

Postcoloniality, Globalization,
and Diaspora

What's Next?

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Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: Postcoloniality, Diaspora, and Globalization: What's Next? <i>Ashmita Khasnabish</i>	1
1 The Battle of Energy between Matter and Spirit: Does It Direct Us to a Better Universe? <i>Ashmita Khasnabish</i>	13
2 After Neoliberalism and Post-structuralism: Postcolonial Studies, Diaspora, and Globalization <i>Paget Henry</i>	27
3 Between "Post-Colonial" and "Postcolonial": Mauritian Fiction as a Paradigm for Literary Postcoloniality in "Different Degrees" <i>Markus Arnold</i>	51
4 "I'm a believer in the dance of change": Metamorphosis and Mutation in Keri Hulme's Short Fiction <i>Melanie Otto</i>	71
5 Magical Realism: Narrative Play and Historical Jokes <i>Stéphanie Walsh Matthews</i>	87
6 Revising the Myth: A Proposal for a Methodological Protocol for the Study of American Culture <i>Aida Roldán García</i>	97
7 Envisioning Global Citizenship <i>Ifeanyi A. Menkiti</i>	111
Index	123

Chapter Three

Between “Post-Colonial” and “Postcolonial”

Mauritian Fiction as a Paradigm for Literary Postcoloniality in “Different Degrees”

Markus Arnold

At¹ the crossroads of histories, cultures, languages and religions, home to diasporic and post-diasporic communities with origins from three continents, Mauritius constitutes a particularly fruitful territory to discuss multiple post-colonial identities, in terms of geographical, cultural, social, and ethnic belonging. Colonized by the Dutch, the French, and the British, subject to migratory movements from Europe, Africa and Asia, and independent since 1968, the island located in the South-Western Indian Ocean offers a rich and diverse literary production: a long tradition in French going back to the eighteenth century, English writing from the 1930s onward, and Creole texts starting with independence, as well as other minor languages, let alone the differences between publications inside and outside the island. Over these last twenty years, one can observe in Mauritian literature a certain aesthetic, thematic, and poetic innovation. Francophone novelists such as Ananda Devi, Carl de Souza, Nathacha Appanah, and Amal Sewtohul have recently gained critical and scholarly attention through their subversive, demystifying, and anti-exoticizing texts, as well as their complex ways of interrogating issues of identity. A mere glimpse at these contemporary texts shows various recurrent thematic, stylistic, and narrative features: the construction of racial, gender, and social identities, the quest of history and memory, the imagination of the island space and its place in contemporary globalization, the role of the writer and the positioning of his work in transnational literary configurations, just to name a few. Yet these authors are mostly published abroad

and their works differ in many respects not only from locally released texts, but also from less-known writings in other languages: English, Creole, Hindi or Chinese. In its linguistic diversity, the Mauritian literary field—as far as one can speak in this specific case about a “field” in the Bourdieusian sense—clearly proves to be unequal and heterogeneous.

In a recent monograph, I have attempted a detailed comparative discussion of this diverse and conflicting literary creation—more specifically from the perspective of contemporary novel writing in French and English—revealing tendencies and dominant characteristics currently found in the island’s literary productions, where motifs such as identity, violence, and interculturality are omnipresent, and where one can see numerous attempts to negotiate the writers’ position at the postcolonial island “periphery” (Arnold 2017). It provides an inquiry into how the writers approach the complexities of the multicultural nation; in other words, how the question of postcolonial identity—in its plural manifestation—inscribes itself in the Mauritian novel. The present chapter thus constitutes an analytic continuation of this comparative work, as well as other articles. In order to acknowledge major traits in the island’s literary expressions without minimizing their diversity and complexity, and to avoid such analytic reductionism which abusively amalgamates very different ideological and esthetic directions under the unique term “postcolonial,” I argue here for a more nuanced reading method. It deduces from contemporary novel writing on the island, analyzed in several studies, two *regimes of discursivity and textuality* conceptualized under the terms—both contrastive and complementary—of “post-colonial” and “postcolonial.” Establishing and thinking these notions enables to set a critical frame of reference for interpreting Mauritian texts. It is also to be understood more generally as an attempt to nuance, reconsider and make operative postcolonial terminology that has often become vague in critical debate, where every text from the Global South or by a writer from a previously colonized country would automatically become “postcolonial.”

Indeed although certain scholars have engaged a displacement from the category of the postcolonial to the global (Spivak 2003), and others even claimed the end of the postcolonial paradigm in favor of new configurations (transnationalism, diaspora, migration, cosmopolitanism, decoloniality, etc.), it is arguably still relevant to critically examine a literary text in the light of colonialism’s impact on its (author’s) referential cultures; not to mention the fact that the label “postcolonial” does not exclude other complementary categories of analysis. Put differently, albeit the controversies it stirred, the term remains indeed “both a way of reading and a critical method anticipating a future beyond colonialism in all its forms” (Zabus 2015, 1). The general objective of this chapter is then to “dig beneath the surface of labels”² in order to take hold of the plural and complex realities of postcolonial literatures. More specifically, it will

introduce and discuss this "post-colonial"- "postcolonial" reading method, show its application in certain novels from the island, and argue for Mauritian novel-writing as a paradigm for postcolonial literary production at large, thus implying a possible application of the scheme for other literary fields/spaces. By attempting to find dominant characteristics and structures in this heterogeneity of expressions and forms, the critical method is opposed to the idea of fixed taxonomies. It operates more in the spirit of *unstable and permeable dividing lines*, imagining some sort of *continuum* between two poles on which the texts slide with regard to certain criteria.

