

reviews

BOOKS

Review Forum

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Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism. By Elizabeth A. Povinelli. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. Pp. 256. ISBN 9780822350842. \$22.95 (pbk).

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Elizabeth Povinelli's absorbing and important new book is about perseverance, endurance, conscience and hope on the cusp of the possible – an 'anthropology of the otherwise' (10), of alternative or imagined forms of life that might offer refuge from the neglect, intrusions and harm of liberal governmentality. The second of a planned three-volume series about 'Dwelling in Late Liberalism', *Economies of Abandonment* calls special attention to social projects that potentially offer new room for manoeuvre both to the dispossessed and to the scholar-activist-critic-ethnographer.

Drawing from years of work in the United States and Australia, and in particular from her friendships and collaborations with indigenous Australians in Darwin and the Northern Territory, Povinelli brilliantly and provocatively reflects on alternative forms of life and their uneven social distribution. Everyone lives between the oscillations of being and not being, between what is and what yet might be, but the conditions and intensity of that dwelling – set down as they are by existing forces and power – are not shared in just or equitable measure. Povinelli's 'sociography' (6–7) of dwelling and potentiality looks at how misery is suffered and endured, at how subjects strive to persevere despite the shabbiness, pain and unreliability of their social worlds. Working without the ethnographer's customary theoretical and methodological attachment to the reflexive views of

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individual moral agents, Povinelli aims to find moments when possibilities for new political and ethical concerns emerge from and within horizons of life largely shaped and constrained by the social project of late liberalism. Those possibilities in turn suggest to her restorative possibilities for critical theory and its method of immanent critique.

Two riveting works of fiction frame Povinelli's book, Ursula Le Guin's short story 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' (1973) and Charles Burnett's 1977 film, *Killer of Sheep*. (Though Povinelli offers extraordinarily effective synopses and critical distillations of these works, I do recommend taking the time to read or view them while reading *Economies of Abandonment*.) Le Guin's story opens with a clamour of bells, as the happy and contented people of Omelas joyously begin their Festival of Summer. All their contentment, however, depends on a single, fearful, malnourished and neglected child kept locked in a basement closet somewhere in the city. Nothing can be done for the child, for (to quote the story) 'if the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place, if it were cleaned, comforted and fed ... all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms ... strict and absolute.' Many of the people of Omelas feel compassion for the wretch but will not sacrifice their joy or their material and ethicopolitical contentment for the sake of this abandoned child. The story ends as Le Guin explains that among those who have seen the child a few occasionally decide to leave Omelas, walking out one by one, to 'a place less imaginable ... than the city of happiness. It is possible it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.' Theirs is an ethics of refusal, a renunciation of a cruel, unchanging and unassailable social form, a 'not this'

enacted with the conviction that there must be an otherwise waiting for them.

Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* follows Stan, a resident of Watts in the 1970s who works in a slaughterhouse, and who for that reason is all too familiar with the fate sure to befall all living things on this bitter earth. There is no way out of the unrelenting poverty that holds Stan and his family, so Stan's is a state of constant striving to endure as life goes on, even as nothing goes forward. Decent, dignified, but worn out and downhearted, Stan refuses the ready temptations of crime, disdains self-pity and summons enough purpose to make futile attempts at restoring a car with the purchase of a used engine, or fixing the kitchen floor, efforts that bring him defeat. Stan and his community lack the material means for exit.

These two works of fiction brilliantly and companionably figure the moods, themes, conscience and predicaments of Povinelli's sociography of late liberalism. Her accounts of ordinary life, vulnerability and sustenance in indigenous communities, and of deeply imaginative and compelling attempts to reinvigorate indigenous geontological traditions with mobile phone and gps technologies, are powerful and persuasive, as are her extensive interrogations of the legal debates and decisions in the United States and Australia through which neoliberalism partly colonizes fields of value, and exhausts 'alternative social projects by denying them sustenance' (134). Povinelli remarks that one reader of her manuscript found her ethnography 'austere', a comment that suggested the book was indifferent to thick description and native point of view. I don't find the book suffering at all for having set aside those ethnographic protocols in order to take soundings of a world-encompassing late liberalism and its techniques of power. Further still, the 'being there' sensibility and discourse of modernist

ethnography would, I suspect, only get in the way of Povinelli's ethicopolitical commitment to the 'hereness' of her dwelling in and with late liberalism, its 'pockets of abandonment and differential belonging' (29), and the discursive mechanisms it deploys to obscure ways of living otherwise.

