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Introduction

Changing Contexts of the Postcolonial Novel

The postcolonial novel, to echo Dorothy Hale in another context, "is a rich problematic rather than a monolithic idea."[1] This insight is fundamental in attempting to set out the literary history of the form. Provisionally, the historical background to the postcolonial novel in the English-speaking world may be broken into four overlapping period clusters: (1) the phase of formal colonialism stretching from the establishment of the reconstituted Colonial Office in 1854 to the end of World War II in 1945; (2) the period of decolonization and postcolonial nation-state formation in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, roughly from 1945 to 1965; (3) post-independence until the end of the Cold War, roughly from 1966 to 1989; and (4) the period of intensified globalization, transnationalism, and the attendant reconfiguration of the nation-state in both the formerly colonized world and their counterpart metropolitan colonial centers, from 1966 to the present time. These four periods are subject to finer internal differentiations to take account of regional variations and also to subperiod themes that fall within the individual phases. These historical periods were in turn shaped by global population flows and multistriated forms of information technology and communications systems that continually evolved and came to be sedimented in the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the like. As Debjani Ganguly shows in Chapter 3, the post-1989 period has proved especially significant in bringing together a confluence of factors that have influenced the representational protocols of the postcolonial novel. She outlines the changing political and demographic landscapes and new modes of media representation that have gained prominence since the end of the Cold War. We should also note the significance of the period after September 11, 2001, which she also attends to. September 11 has not only engendered variant forms of aggrieved nationalisms but also given birth to new inflections of proselytizing monotheisms. Proselytizing monotheisms such as Christianity and Islam have historically always adduced to themselves the privileged authority for determining the contours of teleological

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imagination. What is different in today's post-September 11 world is that the teleological imagination and its consequent actions have been harnessed to forms of delirious sovereignty, as well as to the desperate attempts at either exiting the state or otherwise transcending it. The second form of harnessing is what we see in globalized evangelical Christianity and in ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, alternatively known as ISIL: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), raising the question of what our current historical configuration contributes to the "sense of an ending," to appropriate Frank Kermode's concept for thinking about the teleological imagination.[2] All these have an impact on and have been reflected in the postcolonial novel since September 11.

From a purely historicizing postcolonial perspective, however, we are obliged to pursue the literary history of the postcolonial novel by first accounting for the variegated character of its precursor, the colonial novel. This is a somewhat false beginning, first because postcolonialism as a set of theoretical dispositions and not a period marker is not conventionally considered necessarily to be exclusive to the period after colonialism. What came to coalesce around the colonial novel may also strictly speaking be traceable to the relentless stream of letters, reports, chronicles, and travel narratives by Europeans from the earliest period of contact with people outside of Europe.[3] The term "colonial novel" is somewhat problematic as it may be taken to cover anticolonial works (as in critical of empire and colonialism) as well as colonial works (as in providing subtle-and-not-so-subtle justifications for it). As we see in Chapter 2, for this volume the term is thus deployed to designate at least two orientations. Along with Shakespeare's *The Tempest, Othello*, and *Merchant of Venice,* the novels of Conrad, Kipling, Forster, and Orwell have inspired some of the most fascinating responses of the postcolonial novel to the Western canon.[4] From Achebe's directly stated intent of responding to Conrad in *Things Fall Apart*, to Rushdie's subtle reprisal of the character of Forster's Dr. Aziz in *Midnight's Children,* the colonial novel has produced a rich payout of characters, symbols, metaphors, and contexts for reimagining the colonial encounter within the postcolonial novel. However, the colonial novel was far from monolithic in either content or form, as Watson proceeds to show. It is thus possible to trace its genealogy to representations of the colonial encounter enshrined in the masculine adventure stories popularized during the course of the nineteenth century. The stories for boys by G. M. Ballantyre, R. L. Stevenson, and H. Rider Haggard provided the initial templates for the colonial novel that were subsequently to be rendered into more sophisticated representations by Conrad, Kipling, Forster, Orwell, and others. Switching to the colonized world itself, the novels of authors such

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as Sol Plaatje, Olive Schreiner, Mulk Raj Anand, and Joseph Casely-Hayford provided significant reorientations to the representations of colonial encounters and of empire in general. Finally, and in sharp contrast to the masculine adventure narratives of R. L. Stevenson and others, the colonial novel is further complicated with representations of colonial discomfiture to be found in the works of Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, E. M. Forster (again), and various others. Typically the Europeans in such works are shown to suffer the loss of epic certitude evident in their novelistic adventuring forebears such that the sense of malaise and loss they express paves the way for a new expression of the European's place in the (post)colonial world.

