

Review of Aydemir, Murat, (Ed). *Indiscretions: At the Intersection of Queer and Postcolonial Theory*. Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam & New York, 2011.

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Indiscretions: At the Intersection of Queer and Postcolonial Theory is a good contribution to the theoretical, political and cultural investigations at the intersection of queer and postcolonial theory, as editor Murat Aydemir has managed to bring together a group of excellent authors in the field of cultural analysis who aim to put the postcolonial and the queer into productive dialogue with one another. As he explains in the introduction to the volume, Aydemir's inspiration came from Roderick A. Ferguson's notion of the "ideology of discreteness" (p. 24). Ferguson argues that ideologies such as Marxism and revolutionary nationalism tend to base their analyses of inequality on privileging one axis of oppression over all others, and fail to acknowledge how race, gender and sexuality are mutually productive (p. 24). This volume is to be read as an attempt to correct this blind spot. Through the lens of cultural analysis, the authors make visible the intricate intersections of the seemingly "discrete" realms of postcolonial and queer theory.

The volume is organized around three main themes: gay holiday cruises; rearticulations of sex/race; and queer nations. The first section offers an analysis of orientalist discourses through the lens of homoerotics. The second section explores how notions of the body and desire become racialized or sexualized differently when culturally constructed binaries are traversed. The last part investigates queer postcolonial narratives, asking if and how these narratives offer alternative ways to imagine the nation. As such, each section is devoted to some kind of "indiscrete" crossing of the boundaries between queer and postcolonial theory, the racial and the sexual, and the social and the cultural.

As a play on the multiple meanings of "indiscrete"—which, depending on the context, can mean undefined, loutish or open-ended—the title itself attests to this aim. Throughout the chapters the term "indiscretions" may at times refer to all of these meanings at once. Thus, the notion of "indiscreteness" suggests in itself a multitude of transgressions the authors aim to bring into effect: transgressions of boundaries, of categories, and of norms. At many points these transgressions prove remarkably rich ground on which to reassemble the complex relations of race and sexuality. Other chapters serve as a poignant reminder of how difficult it is to truly transgress certain boundaries, without inadvertently reaffirming others. This problem arises particularly when it appears as if "queer" is taken as a placeholder term to refer to male homosexuality. I will discuss two chapters from each section in order to illustrate when and how productive transgressions are made, and how other transgressions could perhaps be made even more "indiscretely."

In their chapter "Quempire: A Loiterly Journey into Heart of Darkness," Jonathan Mitchell and Micheal O'Rourke reinterpret Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). They suggest that the narrator, Marlow, can be read as an alternative to the linear heteronormative masculine subject of Western colonialism. The strength of the chapter lies in the fact that the authors use the queer school of thought as a critical methodology in order to reread a literary genre that has traditionally been interpreted as quintessentially colonial. Of particular interest is their use of the concept of "loiterature" (p.77). This literary mode is characterized by the presence of liminal characters who don't appear to have a clear goal or identity, and by disruptions of the narrative flow through time-outs. Mitchell and O'Rourke explain that "loiterature" is inherently queer, because it is "disruptive, excessive, and transgressive" and "refuses conclusions about its own meaning" (p. 80). Traditionally understood as

characteristic of gay literature, the authors illustrate that an awareness of the “loiterly” text can produce a new, queer mode of reading colonial literature. Their chapter is therefore a great example of how methodological and theoretical indiscretions bring about politically and academically relevant transgressions.

In “Pleasures of the Orient: Cadinot’s Maghreb as Gay Male Pornotopia,” Jaap Kooijman explores the homo-erotics of orientalism through a comparison of Jean-Daniel Cadinot’s classic gay porn films *Harlem* (1975) and *Hammam* (2004). The plot in Cadinot’s “pornotopia” (p. 98) is always the same: the white protagonist from Paris goes on holiday in the Maghreb to have excessive sex with local men. Kooijman argues that *Harlem* represents a rigid top/bottom dichotomy that reduces Arab men to their genitals, which he convincingly argues to be an orientalist trope in gay male pornography. In the more recent film *Hammam* Kooijman detects a less rigid dynamic. While the topic is fascinating and Kooijman’s style seductive, his chapter seems to lack the more profound sense of indiscretion to which the title of the volume refers. Whereas Mitchell and O’Rourke truly bring about a transgression of the boundaries between the queer and the postcolonial, Kooijman’s analysis appears to rely on a notion of queer that is unselfconsciously male and gay, which prevents a truly productive sense of indiscretion.

One of the most notable contributions in the second section is “Of Passing and Other Cures: Arjan Ederveen’s *Born in the Wrong Body* and the Cultural Construction of Essentialism,” by Maaïke Bleeker. In this chapter Bleeker offers a compelling analysis of the short fictional documentary *Born in the Wrong Body* (1996) by Dutch film-maker Arjan Ederveen. In this early mockumentary, a typical Dutch family is shaken by the father’s admission that he has always felt that he is an African tribesman “born in the wrong body” (p. 129). He is diagnosed as “transracial,” and through surgical interventions his body is brought in concordance with his “authentic” self, which as Bleeker dryly comments is of course the clichéd image of the African “bushman” from Dutch children’s books (p. 130). The protagonist’s failure to realize his authentic self through bodily modification allows Bleeker to illustrate that the body is “a cultural invention, naturalized as the biological other of culture and civilization” (p. 130), that is: a cultural invention. Attempts to bring bodies into concordance with imaginary categories of race and gender, Bleeker argues, are based on the modernist European fantasies of the authentic self and the controllability of nature. Her erudite contribution enriches the queer critique of the psychoanalytical subject with a reading of the postcolonial body, which makes it truly transgressive.

