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Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, ed., *Empire Lost: France and its Other Worlds*. Lanham, MD and Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009. xxiii + 236 pp. Notes, bibliography, index, contributors. £44.95/\$70.00 (cloth). ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-2135-1; ISBN-10: 0-7391-2135-9.

Review by Margaret A. Majumdar, University of Portsmouth, UK.

This volume is the product of a conference organized by Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi and Dan Edelstein at Stanford University in April 2006. The overall objective was to examine shifts in the relations between France as former colonial power and those who had been colonized, following on from decolonization and the end of France's colonial empire. The contributors set out to approach the problematic relationship between France and its "Others," first in the light of the ongoing and persistent differentiation in the postcolonial context of the former colonizers and the formerly colonized subjects, reflected not least in the notion of France and Francophonie, as two distinctly separate entities. However, the relations are also analyzed by taking into account the full impact of the communality that exists among French speakers as a result of a shared, if often conflictual, history, and a common language and culture. It is not supposed that this communality can be subsumed under the banner of a homogeneous universalism; rather, the perspective of the editor and the contributors is to stress the dynamic interactions and cross-connections which take place within this Francophone sphere of influence and the processes of hybridization, or reciprocal transformation, that occur as a result. The final dimension to the material brought together in this volume is constituted by the differences which exist within the community of French speakers, in terms of actual linguistic and cultural differences, and what impact these differences have on relations and practices in the Francophone sphere. This latter point is particularly developed by Mireille Rosello, who stresses the different relationship that French speakers in different contexts will have to the French language. Thus she challenges the map of Francophonie which misleadingly presents the Francophone countries as "homogeneous and circumscribed territories symbolized by block or solid colors," whereas it is instead the case that "global and local Francophone practices form a multitude of dots with various levels of concentration in several countries or cities," the dots constituting "dynamic moments of Francophone encounters" rather than signifying primarily the notion of linguistic "community" (p.54).

Much of this analysis will be familiar to those operating within the field of Francophone studies, particularly outside the French Hexagon, where the subverting of the normalizing hegemony of the French center over the periphery and the critique of the idealizing, pluralistic discourse of Francophone officialdom have become standard practice. Although Alec Hargreaves points to the essential binarism of the Francophone/postcolonial approaches in maintaining postcolonial minorities and their cultural production within an "essentially bipolar center-periphery model, positioning them between the cultural heritage of formerly colonized spaces on the one hand and the national language and dominant culture of the former colonial power on the other" (p.38), he may perhaps understate the degree to which what he calls the "dynamic of globalization," including Anglophone influences associated with the Black Atlantic and even the American Dream (p.44), is also already taken into account. Indeed, the chapter by Tyler Stovall deals precisely with the presence and role of African Americans in France, bringing out interesting links and contrasts between the French and American republics and their histories of slavery and anti-slavery.

A great diversity of subject matter is treated within this general framework. As is often the case with volumes arising from conference papers, the individual chapters do not readily cohere into a clearly structured whole, with an overall reasoned argument. It is true that the diversity of material and of approaches here illustrates to some extent the overall strategy of the book. There are, nonetheless, problems of uneven quality and interest. Moreover, one has the impression that opportunities to give more coherence to the papers, through the way the volume has been edited, have been missed, or insufficiently exploited. For instance, there is a general bibliography of all works cited at the end; however, individual bibliographies are also attached to many of the chapters, leading to unnecessary repetition and an impression of superfluous padding. This impression is reinforced by the reproduction of quotations both in the original French and in translation, although this practice is not followed consistently. The space could perhaps have been used to better effect in developing some of the arguments sketched out in some chapters to a fuller, more satisfying extent. Although much of interest can be found in the detail of the individual chapters, the format of the book does not lend itself to the development of a truly original perspective. This problem is compounded by the fact that several of the texts, or versions of them, have already appeared elsewhere, prior to this publication.

The chapter by Jean-Loup Amselle is a case in point, having appeared as a section of his book *L'Art de la friche*.^[1] It does, nonetheless, offer an interesting, informative, and authoritative account of the history of artistic and cultural cooperation between France and Africa and the Franco-African cultural scene, focusing on the policy of cultural action pursued by France, not just or even mainly through the promotion of French culture *per se*, but far more through the development of an interactive, hybrid encounter with local African cultural production, in which France took on the role of coproducing and promoting African art as a way of maintaining its influence on the continent. With its emphasis on the forms of dance, art, and photography, Amselle's contribution serves as a welcome reminder that there is more to art and culture in the Francophone world than literature.

The volume includes other powerful contributions and, in the final analysis, the reader gains a sense of the interweaving and cross-connections which have been an integral part of the imperial and colonial experience and a vital, ongoing part of its legacy in the postcolonial world. This particularly comes across in the sections dealing with literary texts, where a major theme is the interaction of the French language, literature, and culture with other languages, literatures, and cultures. The figure of the colonized soldier in the colonial novel, as treated in the chapter by Karl Ashoka Britto, serves as a potent focus for the ambiguities of a theoretical French universalism, when it comes into contact with actual colonial practices and the ideas associated with them.

The Algerian novelist and member of the Académie française, Assia Djebar, sets the tone of the volume with an interesting intervention concerning the links between Albert Camus and Marguerite Duras and the experience of loss that both experienced and to which they gave voice in their novels—Indochina in Duras's case and Algeria in the case of Camus. In line with much of the work of Camus rehabilitation currently underway, Djebar is keen to reevaluate his stance on Algerian colonialism. Writing of his autobiographical novel, *Le Premier Homme*, on which Camus was working at his untimely death and what was published only posthumously more than thirty years later, in 1994, she insists that, while Camus was reconstituting Algerian colonial history "through the new settlers' eyes," he was "also looking [at that history] from the other's point of view" and came to realize that the colonial claim that Algerian land had been uncultivated and unsettled was a lie and that the land had in fact been stolen (p. xxxv). She has no doubt that, had he lived, Camus would have evolved toward a position of support for the return of this land to its original owners and for Algerian independence.

