voir Walter Mignolo, 'Herencias coloniales y teorías postcoloniales', in Beatriz Gonzalez Stephan, ed., *Cultura y Tercer Mundo, I- Cambios en el saber académico* (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1996), pp. 99-136 et 'Posoccidentalismo: las epistemologías fronterizas y el dilema de los estudios (latinoamericanos) de áreas', *Revista Iberoamericana*, LXII.176-177 (1996), 679-696.

d'après les indépendances africaines plus d'un siècle après les premières indépendances américaines.

Sans remonter aussi loin dans le temps et l'espace, avec les mêmes références politico-philosophiques ou presque des tenants du postcolonialisme des années 1970-1980 (Gramsci, Fanon, Hegel, Max, Mao, Althusser, la révolution haïtienne, le tiers-monde, etc.), déjà en 1978, l'année même où Said sort son *Orientalism*, il se publie à Montréal un texte fort important pour l'analyse des discours dominants, et des réponses de la périphérie, *De l'idéologie dominée* de Bernard Labrousse.⁸ Mais dans le monde postcolonial (anglosaxon) ce texte est complètement ignoré, comme depuis plus d'un siècle, il ignore la magistrale réponse de Anténor Firmin à Gobineau, *De l'égalité des races humaines* (1885) dont affirme Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban: 'It is as compelling a work of anthropology as E. B. Tylor's *Anthropology* (1881)'.⁹ Et ce texte majeur reste l'un des rares d'un ex-colonisé (et Noir) de l'époque triomphante du colonialisme européen où, malgré les indépendances américaines, le soleil ne se couchait pas sur l'empire britannique, sinon le seul à avoir articulé un contre-discours convainquant, une réponse cohérente (je dirais postcoloniale et déconstructive avant la lettre) à la thèse dominante de Gobineau qui n'a pas perdu (quoiqu'on voudrait nous faire croire) de son attrait pour l'immense majorité du Nord dominant.

Par contre, qu'importe la prégnance ou l'importance du discours colonial ou néo-colonial, hier ou aujourd'hui, l'enjeu n'est pas tant de déconstruire ce canon dominant que de contribuer activement à bâtir, à établir et à promouvoir la diversité des corpus de l'espace francophone – postcolonial ou non, car comme le soutient Mignolo, 'la diversité plus que l'universalité est la

⁸ Bernard Labrousse, *De l'idéologie dominée* (Montréal: Nouvelle Optique, 1978).

⁹ Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, 'Introduction', in Anténor Firmin, 'The Equality of the Human Races (Positivist Anthropology)', trad. Charles Asselin (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. xi-xlvi (p.xiv).

véritable alternative à la globalisation'.¹⁰ Aussi, faut-il, à tout prix, éviter le piège de ramener les études francophones à un corpus de textes du XXe siècle des pays du Sud anciennement colonisés par des puissances européennes. Un texte francophone n'étant pas forcément (un texte) d'un écrivain dit francophone, i.e. un écrivain né ou résidant dans l'espace francophone, et encore moins celui d'un ex-colonisé: *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), généralement reconnu comme un texte fondateur du roman 'canadien-français', est tout de même d'un écrivain hexagonal, Louis Hémon. Aussi, un écrivain francophone n'appartient pas nécessairement à une littérature francophone (les cas sont nombreux et anciens: Bianciotti, Beckett, Casanova, Cioran entre autres), comme la littérature d'un état ou d'un espace francophone n'est pas exclusivement de langue française. Il en est ainsi, par exemple, des littératures algériennes (pensons aux œuvres de Khatib Yacine en français et en arabe dialectal, ou celles de Rachid Boudjedra en français et en arabe classique) ou haïtienne (les œuvres d'un Frankétienne en français ou haïtien et d'un Michel-Rolf Trouillot en français, haïtien et anglais sont fort éloquentes sur ce point).

Par ailleurs, dans la mesure où les études francophones sont d'abord et avant tout des études de pratiques langagières d'expression française, notamment littéraires, c'est d'abord la littérature qui devrait être l'objet privilégié des recherches et d'une revue d'études francophones, d'autant plus que l'écrasante majorité des chercheurs, pour ne pas dire aucun, ne peut maîtriser les nombreuses formes d'expression culturelles de l'espace francophone qui s'actualisent dans des centaines de langues ou sémiotiques et de poétiques différentes, sinon distinctes. Il faut être bien prétentieux pour se croire apte à saisir toutes les expressions culturelles même d'un sous-ensemble aussi peu hétérogène que l'espace francophone maghrébin. Donc face à une habilité si

¹⁰ Walter Mignolo, 'Géopolitique de la connaissance, colonialité du pouvoir et différence coloniale', *Multitudes*, 6 (2001), 56-71 (69).

limitée de valider les recherches sur des ensembles aussi divers, pour ne pas sombrer dans de permanentes affaires Sokal (où des vessies deviennent des lanternes aveuglantes), il conviendrait d'appliquer la simple règle du bon sens de la stricte limitation des champs d'études, d'oublier le chant des sirènes généralisantes/globalisantes (ou totalisantes) pour sortir du spéculable (le fantasme théorique/téléologique) et retourner à l'explorable, le mesurable. Le piège des pièges des tenants du postcolonialisme (comme parti pris ou perspective de recherche) est le glissement ostentatoire d'un champ ou domaine de recherche (études postcoloniales) à la métaphysique doctrinale (théories postcoloniales), comme si chaque objet devait générer sa propre théorie, et chaque chercheur enfanter ses propres concepts (opérateurs ou non). Or dans la mesure où l'ensemble des pratiques signifiantes étudié ou étudiable dans le cadre des études postcoloniales ne sont que des pratiques déjà répertoriées et étudiées dans d'autres champs d'étude (littérature, théâtre, chanson, journalisme, etc.), je vois mal le pourquoi (et surtout le comment) d'une théorie ou de théories postcoloniales (spécifiques). Il n'y pas une théorie chinoise ou chilienne des mathématiques ou de la physique, il y a une ou des théories mathématiques ou physiques sans marques nationales ou ethniques. Une science (molle ou dure) marquée racialement ou localement ne serait plus une science. Si les études postcoloniales ont besoin d'une théorie (postcolonialement marquée) pour exister, mieux vaut laisser sombrer le bateau.