This proposition is made well knowing the fact that today, more than ever, authors and texts are strongly defying analytical categories in which critics place and often confine them. One may recall here the debates on "Commonwealth literature" denounced already in the 1980s by Salman Rushdie as a label imposed by the "center" and its *universalizing* tendencies to confer a differential and *particular* identity to "ex-centered" writers. More recently, one can refer to the manifesto of 44 Francophone writers against the presumably neocolonial category "littérature francophone" (Le Bris and Rouaud 2007). Indeed, postcolonial perspectives, maybe more than others, are necessarily located at crossroads of different theoretical approaches. As Bill Ashcroft puts it, postcolonialism is not a master-discourse; on the contrary, it represents both "a creatively undisciplined collection of 'margins'" and a "rhizomic interplay of pursuits" (Ashcroft 2015, 236). In literature, the notion takes into consideration institutional and topological questions, linguistic, esthetic, and poetic elements, as well as social, ideological, and historical contexts. It is then of course reductive to speak about *the* postcolonial as one unitary, homogeneous or coherent theory, school of thought, analytical procedure or positioning of identity. Twenty years ago, scholars such as Ann McClintock or Stephen Slemon warned against epistemological leveling which risks rendering the concept unoperational. Ella Shohat, who sees in post-colonial theory "not only a vibrant space for critical, even resistant scholarship, but also a contested space" because its central term "is susceptible to a blurring of perspectives," proposes for example a more precise articulation as "post-anti-colonial critique" (Shohat 1992, 108, 110). Anglo-Caribbean writer Caryl Phillips had already suggested in 1989 to speak about "post-migratory" or "post-postcolonial" writing (Boehmer 2005, 250).

Obviously, the issue is not (any longer) about temporality with the prefix "post" signifying "after colonialism": all contemporary Mauritian fiction is in this sense *post-colonial*. But since nowadays texts are not homogeneous, since they are informed by a plural heritage, and since they show a panoply of expressions which cannot be judged with the same criteria, this chapter argues in favor of a postcolonial perspective *in different degrees* as far as their specific artistic positions, locations of identity, esthetic tendencies, and

discursive engagements are concerned which reflect and fit into the sociopolitical and ethnocultural complexity of today's island space. One might also speak of different *strata*.³ Indeed, like the multifaceted discipline of postcolonial studies itself, Mauritian literature today is unmistakably influenced by legacies and currents as different as anti-colonial movements, vernacular modes of expression, poststructuralist pattern or postmodern thought. It relates to the local and the global, embraces the particular and the cosmopolitan, is shaped by the ideas of *routes* and *roots*—to refer to the homophones famously theorized by James Clifford (1997)—engages into formal play as well as political commitment. More generally, it unveils shifting solidarities and various reference frames (France, Britain, Africa, India, China) to assert its multiple and processual identities. The typology or grid within which I locate Mauritian literature thus operates in the sense of what Graham Huggan sees as the triple understanding of the postcolonial: a difficult negotiation of the legacies of earlier colonial eras, an equally challenging account of those new forms of colonialism and imperialism that have emerged in today's globalization, but also a setting up of parameters for “imaginative and material transformation” in favor of cultural and political autonomy and more cosmopolitan visions of the world (Huggan 2015, 133). For this purpose of a postcolonial perspective *in different degrees*, several theories—from literary, social and cultural studies—shall now be drawn on.

In one of his essays, Roland Barthes (1964) creates two terms in order to oppose two types of writing: on the one hand, the *écrivain* (or scripter) who, like a clerk, mostly focuses on contents and uses language merely to express what is already there; on the other, the *écrivain* (or writer) who searches in the discursive process in which he's absorbed for new elaborations and meanings. The *écrivain* works on language and style, refuses “simple” testimony and doctrinal thought. He introduces doubt and ambiguity, whereas the *écrivain* uses language as an instrument to convey a message, for example as a matter of urgency, to testify or for critical and political purposes. The question “how to write?” contrasts here with the one “what to write?”; esthetics are opposed to intellect or even ethics. Despite the binary and schematic character of this structuralist typology—Barthes himself had already nuanced his position observing a rising presence of a hybrid *écrivain-écrivain* type—certain aspects in this conceptual opposition seem to be helpful for a critical consideration of the characteristics and functions of contemporary fiction, especially in the postcolonial field. There are indeed writers who tend to teach and inform, who overtly use didactics, campaign for a cause and want to explain the world. Others focus on style and form and their commitment lies predominantly in the text which becomes the mediator of interrogating the world's complexities, of setting up ambivalence and indetermination. The ones bring in clear answers and more than often closure, while the others

introduce questions and leave us with uncertainties and the word's troubling polyphony. One could thus think of a contrastive model with a porous dividing line between more pragmatic, monological and ideologically transparent texts on the one hand; ambiguous, dialogical and even paradoxical writings on the other.