With the term "postcolonial," understood not as limited to the implicit temporal marking of the "post-," but as the sign of a critical orientation, postcolonial literature in general is thus taken to designate the representation of experiences of various kinds that subtend yet transcend the colonial encounter, including those of slavery, oppression and resistance, migration, race, gender, and colonial space-making, as well as the responses to the discourses of a reconstituted imperial Europe in modern times. As noted earlier, it is conventionally assumed that postcolonial literature is as much a reflection of conditions under imperialism and colonialism proper as it is of conditions coming after the historical end of empires.[5] Despite the many genres that have contributed to the field it is the novel that has provided the main testing ground for central concepts and ideas in postcolonial studies. Furthermore, the rise of interdisciplinarity in the human sciences, especially in the emphasis on the "readerly" nature of cognate disciplines such as history and anthropology and the progressive significance of literary texts and literary methodologies for organizing and thinking about such disciplines, has also helped to give further salience to the postcolonial novel.

If, following Edward Said, Franco Moretti, Mario J. Valdés, and other literary historians who have had an impact on debates in the field, we take as central to the exploration of the postcolonial novel the problems of constituting historical and rhetorical series, of defining the elements proper to each series, and of describing the specific relations between the two, we find that in the literary history of the postcolonial novel the emphasis has always been to combine the explication of historical and political contexts with explorations of the rhetorical dimensions of the novels in question.[6] Since much of the literatures of formerly colonized societies were first introduced to Western audiences whose reading tastes had been deeply influenced by colonial histories of conquest, the early scholars of Commonwealth literature were obliged to educate their readers on cultural context. This was far from straightforward, as any number of anthologies and the pages of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (founded in 1965) amply show. With the

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consolidation of postcolonial studies from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s onward context was to undergo a number of changes and transpositions, further becoming much more elusive. The early concern with the explication of local cultural context common under the model of Commonwealth literary studies was given a more theoretical inflection by Edward Said, then further complicated by Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Robert Young, Abdul JanMohamed, Neil Lazarus, and Frederic Jameson, among various others.[7] The analytical models of colonial discourse analysis elaborated by Said and others were joined to the interdisciplinary offerings put forward by nonliterary scholars such as Arjun Appadurai and Mary Louise Pratt (anthropology), Anne Laura Stoler and Dipesh Chakrabarty (history), and Achille Mbembe (political theory) to offer a heady theoretical and cultural mix that inspired intense debates in the field.[8] The collocation of colonial discourse analysis with the interdisciplinary infusions from outside literary studies had the net effect of shifting emphasis in the field away from the examination of literary and aesthetic products as such and toward the exploration of their discursive contexts and conditions of production. Thus the study of rhetorical devices in the postcolonial novel made way for the analysis of discursive ensembles, yet such discursive ensembles were not necessarily couched in historical terms. The postcolonial novel did not so much respond directly to these shifts as provide more complex materials for framing the central questions of context.

Important in understanding the postcolonial novel and its contexts are also the two orientations Biodun Jeyifo designates as the postcoloniality of "normativity and proleptic designation" and "interstitial or liminal" postcoloniality.[9] The first category embraces that in which the writer or critic speaks to, for, or in the name of the postindependence nation-state, the regional or continental community, the panethnic, racial, or cultural agglomeration of homelands and diasporas. In Jeyifo's account the normativity in this conception of post-coloniality often entails a return to cultural sources, the projection of a futurist agenda, and the celebration of authenticity. This dimension of postcoloniality is often saturated with what could be described as an ethical will-to-identity, an expression of which is that of Chinua Achebe's regularly cited assertion in "The Novelist as Teacher," that he wrote *Things Fall Apart* as an object lesson to his readers to prove that indigenous Africa had a viable culture before the white man came.[10] That this normativity depends ultimately on a perception of literature as part of the contest against colonial hegemony it is impossible to deny, and the implication of "writing back" to the center that was first suggested by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* is taken by many commentators to be very much in evidence in the

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postcolonial novel.[11] However, as Ato Quayson shows in his chapter in the *Companion*, the question of writing back is complicated by the nature of postcolonial adaptations of classical texts and the character of intertextuality implied in them. This is especially pertinent to discussions of the relationship between tragedy and the postcolonial novels. Thus in Alain Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, classical models are combined with intertexual references to import a tragic gravitational pull on the matters being represented. We shall have more to say on this point a little bit later in our introduction.

