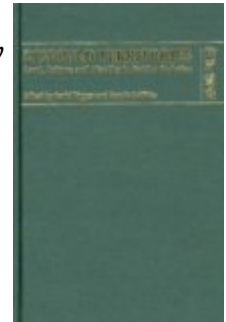




David Trigger, Gareth Griffiths, eds.. *Disputed Territories: Land, Culture and Identity in Settler Societies*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. xiv + 321 pp. \$49.50, cloth, ISBN 978-962-209-648-6.



Reviewed by Sue Kossew

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There are a number of ways in which the essays collected in this book are "disputed territory," as pointed out in the extensive introduction by David Trigger. One of the most interesting for me is the disputed territory of disparate disciplinary approaches, notably the ethnographical approach to land, culture, and identity, which takes a materialist and broadly practical perspective by interviewing people and recording data, and the textual approach of historical and literary studies, which emphasizes the constructed nature of reality and analyses the texts which form part of these social and cultural formations. This disciplinary "split" is addressed in both the introduction and afterword, written respectively by the volume's co-editors. David Trigger is an ethnographer and Gareth Griffiths a literary scholar, so their dialogic book-ending of the text is in itself an interesting exercise. I would suggest a reading of these two pieces before approaching the other chapters. Both editors call for such interdisciplinary debates to become more accepted within the academy, and for exchanges across the social sciences to enrich what is often seen as the specific fenced-off territory of each discipline, yet it seems that

the divide remains symbolically embedded within the text itself.

This does not, however, detract from its originality and its overall purpose of providing a number of differing ways of analyzing land, culture and identity in the settler colonies of the South, that is, Australasia and Southern Africa. This important topic of interest to postcolonial literary scholars, geographers, historians and cultural ethnographers draws attention to other more familiar areas of contestation, such as the differences between European and colonial perceptions of land and landscape and those of indigenous peoples which are most clearly imaged in art and literature. For the early European settlers, for example, the picturesque meant a landscape devoid of activity as opposed to an indigenous view of landscape as active, filled with people and animals. This basic cultural divergence has other implications, too, as in the appropriation of specific sites for commerce, tourism or preservation. National parks, for example, are seen as environmentally positive ways of preserving pristine natural spaces by non-indigenous people, whereas

for indigenous people, it is more important to use such culturally marked places for ceremonial and social gatherings. While these ideas are already in wide circulation in postcolonial scholarship, the volume is interesting for its ranging over Australian, New Zealand and South African cultural texts, including both indigenous and non-indigenous or settler perspectives on land, and for an implicit comparative dimension across the "great Southern lands" even though there is only one chapter that makes a direct comparison, Jane Caruthers's piece on contesting cultural landscapes in South African and Australian national parks. As pointed out in the introduction, such comparative studies of these settler societies are often productive and all too infrequent, particularly if they do not attempt to elide differences. However, like an earlier volume entitled *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* edited by Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner, and Sarah Nuttall (1996) referred to in the introduction, the chapters in this book (apart from Caruthers's) are comparative in their juxtaposition rather than in their analyses. The reader has to do the work here of making links and finding both differences and similarities: perhaps this could have been more effectively made part of the brief.

All of the essays published in this volume engage with these issues in different ways and despite the difference in disciplinary approaches, each, as Griffiths points out in his afterword, has a common thread, that of narrative or story-telling itself, whether this is gathered by a "sensitive ethnography," as he calls it, or by equally sensitive textually based reading practices. Each can gain from the other despite their different methodologies and, as Griffiths demonstrates from the example he gives of his own academic practice of researching East African missionary texts, he believes that this cross-fertilization is vital for academic practice, even for the specifically trained literary scholar. Any text, he suggests, cannot be fully understood outside of its site-specific place so the scholar has access to the "staging of social