In African Francophone studies, Barthes' *écrivain* finds an echo with Bernard Mouralis's notion of "counter literature" (Mouralis 1975) which bears many similarities to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin's "writing back" paradigm (Ashcroft et al. 2005), where the term "postcolonial" was introduced to the literary field by focusing on the texts' ethics of resistance and identity politics. More recently, one can find resonances with Charles Bonn (2003, 2006) who draws on Jean-Marc Moura's notion of the "postcolonial scenography" (Moura 1999)—inspired both by Dominique Maingueneau's formula of the "scenography" (Maingueneau 1993) and postcolonial theory—in order to see the multiple relationships the Francophone postcolonial text establishes with its socio-cultural and historic environment. In the narrower context of Maghrebi literature, Bonn speaks of initial postcolonial models: an "anthropological scenography" and a "scenography of rupture." From the 1980s onwards, these models seem to be increasingly supplemented by post-modern scenographies, which—going beyond traditional postures and their collective, often Manichean and militant stances—seem to correspond more to the *écrivain*-typology.

The notions "*écrivain-écrivain*," "counter-literature" and the different applications of "postcolonial scenography" are useful starting points in order to read the complexities and heterogeneities of the emerging literary field of Mauritius and decipher its main characteristics and tendencies. Yet, to specify the hypothesis of *different degrees of postcoloniality* in the contemporary novel of the island—its textual identities, its esthetics, representations, and fictional universes—one can argue in favor of a productive interaction with other approaches from social, cultural, and literary theory.

To start with, let us refer to Zygmunt Bauman's reflections on the contrast between modernity and postmodernity summed up as follows: "If the *modern* 'problem of identity' is how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open."⁴ The ideological foundations, the social conceptions, the politics of representation, and the mentalities which characterize modernity then concern the postcolonial in three ways: firstly, the colonial enterprise is strongly linked to the modernist project; secondly, modernity contrasts postmodernity which declares itself emancipated from it; thirdly, modernity has a more or less direct influence on identity configurations in the post-independent nation. The modernist perspective lives towards a project, abandons the "imperfect" presence in the name of a better future, connotes order, homogeneity, determination, a dream which can become

obsession, injunction and tend—in theory and practice—towards totalitarianism. Modernity's foes are confusion, ambiguity, multiple or ambivalent identification; in other words, all the “matter out of place” (Douglas 2007). And indeed, the nationalist enterprise and the modern state do not give room to indecision and in-betweenness. It is within postmodernity or “liquid modernity” that identities can (or have to) affirm themselves as plural, heterogeneous, and in movement. The troubling credo of postmodernity—“Nothing can be known for sure, and anything which is known can be known in a different way” (Bauman 1997, 53)—has put an end to the grand narratives and their pillars of unity, clarity, and order.

One should certainly not homogenize the discourse of modernity—Bhabha reminds us of the fact that it is also characterized by temporal ambivalence, contradictions and irresolutions which are often ignored by postmodern theory.⁵ It is, however, significant to notice that Paul Gilroy, referring precisely to Bauman, sets up his paradigm of the “Black Atlantic” as a “counter-culture of modernity” (Gilroy 1993, 1–40). Bauman's opposition, articulated around the general antipodes of fixing and unfixing identities, can thus be operational in the suggested analytical model through/for the Mauritian text. Indeed, modernist logics and economy have not seldom been reiterated in postcolonial nation-building: its claims of identity, uniformity, and differential modalities are incompatible with floating signifiers and multiple or ambivalent identification. Frantz Fanon has famously recognized this necessary violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).⁶ In literature, this position echoes early “writing back” perspectives and Barthes' *écrivain*: explicit commitment, transparent, verbose, and exhaustive realism, the representation of fixed and non-contradictory identities, plots which evolve towards a collective *telos*, rather little concern about esthetics. So, while what I call the *post-colonial* advocates for these logics of homogeneity and the “either-or,” the *postcolonial*, on the contrary, gives voice to the in-between, the hybrid, the “undecidables” (Bauman 1990, 148); in other words, figures who are at the same time near and far, same and different from dominant identities, traditional and official representations.

