

**Critical identities in contemporary Anglophone diasporic literature**, by Françoise Král, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, 200 pp., £50.00, ISBN 978 0 2302 2041 6 HB

Král's timely and rigorous scholarly contribution is a dense study of contemporary diasporic writing and postcolonial debates. The book, articulated in six chapters, and too many subsections, follows two "axes" of investigation. The first addresses "the redefinition of today's geopolitical landscape" (4), while the second discusses the "extent to which globalization has affected social practices" (4). Theoretical definitions of diaspora and cosmopolitanism function as the backdrop to chapter one in which Král explores the "hermeneutic potential" of the in-between (15). As "the diasporic constitutes a unique locus from which to observe the predicament of identity construction" (15), the in-between is better equipped to comprehend postmodernity.

Drawing on Bachelard, Derrida and Bhabha, among others, chapter two discusses the concept of interstitiality and the legacy of colonialism on the diasporic imaginary. The territorial remapping of identity is explored in the works by Farah, Roth and Gurnah, in which the very journey to the host country marks the beginning of spatial discontinuity. Chapter three takes these concerns further by examining literature by second generation immigrants and how it prompts us to rethink national definitions of identities. Works by Levy and M. G. Vassanji articulate the discontinuity in identity's representation of the characters and propose strategies of reinvention of the self.

Chapter four offers an insightful overview of the role of language in the representation of home country. Král discusses nostalgia and the myth of home in narratives of homecoming in Kunzru's *Transmisison* and Ali's *Brick Lane*. In these novels, the representation of places (homeland and host country) are not just about nostalgia of the misplaced, but a "strategy of packaging and marketing, not only of the margins, but also of the centre"; "the avatars of colonial discourse are recycled and rechannelled" (80).

A discussion of ethics and cosmopolitanism is the main focus of chapter five. Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, articulating examples of social deterritorialization, serve as the basis to discuss a critical reassessment of values of the west and of their own countries. Further, Král touches upon the works of Hannah Arendt, Edmund Burke and Baumann to explore ethics and human rights in a translational context – a timely and harrowing matter. The question "What happens to the immigrant as an ethical and political subject?" (109) strikes at the ever contemporary debates over the conception of rights as localized rather than universal. Král addresses the often incongruous dialectic between the state and supranational bodies which leads

migrants' rights to slip through the net. The chapter is brought to a close with a critique of what Hardt and Negri optimistically call "biopolitical potential", the multitude's subversive potential for political action.

The book's rather abruptly concluded last chapter explores languages and globalization. Deterritorialized and distributed between Anglophone and English-speaking populations, English, as Glissant has it, ceases "to be a language with its obscurities, its weaknesses, its victories, its flights of fancy, its dynamism" to become an international code (151). Král offers a reflection on Glissant's position and, drawing on the works of Lecercle and Deleuze, she theorizes a rhizomatic growth of the English language as characterized by an encyclopaedic multi-layering which, rather than reducing the language to its bare bones, contributes to its linguistic richness.

This is a work of admirable scope and scholarship: illuminating and thought-provoking; it sets out to address contending issues with an explicit and accessible approach.

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