Certes, il faut (re)mettre la littérature au centre des préoccupations. Mais cela ne veut pas dire l'étudier hors contexte, et encore moins dans une perspective unique, réductrice d'analyses socio-historisantes ou psycho-sociologisantes dont les commentaires de Fanon sur Capécia et Maran sont symptomatiques d'un certain mépris (qui est aussi méprise et méconnaissance) du littéraire qui hante trop souvent les études dites postcoloniales. En effet, comment qualifier sinon de

méprisants ces propos sur Maran: 'Jean Veneuse, alias René Maran, n'est plus ni moins qu'un abandonnique noir. Et on le remet à sa place, à sa juste place. C'est un névrosé qui a besoin d'être délivré de ses fantasmes infantiles?'¹¹ Dans la même foulée réductrice, un autre exemple moins célèbre, mais tout aussi inquiétant, sinon plus, car là c'est tout bêtement la connaissance de l'histoire littéraire ou des corpus qui fait défaut, ce sont les commentaires de Marcela Breton sur la naissance d'une littérature dans la Caraïbe:

Caribbean literature is a twentieth-century literature. Before an autochthonous literature could develop, the Caribbean writer had to free himself of the cultural models imposed by the colonial powers, whether Spanish, French, English or Dutch. While there are examples of an indigenous literature prior to the twentieth century (for example, the Cuban Cirilo Villaverde's 1882 novel *Cecilia Valdes*, and, in general, Cuba represents a divergent case), the emergence of a native literature follows the emancipation of the slave, independence from the motherland, widespread education, leading to the appearance of middle class, which, in turn, produces an intellectual class. Jamaican H. G. de Lisser's *Jane's Career* (1913) is frequently cited as the first West Indian novel where the main character is black. The Antillean writer had to learn to locate literary inspiration in his native land and people while also developing a means of expression appropriate to a description of this reality.¹²

Pour conclure, si comme il est aujourd'hui généralement reconnu, ces textes dits francophones ne le sont que parce qu'écrits en français, il ne sont pas pour autant exclusivement ou intégralement en français, notamment sous le mode narratif. Étant

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952; 1971), p. 64.

¹² Marcela Breton, *Rhythm and Revolt: Tales of the Antilles* (New York: Plume, 1995), p. xx.

textes allogènes,¹³ ils sont hétéroglossiques,¹⁴ du moins bilingues ou diglossiques,¹⁵ d'où ces procès de traduction qui les caractérisent en partie.¹⁶ Il serait hasardeux de les aborder sans une connaissance minimale des diverses sémiotiques qui les travaillent et qu'ils travaillent. Sémiotiques, notamment celles indigènes et populaires, qui n'ont plutôt d'existence que dans la performance et la furtivité du quotidien. Or, à quelques exceptions près, ce problème fondamental des sémiotiques et des poétiques indigènes en œuvre dans les productions langagières dites postcoloniales semble peu préoccuper la critique qui trop souvent pense que les indigènes n'ont ni savoir ni discours sur leur pratique. Pourtant, si nous apprenions à les lire, les métadiscours indigènes (populaires ou savants) nous enseigneraient tant sur les textes de l'espace francophone. C'est l'argument principal d'un ouvrage en cours, *Lecture de la lecture. Littérature francophone et transtextualité*, dont un premier état est donné dans mon article, 'Sur des lectures de *Traversée de la Mangrove* de Condé'.¹⁷ En effet, je soutiens que toute lecture d'un texte francophone qui ne se veut pas réductrice doit tenir compte à la fois des sémiotiques allogènes généralement manifestes (langue, genre par exemple) et indigènes plutôt latentes (langues, motifs, anecdotes, personnages historiques ou populaires, rhétoriques, etc.) Autrement dit, pour bien les lire, minimalement on ne peut faire l'économie des relations transtextuelles de ces textes francophones avec d'autres

¹³ Voir Jean Jonassaint, *Des romans de tradition haïtienne. Sur un récit tragique* (Paris/Montréal: L'Harmattan/Cidihca, 2002).

¹⁴ Voir Rainier Grutman, *Des langues qui résonnent: l'hétérolinguisme au XIXe siècle québécois* (Montréal: Fides, 1997).

¹⁵ Voir Maximilien Laroche, 'La Diglossie dans *Gouverneurs de la rosée*: termes de couleurs et conflit de langue', in Laroche, *La Littérature haïtienne: Identité-langue-réalité* (Montréal: Leméac, 1981), pp. 57-104.

¹⁶ Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983).

¹⁷ Jean Jonassaint, 'Sur des lectures de *Traversée de la Mangrove* de Condé', *Cahiers Francophones d'Europe Centre-Orientale*, 10 (2000), 419-441.

textes de leur espace en langues indigènes ou non. Une telle perspective d'analyse implique bien sûr un recours à la sémiologie, mieux aux sémiologies et autres méthodes d'analyse (comme la socio-critique, la narratologie, la poétique, la génétique textuelle) qui prennent en compte la matérialité en tout sens du texte dans ses divers procès de production/réception.

Enfin, après détours et palabres, il est temps de réaffirmer qu'une nouvelle revue est toujours une bonne chose, et souhaiter longue vie et grand succès à *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, mais aussi, à la bonne manière caraïbéenne, remercier l'équipe de rédaction pour cette invitation à prise de paroles.