Since my typology thus falls into *certain* modernist and postmodernist tendencies, postures, discourses, and representations, a second step consists of drawing on Ihab Hassan's attempt to provide the main socio-cultural and esthetic articulations of postmodern texts. In a (now classic) essay, Hassan suggested a list of eleven distinctive features of the nebula postmodernism which can inform, at least partially, the *postcolonial* side of the contrastive reading method here argued for. The list containing deconstructive and reconstructive traits goes like this: 1) Indeterminacy, epistemological ambiguities, ruptures, and displacements 2) Fragmentation and moving signifiers 3) Decanonization 4) Deconstruction of the traditional subject and its supposed profundity 5) Contestation of the modes of one's own representation 6) Irony

and its extensions 7) Hybridization 8) Carnivalization, heteroglossia, and polyphony 9) The performativity of the text and the need of the reader's participation 10) Constructionism 11) Non-religious immanence (Hassan 1986, 503–520). In a subsequent article, the late critic added other terms (auto-reflexivity, polychronic temporalities, etc.), explicitly differentiated between postmodernism (the cultural field) and postmodernity (the geopolitical condition and process), and observed: "Perhaps, after all, postmodernism can be 'defined' as a continuous inquiry into self-definition" (Hassan 2001). There are of course multiple perspectives on the protean field of postmodernism, and one needs to be careful when transferring these characteristics on the postcolonial writer: his contemporaneity cannot be reduced to mere epistemological demystification, deconstruction of form and language, ontological fragmentation, alienated identities, absurd ethos, ironic self-conscience, perpetual indetermination, and moving signifiers, associated with thinkers like Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard and others. Yet, numerous Mauritian texts with a more *postcolonial* tendency share some of these features: they do indeed demystify master-codes, delegitimize totalizing positions by addressing issues of minority, the margin, polyphony, and multiple spaces. And they inquire about self-definition by engaging with auto-deconstruction, irony, and metafiction.

Beyond the idea of a certain parallelism between the *post-colonial* and modernist logics on the one hand, the *postcolonial* and postmodern socio-aesthetic traits on the other, it seems important to mention the intricate issue of the complex relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism which has generated heated debates with key theorists in the field (Appiah, Hutcheon, Bhabha, Boehmer, Lazarus, Loomba, etc.). Despite terminological controversies about a possible reification and homogenization of the postcolonial world through the privileged status of thinkers living in diaspora—one can refer here to Aijaz Ahmad's and Arif Dirlik's polemics against an intelligent-sia supposedly rendering postcolonialism into an agent of global capitalism (Ahmad 1992, Dirlik 1994)—the postcolonial shares with the postmodern essential aspects: both focus on difference, ex-centering, heterogeneity, and an interrogative and deconstructive mode of analysis; both are interested in historiography and politics of representation. Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that the prefixes "post" converge by their idea of the "beyond," signifying not only temporal succession but real transcendence: "the *post-* in postcolonial, like the *post-* in postmodern, is the *post-* of the space-clearing gesture"; it "challenges earlier legitimating narratives" (Appiah 1991, 348, 353). This idea is taken up by Bhabha who considers the "beyond" to be *the* trope to locate today's questions concerning culture (Bhabha 2008, 1–2).

However, these shared concerns and locations between the postmodern and the postcolonial are not articulated in the same way and the main difference undoubtedly concerns the idea of *agency*. Indeed, politics of identity

cannot identify with the “typically postmodern truce” (Hutcheon 2005, 166), with its relativity, its “both/and” decisions and open-endedness. As Edward Said puts it, “the ahistorical weightlessness, consumerism, and spectacle of the new order” (Said 1994, 399) in much Western postmodernism, do less concern artists and intellectuals in places that are still involved with the modernist act, and that are still struggling with overcoming tradition and orthodox heritage. Put differently, the postcolonial text—whatever political role it may play—does not only represent a discursive contingency, as Elleke Boehmer strikingly notes:

Postmodern and even postcolonial notions of meaning as arbitrary, or identity as provisional, are hardly relevant to the lives of those—women, Indigenous peoples, marginalized ethnic, class, and religious groups—for whom self-determination remains a political imperative. For them, the signifiers of home, self, past, far from representing instances of discursive contingency, stand for live and pressing issues. (Boehmer 2005, 242)

Shohat had similarly warned against postcolonialism’s “ahistorical and universalizing deployments, and its potentially depoliticizing implications” (Shohat 1992, 242). With such evidence in mind, it becomes clear that the postcolonial text’s signification, its social analysis and its concrete connection to the world cannot simply be dismissed in favor of purely formal and esthetic aspects. These debates have led, roughly speaking, to two critical directions within postcolonial theory which, while sharing the same premises, may diverge considerably: on the one hand, the more cosmopolitan, intellectual(ized) and often relativist site of migrant and transnational writers frequently living in the West and permanently running the risk of falling into the neo-orientalist and neo-exoticist trap (Huggan 2001); on the other, a more contextualizing approach centered around local and peripheral productions. Here lies of course the conflicting—and some may say incommensurable—antagonism between theoretical deconstruction and identity pragmatics, between “textualism” and materialism. Such a contrast between a postmodern postcolonialism (or even post-postcolonialism) and a more local or vernacular postcolonialism is meant to be reflected in the distinction between the *post-colonial* and the *postcolonial*; well knowing that the two poles stand in a complex relationship to each other and a theoretical pluralism enables to see fertile tensions and interactions between them. Bhabha—although generally considered to be one of the key figures in primarily theoretical postcolonialism—seems to touch precisely this aspect, by asserting that today’s true postcolonial agency needs to go beyond the conventional polarity between theory and practice. Indeed, if the postcolonial intellectual project locates itself in the hybrid posture of the “beyond” with regard to all possible dichotomies, if it “resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation” (Bhab-

ha 2008, 248), this transgresses both postmodernism's cultural pluralism or relativism and exclusivist national or collective paradigms.

