

# H-Net Reviews

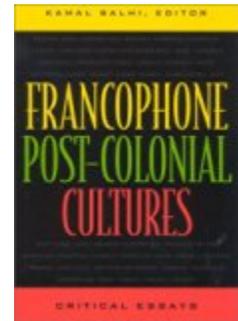
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Kamal Salhi, ed. *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures: Critical Essays*. New York: Lexington Books, 2003. ix + 471 pp. \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0567-2; \$44.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7391-0568-9.

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Published on H-Africa (September, 2004)



Recently the fields of postcolonial theory and Francophone studies have risen to prominence in the academy, together exploring the diversity and complexity of the Francophone world following the colonial period. Kamal Salhi's edited volume, entitled *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures: Critical Essays*, represents a new chapter in the emerging dialogue between postcolonial theory and Francophone studies. *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures* seeks to provide an extensive, although not exhaustive, and up-to-date assessment of the history and the cultures of the French-speaking world.

Salhi's edited volume is monumental in breadth and scope. The book is divided into seven parts, each representing a region of the world, for a total of twenty-nine stimulating and thought-provoking essays written by both well-established and up-and-coming scholars. Each of the essays focuses on the literary texts and cultural identity of the Francophone world from North America to the Indian Ocean. The volume focuses on issues concerning the diaspora, hybridity, and alterity, nationalism and transnationalism, as well as multilingualism and multiculturalism. More specifically, the volume is concerned with migration, exile, racism, hybridity, alterity, globalization and the way in which all of these impact the making, unmaking, and remaking of the post-colonial world. The volume and its contributors position the study of the Francophone world as a comparative and transnational project, thus examining the history and cultures of the French-speaking world within nation-states and across national boundaries.

The volume opens with a short introduction by the editor, which defines the trajectory of the following es-

says; essays that challenge the structural textual analysis of the Francophone world, while moving beyond the important and provocative theories set forth by Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire. For Salhi the goal is to move beyond the "rigidity of representations that reduce the world to binary opposites" (p. xii), in turn, giving voice to the multiplicity of Francophone postcolonial cultures. In other words, for Salhi the essays that precede his introduction speak of the fluidness and flexibility of what has been defined as the Francophone world.

The introduction is followed by Margaret Majumdar's foundational essay "The Francophone World Moves into the Twenty-First Century." Here Majumdar explores the issues of time, space, and difference within the Francophone world, while also highlighting the importance of the political and economic dimensions of the Francophone world. Majumdar also presents a lucid, yet short account of the contradictions embedded in the relationships that exist between France and the Francophone world, particularly with French-speaking African countries.

Due to the breadth of such a work, the entire book is not specifically geared for Africanists. As mentioned above, the book includes essays about the Francophone world at large, thus several of the essays touch upon issues related to North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. Despite the non-specificity of many of the articles in relation to Africa and the African diaspora, the book is best appreciated when read in its entirety. However, each of the essays, whether on Africa or Europe, can be read separately due to the self-contained nature of each essay.

Of particular importance to Africanists, however, are parts 1 (North Africa and the Middle East), 2 (Sub-Saharan Africa), and 3 (the Caribbean), more specifically chapters 2-16. Drawing on examples from Africa and the Caribbean, these chapters discuss aspects of tradition and modernity as well as the cultural hybridity of postcolonial identities. For instance, in part 1, Mohammed-Salah Omari's essay entitled "Collective Memory and representation in Tunisian Literature" speaks of the important and often underrepresented artistic works of Fawzi Mellah. Omari locates the "questioning and reconstruction of memory" found in Mellah's plays and novels "as a form of communal and personal meaning in a modern Tunisia intent on the erasure of the past" (p. 52). In chapter 7, Jonathan Carr-West brings to the fore the works of novelists Labou Tansi, Calixthe Beyala, and Werewere Liking. Similar to Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, the works of Tansi, Beyala, and Liking are wonderful and little-used examples of the hybridity of postcolonial African identity. For Carr-West, "despite a rhetoric of national coherence, the modern African state is significantly more hybrid, more Creole than it appears" and such is evident in reading the artistic products of Tansi, Beyala, and Liking (p. 81). For many Africans, "identity is constructed in the interstices of a variety of ontological loci (nationality, gender, race, etc.) and not by any single one of them" (p. 86). Carr-West's reading of Tansi, Beyala, and Liking is informed by Edouard Glissant's theory of creolization, which sees postcolonial identities as the amalgamation of a variety of discourses. More importantly, Carr-West illustrates how African novels may provide a way of better understanding postcolonial theories.

