

Panel K: African articulation of global change: Reading perceptions of modernity (chair: Maria Olausson)

Panel Abstract

This panel discusses African literary and other cultural expressions of modernity and change in a global context. The spatial and temporal tropes generally used when discussing global change tend to place African representations in a position of belatedness, the “not yet” in relation to Europe, a position which is at times challenged, at times reinforced through the colonial – postcolonial binary. The papers presented in this panel seek to address the trajectories of diverse practises and ideas which come into being through the interaction of local and global histories as well as the means by which these ideas are expressed within an African context. Of particular importance here are the literary expressions which engage with the politics of knowledge production and which point to the global legacy and the multidirectional impact of this history. Such representations also engage critically with ideas of an original “Western” modernity and other later and lesser versions, and instead allow us to rethink the trajectories of change. By exploring representations of diverse concerns, such as forced migration, the history of slavery, questions of nationalism and democracy, and drawing on both pre-colonial and on present day South – South connections, African articulations of change are placed in a context which stresses their contributions to interpretations of phenomena which appear in a global context.

1) David Bell (Umeå University, Sweden): “Subverting the Ideals of Independence and Democracy: The critique of neo-colonialism in Zakes Mda’s plays and novels”

Zakes Mda’s first published play *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1976) exhibits many of the features, both literary and thematic, that characterise the body of his work. Principal among them, from this earliest play to his latest novel *Black Diamond* (2009), is the distorting effect of external capital on the aims and ambitions of newly independent, democratic countries. This neo-colonial perspective on developments in countries such as South Africa and Lesotho, and other un-named newly independent states draws attention to the downside of what currently goes under the rubric of Globalisation. In this paper I deploy an understanding of globalisation as a conceptual framework, with both its advocates and detractors, that is in keeping with a tradition of behaviour described variously as colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism, and which is driven by an underlying sense of progress; the drive for modernity. It is one of the attractions, and merits, of fiction that it creates a space within which readers may examine critically and reflect on conventional wisdoms, among them ideas of progress and modernity. Mda’s works challenge our perceptions of race, discrimination and economic exploitation in relation to South Africa and Lesotho by confronting us, as readers or audience, with a sharpened sense of moral choices. These positions are then constantly shaken in a manner which forces us to accept or reject our own complicity in the course of events. Mda is not only concerned with historical injustices, but also with contemporary issues of corruption and exploitation that threaten the integrity of independent and democratic societies.

2) Ashleigh Harris (Uppsala University/University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa): Estranging the Nation: Rescuing Foreignness in Contemporary Zimbabwean Writing

3) Stefan Helgesson (Stockholm University, Sweden): “Translating modernities: Mia Couto, Assia Djebar and the global spaces of writing”

Proceeding from the assumption that cultural translation is central to Mia Couto's and Assia Djebar's writerly projects, this paper will attempt to demonstrate how their translational impetus is in constant flux, not only in the source texts but more particularly as these works continue to be translated and inserted into new linguistic and geographical contexts. Bluntly put, the content and history of their *oeuvres* differs greatly if we look across languages such as Portuguese, French, English, German, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish. It can be argued, therefore, that our reading of Couto's and Djebar's translations of modernity need to cultivate an awareness of the institutional framing and inherent instability of "literature" as a transnational phenomenon. One motivation for looking jointly at Couto and Djebar is the ambivalent way in which the name of the nation – "Mozambique" and "Algeria", respectively – figures in their work as both an inescapable, determining focus for their writerly desire, and a contested space torn between patriarchal law and women's freedom, between European and local regimes of knowledge, between memories of violation and the need for reconciliation. As is often observed, this ambivalence manifests itself particularly in their self-reflexive uses of Portuguese and French. This understanding, which conventionally (but often in bad faith) sees the author as the originator and ultimate determining instance of meaning in literature, needs however to be supplemented with a perspective that highlights the agency of the many translators of Couto and Djebar as co-creators and "differentiators" of their writing in the multiple networks of world literature.

4) Anna Greek (Linnaeus University, Sweden): Conditions of Not: articulations of transition in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

This paper focuses the effects on the identity of an individual character who is caught in the crossfire between conflicting cultural and political identities. In her novel of 2006 *The Book of Not*, the Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga articulates this problem area through the representation of the main character Tambu. Drawing on postcolonial theory, cultural studies and psychoanalytic-linguistic theory, the paper addresses Tambu's first-person narrative of the political transition from apartheid Rhodesia to majority-rule Zimbabwe as well as her own transition from the identity of a culturally displaced village girl in a war zone to that of a struggling young city professional in the supposedly non-racist Zimbabwe. In tracing the trajectory of Tambu's development the paper discusses the contact zones of the village, a secondary school, a city office and a residential hostel. These transitional processes are, for the main character, fraught with loss of meaning and an increasingly fragmented sense of cultural and personal identity.

Insofar as modernity includes the transition from tradition-based clan societies to individualist city life and the fragmentation of the idea of unified self-identity, Dangarembga's novel is one of many contemporary African articulations of global modernity.

