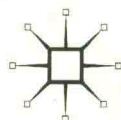
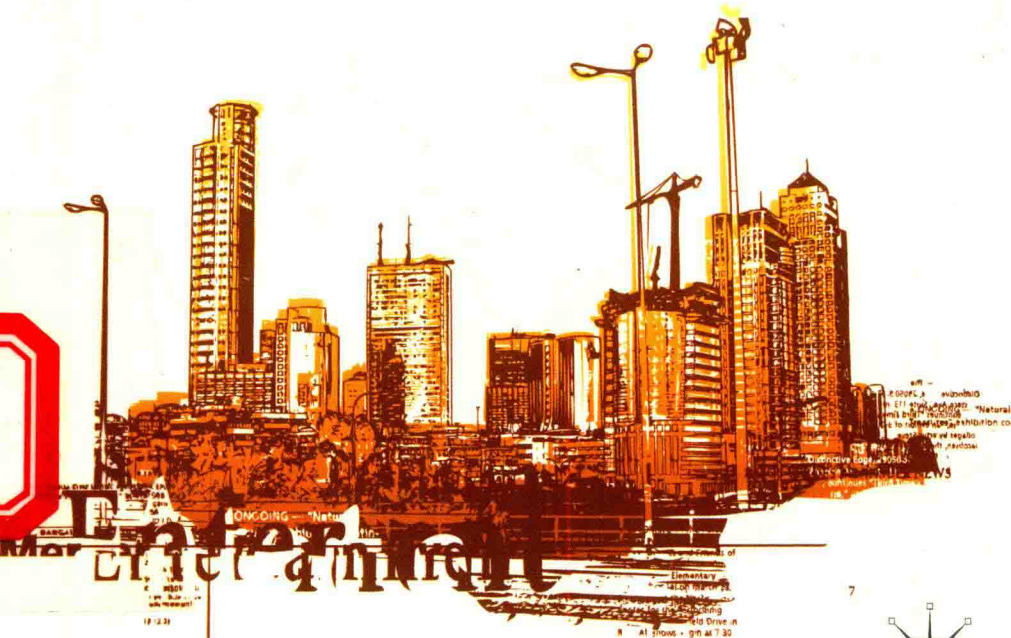


Beyond the Postcolonial

World Englishes Literature

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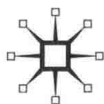


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E. Dawson Varughese

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First published 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978–0–230–30096–5

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

Beyond the Postcolonial

Also by E. Dawson Varughese

READING NEW INDIA: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English

*To Numbers '5' and '7' and the space that is found
in-between; a well-trodden path for many years*

Tables

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Preface

This volume presents the findings of fieldwork which took place across seven countries. The work generated a body of new writing that has been published by CCC Press of Nottingham, UK. This project and the anthologies of new writing which have been produced from it would not have been possible if CCC Press had not decided to back it, indeed, believe in it from the beginning. As this volume will demonstrate, moving beyond the 'known', trying out new approaches and signing up new, unfamiliar authors is not generally a safe and wise move for a publisher to make. My thanks go to CCC Press for their open-mindedness in taking on the 'World Englishes Literature project'. My thanks also go to all the authors, publishers, critics and readers encountered through this research who have helped to inform and shape this study to be what it is today.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Critical, Cultural and Communications Press (Nottingham) for permission to republish, in revised form, material first published in:

(2009) *'The Spirit Machine' and Other New Short Stories from Cameroon*

(2010) *'Daughters of Eve' and Other New Short Stories from Nigeria*

(2010) *'Butterfly Dreams' and Other New Short Stories from Uganda*

(2011) *'Man of the House' and Other New Short Stories from Kenya*

(2012) *'Black and Whites' and Other New Short Stories from Malaysia*

Early analysis of the data collected in Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya featured in a paper entitled 'Emerging writing from Four African Countries: Genres and Englishes, Beyond the Postcolonial' in *African Identities*, Routledge, Vol. 10, Issue 1, February 2012.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

This book has spent a long time swishing around in my head. I think it first really came to 'action point' as I drove back from 'Re-routing the Postcolonial' at the University of Northampton in 2007. The project has also travelled the globe and swished around in my head in airports, during long (uncomfortable) bus journeys, in bookshops, universities, churches and even on the back of that suspension-suspicious *okada* desperately trying to get me to Lagos airport on time!