Jean Jonassaint
Duke University

Francophone Postcolonial Studies: Revisiting Orientalism

Edward Said has defined Orientalism as a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the latter's special place in Western experience.¹ In his view, the Orient is the source of one of the West's deepest and most recurring images of the Other. Hence, it helps define Europe in terms of contrast; one culture is what the other is not. Exploring the concept further, Said introduces the relationship of power into his discussion by giving a pertinent example of Western cultural domination drawn from nineteenth century French literary history. When the French writer Gustave Flaubert met an Egyptian courtesan, Kuchuk Hanem, he never allowed her to speak for herself. For Said, Kuchuk Hanem, as muted object, stands for the relationship between Western domination and Eastern submission.

As Said also notes, Orientalist writers dealt with their predecessors in a 'citationary' way; they made use of previous writers' work. Nerval's voyage to the Orient was influenced by Lamartine who had followed a path previously charted by Chateaubriand.² By reading one another, Said concludes, Orientalists reinforced Oriental stereotypes and masked reality. These processes held true for painting as well. Although Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres never traveled to the Orient, his bathers and odalisques, derived primarily from eighteenth century images of the Islamic world, served to shape the European vision of the Orient throughout most of the nineteenth century.

If the Westerner's gaze and voice contributed to the imperialist venture, how have postcolonial writers and critics reacted to earlier

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978; repr. 1994).

² *Ibid.*, p.176

cultural domination? Have they challenged it or merely ignored it as an irrelevant vestige of a distant past? One response has been to revisit Orientalism, its texts and images. Thus, we find reflections upon the 'imaginary Orient' occurring in postcolonial fiction and criticism. In this essay, I would like to examine a selection of works of fiction and critical essays that evoke the odalisques, the harem women of Orientalist paintings, as well as the tales of *The Arabian Nights* and its legendary storyteller, Scheherazade.³

In this vein, Algerian writer Assia Djebar has written an essay on Delacroix's painting, 'Femmes d'Alger dans leur Appartement' as well as a short story 'La femme en morceaux' which incorporates a tale of *The Arabian Nights* into a text set in contemporary Algiers.⁴ Franco-Algerian writer Leila Sebbar has created Shérazade, the intrepid 'Beurette' whose discovery of Orientalist art has a decisive effect on her identity quest. Finally, Fatema Mernissi's *Scheherazade goes West*, presents an analysis of the odalisques of Orientalist painting and Western interpretations of *The Arabian Nights* as misreadings of the Orient. In their texts, the three writers evoke the harem as a representation of women's confinement that originates in the Orient but has been distorted by Western fantasy.

Djebar's essay, a postface to her collection of short stories that bears the same title as the Delacroix painting, studies the effects of confinement in the harem by closely examining the painting: the relationship between subjects, painter, and public. Delacroix composed the work in 1834, two years after the French conquest of Algeria; a second version followed in 1849. In both canvases, the

³ *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Sir Richard Burton (New York: Deluxe Editions Club, 1930).

⁴ Assia Djebar, 'Postface: Regard interdit, son coupé', in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1980), pp. 167-189, and 'La Femme en morceaux', in *Oran, langue morte* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1997), pp. 163-215.

Algerian women, confined to a dimly lit, richly textured interior, are decorative and mute prisoners of opulence. Djébar, like Delacroix, views them as victims of confinement, women denied the freedom of movement and speech. She notes that their facial expressions convey bitterness and hopelessness. Linking these women of Algeria's past to those of the present, she articulates a feminist interpretation and a personal mission. Having revisited Delacroix's Orientalist canvas, Djébar discovers that she must lend her ear to the whispers in the harem in order to restore speech to her muted sisters. The necessity to liberate the odalisques, representatives of patriarchal oppression, becomes the symbolic quest of Djébar's individual and collective narrative. As she focuses on this representation of confinement, the Algerian writer also probes the meaning of the European painter's stolen gaze and concludes that Delacroix, a European male, is indeed an intruder in the harem.

Sebbar's protagonist Shérázade comes to terms with Orientalism in a different way.⁵ She lives clandestinely in Paris with a group of teenagers who like her, have left their family. A chance encounter with Julien, a *pied-noir* intellectual, leads her to Orientalist paintings. Sharing her friend's passion for art, they visit the Louvre to view Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* and discover that Shérázade resembles one of the odalisques; both women have the same green eyes. Thus, having fled one enclosure, the restricting walls of her immigrant home, Shérázade encounters another in the pictorial representation of an Algerian harem. Yet, by studying the painting objectively, Shérázade maintains distances from the imprisoned; as an observer, she remains free.

⁵ Leila Sebbar, *Shérázade 17 ans, brune frisée, les yeux verts* (Paris: Stock, 1982), and *Les Carnets de Shérázade*. (Paris: Stock, 1985).

When she is drawn to Matisse's *L'Odalisque à la culotte rouge*, Shérázade decides to sequester herself one night in the Beaubourg museum where the painting is displayed, in order to study the canvas undisturbed. Here, Shérázade writes an objective description of the painting and then experiences an intense personal bond with the odalisque as she gazes intently upon the work. The emotional experience results in her decision to revisit Algeria, the land of her ancestors and a source of Orientalist artistic inspiration.

I believe it is important to note that Djébar and Sebbar position themselves and their protagonists outside of the canvas. Distance characterizes their relationship to the harem. They, like Delacroix and Matisse, do not experience life bounded by heavy curtains but reflect upon it. In this regard, Fatema Mernissi's analysis adds important sociological and historical dimensions to the exploration of Orientalism.⁶ The Moroccan sociologist enters the imaginary Orient via Ingres, his *Grande Odalisque* (1814) and *Turkish Bath* (1862). She points out the false elements of both, the nudity of the odalisque in the first painting, the erotic caresses between two women in the second. Accompanied to the Louvre by a French friend who mockingly refers to the women in the paintings as his harem, she is quick to observe that Muslim men enjoy the power of veiling women while Western men find pleasure in unveiling - gazing upon nude female bodies.⁷

Pursuing their Orientalist inquiry, Mernissi and her friend visit the modern art collection at Beaubourg where they, like Sebbar's Shérázade, view Matisse's *L'Odalisque à la culotte rouge*. Here, Mernissi reflects upon the female figure's vulnerability and apparent loneliness. Most importantly, she makes a crucial

⁶ Fatema Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001).