In this sense, Bhabha's postcolonial reading of the nation and his set of oppositions between "the pedagogical" and "the performative" can be mobilized as yet another complementary tool for my contrastive reading method. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" and inspired by Derrida for the notion of "DissemiNation," the critic argues against the idea of a unified and unitary national culture and observes, on the contrary, increasing markers of cultural difference and heterogeneity in the nation.⁷ He sees the supposed national linearity and homogeneity as being troubled by minority discourse, cultural liminality, and otherness: an otherness residing in the people's identity itself. In other words: the *pedagogical* claim for fixed identities and organic totality is more than ever challenged by the *performative* real. In the case of multicultural and creolized Mauritius, where any mono-ethnic national narration seems impossible, we need to shift from *nation* to *community* or *collective identity*. For if ethnicizing policies seem impossible on the level of the nation—in the same way that nativist claims in an island without indigenous population are untenable—these policies operate *within* the nation. Indeed, official "Unity in diversity" discourses rely on the *pedagogical* vision of ethnically homogeneous and coherent groups, internally totalizing historicity and fixed ideas of otherness. Hybridity, historic discontinuity, plural solidarities and social creolization, which are central parts of the island society's *performative* reality, tend to be relegated to the margin of the model "Rainbow nation."

A final analogy may come from the common ground between postcolonialism and feminism, as well as resemblances in the evolutions of these disciplines/movements. It is symptomatic that McClintock has based her call to diversify the notion of "post-colonial" on the example of the discredit brought upon the category of *the universal woman* (McClintock 1992, 86). Similarly, Bhabha acknowledges the influence of Kristeva's idea of female temporality on his postcolonial philosophy and psychology (Bhabha 2008, 219 sq.). Since postcolonialism and feminism can operate similar strategies in order to assert themselves within dominant and hegemonic discourse, one may argue for a conceptual correspondence between the "*post-colonial*"-"*postcolonial*" reference frame on the one hand, the contrast between identitarian feminist approaches and new (post)feminist tendencies on the other. More precisely, this analogy can be seen with Kristeva's article "Women's Time" where both egalitarian and differentialist feminist conceptions are rejected in favor of alternative temporalities. The critic dismisses universalist approaches and the idea of an exclusive female specificity in order to proclaim a new signifying space where the "singularity of each woman, and beyond this, her multiplicities, her plural languages" (Kristeva 1997, 214) can unfold. Such a theory, which takes into account the potentials of a fluid

(postmodern) subjectivity while supporting social and ethical questions, can arguably inform tendencies within the postcolonial field. The *post-colonial* tendency of the proposed reading method appears here first and foremost concerned by collective stances—be they egalitarian or differentialist—whereas the *postcolonial* pole focuses on more individual manifestations of otherness.

These reflections then converge into the critical typology of the *post-colonial* and the *postcolonial*, developed in order to interpret current novel production in Mauritius, its different concepts of time and space/place, its representations of and discourses on *self* and *other*, its esthetic and narrative identities. A more precise look at some concrete examples shall illustrate these thoughts.

EXAMPLES FROM THE MAURITIAN NOVEL PRODUCTION

Not surprisingly, certain Mauritian authors thematize the multiple and conflicting pasts of the island. Thus, the subject of Indian indentureship comes up in various texts about the coolies' odyssey from the subcontinent to the island. *The Changing Pattern* (1995) by Bhageeruthy Gopaul, *Beaux Songses* (1999) by Nando Bodha, *The Snake Spirit* (2002) by Chaya Parmessur or *That Others Might Live* (1976) by Deepchand Beeharry are such memorialist endeavours which take up the important role of filling in the subaltern gaps in traditional literary representation. Yet, a closer look reveals that they often do not go beyond mystifications of a purely ethnicized memory: they provide brave narratives of migration or nostalgic accounts of Indo-Mauritian life with its pedagogies of unbroken filiations. Such victimizing or idealizing discourses are obstacles for historical dialogue and intercultural widening of horizons (Arnold 2012). The rhetoric of pathos and the emotive subjectivity they frequently deploy draw on collective emotions, which is prone to reduce the plurality of cultural values and may even flirt with ideological manipulation (Rinn 2008). On the contrary, Nathacha Appanah's novel *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or* (2003), for example, transgresses such conventional narratives of originary and initial subjectivities. Her polyphonic fiction abandons the idea of glorification and heroic quest in unity. She gives the *kala pani* paradigm a more multifaceted and also feminine touch and provides a complex comparison between indenture and slavery. Ananda Devi, in the novel *Le Voile de Draupadi* (1993), goes even further by deconstructing the traditional diasporic narrative and demystifying its patriarchal and religious foundations in favor of contemporary subaltern voices. Her transgressive protagonist violently defies the claims of monolithic ancestry and points towards an intercultural opening-up. With these indenture novels and their opposing views on origins, filiation, sacredness, convention,

and the individual, the contrast between what is called *post-colonial* and *postcolonial* can clearly be seen.