For Jeyifo whatever politics is derived from the standpoint of proleptic designation normally intersects with another type of politics, again fed by an ethical imperative, but this time not aligned solely to racial or cultural identity. This is the dimension of internal political and social critique that writers and critics feel themselves obliged to undertake on behalf of their people. Neil Lazarus, elaborating a Fanonian perspective on African literature, identifies this impulse as partly due to an unacknowledged messianism that draws on the heady dynamics of decolonization struggles and the disillusionment with internal political conditions that were their aftermath.[12] African writers, and indeed postcolonial writers, feel themselves to be part of a larger social struggle in the quest for absent or vanishing agents of democratic social change. In many respects this dimension of their literary practice defines postcolonial writers as effectively taking on the role traditionally assigned to the press. The same intensity of focus on pursuing social goals that marks the quest of the vigilant press everywhere in the world also informs the work and lives of such postcolonial writers. And so politically committed writers join the press to become the fourth estate of the postcolony.

Jeyifo's second category, that of "interstitial or liminal" postcoloniality, embraces what is normally perceived as a hybrid cosmopolitan sensibility. He notes that

> the interstice or liminality here defines an ambivalent mode of self-fashioning of the writer or critic which is neither First World nor Third World, neither securely and smugly metropolitan, nor assertively and combatively Third-Worldist. The very terms which express the orientation of this school of post-colonial self-representation are revealing: diasporic, exilic, hybrid, in-between, cosmopolitan.[13]

He goes on to name Salman Rushdie as the paradigmatic figure of this mode of postcoloniality, along with Derek Walcott, J. M. Coetzee, and Dambudzo

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Marechera. One would have to add to this provisional list the names of Gabríel García Márquez, Junot Díaz, and Zadie Smith as other supreme examples of interstitial postcoloniality. The two forms of postcoloniality – proleptic designation and interstitial/liminal – are often expressed within the same postcolonial text such that it is preferable to speak of the two poles as a dialectical continuum, rather than as polarized and mutually exclusive entities. This is certainly the case with postcolonial novelists who, though defining a subject matter critical of the colonial heritage, simultaneously critique their own nation-states that to them reproduce oppressive frames of reference on the excuse of nationalist sentiment. This duality can be seen, for example, in Alain Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, both novels published since 2010. The eponymously named narrator of *Broken Glass* sits in a bar called Credit Gone West in the Congo to write down a compendium of stories told to him by customers of the bar.[14] The narrative set up rivals the omnibus narrative format of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tale* and the *Arabian Nights*. Originally in French, the novel has the distinction of being written from beginning to end without a single full stop. Instead commas provide natural pauses and unnumbered chapter breaks institute demarcations for turning points in the narrative. At the same time, the hilarious stories that Broken Glass writes down as related to him by the people that come to the bar are given an inflection of seriousness via the wide range of intertextual references that are also to be found in the text. At a rough count there are at least seventy-five references to literary titles and segments of literary texts incorporating everything from the Greeks, Shakespeare, Albert Camus, Gabríel Garcia Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Mongo Beti, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, and Conrad, among numerous others. Holden Caulfield from J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* makes an appearance toward the end of the novel and repeats the question: "can you tell me what happens to the poor little ducks in cold countries during winter, do they get put in a the zoo, or do they migrate to other countries or do the poor little ducks get stuck in the snow, I want to know what you think," to which Broken Glass's response is an ill-tempered: "I don't want to listen to you, I don't want to listen to anyone in this bar anymore, I've had enough, I don't give a shit about the ducks, I don't give a shit if they put them in cages, or if they die in the snow, or migrate to other countries" (151–152). The introduction of Holden Caulfield from Salinger's novel is a major modulation to the narrative. It represents an uncanny postmodernist device reminiscent of historiographic metafiction, except that here it is not a real historical personage who is incorporated into the fictional account (say in the manner of the film Forrest Gump), but a real fictional personage from another literary text who is inserted into a

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completely different text and context. It is the repetition of Holden's signature question from *Catcher in the Rye* that serves to distinguish him from every other fictional character in literary history.[15] Though *Broken Glass* is firmly set in the context of the Congo, the novel's lack of punctuation and its effervescent intertextuality place it at an interface with the universe of world literature, also making it liminal in key dimensions of its narrative structure. What we might take for hybridity or cosmopolitanism should also be tempered by the fact that the stories Broken Glass tells us are mired in a palpable sense of malaise and scatological decay; references to urine (there is a hilarious pissing competition on display in the text), feces (Broken Glass is at one point forced to pick up his own excrement), and sex (several times) situate the text as a carnivalesque novel quite different from the cosmopolitan offerings of a Rushdie, a Márquez, or a Coetzee.