⁷ Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, pp.106-7.

historical connection as she realizes that Matisse finished the work in 1921, a significant year in the history of Turkish women's liberation. In the 1920s, Mernissi recalls, Matisse was painting Oriental women as harem slaves while Kemal Ataturk was instituting political reforms that granted women the right to participate fully in the public sector: education, the right to vote, the right to hold public office.⁸ Furthermore, at a time when Matisse was painting naked women lounging in *hammams* and harems, Turkish photographers were taking pictures of female university students in Ankara dressed in their military uniforms.⁹ Hence, as European painters pursued their Western fantasy by portraying passive figures who, naked or half-dressed, dwelled exclusively in dimly lit indoor chambers, the truth clearly lay elsewhere. Although we must acknowledge that Delacroix faithfully represented the Orient of 1832, (his notebook entries supporting the drawings in his sketchbooks), by 1921 the Middle East and North Africa had undergone sufficient transformation to call into question timeless representations of languid odalisques.

Turning to the realm of literature, we find that Scheherazade has long been an important symbol of storytelling, the frame narrative of *The Arabian Nights* fascinating readers and listeners in the Orient and the West with the unique relationship it posits between sexual and narrative desire. Does she represent a progressive voice? Djebbar, Sebbar, and Mernissi tell us she does.

Djebbar uses the tale, 'Les trois pommes' as a key element in her text, 'La Femme en morceaux' set in Algeria of the 1990s, when Islamic fundamentalists began attacking Algerian women who refused to wear the veil. Her protagonist Atyka, a high school French teacher in Algiers, becomes their victim. In the week preceding the teacher's murder in her classroom, she and her

students analyze 'Les trois pommes', a tale that centers on a mutilated female corpse, the body of a young woman murdered by her jealous husband and cast into the Tigris River. Within the text, one violent act provokes another. Unless the woman's murderer is found, the Sultan warns, his vizir will pay with his life for the crime. Hence, the Sultan's violent nature within the tale mirrors the murderous behavior of the Sultan of the frame story. If the storyteller cannot entice her husband's curiosity each night by suspending her tale at dawn, she, like the brides before her, will lose her life.

Recounting the tale and analyzing its components with her students, Atyka becomes a modern day Scheherazade, conveying the importance of reflective attentive listening. Unlike the storyteller, however, she fails to stop the killing of innocent women. Yet she shares Scheherazade's courage and faith in the power of words. Her head severed from her body, Djebbar's dismembered heroine narrates the tale until the end.

As Djebbar recasts Scheherazade as a martyr, Sebbar and Mernissi transform her in significant, but less dramatic ways. Sebbar's Shérázade, like her namesake of *The Arabian Nights*, also lives by her wits. Having run away from home to join other runaway adolescents, she faces the danger of living on the margins of society. In *Les Carnets de Shérázade*, she assumes the role of storyteller, spinning yarns in exchange for free transportation as she crosses France. Although Scheherazade used her extraordinary imagination to open the closed space of the Sultan's chambers to the realm of adventure - the tales of Sinbad the sailor, Aladdin, Ali Baba and the forty thieves - Sebbar's protagonist eludes enclosure. An itinerant storyteller, she delights in the freedom of the open road.

Finally, Mernissi, unlike Djebbar and Sebbar, does not remodel Scheherazade; she examines the storyteller's transformation in Western culture. In her view, the West misrepresents Scheherazade

⁸ Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, p. 109.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 163-4.

by refusing to acknowledge her intelligence. The storyteller survives, Mernissi explains, because she is a 'super-strategist' of the intellect.¹⁰ Yet, Scheherazade's power to manipulate the word has been lost to Europeans who seize upon the erotic elements of *The Arabian Nights* and change the 'brainy' heroine into a purely eroticized body. Recontextualizing Scheherazade within her own culture and the Arabic language, Mernissi emphasizes the element of *samar* in the text. The Arabic word for 'talking into the night' is an art, she claims, that Europeans have not fully understood.¹¹ It implies that to talk softly in the darkness is to encourage dialogue between men and women. Returning to the frame story of *The Arabian Nights*, she explains that once Scheherazade understands that the Sultan has come to associate sex with trauma, because of his first wife's infidelity, she uses *samar* to change that association. By talking softly in the night, Scheherazade leads him to overcome his trauma and its destructive behaviour.

Mernissi neglects to remind her readers, however, that Scheherazade's solution to the Sultan's problem involves matrimony. To liberate the world from a Sultan's tyranny, she marries the tyrant. As Fedwa Malti-Douglas notes, after 1001 nights, the Sultan regains his active role, Scheherazade, a passive one. Registering her disappointment at this turn of events, the critic writes: 'Shahrazâd relinquishes her role of narrator for that of perfect woman: mother and lover'.¹²

In conclusion, to revisit Orientalism is to enter an imaginary world that calls for continued interpretation. Engaging in the process, however, postcolonial writers and critics are able to recontextualize art and literature within their appropriate historical

¹⁰ Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West* p. 48.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 62.

¹² Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 28.

time frames, refute erroneous stereotypes, and challenge a legacy of Western cultural domination – all valid and pertinent projects. Perhaps it will also encourage someone to turn the tables on Flaubert and recast 'his' Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem in a new role, one in which she finally speaks for herself.