In “Blood Brothers,” Murat Aydemir discusses Bram Stoker’s classic horror novel *Dracula* (1897). The title of the chapter relates to the scene in which the men share their blood amongst each other, and with Dracula, through blood transfusions. Aydemir analysis echoes on the one hand, the old tradition of psychoanalytical literary criticism, and on the other, the much younger and burgeoning discipline of masculinity studies. He centres male bonding based on his concept of dynamic of inter-male group relationality. His argument is that in *Dracula* this relationality is simultaneously racializing and sexualizing. Aydemir bases his analysis on three important theorists of relationality: Edward Said’s dialectic of filiation and affiliation, Jacques Derrida’s politics of friendship and Kosofsky Sedgwick’s male homosocial desire. Aydemir’s interpretation of the crucial scene in which the male protagonists share their blood suggests the emergence of a new “collective subjectivity” (p. 178) that traverses the culturally constructed binaries between friendship/brotherhood, alliance/kinship and friendship/desire, through the act of sharing their blood. Aydemir queers

patriarchal relations of kinship through the metaphor of blood transfusions whereas Bleeker queers an authentic notion of self.

In the final section, Nishant Shashani addresses the tendency within queer theory to centre Euro-American paradigms in theorizing sexuality. In “What can Queer Theory Learn from Feminism in India?: Reversing Epistemological Frames,” Shashani claims that queer theory can actually learn a thing or two from Indian feminism. She criticizes the biased Western queer movement’s stance against gay marriage—which is framed as resistance against heteronormative assimilation—arguing that in the Indian context, gay marriage has an emancipatory potential for sexual minorities. While correct in her assessment that the global Queer movement tends to pay insufficient attention to the particularity of the situations and needs of non-Western queers, Shashani herself appears to homogenize the experiences and politics of queers throughout the West. Whilst her fight for equal rights for “gay” couples (p. 234) is a worthy one, she does not pay attention to the fact that in many Western countries, despite having obtained the right to marry, married ‘gay couples’ do not enjoy the same protective rights as married ‘heterosexual couples.’ In the Netherlands for instance, same-sex couples are allowed to marry under (theoretically) the same constitutional principles as heterosexuals. Nevertheless, this does not automatically guarantee equal rights in terms of parenthood. Whereas a man in a ‘heterosexual couple’ can claim his partner’s child as his own (whether or not it is genetically his), non-birth parents in a same-sex marriage need to establish parentage through a lawyer. As long as heteronormative ideologies concerning parentage and community remain intact, the right to marry may have limited emancipatory potential, depending on the legal context. She rightly points out that when it comes to international aid from Western NGO’s, there is a tendency to project Western ideologies on to postcolonial contexts. As one of the few articles in this volume, the strength of her chapter is that it centres a postcolonial perspective.

The volume ends with Ryan D. Fong’s article, “Weaving a Different Kind of Tartan: Musicality, Spectrality, and Kinship in Jackie Kay’s *Trumpet*.” Fong argues that while the traditional idea of Scottishness as prevalent throughout the Scottish literary tradition is heteronormative, patriarchal, and white, Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet* (1998) constructs a different notion of Scottishness through its character and its narrative structure. The central character of the novel is loosely based on the transgender American jazz-pianist Billy Tipton, but Kay rewrites him as Joss Moody, an African immigrant in Scotland. Fong reads his diasporic, racialized and gendered identity as a queer and postcolonial reconceptualisation of Scottishness. As Moody has died shortly before the beginning of the narrative, the reader is invited to fill in the gaps of Joss Moody’s identity through the fragmented narratives of the people close to him. Fong argues that this multiplicity of voices, together with the poetic language of the novel, brings about a sense of haunting that highlights the liminality of the migrant, transgendered main character. Interestingly, Fong suggests that “in *Trumpet*, “the transnational and the transgender perpetually haunt one and other” (p. 258). It is the mixing of postcolonial and queer pasts that produces both suffering and trauma as well as possibilities for forging new forms of kinship and identity.

It is not until the last section that the notion of queer is problematized. In the first two sections queer is often conflated with sexuality, more specifically, homosexuality. This is at times unfortunate considering that the aim of this book is to bring the postcolonial and the queer into productive dialogue. The volume begs the question whether, and if so why, the queer subject is perpetually conceptualized and represented as a white, privileged homosexual man. A good follow-up edition to this volume could include articles that reflect

on more diversely gendered expressions of (trans)sexuality, since queerness in its most productive theoretical capacity questions gender more so than it does desire. In the same vein, a follow-up could perhaps reflect more explicitly on the situatedness of both the researchers and the cultural artifacts, and the way relationships between the two are constructed through the mutually constitutive roles and effects of gender, sexuality and race.

Scholars in the field of cultural analysis will find this volume a welcome addition, with diverse, well-written, thorough, and at times very original analyses of film and literature at the intersection of postcolonial and queer theory. That the intersections between queer and postcolonial theories provide a rich breeding ground for cultural analysis is well illustrated by the contributions in this volume.

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