Another example comes from the text *Terre d'orages* (2003) by Serge Ng Tat Chung which, strikingly, is the only contemporary novel representing the period of slavery in Mauritius. However, close analysis of the work shows again that beyond its undeniable merit to speak for the absent African voices in literary discourse (Prabhu 2005), and beyond the fact that it avoids the ethnicizing positions of the indenture novels, it remains stuck in a blissful conciliatory perspective of the past which portrays a happy multiculturalism perfectly in line with official representations of the subject (Arnold 2014). On the contrary, in *Le Silence des Chagos* (2005) by Shenaz Patel or *Ceux qu'on jette à la mer* (2001) by Carl de Souza, we find more contemporary plots behind which unveils subtly the paradigm of slave deportation (Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo 2008). Patel's text is particularly interesting insofar as, in order to emancipate the oppressed protagonists, it plays with the idea of “strategic essentialism”—the recognition that the leveling of differences is necessary to secure political agency (Spivak 1987, 205)—while at the same time investing the notion of “multidirectional memory” (Rothberg 2009). Put differently, the novel advocates both for one group's affirmation of identity and for the resonance of the “the trace of the other” (Spivak 1999, 198). Concerning racial relations under colonialism, one equally observes diverging perspectives. Whereas Marie-Thérèse Humbert, in *À l'autre bout de moi* (1979), and Julia Blackburn, in *The Book of Colour* (1995), provide a complex discussion about colonial *métissage* through the figure of the light-skinned Creole (*mulâtre*) and the subversion of ethno-racial taboos, other texts—such as *La Brûlure* (2003) by Renée Asgarally—idealize on the contrary intercultural questions and romanticize interethnic transgressions.

One could also refer to the novels of Lindsey Collen, especially *There Is a Tide* (1991), *The Rape of Sita* (1993), and *Getting Rid of It* (1997). Through their multiple commitments for gender and racial identities, their complex representations of history and present as well as their elaborated, often hybrid, style and esthetics, these texts reflect a truly emancipated *postcolonial* position. But one can also frequently observe rather radical feminist and (neo-)Marxist didactics in them which clearly show that the author cannot be counted among the cosmopolitan postmodern postcolonialists. With regard to Collen's multifaceted work, which is not devoid of its own internal contradictions, Kristeva's idea of “multiple temporalities” co-existing at the same time comes to mind. One of the Mauritian writers who seems to correspond to this perspective of the “cosmopolitan postmodern postcolonialist” is Amal Sewtohul. His novels which heavily draw on Rushdie's *bricolage*-esthetics—especially *Les voyages et aventures de Sanjay* (2009)—deal with the motive of migration, hybridity, stylistic exuberance and self-irony (Arnold 2011). While these texts may at moments appear

elitist and hermetic, and while more than often the idea of postcolonial exoticism becomes palpable, they arguably express a most complex contemporaneity.⁸In terms of hybridity, Ananda Devi's novels—notably *Moi, l'interdite* (2000) and *La Vie de Joséphin le fou* (2003)—do figure as prominent examples for a negative and pessimistic interpretation of the concept. Her transgressive texts can “provide a political space to articulate such culturally hybrid social identities” (Bhabha 2008, 359). In general, with the Indo-Mauritian author it seems clear that “marginality . . . became an unprecedented source of creative energy” (Ashcroft et al. 2005, 12). Her fiction is indeed filled with ostracized, queer, erratic, and rejected characters for whom (self)violence certainly often seems the only way of affirmation, but whose uncanny presence permits to ask unpleasant questions which prove to be decisive to discuss identity, justice, and democracy in its contemporary plurality. A final—quite “extreme”—example would be Devi's exploration of the arctic in her short story “Bleu glace” (2007), an investment on the antipodes of her more usual island chronotopos. Interestingly, the general opening up of spaces and referential universes in contemporary Mauritian fiction echoes here literally with the entry of new conceptual and geographical territory in the theoretical debate, such as recent attempts at “decolonizing the Arctic” (Huggan 2015).

This brief overview shows that when asking the following questions—How do the writers imagine their island space? How do they depict the relationship between and within communities? How do they think racial, gender, and social identity construction? How do they deal with history and memory? How do they perceive ambivalent, moving, and transitory phenomena in society? What is their attitude toward tradition, convention, and the *doxa*?—the positions of the *post-colonial* and the *postcolonial* can provide different answers. *Postcolonial* Mauritian texts are then the manifestation that the hybridity of literary and social discourse has become one of the leitmotifs of our contemporary world. Not only is their high degree of intertextuality remarkable, but contrary to the *post-colonial* claims about homogeneous and unitary belonging—in terms of community, religion, history, patriarchy . . . —they seem to have moved on to the “next” stage. It is here that one observes textual innovation where the nation is examined and questioned from the perspective of the margins, ambiguous interstices, friction, and discontinuity. These novels may thus draw on postmodern modes and invest original styles and themes: hybridity, metafiction, re-imagining former literary paradigms, break with tradition mimesis (Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo 2004), “anti-tropicalization” (Arnold 2014), etc. Clearly, the different productions within the Mauritian literary field/space do not evolve at the same pace. But the examples reveal as well that a clear-cut contrastive reading between *post-colonial* and *postcolonial* fiction is frequently not possible and