Mildred Mortimer

University of Colorado, Boulder

The Other Violence: Deconstruction, Africa and the Postcolonial

What could deconstruction possibly have to do with Africa? As Robert Young has reminded us in his chapter 'Deconstruction and the Postcolonial', a contribution to a recent collection edited by Nicholas Royle, Jacques Derrida's work has always in fact engaged directly, as well as indirectly, with ethical questions and with colonialist ideology, both of which are theorized in relation to differently conceptualized categories or modes of violence.¹ Young's article correctly resituates Derrida's work within a postcolonial (and, from the outset, anti-colonial) theoretical framework by showing how his analysis, in *Of Grammatology*, of the discursive oppression of the Western metaphysical tradition, and the violence underlying it, is from the opening lines of this text, relayed through a critique of ethnocentrism, where he describes logocentrism as 'nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world'.² Young then proceeds to demonstrate how Derrida's notion of *écriture* is coextensive with a persistent and enduring condemnation of forms of actual violence, beginning with his own experiences of racism and exclusion as a Francophone Maghrebian Jew in colonial Algeria. So contrary to a popular but mistaken view of Derrida as a representative of the very French philosophical tradition he is deconstructing, Young places Derrida within another, more militant Francophone anti-colonial genealogy, which would include the more familiar figures of

Sartre, Fanon, Memmi and Abdelkebir Khatibi, a genealogy that Derrida playfully inscribes himself into in his quasi-autobiographical text, *Monolingualism of the Other*.³ This leads Young to conclude that deconstruction has 'itself been a form of cultural decolonization'.⁴ This is further confirmed in Derrida's more explicitly political *prises de position* of recent years, and his interest in questions of justice and democracy, which are directly contextualized in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

While Robert Young should be applauded for being one of the few critics to acknowledge the importance of deconstruction for postcolonial theory, the problem with his approach is that in positing a kind of discursive isomorphism between deconstruction and various forms of cultural or ideological decolonization, he is falling into precisely the trap that, according to Derrida, both Lévi-Strauss and Foucault fall into, that is, reducing the logically anterior 'archi-violence' of writing, in the strong theoretical sense of the term, to historically or empirically determinate, local manifestations of violence. To summarize very schematically Derrida's argument, he critiques Lévi-Strauss's phonocentric analysis of writing as cultural violence, by insisting on the necessity of accounting for a prior, 'originary violence', that is, the opening which makes possible the distinction between presence and its other (say, voice and writing), and the associated metaphysical concepts that emerge from this, but which thereby makes it impossible to posit a determinable, fully self-present point of origin: 'There is no ethics without the presence of the other but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing. The archi-writing is the origin of morality as of immorality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A

¹ Robert J. C. Young, 'Deconstruction and the Postcolonial', in Nicholas Royle (ed.), *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 187-210.

² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 3.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (1996; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁴ Young, 'Deconstruction and the Postcolonial', p. 199.

violent opening.’⁵ This originary violence is then overlaid by the secondary, logocentric violence that tries to make sense of the first violence, by positing speech as prior to violence (and then the subsequent transposition of this secondary violence onto various forms of empirical violence, such as in Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation of writing as a kind of cultural violation, becomes a third violence). Derrida’s point is essentially that one has to go further ‘upstream’ in the decision chain, and this has implications for everything else further downstream. So how could this concept, or quasi-concept, of ‘archi-violence’ be deployed in relation to African writing? I would like to suggest some possible ways by looking at the recent highly acclaimed text *On The Postcolony*, by the Cameroonian social theorist, Achille Mbembe.⁶

Mbembe characterizes colonial Africa, as well as the post-independence African states, in terms of a ‘never-ending process of brutalization’,⁷ and sees African political and social history, and African subjectivity, as trapped within an internalized Hegelian master-slave dialectic of European colonizer and African colonized, with all the attendant structures of fantasy and desire that persist to this day in postcolonial Africa. He describes the interlocking dynamics of economic interests, the violent exercise of power, and structures of desire, as a ‘labyrinthine entanglement’. For Mbembe, most present-day political and economic theories that are applied to Africa and its problems are nothing more than neo-liberal ideologies that have their eyes firmly set on the global market economy, such that policies of deregulation, for example, end up in fact financing the ongoing relations of subordination of the people to autocratic regimes. Mbembe is very clear about where he stands in relation to contemporary theory: he rejects postcolonial theory, as well as

Foucault, Derrida, and other critics of rationality and modernism, for not attending sufficiently to the concrete experience of the African subject, and the economic conditions underlying the various symbolic and discursive theories they might bring to bear upon the analysis of present-day Africa.⁸ Crucially for Mbembe, they fail to take into account the African subject as a victim of the potentate which has arrogated to itself vast material and economic privileges, and Mbembe describes the status of this subject not only in terms of continued bondage, but of animality.

One of the major theses of the book is that colonial violence, what Mbembe terms ‘colonial sovereignty’, is at the source of the brutal relationships that characterize the postcolony in Africa. This is more than just the well-worn theme of the ways in which post-independence neocolonial regimes have, to a large degree, adopted the colonial framework they inherited from their former masters, but this colonial sovereignty fundamentally determines the relationship of the governing class to the people within many African nation-states. In the chapter ‘Of Commandement’, Mbembe traces the corruption and violence that is at the heart of many African postcolonial regimes back to the ‘founding violence’ of the act of colonial conquest, a violence that is in essence the exercise of an arbitrary force that affirms its own right to supremacy precisely by denying the rights of those it conquers. Mbembe provides a footnote at this point acknowledging his indebtedness to Derrida’s *Force de loi*, a text that tries to tease out the relationship between law, justice, power and violence, and which focuses on the tautology of the founding moment of a law, and how the legality of this violence can only be, but also *has* to be, justified and ‘naturalized’ retrospectively by the juridical system it institutes. In fact, as Derrida reminds us, there is no such thing as ‘natural’ violence; an earthquake, for example, is not naturally violent, but we are using a figure of speech, or talking

⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.140.

