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Abstract

Review of Jenni Ramone, ed. *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postcolonial Writing: New Contexts, New Narratives, New Debates*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. xiv + 356 pp.

Keywords

postcolonial writing, new contexts, new narratives, new debates

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Founding scholars of postcolonial studies first identified then deconstructed Eurocentric discourses based on the imagined binaries—east and west, self and other—that have long legitimized sociopolitical inequities. From their critical analyses of western European epistemologies sprang new perspectives on the cultural production of and about formerly colonized regions. This pioneering work, although criticized for depoliticizing debates on the flow of culture and for overemphasizing the colonial period in postcolonial national histories, nevertheless engendered new ways of seeing and conceptualizing the world. Today, detractors are questioning the field's relevancy, this time in light of recent changes made to the geopolitical landscape after 9/11 and the Arab Spring. And as new theoretical paradigms and forms of imperialism continue to emerge, some scholars fear that the field's once characteristic radicalism is waning now that postcolonial studies has achieved institutional recognition. These debates have led postcolonial scholars to wonder if they are witnessing the end of postcolonial theory.

Bearing in mind this epistemological crisis, Jenni Ramone's collected volume is timely and brings together essays that redress the most recent accusations leveled against the field. In her introduction, Ramone acknowledges such charges while providing evidence of the contrary. According to Ramone, postcolonial studies is not static and continues to challenge global inequities. Building on Graham Huggan's work, Ramone underscores the continued relevancy of the field whose conceptual framework allows scholars to consider alternatives to imperialist imperatives. Indeed, the field actively remaps and redefines the postcolonial as new artistic forms, new geographies, and new debates emerge. The essays selected for this volume are therefore rooted in the field's theoretical foundations and demonstrate how scholars are reshaping the field in new and interesting ways.

Organized into three sections, "New Contexts," "New Narratives," and "New Debates," this volume invites readers to consider how these three categories are influencing the development of postcolonial studies. Readers will appreciate the balanced presentation of material with six essays devoted to each category. Throughout, the central thematic of newness is a direct response to critics who consider postcolonial studies to be inadequate and obsolete in today's world. Part 1 problematizes academic and commercial interests in a singular world literature and the assumed teleology of a neoliberal global marketplace. Contributors to this section propose original theoretical approaches coupled with textual analysis to reveal the ways in which postcolonial studies can inform our understanding of new contexts of cultural production and dissemination. Wendy Knepper, for example, explores the relationship between postcolonial writing and a world literature—one

that is both radical and dynamic—via close readings of Caribbean, East African, and Southeast Asian writers. In chapters 3 and 4, Philip Leonard and Melissa Kennedy engage with neoliberalism and the economics of postcolonialism, respectively. For Leonard and Kennedy, Indra Sinha's, Amitav Ghosh's, and Kiana Davenport's novels denounce and resist models of global production. Ramone's chapter on local literary marketplaces emphasizes the importance of how literature is read in different contexts. The final chapters of this section by Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee and Roopika Risam consider other contexts affecting contemporary postcolonial studies: the uneven development of the modern state (Mukherjee) and postcolonialism in the digital age (Risam).

In part 2, contributors engage with less commonly studied narrative forms. Emma Bird, Emma Cox, Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji, Jocelyn Stitt, Kerstin Knopf, and Ramone examine in turn poetry, verbatim theater and performance, the graphic novel, life-writing, cinema, and gaming. In so doing, they indirectly question the primacy of the postcolonial novel by highlighting other new and often participatory modes of cultural production. This section is perhaps the most valuable to students due to its broad array of critical readings, which illustrate how scholars are using the new contexts and debates explored in other sections of this book to enrich textual analysis. The final section explores how other conversations and fields have informed (or have been informed by) postcolonial studies. If the debates presented in part 3 are not necessarily new, contributors explain how postcolonial theory continues to inform our understanding of old debates in new contexts. Stephen Morton considers the economics of dispossession in narratives by postcolonial refugees. Similarly, Subha Xavier's essay considers the global dimensions of migration, diaspora, and transnationalism through literature. In chapter 15, Humaira Saeed explores postcolonial, dissident sexualities. John Cullen Gruesser argues in his contribution that although African American studies is not postcolonial, certain aspects of postcolonial theory can be usefully applied to African American literature. Finally, Dawn Miranda Sherratt-Bado and Manav Ratti consider faith and secularism as they are articulated in the Caribbean and India.

Ramone's volume accomplishes what it sets out to do: it "identifies ways in which the postcolonial as a period is far from over, while acknowledging that debates and contexts characterizing the postcolonial have shifted ground" (2). Contributors demonstrate their ability to remap, reframe, and redefine all that the postcolonial encompasses. While the diversity of the contexts, narratives, and debates considered in this volume is highly commendable, Ramone signals two notable omissions that her introduction serves to address: the postcolonial medical humanities (disability studies) and Dalit literature. Despite her short discussion of these complex disciplines, Ramone references relevant titles and scholars for further reading. Those new to postcolonial studies and its various subfields will

undoubtedly appreciate the book's clear articulation of the purpose and scope of postcolonial theory. In addition, the volume includes a glossary and extensive bibliography. For those already familiar with the field, Ramone and her collaborators provide ample fodder for further cultural analysis and interdisciplinary debate. For these reasons, this volume is an excellent and stimulating resource for students, as well as for new and seasoned scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

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