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Anne Collett

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Abstract

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ABSTRACTS

ASHLEIGH HARRIS

An Awkward Silence: Reflections on Theory and Africa

This article begins by establishing the ways in which so-called global circuits of theory formation have circumvented Africa as a site where theory is produced. Instead, Africa remains the object of theoretical interpretation, not an active participant in its making. The essay discusses the ways in which the use of postcolonial theory, by both African and non-African scholars, has colluded in these patterns of knowledge distribution, primarily through a demand for an African account of the self. Resisting this call to the African to give an account of him/herself (even in the interests of scholarly ‘hospitality’), the paper considers various investigations into the ethics of letting the other ‘be’. Following the work of Luce Irigaray, I suggest that a true incorporation of African knowledge production in cultural theory would involve the creation of an ‘awkward silence’: this silence would enable the African subject’s refusal to speak *for* the understanding of the West and would thereby require that both African and non-African scholars alike suspend their demands for absolute knowledge of African subjects.

SUSAN N. KIGULI

Performer-Critics in Oral Performance in African Societies

This article aims to use the voices of ‘performer-critics’ as part of the effort to break out of scholarship based mainly on models of the West that encourage strict categorisations of genres and adherence to understanding form and practice as it presents itself in contemporary Western traditions and culture. Scholarship on African Literature has had to admit the central role live performance plays in the literary material coming from and focusing on the different parts of Africa. The study will draw on examples from Buganda, Ankole (Uganda) and Zulu (South Africa) oral poetry in order to widen and promote the analysis of commonalities and differences between these specific cultures on the African continent. Policy makers and academics who find themselves performing simultaneously as outsiders and insiders to the culture, have to use as well as understand their double role. They have to take into consideration the seriousness with which practitioners take their conceptual culture. I contend that the poets’ performances are informed very much by what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls ‘conceptual heritage’ and the practical situation on the ground in the environments of performance. To understand the function of oral poetry performances, it is useful to understand the work within its specific contexts, time and even intercultural connections without merely imposing on it preconceived rules and subdivisions.

GRACE A. MUSILA

Submerged Fault lines: Interests and Complicities in the Julie Ward Murder Case

This article reflects on the intersecting complicities between Kenya and Britain, as revealed in the highly publicised case of the 1988 murder of 28-year-old British tourist and wildlife photographer, Julie Anne Ward, in Kenya. Using John Ward's *The Animals are Innocent*, John le Carre's *The Constant Gardener*, and news articles drawn from Kenyan and British print media, the essay reflects on the configurations of the official British interventions in the case. In his investigations, as documented in *The Animals are Innocent*, John Ward approached the matter with rigid assumptions which constructed British institutions and officials as honest, professional and committed to justice, in sharp contrast with Kenyan officialdom's unprofessionalism and lack of integrity. The essay suggests that these assumptions — which I term 'bipolar lenses' — blinded Ward to the subterranean faultlines of competing interests in the official British involvement in the quest for his daughter's killers. By reading Ward's account of the quest for his daughter's killers alongside a fictional account of a similar quest in le Carre's novel *The Constant Gardener*, and the subsequent revelation of British complicity in the cover-up of the truth behind Julie Ward's death, I illustrate that contrary to popular wisdom about British moral integrity and commitment to justice as sharply contrasted with the failings of the Kenyan officialdom, there were underlying faultlines which suggest continuities and complicities between Kenya and Britain in the cover-up of the truth behind his daughter's death in Kenya. These bipolar lenses — often articulated through notions of Europe's commitment to justice and human-rights as contrasted with postcolonial African states' abuse of these — work to mask the intersections between the two, marked by complicities largely mediated by the interests of capital.

JAMES OGUDE

Whose Africa? Whose Culture? Reflections on Agency, Travelling Theory and Cultural Studies in Africa

Who defines Africa? Who provides the theoretical templates for knowledge production in Africa? This article seeks to answer these questions and to argue for a neo-pragmatic approach to the concept of agency, particularly in relation to knowledge production on the continent. The essay argues that an understanding of multiple varieties of individual and collective agency available to the African subjects will help cultural researchers and scholars to develop an emancipatory discourse and an explanatory model of the continent that is neither imprisoned by inward conceptions of Africa nor fuelled purely by Euro-centric discourses on Africa. Drawing on Edward Said's idea of 'travelling theory', the article seeks to interrogate the totalising discourses of globalisation and related theories, and

indeed, the mobility with which received theories move in and out of the continent, while local perspectives and voices remain repressed.