⁶ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁷ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p.14.

⁸ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 11.

symbolically, when we describe it as such.⁹ This naturalization of violence is unavoidable to the institution of a so-called 'natural' law, in which the ends then justify the means, as is the case with colonial conquest and rule, but this 'performative tautology', as Derrida terms it, is not limited to tyrannical regimes, since even more democratically self-conscious systems of justice are caught within the same logical aporia of the founding moment. Although Mbembe dismisses Derrida's text as 'dealing with a different issue',¹⁰ he nonetheless goes on to describe the institutionalization of violence in Africa as unfolding in successive stages in precisely the way that Derrida does. Thus, for Mbembe, the second violence is the process of legitimation of colonial rule, which provides the language justifying the first violence, and its necessity, and arrogates to itself the authority of its universalizing mission. Mbembe then sees a third violence as the normalization and socialization of this authority as it gradually permeates all aspects of colonial life. According to Mbembe, this rationale, or colonial rationality, is reappropriated by postcolonial regimes after independence, and the relations of subjection are perpetuated by a process of the indigenization of the state that colonialism had set in motion, so that governance and the exercise of violent power are indissociable, and a logical extension of the violent origins from which they have emerged. Both the potentate and the increasingly animalized African subject are thus defined by their mutual dependence on this systemic violence, much like Hegel's master and slave.¹¹

⁹ See Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p. 80.

¹⁰ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 25, and again on p. 58, note 1.

¹¹ The other major themes of the book are *necropower* (or economies of destruction that tend towards the exercise of a power of death over others); the ways in which the breakdown of the state leads to forms of *privatization of violence*; the *multiple temporalities* of the 'entangled' politics of the postcolony; and the necessity of working towards subjective *freedom*, which Mbembe describes as 'the ultimate ethical frontier'.

The rather ambivalent inclusion/exclusion of Derrida in this text suggests an uncertainty about where he fits in the pantheon of Western, single-factor explanations of the world. In fact, the very idea of a monocausal explanation, and the belief in the homogeneity and supremacy (or 'lordship') of Western philosophy is something he has critiqued as one form of 'white mythology'. For him, so-called Western philosophy 'has always been bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear and polyglot'.¹² His text *Monolingualism of the Other* provides an interesting parallel to Mbembe's argument about 'colonial sovereignty', and brings the two respective projects together into sharper relief. One of Derrida's lines of enquiry concerns the relationship between colonialism and the sense of one's ownership of the language one speaks, or of how language is used as a means of appropriation, of self as well as of other. 'Originary violence' means that there is no such thing as property to begin with: 'For contrary to what one is most often tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything [*il n'a rien en propre*]. Because the master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language [...] because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of a cultural usurpation, which means always essentially colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as "his own."¹³

Culture and colonialism are bound together in what Derrida terms an 'essential coloniality', by which he means that if colonialism is the process of appropriating the other as self, and reinscribing alterity as identity, all culture, insofar as it is monocultural, is essentially colonial. This is not, as Derrida says, to efface or deny the 'traumatizing brutality of colonial wars', but

¹² Jacques Derrida, 'Of the Humanities and the Philosophical Discipline', quoted in Bruce Janz, 'Debt and Duty: Kant, Derrida, and African Philosophy', *Janus Head*, supplement (Winter 2001), p. 117.

¹³ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, p. 23 (translation slightly modified).

his argument is directed towards simultaneously deconstructing what he calls the 'hegemony of the homogenous', and probing the ways in which this deconstruction can be effectively redeployed within more explicitly political contexts. As he says towards the end: 'Where neither natural property nor the law of property in general exist, where this de-proprietation is recognized, it is possible and it becomes more necessary than ever to identify, in order sometimes to combat them, impulses, phantasms, "ideologies", "fetishizations", and symbolics of appropriation.'¹⁴

Deconstruction is thus proposed not only as a method of reading the multifarious 'symbolics of appropriation', of which colonialism is perhaps the exemplary form, but of preparing the ground for strategic political interventions at a fundamental, indeed foundational, level. For contemporary Africans the question is one of subjective freedom, the 'ultimate ethical frontier' as Mbembe describes it, or of how the subject can effectively free itself from the entanglement of discursive, political and economic subjection in which it is trapped. Mbembe's uncompromising realism (some would say: Afropessimism) means that he ends his book with no real answer to the question of how Africans can escape the seemingly infinite circulation and perpetuation of colonial sovereignty, along with all of its forms of violence, whether actual or symbolic. It clearly requires something more than contesting this sovereignty from 'within', as the example of Mbembe's analysis of satirical political cartoons demonstrates. While these cartoons make vicious fun of the autocratic rule of Paul Biya in Cameroon, and they are clearly subversive in intent, they ultimately end up merely consolidating the power they are intending to subvert, as well as being caught within a kind of fetishistic dependency upon this

¹⁴Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, pp.63-64 (translation slightly modified).

power.¹⁵ Deconstruction may not be able to offer anything more in the way of solutions to the seemingly intractable problems of contemporary Africa, but it may at least help to formulate the fundamental questions, internal to the context that is their ground, with more precision. Derrida's argument in *Monolingualism of the Other* is that such questions, in order not to be endlessly reappropriated by whatever the 'symbolics of appropriation' may be, have to open up a space for the otherness which is irreducibly at the origin of all language, the trace of archi-violence. This is not at all the same as Mbembe's characterization of Africa as the 'other' of Western theory, and his expulsion of a more radically deconstructive perspective from his text may determine to some extent his own sense of circular entrapment.

Michael Syrotinski
University of Aberdeen

¹⁵Mbembe, Chapter 4, 'The Thing and its Doubles', in *On the Postcolony*, pp. 142-72.