life and identities" within that cultural space as well as to the ways in which these may be constructed or represented in the text itself. Thus, literary scholars must be both literary and ethnographic researchers, and ethnographers similarly need to take account of textual evidence and fictional constructions to contextualize their practical research. In illustrating this type of reading, Griffiths gives the example of his observation of a dance performance in Zanzibar in 1995 which could be read as performing a similar objectification and commodification of "Africanness" to early colonial representations of Africans. It was, he suggests, only when he interviewed the dancers personally that he was able to gain a fuller perspective on the notions of "authenticity" and "tradition" that a "free-floating textual reading" of the dance would not have produced. In anticipating the question about the practicality of his suggestion that scholars become expert in both textual and material research, he suggests that a more reasonable solution may be for scholars from these different disciplines to collaborate on such investigations, rather than expecting one person to have the necessary expertise. In the course of collaborative tasks, it is implied, rigid disciplinary boundaries would be effaced and would lead to "productive collaboration among scholars who typically do not speak to one another enough in the universities of the early twenty-first century" (p. 315). As the acknowledgements show, cross-disciplinary collaboration involving a number of scholars was part of the process by which the book came into being.

A brief overview of the chapters, in the order in which they appear, and their authors' approaches should illustrate the volume's range. Catherine Nash's cultural geographical essay on Irish diasporic identities and genealogy, while seeming somewhat distant from the other chapters, explores more generally the theme of belonging within settler societies and the need to trace ancestral roots to a "home." Michèle Dominy writes from an anthropological perspective but, in

the spirit of the volume's inter-disciplinarity, uses New Zealand novelist Maurice Shadbolt's *Monday's Warriors* among other literary and historical texts to discuss the issue of colonial invasion in Aotearoa-New Zealand through "ecological encounters" where the settlers' introduction of grass is juxtaposed with indigenous vegetation. Roslynn Haynes similarly focuses on natural landscapes and specifically the evolution of the idea of wilderness in Tasmania to interrogate competing notions of the value of land in a range of cultural texts. Taking up the close link between representation and ideology, Ian McLean, by means of an analysis of the "picturesque," shows how eighteenth-century visual interpretations of Sydney Cove illustrated not just a particular site but also the artists' ideological readings of "what the relations between Indigenous and settler populations were or might become."

In her specific focus on indigenous African responses to European evangelical Christian texts (particularly visual texts) and ideas, Isabel Hofmeyr shows how the early twentieth-century Lesotho writer, Thomas Mofolo, uses landscapes encountered in these European missionary texts and traditional Sotho landscapes to configure new identity-formations in his first novel. This focus on indigenous responses to land and identity is continued in an Australian context in the two chapters that follow, written from broadly anthropological perspectives: Valda Blundell's reading of depictions of the Wandjina in the rock art of north-west Australia; and Neville White's analysis of the ways in which the Yolngu people of northern Australia conceive of the land and landscapes both spiritually and aesthetically. Norman Etherington's chapter shows, through detailed analysis of particular cartographic practices, how historical maps drawn of South Africa often concealed their ideological and political purposes, misrepresenting and distorting both physical and cultural features of the land. Jane Carruthers's chapter (mentioned above) compares two national parks, one in South Africa and one in Australia, and re-

lates them to the displacement of their original indigenous inhabitants, San and Aborigine. As "symbolic landscapes," these parks played a significant role in realigning national identities and conserving natural landscapes. By drawing out similarities as well as differences, Carruthers explores the often fraught links between land, culture, and identity in these settler societies. The final chapter by Paul Carter, whose previous work has been so influential in conceptualizing space and place, takes up the issue of mapping the land. He traces the territorializing effects of the graphics used in maps and contrasts these with ichnography (the study of tracks), making some thought-provoking suggestions about ways of tracing movement in graphic form in a non-linear, deterritorialized way.

It will be evident even from this brief overview that this collection contains a variety of approaches and topics that cover a wide range of disciplines, locations, and themes, all connected to land, culture, and identity. With useful illustrations and a very detailed summary of each chapter in the introduction, this volume--by eminent scholars--is a valuable addition to and development of the important issue of the "disputed territories" of settler societies and of the ongoing and reciprocal nature of colonial and post-colonial exchanges.

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