

Postcolonial (Dis)Affections

Edited by
Walter Göbel and Saskia Schabio

Walter Göbel, Therese Fischer-Seidel, Klaus Stierstorfer (Hg.)

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Postcolonial (Dis)Affections: Introductory Remarks

In the last few years, the postcolonial world has been mapped with the help of economic, social, political and linguistic methodologies, which have helped us to understand how mechanisms of subjection and resistance play out in imperialist, neo-imperialist and globalizing contexts and how cultural norms and sign systems are translated in the process. There is, however, also an ‘inside’ story to intercultural contact, a story concerning the psychological and the affective which shows up in collections of letters, in autobiographies, in novels and plays. This story has traditionally been mapped onto binary oppositions of containment vs. lack of restraint, of mind vs. body, which have led to stereotypical projections, for example of the noble savage, of the cannibal, of Western returns to savagery (e.g. Kurtz) or of afrocentric concepts of the ‘sun people’ vs. the ‘ice people’. While acknowledging this history of the mapping of the passions and emotions, the essays in this volume attempt to move beyond traditional oppositional images and to anticipate more intricate – though generally not yet symmetrical – forms of intercultural exchange, which result when affections – along with the disaffections they quite often inspire – are translated.

While on the one hand stories of successful or unsuccessful affective ‘investments’ and negotiations may appear to belong to private history and the collective unconscious (Philippe Ariès), they also elucidate the public networks of signification in which they occur. Grammars of the passions and feelings (as for example explored by Norbert Elias for early modern European cultures), histories of misunderstandings, of beliefs, patterns of self-fashioning and customs, which facilitate or hinder symmetrical forms of intercultural communication, lead us to the heart of personal cross-cultural conflicts and of specific mentalities. The subtleties of certain grammars of feeling are not analyzed in scientific literature so much as in autobiographical and fictive texts, which project individual lifestyles and test the boundaries of specific concepts of the self. In postcolonial literature such texts can reveal the hidden conventions of gift-giving, the etiquette of invitations and rejections as well as the patterns governing gender roles and exchanges of feelings and passions. Classical texts which articulate such intricacies of emotional exchanges and explore the tragic nature of failed invitations or thwarted affections are E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson*. In these exemplary novels affections are offered as gifts beyond a strict economy of exchange or surplus value, but then come into conflict with social, economic, religious and epistemologic discourses.

We know from the culture of feeling in eighteenth-century Europe, that patterns of emotional exchanges can be politically subversive as well as inhibiting. How the good heart and exemplary human values of sympathy and compassion were then estab-

lished, policed or even denounced, defined the emergence of an anti-aristocratic 'habitus'. Similarly, the policing and liberating of passions and feelings in postcolonial cultural contact zones can define specific faultlines of colour, class, gender and economic advantage. Tracing aspects of the history of the emotions/passions will also shed new light upon the development of (post)colonial disaffections: alienation and estrangement from a dominant culture, as well as from the (imagined) homeland have characterized many experiences of decolonization, while images of subaltern anger, rage and emotional excess in their various forms have lent support to eurocentric notions of self-control and civilized behaviour. In this volume we shall be focusing mainly upon the extended black Atlantic and thus to some extent following up on our former volume, *Beyond the Black Atlantic*. Inevitably the theme of ethnic discrimination will come to the foreground, along with some of the darker aspects of decolonization – more so than in investigations of what has been termed the *settler colonies*.

Bill Ashcroft begins with the theme of disaffection by investigating sites of local resistance to forms of US hyperimperialism. He asks to what extent it may be possible for the colonized subject to appropriate strategic forms of counter-discourse and counter-representation in the media as a basis for resistance and empowerment. Can the disempowered interpolate a different representation into the dominant discourses or, to put it another way, how articulate can the subaltern become? Saskia Schabio attempts to provide a tentative answer by exploring the outlines of an 'aesthetics of disaffection', as suggested by V. S. Naipaul. Alienation, estrangement and the search for an authentic voice, topics of many a Western Künstlerroman, allow for a comparative (anthropological) approach to postcolonial aesthetics, while questioning Eurocentric claims to the discipline of aesthetics since the enlightenment. At the same time attempts to restrict the postcolonial artist to an aesthetics of mimesis and sympathy, as in *littérature engagée*, are firmly rejected. Frank Schulze-Engler also looks at the way oppositions between the West and its Others have been constructed and he considers how postcolonial nations can move out of the shadow cast by Western modernity and modernization. Schulze-Engler's analysis of the dialectics of Othering and of disaffection offers a framework for the papers to follow. Annette Bühler-Dietrich's essay dovetails with Saskia Schabio's in its focus on the aesthetics of disaffection and suffering. She presents a close reading of Homi Bhabha's language of affect as developed by his misreadings of Frantz Fanon. Pain and anxiety, in Fanon directed towards a humanist past, are in Bhabha diverted towards experiences of ambivalence and disorientation that beset the enunciation of the colonial/decolonized subject. Fanon's social and racial registers are thus replaced by psychological ones. In Bhabha's world anxiety is likely to be triggered by an agonistic state of hybridity rather than by recollected experiences of suffering.

The second section of the book deals with the translation of emotions in intercultural contact zones. Sue Kossew presents some examples of the way cultural identities have been reinvented in post-apartheid South Africa, and she highlights the affective