Francophone Postcolonial Studies and the Nineteenth Century

Involved in both nineteenth-century French studies and Postcolonial French studies, I have often been struck by how distinct these two areas are in institutional terms. There is little overlap between learned societies; conferences in one domain remain to a great extent closed to the other; departments describe research areas as one or the other as if they were worlds apart. One might almost think that nineteenth-century studies were a dignified survivor of a sedate older era when academics each had their 'century' and French studies was not yet considered to be primarily a twentieth-century field; one might also think that the Francophone world sprang into existence ex-nihilo some time after the mid-twentieth century and well after the ending of even the longest 'long' nineteenth century. And yet the arguments for a very different view seem so strikingly obvious that I feel it is useful to review them very briefly here.

The meaning of the prefix 'post' in the key term 'postcolonial' has come under considerable scrutiny, primarily in the world of English-language criticism. With or without a hyphen, 'postcolonial' is most productively understood as covering 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day',¹ though it is still often used to indicate simply the period following decolonization. Of course the more historically aware critics are rarely guilty of considering the ideology of decolonization, and what has followed it, as independent of the discursive systems of colonization itself.² And

yet it is too often the case that we look at the colonial period as if it were forever behind us. In the context of the Francophone world, I would suggest, the use of the prefix 'Post' is even more problematic than in the English-speaking world. It should be read not so much as a given but rather as a provocation and a question.

In the English-speaking world political decolonisation was followed by a period of ideological reaction against colonialism, which is now in some spheres under threat. Taken in its narrowest sense, the 'post(-)colonial' moment may well appear, in a few decades, to have been simply a brief parenthesis between the ending of one imperialist ideology and the rise of a new one. The new imperialism can increasingly be proclaimed without hesitation, for example by Niall Fergusson's recent Channel Four documentary, 'Empire', which uses a celebratory quotation of Kipling's 'White man's burden' in order to underline that the United States is a worthy successor to Great Britain's noble imperial role.

In the case of France, the situation is, I would argue, rather different. There does not appear to be any new, rising wave of imperialism. On the other hand there was no widespread social rejection of the first modern imperialism (that is, roughly speaking, the 'colonial' imperialism dating from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries). Despite the brilliant names associated with anti-imperialism in France, particularly around the mid-twentieth century with radical Francophone thinkers such as Césaire and Fanon, their fundamental critiques of the ideology of the first modern imperialism remained at the

question the momentous schism that tends so often to appear between these two halves, and her first two chapters deal mainly with the (long) nineteenth century; she does however limit her study almost entirely to the English-speaking world. In French studies, Charles Forsdick's work on the exotic is a major contribution to bridging the gap: see for example 'Travelling Concepts: Postcolonial Approaches to Exoticism', *Paragraph*, 24.3 (2001), pp. 12-29.

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989; London and New York: Routledge, 1999) p.2.

² Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), for example, deliberately sets out to

margins of the French university system, and were often better known in the English-speaking world than they were, or indeed are, in France itself. After the Second World War there was also an official condemnation of the racism, or 'racialism' of the nineteenth century; but this condemnation was based not so much on a rejection of imperialism as on an evocation of the universal nature of French values. In other words, there was no decolonization of mentalities. The long period of modern French imperialism had its crises, of course, with the defeat in Vietnam and the much more traumatic Algerian war; but these did not undermine the basis of imperialism. Rather than ending, French colonialism went through a metamorphosis which transformed the old colonies into the 'DOM-TOM', while denying any continuity within imperialism.

This absence of any real rupture with imperialism helps explain the defensive reaction of the French public to many of the ideas of postcolonialism,³ and the marginality of studies of colonialism in France. Only recently the tables have begun to turn, with, among others, the work of the ACHAC group and the publication of the collective work *Le Livre noir du colonialisme* by Marc Ferro.

Given the absence of a moment of 'ending' in the history of French colonialism, French postcolonial studies should, even more than Anglophone postcolonialism, constantly place postcolonialism within the context of colonialism itself and therefore refuse to see the field as belonging to the twentieth century alone. The military and political actions of France's modern imperialism, whether they are seen as beginning in 1830 or, following Edward Said, with the invasion of Egypt by

³ With the notable exception, of course, of Jean-Marc Moura's attempts to make postcolonial theory available in France. See for example *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); 'Francophonie et critique postcoloniale', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 1 (1997), 59-87.

Napoleon in 1798,⁴ are the products of the nineteenth century, but they establish a system that has not entirely disappeared even in the twenty-first. As Raoul Girardet has shown, the political and military actions of France in Africa and elsewhere in the nineteenth century were followed, from the 1880s onwards, by the rise of a 'colonial ideology' that reached the wider public and touched the French in their daily lives.⁵ While this ideology is commonly seen as reaching its apogee in the 1930s, in many ways it did not disappear with the 1950s and 1960s, but remains intact in different forms. Thus the idea of a 'mission civilisatrice', for example, is far from being a cultural epiphenomenon: not only has it now been resurrected under different names in the English-speaking world; it haunts the mentality of the French along with the idea of the universalism of French values even today. These ideas evolve rather than disappearing; and to begin to understand them means analyzing them over the last two centuries at least.

The study of the Francophone world must accept the fact that this cultural production occurs from within imperialism, and not from outside it. The term 'Francophonie' itself apparently dates back to the heart of the imperial era in the 1880s, though it was not to enter common usage until the 1960s.⁶ In a recent article David Murphy shows that the invention of 'Francophonie' as a political institution prolongs, rather than subverts, the inheritance of imperialism.⁷ He also suggests that the opposition between a metropolitan centre and the periphery remains intact for the

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; London: Penguin, 1991) pp. 87-88.

⁵ *L'Idée coloniale en France* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972).

⁶ On Onésime Reclus's forging of the term, and its later resurgence, see Roger Little, 'World Literature in French; or is Francophonie Frankly Phoney', *European Review*, 9.4 (2001), pp. 423-24.