NoViolet Bulawayo's novel is, on the other hand, divided into two sections, with the first being set in the ironically named slum district of Paradise in Zimbabwe and the second in Kalamazoo, "Destroyedmichygen," in the United States.[16] The novel is narrated entirely from the childhood perspective of Darling, who as a 10-year-old plays with her friends in the slum Paradise before moving as a 14-year-old to the United States. The first part of the novel, a celebration of childhood innocence, provides us with an inventory of maledictions produced either directly or indirectly by the heartless political regime of her native Zimbabwe: childhood pregnancy, rabid political violence, unscrupulous religious leaders, AIDS, insensitive camera-wielding NGOs, and hunger. Plenty of it. And yet we also find that Darling's sojourn in the United States brings only ambiguous relief, for it is a country where the anxieties of illegal migration means that the life of migrants from all over the world is conducted through fugitive identities and furtive nostalgias. The chapter titled "How They Lived" is an elegiac detailing of the diasporic life cycle of migrants, filled with inexorable loss, bewilderment, and lamentation. Like Mabanckou, Bulawayo's novel is not easily reducible to either pole of Jeyifo's nomenclature but has to be seen as incorporating both in a heady new arrangement.

Implicit also to Jeyifo's propositions is the relationship between national and post-national allegories. This is not entirely accidental, since it is the nation-state that provides the readiest template for understanding the postcolonial novel, even in its diasporic and transnational iterations. The sometimes violent birth of nations following colonialism (we think here of India and Pakistan, Algeria and Angola) and the general euphoria produced from the initial feeling of being freed from the shackles of colonialism served to install an idea of the nation-state as being epochal, guaranteeing that it provided the preferred horizon for elaborating social, political, and cultural

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history that the postcolonial novel then refracted. It is in part this epochality that leads to Jeyifo's proleptic postcolonialism. However this was in no small part because the epochality of the nation took shape under the aegis of a decolonization process that then succeeded in elevating the struggles and sacrifices of political elites against colonialism to the level of an ontological necessity and thereby projected them as the privileged subjects of representation. As Anthony Kwame Appiah points out in the context of African literature, the early novels after decolonization came to reflect the recapitulation of "the classic gestures of nation-formation in the domain of culture."[17] And even with the sharp critiques of postcolonial nation-states that were later to be found in the works of Ngugi wa Thiongo, Ben Okri, Junot Díaz, Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga, and others, the critiques served only as variations on the themes of nation and narration that were well grounded in postcolonial literary history. This is not to say that other themes were not present in the literature, but that somehow what Frederic Jameson came to call the national allegory has remained a central pivot of the postcolonial novel.[18] Even with Salman Rushdie, whom Jeyifo places firmly within the interstitial category of postcoloniality, there is a sense from his work that the nation-state performs the function of a performative epochality and that it is the oscillation between its repeated affirmations and its dissolution by way of heightened narrative experimentations that makes him appear as an exemplary *griot* of the Indian condition, even if he is in fact writing from its disenchanted postcolonial diaspora.[19] In elaborating a complex diasporic and transnational aesthetic in the course of his career, Rushdie has maintained a long-standing interest in moments of epochality as a creative inspiration for his best writing, whether this was the birth of India in *Midnight's Children*, of Pakistan in *Shame*, or of Islam in *The Satanic Verses*. However, after the infamous fatwa of 1989 Rushdie turned decisively away from the trope of the epochal, nation-state-inflected or otherwise. He deploys a somewhat attenuated form of it in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and by *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has abandoned the trope altogether. *Fury*, *Shalimar the Clown*, and *The Enchantress of Florence* have nothing epochal in them, but his latest, *Luka and the Fire of Life*, reprises the terrific storytelling for young adults he showed himself a master of twenty years earlier in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

As Yoon Sun Lee points out in Chapter 8, novels of diaspora help to put another inflection on the epochality of the nation-state. Postcolonial novels of diaspora insist on seeing the nation-state as only one vector for understanding societies and the cultures that they produce. Rather, the emphasis is on the multifaceted character of identities that are stretched over transnational borderlands, and the concomitant opportunities and pitfalls that

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they produce for understanding such identities in the first place. Making central the rubric of diaspora, Lee's chapter discusses some common themes that constitute a singular genre out of which characters in the novels are linked to disparate literary, linguistic, and political histories across the once-imperial world.

