

Novel Approaches to Understanding and Conceptualizing Diaspora
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Ilott, Sarah, Ana Cristina Mendes, and Lucinda Newns, eds. *New Directions in Diaspora Studies: Cultural and Literary Approaches*. London, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018. xxxiii + 165 pages. ISBN 978-1-78660-516-0. Hb. £85.

New Directions in Diaspora Studies is a comprehensive volume offering fresh insights into the study of diaspora. As the Acknowledgments reveal, the collection came to life as the proceedings of the 2015 convention of the Postcolonial Studies Association, held at Leicester University. The volume contains a preface by renowned professor of postcolonial and diaspora studies John McLeod and an introduction by the editors, discussing the wide range of definitions and interpretations of the concept of diaspora, the evolution of its study, as well as new tendencies in human mobility and new experience of diaspora space. The editors' primary aim is to open innovative lines of inquiry through a dialogue between diaspora studies and other disciplines and thereby help reassess the vital part diaspora plays in our contemporary globalized world. The multifaceted interdisciplinary nature of the book is guaranteed by contributions from scholars based in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Hungary, and doing research mainly in the fields of postcolonial and diaspora literature, film, and arts. Their chapters approach the topical issues of diasporization and "push beyond diaspora's most frequently discussed territorial locations" (xxii-xxiii). The nine studies are organized into four parts, focusing on performance, speculative diasporas, city spaces, and precarious and silent diasporas, respectively.

Ilott, Mendes, and Newns's introduction calls attention to the need for a critical re-examination and reassessment of the term diaspora, emphasizing Avtar Brah's assertion that the overlapping of border theory, postcolonial theory, and diaspora theory could provide a new analytical frame for addressing and understanding issues of diaspora. As the editors point out, the studies in the volume apply, among others, the theoretical and conceptual framework of performance studies, visual art and media studies, urban geography, affect theory, and phenomenology to the analysis of literary and visual texts.

"Part I: Performance" includes two chapters providing analyses at the intersection of diaspora and performance studies by discussing the creation

of new transcultural affiliations addressing visual representation of performances with respect to theater, installations, and street art. Miki Flockemann's study, "Transcultural Performance in Diasporic Contexts: Spectating Otherness at Home and Abroad," examines the complex ways in which cultural memory operates in diasporic contexts. By arguing for the understanding of memory as performance and transculturalism as performance aesthetic, Flockemann calls for an alignment of the agenda of memory and diaspora studies, with a special focus on migrants' experience of cultural memory in displacement. The author's analysis of the reception of Chokri Ben Chikha's international performance group *Action Zoo Humain* and Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A* and *Exhibit B* (2010-13) reveals how these on-site performances produce "a virtual, deterritorialized, and possibly transcultural contact zone" (xxv) within which articulations of cultural memory, Flockemann argues, may be used for strengthening identities in diasporic communities and transculturality can be experienced or experimented with.

The second chapter, Cathy Covell Waegner's "Performing Street Art: CityLeaks, Affiliation, and Transcultural Diaspora," highlights Cologne's biennial urban art festival, identifying five interconnected functions of street artworks (socio- and ecocriticism, human rights engagement, explicit political comment, instrumentalization and subversion of stereotypes, and postmodern reinscription) and analyzing a selection of murals and paste-ups in relation to diasporic discourses and processes. Waegner explores how the street artists of the festival, an "assertive network of constantly peripatetic international unsettlers" (33), may be considered a diaspora and argues for a broader understanding of transcultural diaspora as cross-ethnic and affiliative, characterized by "engaged choice" and "desired attachment" (xxv).

The two chapters of "Part II: Speculative Diasporas" explore how diaspora may be used as a critical tool to interpret postcolonial speculative fiction due to its investigation of diasporic communities as a central theme. "Mythology of the Space Frontier: Diaspora, Liminality, and the Practices of Remembrance in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*" by Agnieszka Podruczna discusses postcolonial science fiction as the ultimate genre to explore issues of diaspora, due to their shared characteristics of being hybrid and counterdiscursive. Through the analysis of remembrance and ancestry as central themes of Hopkinson's novel, Podruczna argues for the vital role of memory and subversive storytelling in the decolonization process. By challenging Western modes of writing, she contends that postcolonial speculative fiction is an essential forum and tool for authors to articulate the

fragmentariness of the diasporic condition and for diasporic communities to come to terms with their past and the reality of colonialism.