There have been a few people who have followed this book from the beginning and I'd like to thank them here: Robert Eaglestone for his boxing-ring-style pep talks when I was very close to giving up; Pierre Larrivee, who knew way back in 1997 that which I have had to discover; John Thieme for his most helpful advice and guidance on chapters 1 and 2 in particular; (academic!) friends Odette, Nat, Lisa, Charlotte and Mark (who helped me immensely in the early stages of putting this book together), Paula Kennedy and Ben Doyle at Palgrave for getting this book into print and to all those who edited this volume.

The period of writing this book has brought with it some sadness – I remember my maternal grandparents and Grandma Dawson, whose absence at Number 7 is felt every day.

During this period, I have struggled to find any kind of 'academic home' and, although still homeless, I feel more at peace with my academic travel bag and toothbrush.

Finally, yet most importantly, my love and thanks to Sabu, to all at Number 5 and to Grandad Dawson of Number 7, who has handed down that maddening, yet deeply rewarding, drive to work, to create and to strive for what you want. This remains with me always.

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1

Introduction: Being Beyond

This study aims to demonstrate that post-millennial writing in English from some countries that have known a British (post)colonial legacy is less and less recognizable by the tropes and guises of postcolonial literature. Importantly, though, this inquiry does not suggest that colonial forces are no longer at work in our 21st-century world and thus recognizes that the field of postcolonial studies is still a very valid one given the 'empires' of the contemporary world (Venn, 2006, pp. 1, 3, 4). Often found in the disasters, the regimes, the military powers and the vast displacement of people around the globe, and often referred to as being 'neo-colonial' (e.g. Boehmer, 2005), today's world is certainly still caught up in notions of 'empire'. Ecological disasters, poverty and inequality in societies around the world can still use the broad frames of reference that postcolonial studies offer in order to critique and better understand the issues, the power relations, the perspectives and the positions of 21st-century existence (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazarus, 2006). As Desai explains, '9/11 and the reimagining of the world as us versus them led to the resurgence of rhetoric and action increasingly marked by colonial overtones' (Yaeger, 2007, p. 641).

What this volume suggests, however, is that within the field of postcolonial studies, it is postcolonial *literature*, its definitions and its terms of reference that are undergoing significant change. Helen Gilbert summarizes some of the various ways in which the term 'postcolonial' has come to be used in the 'General Introduction' to her anthology *Postcolonial Plays*:

In many contexts, the term indicates a degree of agency, or at least a programme of resistance, against cultural domination; in others,

it signals the existence of a particular historical legacy and/or a chronological stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation-state; in yet others, it is used more disapprovingly to suggest a form of co-optation into Western cultural economies. What is common to all of these definitions, despite their various implications, is a central concern with cultural power. For those less interested in staking out disciplinary boundaries, 'postcolonial' has become a convenient (and sometimes useful) portmanteau term to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race and gender oppressions.

(Gilbert, 2001, p. 1)

Although this citation is now ten years old, it serves as a useful touchstone for understanding the broad concerns of postcolonial studies, and this study will return to Gilbert, and explore characterizations of the postcolonial in literary studies, later in this chapter.

Beyond the Postcolonial: World Englishes Literature suggests that the framework of postcolonial literary theory has become limiting because, essentially, the production of 'postcolonial literature' per se is waning. There is, of course, an argument to suggest that if there are, indeed, 'new empires' of today's world (as acknowledged above), then surely a body of postcolonial literature must be present; such production is a logical given. Interestingly, this study will suggest that this is not the case for some countries that have known former British colonial rule. This inquiry aims to demonstrate that post-millennial writing in English from some countries which have known a British (post)colonial legacy is less and less recognizable by the tropes and guises of 'postcolonial literature'. In short, contemporary and emerging writing has less in common with postcolonial literature from the second part of the 20th century than one might immediately appreciate.