From a completely different perspective, it can also be shown that the decolonization project and the postcolonial nation-states that were its direct products also harboured implicitly privileged values of able-bodiedness and certain sexual and gender hierarchies. The able-bodied character was assumed as the focal point of narration, while those with impairments or disabilities were considered either anomalous or otherwise peripheral. In Chapter 6, Clare Barker inverts this template by arguing for the centrality of disabled characters to the postcolonial national allegory in the first place. Through readings of Salman Rushdie's *Shame,* in which the brain-damaged Sufiya Zinobia Shakil embodies the "shame" of Pakistan's violent origins, and Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story*, in which the protagonist's journey through the mental health system is chronicled in tandem with Australia's twentieth-century history, she shows among other things how the interaction between normate and disabled embodiments come to define the essentially unstable and problematic nature of the postcolonial nation-state.[20] Barker also explores the ways in which disabled characters telescope material narratives of violence, corruption and impoverishment in contexts of decolonization and resistance, with a range of examples from Ngũgĩ's *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, V. S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* being used to show how the postcolonial novel mobilizes disability to address questions of voice, self-representation, and agency that are so fundamental to many such novels. In Chapter 7, on the other hand, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* is invoked by Evan Mwangi to read sexuality as an important signifier of power relations that interacts with other variable power asymmetries to define historically situated modes of representation of both sexuality and gender within the postcolonial novel. In both chapters the novelistic representations of the postcolonial nation-state are no longer interpreted as just emblematic of national allegories but rather the crucibles within which social hierarchies are situated, critiqued, and reimagined.

Following the global popularity of magical realist novels from the boom period of Latin American writing in the 1960s, the genre was taken as the signature genre of the global south. That this genre drew liberally from traditions of folklore, myth, and fantasy to infuse its brand of literary representation and pose a challenge to existing Western hegemonic forms of realism was generally celebrated. Zoe Norridge shows in Chapter 4,

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however, that this celebration ignored a major dimension of the representational protocols of magical realism, namely the fact that the so-called "real" itself has always been mediated in the postcolonial novel. She argues that while the postcolonial novel is interested in a corresponding referent in reality – *real* societies, geographies, political regimes, and histories – it is also wary of taking for granted any possibility that such a relationship might be established without being framed through individual and group subjectivities, colored with prejudice, prevailing ideologies, and also alternative means of representation. Thus she suggests a dialectical relationship between enchantment and realism in both the realist and magical realist novels that she discusses.

If realism has been the source of extensive experimentation, then so has also been the representation of the natural environment. This last point has not been prominent in commentaries on the postcolonial novel until the rise of ecocritical theories in the last decade or so. Chapter 5 provides a corrective to this lacuna by a rich ecocritical account of representations of nature and the environment in the postcolonial novel. Anthony Carrigan explores how texts produced in relation to diverse cultural and geographical locations in the period following World War II refract pressing environmental issues such as the relationship between development and urbanization, land and sea rights, and the dynamic links between nonhuman animals, disaster, waste, and ecological imperialism. At the heart of his chapter is a focus on the ways in which postcolonial novels depict power relations as environmentally embedded while at the same time presenting alternative narratives of space and place that dramatize the tensions associated with decolonizing nature in an era of rampant globalization.

The transition from traditional societies depicted in famous works by Chinua Achebe and Raja Rao has come alongside a more general depiction of postcolonial societies as harnessed to the fate of urbanization and modernity. As Rashmi Varma shows in Chapter 11, a central question in the postcolonial novel concerns the city's emergence as a powerful signifier of relations of colonial rule, and of urbanism as key to the colonial project, such that the metropolitan city of the colonial world became the exemplary model of modernist urbanity everywhere. At the same time, she argues, such a modular view ran counter to the real ways in which notions of center and periphery were scattered, twisted, and reconstituted by contestations with, and transformations of, the imperial project, and the centrality of the city within it, leading to literary representations of alternative modernities in which the city served as crucible, hub, and switchboard for the reconstitution of identities. Undergirding representations of the city in postcolonial novels has also been latent ideas of space and space-making. For Robert

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