In “Speculative Diaspora: Hari Kunzru’s Historical Consciousness, the Rhetoric of Interplanetary Colonization, and the Locus-Colonial Novel,” Rachel Rochester explores the growing possibility for and literary narratives of interplanetary diaspora to solve Earth’s environmental crisis. Rochester’s reading of Kunzru’s *Gods without Men* (2011) introduces the idea of “speculative migrations” (xxvi) and claims that the novelist’s bleak vision of the colonial past repeating itself in interplanetary colonization, mass migration, and displacements calls for intervention by speculative fiction and theorists of diaspora studies to help meet the new challenges and avoid environmental degradation and social injustice.

The three chapters in “Part III: City Spaces” evaluate literary representations of postcolonial cities and experiences thereof, exploring the effect of lived spaces of cities on diasporic identity construction. Christiane Steckenbiller’s “Diasporic Ways of Knowing: Teju Cole’s *Open City*” examines the protagonist’s relationship with the urban space of New York through a set of themes: migration and global connectedness, memory and storytelling, as well as knowledge production. Cole’s novel presents a model for what Steckenbiller refers to as diasporic ways of knowing (belonging as knowing) (72), created through multiple perspectives, critical engagement, and movement. Steckenbiller argues that the novel is a challenging commentary on migration, exposing the possibilities and limitations of diasporic ways of knowing as they tally with urban space through the disengaged and unreliable narrator.

“Emotional Geographies of London: Doris Lessing’s Diasporic Vision” by Ágnes Györke gives a gendered analysis of Lessing’s urban imaginary of London and highlights the roles of affect in diasporians’ various encounters with the city. Arguing for considering Lessing a diasporic writer, Györke stresses the ways in which Lessing’s fiction defines new directions in diaspora studies: “they depict the diasporic condition as a translocal, primarily affective entanglement, redefining the major tropes that urban narratives rely on, such as *flânerie* and the house” (88). The phenomenon of *flânerie* (in Lessing’s early fiction), Györke contends, reveals the affective aspect of intercultural trespassing, while the house as a translocal interior (in the later novels) comes to be imbued with emotions, juxtaposed to the indifference of and solitude in London, thereby treading a path for postmillennial diasporic fiction’s urban imaginaries.

In Sibyl Adam's "Everyday Emotions and Migration: Affect in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*," affect is conceived as both a kind of experience and a specific mode of narration characterizing diasporic fiction. Adam's analysis of Ali's novel explores emotion and meaning in the female protagonist's relationship with domestic space and on her movement in London, generating affective responses and thus providing her with affective knowledge of the city. Adam delineates affect as a generic style inherently linked to contemporary diaspora novels' subject matter and "affective knowledge" (100) as a way of understanding place via everyday emotions of diasporic experience, an aspect of diasporic writing in need of more scholarly attention.

"Part IV: Precarious and Silent Diasporas" focuses on forms of migration that question the boundaries of and the tenets linked to the term diaspora through exploring the ways in which those excluded from its dominant narratives are represented. In "British New Slavery in Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand* and Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow*: Diachronic and Synchronic Reflections," Pietro Deandrea examines forced migration and recent waves of Eastern European migrants to the UK as compared to established communities of black Britain. Deandrea's comparative analysis of the two novels reveals that the UK's criminalizing immigrant policies and exploitative labor market results in new immigrants' underground, ghostly existence, characterized by isolation, fragmentation, and a lack of community—tensions that call for new flexible definitions of diaspora.

The final chapter, "Gendered Silence in Transnational Narratives" by Karen D'Souza, introduces post-independence South Asian immigration from the aspect of what she refers to as the "diasporic subaltern" (139) (those marginalized through both gender and class in diasporic metanarratives). Analyzing Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000) and Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), D'Souza contends that the female characters in the two novels call attention to different forms of gendered silence and negotiate their identity in relation to various transnational spaces. Therefore, a gendered approach to diaspora is required, one that acknowledges and maps women's specific histories of displacement and which leads to a reconsideration of how women are positioned and interpreted in diaspora discourse.

Through its cross-disciplinary approach, *New Directions in Diaspora Studies* investigates the need for new points of interest and areas of research in the field, bringing together multiple contexts and forms as well as histories and lived experiences for a more comprehensive exploration of the various ways in which diaspora is imagined and represented. The wide range of

literary and cultural approaches compiled in the volume provide both specific reflections on certain diasporas and a broader reflection on diaspora studies *per se*. Ilott, Mendes, and News assert the importance of acknowledging these novel contexts and methods of contestation and call for a more inclusive framework in which to map and interpret the increasing complexity of diasporas. The new tools and avenues offered make the volume a valuable collection of trailblazing exploratory analyses in their approach to and application of diaspora theory. Complete with a List of Figures, Bibliography, Index and an About the Editors and Contributors section, Ilott, Mendes, and News's edited volume will prove to be highly useful for researchers and students of both diaspora studies and postcolonial literature and arts and merits a high recommendation as an addition to library collections of diaspora as well as literary and cultural studies.

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