The title of this study employs the word 'beyond', and Boehmer and Chaudhuri remind us that the field of postcolonial studies is pre-eminent in its ability to confidently predict its death (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 2011, p. 3). The word 'beyond' is, indeed, one such term that has previously been employed to suggest the death of the field. To reiterate, the study presented here is not one that suggests that postcolonial critique is dead; rather, what is presented here highlights the movements in emerging, post-millennial fiction that in itself is less easily identified by the allegorical motifs of traditional 'postcolonial literary texts', a concept that will be explained later in

this chapter. The focus of this book is Anglophone literature production and not Francophone, Lusophone, Dutch or German (as examples) of postcolonial literature production; and in short, the study interrogates perceptions of the current state of postcolonial writing in English, advocating that we are 'beyond the postcolonial'. In order to substantiate the claim that we are reading literature that is 'beyond the postcolonial', this volume brings together the results of an empirical research project – the World Englishes Literature project – which, conducted through fieldwork between 2008 and 2011, aimed to investigate the state of emerging 21st-century writing in English in seven countries around the world. These seven countries were Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Singapore, Malaysia and India – all nations that have known some form of British colonial rule. Such investigation, it seems, is timely as Boehmer and Chaudhuri write that 'the reconfiguration of postcolonial studies in the present and immediate future requires a rather more practical agenda than that of envisioning an end to the eternal inequalities of humankind – inspiring and important as this aim remains' (Boehmer and Chaudhuri, 2011, p. 7).

The approach adopted in the World Englishes Literature project also draws on the work of Hulme, who writes in a chapter entitled 'Beyond the Straits: Postcolonial Allegories of the Globe': '[So] one of the fundamental "beyonds" suggested by my title is an encouragement to strip off the straitjacket of those accounts and definitions of postcolonial studies that simply narrow its range to the work of a handful of theorists and a handful of novelists' (2006, p. 42). The World Englishes Literature project is an attempt to engage with these ideas: Hulme's call for a move beyond a particular canon towards a more 'practical agenda' as suggested by Boehmer and Chaudhuri.

In using fieldwork to investigate and inform its thesis and position, this study attempts to offer a new means by which we might consider emerging writing. The fieldwork conducted in each of the seven countries included meeting and interviewing writers and publishers; talking with and listening to readers; visiting universities (and presenting papers); researching critical perspectives from within the country in question and purchasing many texts unavailable in the UK; as well as investing substantial effort in disseminating the call for submissions to as many different people, organizations and interested parties as possible (using email, fliers and television interviews). During the fieldwork, the aim was to see through the country's lens as much as possible, to understand the emerging writing from that very particular

perspective. Boehmer and Chaudhuri write that the future of the postcolonial studies field is to: 'enlarge the wide scope of the field – to open it up to new horizons and to support the emergence of a broader postcolonial intellectual practice' (2011, p. 7). The fieldwork activities aimed to do just this; to enlarge the scope of the field and open it up to new horizons in adopting a different approach within the field. According to Huggan, the approach described here is also timely; on the matter of postcolonial studies and interdisciplinarity, he writes:

What is new, is a sense, sharpened no doubt by the institutional successes of cultural studies, that the postcolonial field is rapidly transforming itself into a prime location for the experimental deployment of cutting-edge interdisciplinary methods in the humanities and social sciences as a whole.

(2008, p. 4)

Huggan goes on to discuss a growing relationship between the arts and the (social) sciences as a 'post-disciplinary' view of the academy (2008, p. 13). Writing then in 2008, Huggan suggests that such a move 'might be some way off yet, but its future is foreshadowed in synoptic views of interdisciplinarity that work self-consciously towards decolonization of knowledge and the mutual interaction between nominally separate, but by no means incommensurate, knowledge-forms' (p. 13).

What follows in the ensuing chapters talks to Huggan's 'post-disciplinary' view and in particular enacts 'mutual interaction' between knowledge-forms.

In short, this volume presents newly sourced writing – now less 'new' than it was when it was sourced between 2008 and 2011 – through field research, as evidence of being 'beyond the postcolonial'. This position is substantiated by presenting recent, published fiction from various publishing houses from around the world – such as Silverfish (Malaysia), Penguin India and Hachette India – which reveal similar trends and departures in their post-millennial fiction to some of those found in the fieldwork of the World Englishes Literature project; this presentation of recent, published fiction will appear throughout the volume where suitable and necessary. Chapters 3–9 each also include an interview with a writer, publisher or academic of literature in the English of the country in question and this interview discussion also explores the notion of 'beyond'.