MARIA OLAUSSEN

Africa's Indian Ocean in Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed*

This article explores Africa's Indian Ocean heritage through an analysis of Yvette Christiansë's novel *Unconfessed*. I draw on work on the Indian Ocean World as well as historical sources on slavery at the Cape in order to argue that this literary representation expresses a paradigm shift: it superimposes a racialised Atlantic paradigm with clear divisions between settlers and slaves onto an Indian Ocean paradigm where different degrees of bondage and freedom were experienced within a transnational movement. The literary analysis relates to the function of the colonial archive and argues that expressions of resistance to this particular type of inscription in the novel should be read alongside the visions of freedom and hope which are connected to a disappearing Indian Ocean heritage.

CHRISTOPHER E.W. OUMA

Navigating the Lagos Cityscape in Chris Abani's *Graceland*

This article maps out, through Abani's sixteen-year-old protagonist, Elvis, the city of Lagos as a place of material dystopia but cultural utopia. The scatological imagery employed by Abani is contrasted with the image of the city as a culturally rich topography. Through Elvis, the reader is invited to 'redistribute the sensible', to navigate the city through its cacophonous harmony, to map it out through not only the ocular, but also the aural and nasal. It is only through this redistribution that the reader is able to grasp the order in the chaos, the harmony in the cacophony, but most significantly, the cityscape as a matrix of cultural productivity and liminality and therefore as a political topography for the marginalised occupants of the 'miasmatic city' of Maroko, who can effectively map out their resistance, empowered by a 'vernacular cosmopolitanism'.

TINA STEINER

Writing on and over Communal Boundaries: East African Asian Subjectivities in Sophia Mustafa's *In the Shadow of Kirinyaga*

Sophia Mustafa (1922–2005), Tanzanian novelist and political activist of South Asian origin, was highly critical of an identity politics that privileges ethnic identity over national affiliation. This article investigates her complex engagement with East African Asian subjectivities in her novel, *In the Shadow of Kirinyaga* (2001). With a keen eye to capture communal identity in the early part of the twentieth century, her fiction provides a 'critical ethnography' that interrogates minority identity construction within and beyond East African colonies and the emerging independent nation-state. Mustafa's portrayal of East African Asian

community life in careful detail while occupying a political position critical of some aspects of this life, makes her narrative a fascinating testing ground for interrogating nationalism and the status of minorities within state structures. In the journeys of her characters across East Africa and to India, narrow definitions of belonging are contrasted with more cosmopolitan conceptions of movement and travel.

ANDREW VAN DER VLIES

Art as Archive: Queer Activism and Contemporary South African Visual Cultures

This article discusses the work of South African artist, Nicholas Hlobo, and for the purposes of comparison draws on the work of artist-activist photographer Zanele Muholi. Both are known for work concerned with the idea of the archive, which intervenes in the fields of local gender politics and anxieties about the body politic and the politics of the body. In both Muholi and Hlobo's cases, too, we encounter work that grapples with the idea of (sub/)cultural and personal loss, of mourning, and of anxieties about biological reproducibility that are keenly connected with the idea of community and affiliation. My essay considers the pay-offs for invoking questions about what archives that engage with, or that *are* forms of, 'cultural production' might look like, and how they might be read against the grain, to suggest that art might function as an intriguing archive of queer affect and queer knowledge thereby constituting or making possible a different kind of gay and lesbian — as well as aesthetic — activism.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GABEBA BADEROON is a South African poet and scholar, and the author of the collections *The Dream in the Next Body*, *The Museum of Ordinary Life* and *A Hundred Silences*. She received the Daimler Award for South African Poetry in 2005, and has held fellowships at the Nordic Africa Institute, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation and the University of Witwatersrand. Gabeba teaches at Pennsylvania State University.

IRINEIA LINA CESARIO is a doctoral candidate at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Her research focuses on Afro-Brazilian and Mozambican female writing on issues of gender. Irineia's research interests include gender, diaspora, postcolonial literatures and African Literatures in Portuguese.