that we are dealing with unstable poles on some kind of continuum, transitions, and penetrable spheres.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is certain that whatever internal nuance one may find within the notion of postcoloniality, most postcolonial writing—through its new literary and linguistic codes, its new modes of representation, and its complex position within (inter)national markets—engages a (more or less subtle) cultural and political critique in order to endorse otherness, focus on "peripheral" identity, and emancipate past and present minority and subaltern groups. Yet postcolonial studies' various legacies (Marxist criticism, cultural studies, deconstruction . . .) and present influences (globalization, transnationalism . . .) do not translate equally—quite far from it—in Mauritian literature. Thus, in the contrastive reading method, with regard to the construction and representation of identities, and socio-ethnic positioning, the *post-colonial* Mauritian texts tend to fall into dialectics of *same* and *other* which fail to acknowledge the complexity of reality. Even though they often invest necessary sites of engagement—to resist injustice, reaffirm offended identities, reconstruct missing memory, etc.—they are prone to homogenize collective identities, and to omit hybrid realities and stakes concerning the individual. These fictions operate through clearly defined, stable, voluntarist or even heroic characters who are frequently representative of a larger unit. Such figures bear coherent worldviews and unwavering projects, rely on traditional belief or myth; they tend to romanticize the past and depict the island under conformist, politically correct or folkloric traits. The *post-colonial* texts may remain stuck in conventional ethnographical figurations with their cultural inventories, recurrent themes, often didactic stances, frequent use of pathos, and Bhabha's idea of the "pedagogical." Their "contrapuntal" or "writing back" perspectives do only concern colonial or Western reference frames; they only seldom destabilize the *doxa* and question or jeopardize power relations in nowadays society.

On the other hand, we find *postcolonial* texts with more contemporary, emancipated, and postmodern directions and textures, in which universal configurations of social explanation and collective standpoints have seriously lost their efficiency. These texts position themselves, more or less explicitly, as "counter-narratives"⁹ in relation to the identity fixation operated by the official discourse of the nation. They imagine the island's modernity by taking into consideration its irremediably heterogeneous space as well as the individuals with their plural, but potentially fragmented belonging. The *post-colonial* text unsettles restrictive classifications and breaks with traditional representations of the island in favor of more flexible references and the idea

of transitions instead of oppositions—Nietzsche’s aphorism about the “habit of contrasts”¹⁰ comes to mind. While these fictions do not deny commitment—deploying it, however, with more subtlety—they go beyond monological claims in order to focus on the individual’s multiple, but also troubled and marginal identity as well as new (and often transgressive) representations of the island. If the *postcolonial* text, deconstructs Manichean logics and accepts or even valorizes figures of difference, mixture, and mobility, it does, however, not fall into the trap of postmodern indetermination, nor celebrate blindly a blissful hybridity. Not only does it subscribe to Bhabha’s idea of the *performative*, but it also reminds of Barthes’s vision of *true* fiction: fiction that less aims at telling truths but introduces doubt and ambiguity into our certainties. Thus, in a *postcolonial* scenography, looking back in time and space goes beyond paralyzing nostalgia or lament; past and present interact by reading one through the prism of the other so to invest history as a constructive and enabling, yet critical tool in the enunciative temporality of the text.

On the level of discourse and narration, the *post-colonial* affirmation of identity often translates by a relatively conventional esthetics somewhat corresponding to the characteristics of Barthes’s *écrivain*: (documentary) realism, description, Olympic third-person narration, chronology, simple focalization, etc. It comes in the shape of testimony, with a clear explanation of the world and sometimes—but not systematically—commitment to a cause or emotive rhetoric. In other words, the *post-colonial* regime generally provides a “position expressed without ambiguity.”¹¹ The *postcolonial* text, on the contrary, often brings along innovation, or even subversion of discourse and genre: stylistic transgression, code switching, a-chronology, fragmentation, polyphonic focalization, emphasis on psychology and the interior world, sometimes stylistic exuberance. *Postcolonial* fiction tends to operate a friction between languages and destabilizes the codifications of conventional literary genre, thus reflecting more appropriately the complexity of the island society. But one can also find short forms, stark and minimalist styles and esthetics like those designated by the idea of the “writing degree zero” (Barthes 1953), which are the complete opposite of the newly canonized neo-exoticisms. Barlen Pyamootoo’s *Bénarès* (1999) and *Le Tour de Babylone* (2002), but also Bertrand de Robillard’s *L’homme qui penche* (2003) and *Une interminable distraction au monde* (2011), which look like a contemporary variety of the Nouveau Roman paradigm, are striking examples of such esthetic and narrative rupture; they are difficult to locate within new Francophone and transnational conventions. This being said, the *postcolonial* novel adheres more to innovation, textual work and the question of “How to write?” of Barthes’s *écrivain* without being reduced to it.