Why beyond?

It is usual current practice for any volume that engages in a debate of the postcolonial to set out very early on the notion of 'the postcolonial', its starting point, its geographical extent, its origins and movements. Although this volume will shortly focus on characterizing 'postcolonial texts' – drawing on a range of works from critics in the field – it will not debate the differing perspectives of these scholars, assessing their merits and demerits. This resistance to engage in such activity is part of the move 'beyond'. Given the empirical nature of this inquiry, the newly sourced literature presented in chapters 3–9 will be examined against the characterizations and notions of 'postcolonial texts'; ideas of which scholars in the field over the last 30 or more years have presented and debated. The scholars whose work will inform this understanding of the 'postcolonial text' include Boehmer, Walder, Gandhi, Venn, Nayar, Harrison, Wisker, Ashcroft et al., Thieme, Quayson and Lazarus.

The motive for my reticence towards disentangling ideas of the 'postcolonial text' from a subjective, interpretative position is an intention consciously sought because this study is not simply interested in offering yet another definition of the 'postcolonial text'; it is not focused on redefining that idea. Rather, the study focuses on post-millennial and emerging fiction, exploring whether this fiction is still discernible by the label 'postcolonial literature' – and since the research presented here suggests that it is not discernible by that label, by which labels and through which terms might we speak of this literary production.

So why argue 'beyond'? The rationale behind conducting the field-work and the exploration of the hypothesis of being beyond is found somewhere in the space between ethnographic research and literary studies. That is not to say that these two fields of study have not come together before. Indeed, creative writing, poems, reflections and journal writing on the part of either the ethnographer or the subjects of the ethnographic study are often central data collection tools, making up a large part of the field notes; they are tools used as and for cultural critique. As an example, Frank reveals that she had written fiction long before she had ever heard of the term 'ethnography', but now as an anthropologist she states that 'writing fiction – the process of creatively intertwining fantasy and various realities – has had the potential to restructure my ideas about the issues that I study' (2000, p. 486).

In a similar vein, and yet a different product, is the 'ethnographic novel'. This has often been used as a tool of inquiry into cultural and

historical flashpoints or periods of social change – see in particular, Lyons (2003) in his paper ‘The Ethnographic Novel and Ethnography in Colonial Algeria’. Of the ethnographic novel, Marcus and Fischer write:

The ethnographic novel has long been a durable kind of experiment for fieldworkers who have been dissatisfied with the ability of the conventions of the genre to portray the complexity of their subjects’ lives. Here the use of fiction is legitimated by the clear marking of a genre separate from the scientific monograph, and most often, novels have appeared as a subordinated, and somewhat fanciful, part of an ethnographer’s corpus.

(1986, p. 75)

Brady refers to the ethnographic novel as ‘anthropology’s only established poetic genre’ (2000, p. 954) and writes that ‘there is an active search on in many quarters of anthropology to adopt more obviously literary forms that can be used to enhance communication of the ethnographic experience in the realist tradition...’ (p. 954).

Although these forms of written expression – the various ethnographic field notes and the ethnographic novel – are creative endeavours, they are writings borne out of a consciously mediated activity, and written mostly mindful of the audience and of the objective behind producing the work. The body of creative writing from the seven countries presented in this volume (chapters 3–9) is respected as one of several possible vehicles of cultural critique, similar, therefore, to the ethnographic writings described above; but unlike these ethnographic writings, the creative fiction presented in this study is sourced independently, without the involvement of a demonstrative ‘investigation’ in its production. In sourcing new writing through the World Englishes Literature project, the authors were not asked to write on a specific theme, nor were they aware that their works would be used as a vehicle for cultural critique – in effect, as ‘data’ to investigate and understand the ‘beyond’. The details of how the call for stories was designed, the criteria and the formalities of its dissemination will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, which will demonstrate how the design of the call was crucially underpinned by the ideas presented here – that is, in terms of interdisciplinary inquiry and sourcing creative writing independently of the ‘ethnographic’ interest.

Why, though, is there a need for interdisciplinary research on (the future of) postcolonial literature? Since the early 2000s, the field of