CLAUDIA MARIA FERNANDES CORRÊA is a doctoral candidate at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Her doctoral research is funded by São Paulo Research Foundation – FAPESP. She has published in Brazilian academic journals and also in *ARIEL*. Claudia's research interests include postcolonial literatures, diaspora, memory, slavery, women's writing and gender.

MARGARET DAYMOND is Emeritus Professor of English Studies and a Fellow of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research is mostly on women's writing and feminist issues in South Africa in particular and in Africa more generally. This includes fiction, autobiography, letters and diaries and travel writing.

ASHLEIGH HARRIS completed her Ph.D. at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. Her postdoctoral research has focused on writing of the Southern African region and she is currently completing a monograph entitled, *Postcolonialism on Edge: Zimbabwe as Trans-Nation*. Harris was senior lecturer in English literature at Wits until 2008 when she took up her current position as guest senior lecturer at Uppsala University, Sweden.

JOHAN JACOBS is Emeritus Professor and Senior Research Associate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. He has published extensively on South African and postcolonial fiction and autobiography, including *Momentum: South African Writing 1976–1983* (republished 2011, with M.J. Daymond and Margaret Lenta), *a.k.a. Breyten Breytenbach: Critical Approaches to his Writings and Paintings* (2004), and *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda* (2009). He is a founding editor of the journal *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*.

SUSAN NALUGWA KIGULI is a Ugandan poet and academic. She holds a PhD in English from The University of Leeds sponsored by the prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme. Her research interests fall mainly in the area of Oral Poetry, Popular Song and Performance Theory. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Literature, Makerere University, Uganda, and has served as the chairperson of FEMRITE (Uganda Women Writers' Association).

T. MICHAEL MBOYA is an Associate Professor in the Department of Literature, Theatre and Film Studies, Moi University, Kenya and a Research Associate at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.. His research interests are in African postcoloniality, the popular culture of the Luo of Kenya and East African Literature in English. Mboya's poems and short stories have been published in several magazines, journals and anthologies. His short story 'These Things Happen' won First Prize in The National Literary Awards (of Kenya), Short Story Category, in 2004.

GRACE A. MUSILA is a senior lecturer in the English Department at Stellenbosch University. She teaches African, African American and Caribbean literatures. She has published articles on Eastern and Southern African literature, gender, and African popular culture.

JAMES OGUDE is Professor of African Literature in the School of Literature and Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. His research interests include the African novel and the Postcolony, Popular Culture in East Africa and Black intellectual traditions. He is the author of *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* (1999). He has also co-edited, *Urban Legends, Colonial Myths: Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa* (2007), among other edited works.

MARIA OLAUSSEN is Professor of English at Linnaeus University in Sweden. Her essay in this volume is part of a larger study on literary representations of the Indian Ocean World and the research is carried out in the interdisciplinary project *Concurrences: Conflicting and Simultaneous Voices in Postcolonial Spaces*. Olausen's latest book is the edited collection *Africa Writing Europe: Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement* (2009). She has published on African literature, postcolonial theory and feminist studies.

CHRISTOPHER E.W. OUMA holds a PhD from the Department of African Literature at University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Christopher also holds a BA (Hons I) from the Department of Literature, Theatre and Film Studies, Moi University Kenya. He is a lecturer in the University of Cape Town's English Language and Literature Department. Ouma's research interests and publications revolve around popular culture, the representation of Childhood and its connections to Postcolonial studies and Contemporary or new Diasporic African identities. He lectures and gives seminars on East, West and South African literatures.

TINA STEINER lectures in the English Department at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. She teaches African literature, translation studies, postcolonial studies and narratives of migration. She has published articles and chapters on Leila Aboulela, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Jamal Mahjoub, Sophia Mustafa, Ishtiyaq Shukri and M.G. Vassanji. Her monograph *Translated People*,

Translated Texts: Language and Migration in Contemporary African Fiction appeared in 2009.

ANDREW VAN DER VLIES is Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. Born in South Africa and educated there and at the University of Oxford, he has published on contemporary South African literatures and on African and postcolonial print cultures. Author of *South African Textual Cultures* (2007) and *Coetzee's Disgrace: A Reader's Guide* (2010), he is editor of a forthcoming collection of essays on South African 'histories of the book', co-edits *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, and also writes about South African art and postcolonial queer studies

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