⁷ David Murphy, 'De-Centring French Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Theory of Francophone Cultures', *French Cultural Studies* 13.2 (2002), 165-185 (167).

Francophone world as is no longer the case for the Anglophone, Hispanophone or Lusophone worlds.

This continuity between the colonial and the 'post'-colonial, implying the need for an analysis of shifts, dissension and revision between the two periods, must be borne in mind at least as much as the idea of rupture, revolution and complete transformation. Such a continuity, in literary terms, suggests at least two intriguing directions for study: how, one must ask, does the literature of anti-colonial writers deal with the world view inherited from their weighty colonial past? And conversely, to what extent do writers from more overtly 'colonial' periods nevertheless question the ideology of European imperialism?

It is indeed this continuity, demanding a subversion from within rather than from without, that characterizes the writers of 'la créolité': so Patrick Chamoiseau underlines when his character Pipi, in *Chronique des sept misères*, observes that the names of the slave-owners of the past are still the same as those that appear on the shop-fronts of Martinique.

Jennifer Yee
University of Newcastle

Book Review

Pierre Mille, *Barnavaux aux colonies*, suivi d'*Écrits sur la littérature coloniale*. Edited by Jennifer Yee. Paris: L'Harmattan (Collection Autrement Mêmes), 2002. xxviii + 196 pp. €18.30.

While studying postcolonial literature in French has been rapidly facilitated over the past decade or so by the increased availability of texts from across the Francophone world, reading colonial literature often remains a process of unearthing what, in relation to the nineteenth-century novel, Margaret Cohen has called the 'great unread'.¹ Despite (or, perhaps more accurately, because of) its previous popularity, shelf loads of fiction and reportage from the period of New Imperialism have been rapidly relegated to the library stacks, where they have joined a hidden archive of earlier material reflecting, in plays and treatises, the ideologies and dilemmas of France's first period of colonial expansionism. Alain Quella-Villéger's *Carnets de l'exotisme*, the first series of which was launched in 1990, began a process of steady excavation, and the exoticist tendencies of the review have now been tempered by the excellent work of SIELEC; a second series of the *Carnets* has been published since 2000 by Kailash, and it is to this publisher that we owe new editions of a range of long unavailable texts by the *Français d'Asie* and their *opiomane* contemporaries. Roger Little's Autrement Mêmes series, published by L'Harmattan, has made a major contribution to these processes of recovery,² and is underpinned moreover by a clear and cogent rationale: 'mettre à la

¹ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

² See also David Williams's review of Pigault-Lebrun's *Le Blanc et le noir* in the same series, *ASCALF Bulletin*, 24 (2002), 54-55.

disposition du public un volet plutôt négligé du discours postcolonial'. Such an inclusive understanding of the potential scope of the postcolonial field is based on a conviction that cultural production post-independence is often illuminated in surprisingly original and complex ways by reference to earlier representations of colonial spaces, events and phenomena.

Jennifer Yee's meticulously edited selection of texts by Pierre Mille is accordingly a most welcome addition to the series. Although Mille has been the subject of recent research on colonial literature by critics such as Alec Hargreaves, Yaël Schlick and Yee herself (in *Clichés de la femme exotique* (L'Harmattan, 2000)), his work has remained long out of print, despite the fact that he was compared favourably in the early twentieth-century to authors such as Gide, Bernanos and Duhamel, and was even seen as *le Kipling français*. A leading figure in the *littérature coloniale* movement, the author is best remembered for having created the popular fictional soldier Barnavaux, a colonial everyman and plain-speaking encapsulation of French prejudice and tenacity overseas. The ideological assumptions underpinning many of his texts are predictable, but Mille's work remains a clear illustration of the heterogeneity of colonial discourse, a reminder of the pitfalls of reducing *littérature coloniale* to an easily disposable monolith. In the Barnavaux texts (which represent all but two of the twelve stories selected for inclusion in this volume), as Yee reminds us in her excellent introduction, there is an underlying irony and cynicism, implicit not least in the slippage between the narrator's comments and those of his protagonist. Mille often satirizes French identity, pointing to the pitfalls of the *mission civilisatrice* ('La justice') and suggesting that colonial policy contains the seeds of its own decline ('Barnavaux, homme d'état'). There is a critique of colonialism, without there being evidence of anti-colonialism. The recently settled colony is presented as an almost utopian space in which metropolitan morality is inverted and identity reconstructed ('Marie-faite-en-fer'), but where the indigenous population are

little more than *figurants*. Yet Mille does not ignore the colonised's experience altogether, and manages, in certain texts, to present what Yee calls 'des instants qui semblent bien fragiles et transitoires' (p.xvii), casting light on colonial excesses such as the sexual abuse of young indigenous women (powerfully explored in 'L'Aventure de Sara') or the experience of Chinese labourers in West Africa ('Les Chinois').

Such issues of representation inform Mille's own critical writings, and particularly useful in this edition is the brief annexe of texts selected from these (for access to which readers will no longer have to squint at poor quality, microfilmed reproductions). Along with Robert Randau, Louis Bertrand and Eugène Pujarnisclé, Mille was one of the leading 'theorists' of colonial literature; but unlike his peers, he tended to dismiss *littérature coloniale* (his own work included) as 'littérature de tourisme colonial' (p.173), suggesting that non-metropolitan space and culture would be best described by a 'métis de génie' (p.191). Implicit in this critique is, of course, a statement of the continued leavening effects of an inevitable French presence in the colonies; yet also there, in embryo, is an awareness of the inevitability and even desirability of self-representation.

Charles Forsdick
University of Liverpool

Books Received

Gertrud Aub-Buscher and Beverly Ormerod-Noakes (eds), *The Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language Culture* (Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2003)

Patrick Corcoran, *Oyono: 'Une Vie de boy' and 'Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille'*, Critical Guides to French Texts, 132 (London: Grant & Cutler, 2003)

Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2003)

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