Povinelli argues that we need to discern and critically interrogate the constellations of tense, eventfulness and ethical substance that help late liberalism do its penetrative work. One way of summing that up is to say she is interested in looking at emplotment – the evocation and constitution of events, their open-endedness or finitude, and their ethicopolitical trajectory, relative to moments of past, present and future narration. (It is perhaps no coincidence that Povinelli chose plotless (or unplotted) fictive works by Le Guin and Burnett as her touchstones in *Economies of Abandonment*. They each suggest a durative aspect with their focus on unfinished and uneventful cruelty or weariness.) As with Rob Nixon's 2011 book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (see *Interventions* 14(2): 298–308), Povinelli's work raises the question of how to narrate the 'ordinary, the chronic and [the] cruddy' (13), how to give everyday suffering and violence eventfulness, in opposition to late liberalism's teleological discourses and in light of the crises of disparity and futurity already upon us. Wresting narrative ground from those teleological discourses, Povinelli claims, requires us to attend to potentialities and social conditions for other forms of dwelling in the world, despite their continued subversion by prevailing powers, and despite their own contradictions.

Povinelli's sociography of potentiality has admirably romantic and emancipatory aims, and in spirit and method *Economies of Abandonment* seems akin to Nikolas Kompridis's

Critique and Disclosure (2006). What her sociography so compellingly demonstrates for me are (1) the importance of endurance as a site of small and sometimes successful miracles of reflexivity and world-disclosure; and (2) the analytic gains that may be had by refraining from normative concepts of culture or cultural difference, concepts that are as likely to harm or entrap as to emancipate and empower the lives of those dispossessed and abandoned under liberal governance. Criticism lodged against immanent critique and critical theory sometimes faults them for failing to stipulate the normative direction or foundations that would secure justice for the abandoned and dispossessed or overturn an oppressive social order, as though the normative is what is needed to assert or safeguard our common humanity. It seems to me that Povinelli's sociographic intervention – with its philosophical roots in American pragmatism – wisely suggests we dispense with abstract or uniform schemes for justice or emancipation, and look instead to emergent coalitions and movements whose robust if 'messy, localized visions of justice' take shape in people's everyday struggles to persevere (Theriault 2012: 1436).

At the close of her book, Povinelli expresses dismay that Le Guin would let some people walk away from Omelas without trying to rescue the child in the basement (187–8). Indeed, their exit and apparent failure of conscience unsettles us. They depart into darkness, preferring the unknown and unknowable to the human community they have left behind. Le Guin is careful, however, to tell us that each departs alone. They do not share each other's company when leaving, and they show no interest in coalescing or mobilizing as a group with a collective politicoethical aim of exit or communal reconstitution. Povinelli ascribes a positive political force to critical theory for saying 'not this' when those

words are addressed to ‘those for whom the world seems to work just fine’ (192). I agree, yet the individuated gestures of ‘not this’ we see from those who leave Omelas lack, I think, the kind of political vision, address and struggle Povinelli sees vested in critical theory. The walk away from Omelas seems to me a bid for radical self-isolation outside of any polis, a wish to no longer be known or recognized or governed, to no longer be counted or counted upon, a bid to persevere in one’s own being and to be left alone to die in one’s own way (see Klausen n.d.).

Povinelli has no such exit in mind. She does not evade or walk away from the cruel disparities of our world, but looks instead to assemble a practical and social-theoretical compass that will see us through into a new positive form of life. *Economies of Abandonment* impresses, to be sure, because of Povinelli’s penetrating analyses and intellectual sweep, but even more so because of her conscience, political passion and willingness to persevere.

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In *Economies of Abandonment*, the second in a planned trilogy on ‘Dwelling in Late Liberalism’, anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli considers the modes by which social difference is governed in late liberalism, especially in Australia and the United States. To do so, she analyses and sometimes juxtaposes a variety of projects and discourses, including an indigenous mixed-media endeavour, the notorious Australian state ‘intervention’ in indigenous governance prompted by a report on child sexual abuse, a US Supreme Court decision about a claim for religious freedom from laws governing drug use, and the US radical green movement. With creativity and political punch, Povinelli explains how late liberal governance binds people together ethically and shapes the modes of life (and death) of indigenous people and other others. One important but under-appreciated way, Povinelli argues, is via the socially distributed deployment of tense, which establishes a temporal relationship between the moment of speaking and that of what is spoken of.