5) Jopi Nyman (University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu): Narrating Southern African Refugee Life in Simao Kikamba's *Going Home*

6) Maria Olausen (Linnaeus University in Sweden): 'The sound of sand and small stones:' Indian Ocean Narratives of Slavery

This presentation forms part of a larger project where I study the way fiction is produced through the use of the colonial archive. The project brings together South African novels and poetry dealing with the history of slavery at the Cape and focuses on the use of fiction as a

way of positioning and expressing the author as descendant, both in a literal sense and in the figurative meaning as inheritor of the legacy of slavery. In this presentation I will focus primarily on *The Slave Book* (1998) by Rayda Jacobs and briefly look at how the theme of ancestry is approached in two very different later novels, *Kites of Good Fortune* (2004) by Therese Benadé and *Unconfessed* (2006) by Yvette Christiansë. In their search for the figure of the slave the authors both challenge and utilize ideas of the archive as a site of the original and the real as well as perceived notions of family and ancestry. They deal with material produced during the early Dutch settlement of the Cape, a slave society from the start, where, until the British took over in 1795 and brought slaves from Mozambique and other parts of Africa, the majority of slaves were imported from Asian and Southwestern Indian Ocean regions as part of trading network the Dutch East India Company. Studies of slavery, indentured labour and free migrants show that the movement of people across the Indian Ocean has evolved over a period of approximately four thousand years in multidirectional patterns of migration where the distinctions between slave, indentured labourer, convict and free settler are blurred and do not follow clear cut racial or ethnic divisions. These movements testify to global change through a combination of different intellectual traditions developed within a history of south–south patterns of exchange. Although the documents produced by colonial administrations evolve around the production and perpetuation of social taxonomies, they function also, in Ann Laura Stoler’s words, as “active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own” (Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 1). Present day South African novels of slavery are formed by the intellectual traditions of the Indian Ocean World as well as the generative function of the colonial archive.

7) Jenny Siméus (Linnaeus University, Sweden): The Issue of Narrative Power in Elsa Joubert’s *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena* and Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story*

8) John A Stotesbury (University of Eastern Finland): “The second thing that I have to confess is that I am a Muslim woman”: Rayda Jacobs’s *Confessions of a Gambler* as Post-apartheid Cinema

9) Anna Thyberg (Linnaeus University, Sweden): Four female student readers of Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen*: Reinforcing national identity in a globalized contact zone?

In today’s world of instant online interaction, large migration flows, and unprecedented expansion of tourism and travel, global perspectives and multiculturalism are considered essential parts of education in democratic countries. Apart from electronic communication, postcolonial literature could be one way of introducing aspects of globalization into the language classroom. In an application of Mary Louise Pratt’s concept “the contact zone”, I would like to suggest that postcolonial texts can function as contact zones since they give the students a chance to encounter fictional representations of voices and perspectives from previously unknown global settings. In this paper I will study the reader response of four female Swedish upper secondary students to a postcolonial text in order to explore how concepts of tradition and modernity in European vs. African societies are formulated and discussed in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The novel which the students read is Buchi Emecheta’s *Second-Class Citizen* (1974). I find that Emecheta’s depiction of Nigeria leads to discussions of Africa which construct and reinforce the students’ national identity and privileged position. Furthermore, the treatment of spousal abuse in the text stimulates the students to articulate their values on gender issues and reflect on sociological factors impacting on human behavior vs. psychologically oriented explanation

models. Thus the students move between different reading stances depending on whether they consider group or individual perspectives and this also affects how they construct notions of tradition and modernity.

10) Lin Bernard Nka (University of Bergen, Norway): The chronotope of the city in Mongo Beti's *Ville cruelle*, *Perpétue* and *Branle-bas en noir et blanc*: from clichés to exuberance.

In his essay *Aesthetics and theory of the novel*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1978) defines the chronotope as "time-space": the essential correlation of spatio-temporal relationships, as it has been assimilated through literature. " The city, a symbol of the Western presence in Africa and a meeting point between the two civilizations is central in Mongo Beti's novels, as the Cameroonian writer whose works best trace the development of relations between his homeland and France from colonization to the present. Thus, *Ville cruelle* his first novel is, according to him, a symbolic place, the tilting of small farmers in an urban world, the white city where blacks had no voice. So they endeavour to settle by ethnic affinities in such a way that there are finally two Tangas, two worlds, two destinies (20). *Perpétue*, a chronicle of the misery of the people in the postcolonial dictatorship is a journey into ruins, repression, poverty, promiscuity, death. The city is symbolically represented as a cemetery inhabited by ghosts, which portrays the state of the whole country. *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* brings in a totally different environment with the adventures of Eddie, the African private detective, and the French adventurer beginning "here" (7) and ending "there" (351). The three novels recreate three representations of the city in the existential world of the globalization bound African, as he coexists with the other party who imposed himself on him and in his own land. We intend to address how, after the colonial and dictatorial cities which are strongly typed and featuring emotional values, the "world city" poses the problem of the "drowning" identity of Africa.

11) Anna-Leena Toivanen (University of Jyväskylä, Finland): Reading Uneasy Dislocations in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*

Postcolonial literary discussions have been fascinated with the notion of dislocation from a (specific) migrant perspective. While, theoretically, the notion of dislocation can be empowering, its complex material realities challenge any simplistic celebration. This paper analyses the themes of dislocation and movement in two Zimbabwean novels, Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009). Vera's novel takes place in the settings of the Zimbabwean anti-colonial freedom struggle, its viewpoint being that of the gendered subaltern. The novel's protagonist is in a perpetual state of movement which is motivated by an imperative to escape a traumatic memory. The protagonist's condition of dislocation is marked by her failure to establish belonging on her own terms, outside the logic of nationalist discourses. Chikwava's novel addresses the theme from a different angle, namely that of illegal immigration. The novel's protagonist, a Mugabe supporter and a former youth militia member, travels destitute to London in order to earn money to get him out of trouble back home. Here, too, the motive behind dislocation is violence, echoing the crisis in the geopolitical space of the postcolony. Transnational movement in this context is a condition of disenfranchisement without potential for upward mobility in the new location. The fact that the narrative viewpoint is that of a perpetrator complicates the setting even further. The novels under scrutiny tell as much about the movement as about the space from which one is dislocated: the national informs the protagonists' displaced conditions in

somewhat uneasy ways. The texts raise questions of who, and where, is the displaced subject and what are the reasons that motivate the movement.