Djebar's own work is later analyzed in a reading by André Benhaïm that sees her as a "weaver" and her texts as "textiles" (p.125), with her writing/weaving practice one that challenges duality: "Step by step, thread by thread, the weaving writer inextricably links all sides (including the shores of the

Mediterranean, between France and Algeria), inseparable even as they drift apart, challenging the reader to keep pace with her" (p.126). There is an explicit link to Penelope, who threaded and unthreaded, "to pull the thread of the story as long as possible" (140), a figure akin to Djébar's own reference to Camus' "stretching loss out" (p.xxxv).^[2] The whole process of weaving, *tissage*, is linked in this interpretation of Djébar's writing with *mé-tissage* or *métissage*, this hybridity linked here with the use of the foreign French language to write of women's revolt and liberation (p.132).

Yvonne Hsieh makes a convincing case for the debt that the Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant acknowledges to his precursor, Victor Segalen, in his almost-postcolonial approach to difference. In an all-too-short chapter, she also analyzes the way in which Segalen interweaves a confrontation of two cultures, Chinese and French, and indeed two languages, into the form and content of his poetry, echoing Glissant's awareness of the "presence of the world's languages in the practice of one's own" (p.96). The role of the author as mediator between different groups is also brought out strongly in Kathy Richman's chapter on Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, where she likens Roumain's use of a combination of standard French and Haitian Creole to translate and thus represent the poor rural community, in both meanings of the word "representation," i.e., portrayal as well as advocacy, to similar practices by Eugène Sue and George Sand.

The piece by Jocelyne Dakhlia usefully sets the situation of Muslims in France and attitudes to them in their historical context, both during the colonial period and prior to it, referring to the presence of many thousands of Muslims in France before colonialism, as captives or as slaves. This is not to deny the specificity of colonialism, fundamental to which was the denial of "a commonly shared past, woven back and forth from shore to shore of the Mediterranean, and even when these intricate links and fusions came at the price of a violent, antagonistic history" (p.28). However, she rightly points to the primacy of the binary dichotomy of colonizer and colonized in colonial relations over the process of hybridization which is a secondary by-product. She also has interesting things to say about the emergence of a "new territorial logic" in reference to the presence of Muslims on French soil.

To sum up, the approach followed in this book will be familiar to those working in the field of Francophone studies. What is perhaps unusual and a little disconcerting is the title, especially in the light of the emphasis that most of the contributors place on the interactions between and among the different players in Francophone colonial and postcolonial relations. The notion of a "lost empire" is normally associated with the loss of India in the eighteenth century and subsequently with the loss of Indochina and then particularly Algeria in the mid-twentieth century. In reality, France still maintains its presence and its power on the global stage, and particularly in Africa and the Caribbean, through a variety of means, ranging from military intervention, political and economic ties, cultural policy, and organizations such as the OIF (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie). Similarly, the notion of France's "other worlds" is subverted by the thrust of most of the pieces represented here, which in fact focus on processes of blending and hybridization, not just between a dominant French culture and its colonized "others," but also on multilateral and multidimensional forces of relationality across the Francophone world, not least within France itself.

Indeed, the volume ends with an essay by another member of the Académie française, the philosopher Michel Serres, an outsider like Djébar, though in his case by dint of his Gascon origins and Occitan mother-tongue. Thus he superimposes on the map which situates France at the center of the Francophone world the further image of a Paris-dominated France, made up of linguistic and cultural diversity within the borders of the Hexagon itself, what he refers to as "a composite, disparate, heterogeneous France, divided by borderlines, sprinkled with languages, and with no bridge to connect them all" (p.198). This linguistic diversity is limited not just to regional languages, but also to the various subsets of language, involved in technical, scientific, and handicraft and other practices, all of which contribute to the heterogeneity of the language and its richness and all of which are endangered.

NOTES

[1] Jean-Loup Amselle, *L'Art de la friche, essai sur l'art contemporain* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).

[2] Albert Camus, *Le Premier Homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

[3] These issues were fully explored in the exhibition entitled "The Fabric of Myth" at Compton Verney, Warwickshire, in summer 2008, which illustrated the use of spinning and weaving as metaphors, for the fabrication and transmission of story and myth through the generations, from antiquity to the present day.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Introduction

Assia Djébar, Overture

Part One: Homogeneity Subverted

Mireille Le Breton, Laïcité in the French Public School System: In the Name of the Law!

Jocelyne Dakhlia, Muslims in France: History under the Carpet

Alec G. Hargreaves, Beyond Postcolonialism: Globalization and Postcolonial Minorities in France

Mireille Rosello, We, the Virtual Francophone Multitudes? Neobarbarisms and Microencounters

Tyler Stovall, "No Green Pastures": The African Americanization of France

Part Two: Cross-Textual Encounters

Yvonne Hsieh, A Poetics of Relationship: Victor Segalen's *Stèles*

Kathy Richman, Whose Other? The Centrality of Language to Identity and Representation in Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*

André Benhaïm, Shadowing Assia Djébar

Karl Ashoka Britto, *L'Esprit de Corps*: French Civilization and the Death of the Colonized Soldier

Jean-Loup Amselle, Franco-African Artistic and Cultural Cooperation

Conclusion: Michel Serres, My Mother Tongue, My Paternal Languages

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