Gloria Nne Onyeoziri's "Revisiting the 'Roman de la Desillusion': A Semiotic and Cultural Reading of Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*" examines the narrative structure of Sembene's fourth novel and the way in which the play of language in *Xala* helps the reader to understand postcolonial disillusionment and crisis. As Onyeoziri posits, the postcolonial experience in *Xala* is "both crushing and unstable, characterized by binary oppositions: tradition/modernity, us/me, external greatness/internal emptiness" (pp. 104-105). In short, Sembene's *Xala* represents an extraordinary example of the reconceptualization of African social space, from communitarian to individualistic social space.

Rachael Langford's essay "Challenging the Colonization of Space: Exteriors and Interiors in the Films of Ousmane Sembene and Souleymane Cisse" examines Sembene's and Cisse's representations of African space in

films like *Borrom Street*, *Guelwaar*, *Finye* and *Waati*. For Langford each of these films represents a challenge to the ideological legacy of colonialism by attacking elements of colonial and neocolonial discourses of space, particularly the notion of boundaries, which for Sembene and Cisse do exist, but will not and do not limit the experience and growth of Africa and Africans. In other words, postcolonial boundaries are unstable and fluid and Africans will continue to test their integrity.

Part 3 on the Caribbean gives much attention to the works of Maryse Conde and her piercing rebuke of cultural authenticity and locality in Caribbean history and culture. Florence Martin, on the other hand, in "Literature in Guiana: The D'Chimbo Narratives," examines Guianese literature and its Foucauldian-like deconstruction of power discourse. In particular Martin uses the work of Elie Stephenson to illustrate that each D'Chimbo narrative reflects a moment of political consciousness and identity construction. More importantly, each D'Chimbo narrative reflects on what it is to be French Guianese. Other essays interrogate Guadeloupean literature and the complexities of modern Guadeloupe as pronounced in its literary texts and the history and cultural identity found in Haitian writings, those both written in French and English. The rest of the volume examines the postcolonial cultures of North America, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

The appendix provides two useful tools: summaries of selected creative and critical works, and a glossary. The summaries of selected creative and critical works is a handy reference guide to the important pieces of literature and film that have been produced since the demise of colonialism. Each summary is short, yet concise, which leaves the reader with a general understanding of the importance of the works of people like Souleymane Cisse, Ousmane Sembene, Ferid Boughedia, Maryse Conde, Robert Ranau, Ferdinand Oyoro, and others. In short, this appendix reads like an alternative list of canonical literary works. The glossary, which includes people and commonly used words and terms in postcolonial theory and Francophone studies is also a handy reference for readers unfamiliar with the two fields of study. Despite the usefulness of the glossary, all French passages throughout the volume are un-translated, thus making it difficult for non-French readers to grasp the subtle nuances and richness of each essay. This is especially problematic since the book is geared for an Anglo-speaking audience. Although selective, the bibliography provides an extensive list of Francophone literary works.

In short, *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures* is focused and accessible to advanced students and their teachers who wish to go beyond the French literary canon and a valuable reference to any Africanist. The essays display historical depth and theoretical finesse, thus providing a starting point for the examination of the cultural differences and commonalities that comprise the Francophone world today. In a word, this volume has the ability to trigger a dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone scholars of postcolonialism and to further Africanists understanding of postcolonial Africa and the diaspora.

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**Citation:** Paul Khalil Saucier. Review of Salhi, Kamal, ed., *Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures: Critical Essays*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. September, 2004.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9774>

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