Interestingly, in the contemporary Mauritian novel, the separation between the *post-colonial* and the *postcolonial* goes often—but not exclusively—along with the linguistic dividing line English-French as well as a generational transition. The discursive and thematic renewal since the mid-1990s do indeed mostly concern the island's fiction written in French. Besides, the two tendencies can generally be found in different circles of editing and reception. An essential aspect in this discussion then also concerns the question of the Mauritian literary field and its place in the Francophone and Anglophone "literary system" (Halen 2001, 2003) or, more generally, in the "world republic of letters" (Casanova 1999). Very often—at least with regard to style—the question whether an author is published in the European (or Western) metropolitan "centers" or elsewhere does directly inform the critical reading method this chapter is putting forward, although notable exceptions exist.¹² And quite evidently, this topological discussion opens up the tricky issue of postcolonial exoticism (Huggan 2001) and the controversial notion of *authenticity* (Jourde 2001); let alone the ultimate question of each reader's and critic's position.

It needs to be underlined that the *post-colonial* texts shall by no means be discredited or relegated to the past: their merit lies in the fact that they often introduce to us literature figures who have traditionally been absent, and their perspectives of identity can reveal a lot about social discourses, values, and worldviews. Albeit their possibly lesser literary quality, they do not have to be ruled out in the negotiation of identities and imaginary worlds. However, I argue that the *postcolonial* vision suggests a more creative, innovative, and daring perspective to critically reflect upon our contemporary times. It translates better postcolonialism's pivotal ideas of *difference* and *identities in movement*, withstands more successfully the temptation of essentialist fixation, and inquires further into the question "how newness enters the world" (Bhabha 2008, 303–337). It shows that dominant representations in (and of) the island have to take into account the constructed dimension of belonging, to see Mauritian society as it is, that is to say at the same time diasporic and ethnically fractured as profoundly hybrid and creolized. It thus tends to what one could consider to be a truly emancipated postcolonial scenography where cultural difference, past and present are dealt with in all their complexity. The suggested typology is not meant to be a rigid corset forced upon a most diverse corpus. It is aware of the singularities of each author and text, it adheres to the idea of "discrepant experiences" (Said 1994, 36) which have to lie at the heart of any comparative (postcolonial) study, and it knows about the abusive schematization of terms such as "postmodern postcolonialist" (Spivak 1999, 361). Not only is what is here called *post-colonial* and *postcolonial* neither categorical nor static; the two are the poles of a mobile "grid" within which exist evident oscillations, convergences, and transitions. This reading method may thus permit to outline and to understand certain recur-

rent features in the different temporalities and heterogeneities of the emerging literary field of Mauritius, as well as other postcolonial spaces.

NOTES

1. This is a modified version of the article “Between Post-colonial and Postcolonial: A Reading Proposal through and for the Contemporary Novel Production of Mauritius (and Beyond),” published in *Pensée, pratiques et poétiques postcoloniales contemporaines: Monde atlantique et océan Indien*, edited by Rodolphe Solbiac, 113–140, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2018.

2. Cf. “creuser la surface des labels” (Joubert 2014, 7). All translations are mine.

3. I borrow the term “stratum” from Patricia Donatien (2015) who argues that the postcolonial in different historical stages (*étapes*) in the Caribbean is structured in various strata or levels (*strates*).

4. Bauman, Zygmunt, “From pilgrim to tourist; or A short story of identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall, and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 18. Quoted by Eriksen (2002, 143).

5. Cf. “Under the rubric ‘the discourse of modernity’, [one should not] reduce a complex and diverse historical moment, with varied national genealogies and different institutional practices into a singular shibboleth—be it the ‘idea’ of Reason, Historicism, Progress—for the convenience of postmodern literary theory” (Bhabha 2008, 342).

6. Cf. for example his observation, with regard to the question of nationalist struggle, about an inevitable “brutality and a contempt for subtleties and individual cases” (Fanon 2002, 140).

7. Cf. “a space that is *internally* marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations” (Bhabha 2008, 299).

8. In his more recent fiction—*Made in Mauritius* (2012) and *A la dérive* (2014)—Sewtohul seems to have reduced the somewhat excessive and oneiric dimension of his narrative, while maintaining his leitmotifs of interculturality, mobility, and transnationalism.

9. Cf. “Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (Bhabha 2003, 300).

10. Cf. “The Habit of Contrasts—Superficial, inexact observation sees contrasts everywhere in nature (for instance, “hot and cold”), where there are no contrasts, only *differences of degree*. This bad habit has induced us to try to understand and interpret even the inner nature, the intellectual and moral world, in accordance with such contrasts. An infinite amount of cruelty, arrogance, harshness, estrangement, and coldness has entered into human emotion, because men imagined they saw contrasts where there were only transitions” (Nietzsche 2006, 388, my italics).

11. Cf. “prise de position formulée sans ambiguïté” (Mouralis 1975, 185).

12. One might think here about Lindsey Collen’s or Amal Sewtohul’s locally published novels, as well as Brigitte Masson’s *Le chant de l’aube qui s’éveille* (2012), a hybrid narrative with a straightforward political and transcultural stance, while at the same time original in stylistic and esthetic terms.

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