With this book Povinelli adds to her important long-term project of exploring the booming echoes and long shadows of liberal recognition in the lives of people who strain, and thereby bring into relief, its logics and limits. In the trilogy’s prequel, *The Cunning of Recognition* (2002), Povinelli showed how

liberal recognition regimes demand that indigenous peoples and others meet an impossible Goldilocks standard of difference: you must be different, so the logic of recognition goes, but you must not be so different as to be really different, lest you appear illegible, repugnant and psychotic. In *The Empire of Love* (2006) Povinelli demonstrated how ideologies of free love and the constrained love of genealogy conjoin to discipline and differentiate lives in settler societies.

Economies of Abandonment turns to the question of how late liberalism engenders temporal and material relationships of obligation that are unevenly distributed and felt. Few would disagree that the lives of indigenous peoples in settler societies have been harmed. Povinelli goes further to show how readily available modes of accounting for such lives render such harms understandable and just. This occurs, for example, when public opinion and policymakers project harm back onto indigenous people as if it were the result of their own shortcomings. In Australian political discourse, indigenous self-determination policies increasingly are taken to have failed, as evidenced by the infamous ‘intervention’ in the Northern Territory that ostensibly would rectify child sexual abuse and/but radically curtails indigenous self-governance and social welfare. Late liberal governance, argues Povinelli, operates through tense when present arrangements are viewed from the perspective of that which will have resulted in a better future. So pain caused by the ‘intervention’ will have been a sacrifice worth it in the long run. Thus, harm persists while remedies/responsibilities are deferred in the present.

This also occurs when observers overlook harm as such, especially as this type of harm, Povinelli argues, generally does not take the form of crisis. Whether meditating on a scene

in the film *Killer of Sheep* in which a car part falls off the back of a truck and breaks, or a similar moment in Australia when a washing machine lid flies away on the road, this book evocatively lives in and with the chronic aches and dirt of life that are experienced less as crisis than as things to be dealt with. Her term for such non-crises is ‘quasi-events’. In asking how an analyst/activist/ethical subject can attune herself to quasi-events, Povinelli can be read as levelling a trenchant critique of prevailing scholarship, which more often dwells in crisis (echoes of Agamben) or in the phenomenology of suffering. The latter is accessible via empathy, which Povinelli faults for failing to recognize the shared substance of harm and good as they are distributed in liberal settler societies (162). Povinelli evokes this shared substance by reading Ursula Le Guin’s story ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’, in which the well-being of a town’s residents is a direct and known function of the ongoing suffering of a child who is tortuously confined to a broom closet. There, she endures.

Scholars struggle over the relationship of endurance to indigeneity. Some time ago, a colleague – like me, a white woman – pointed to a book’s title that took the form, ‘The Enduring [name of indigenous group]’, and expressed frustration with the trope, explaining that indigenous peoples have done much more than endure. In scholarship about indigenous peoples (perhaps more than in post-colonial studies) the discourse of endurance threatens to produce people as remainders; conversely, and with as many shortcomings, it can minimize past and present violence and romanticize continuity. However, endurance is a potentially unsettling stance towards the world that deserves more careful analysis, and Povinelli points in the right direction. Povinelli emphasizes that endurance is unevenly

distributed across and within social fields. She considers what it feels like to live in times/spaces in between recognition and crisis and she asks, if not answers, the wrenching question of how to theorize why some people endure while others burn out. In a friendly and apt critique of theorists of immanence, Povinelli addresses the burden of enduring others' expectations for one's own potential.

As in her discussion of endurance, the economic action that most occupies Povinelli is distribution. Povinelli calls attention to the uneven distribution of harms, pleasures and obligations in late liberalism, writing throughout the book of intertwined macro-economic forces and day-to-day relationships. She tracks political economy with an extended discussion of neoliberal economics; unfurls the logic of sacrificial love and, implicitly, of the debt and deferred return that it implies; and notes the local economic impact of various moments of (non)recognition. Throughout, Povinelli calls on liberalism's beneficiaries to understand and then ethically act upon this distribution. I expect that, given her criticism of sacrificial love, Povinelli would resist figuring obligation – which she takes to be an immanent drawing towards – as debt. This leaves me wondering: what kind of economies can be produced by the obligations that operate within and beneath alternative social projects like green movements or drug-using religious observance or indigenous digital archiving? Too many critics shy away from the language of economy out of fear that economic logics are taking over the world or, alternatively, move towards the overly humanist language of 'human economy'. Calling less for a normative stance than a creative one, I would like to know where Povinelli's critique of late liberal governance and her exploration of possibility in the brackets of recognition could take us

towards a theory and politics of obligation that is not built on sacrifice or debt.

Povinelli works from the position of a critic and defends criticism as a form of action in the face of demands by normative theorists and policymakers alike that critics offer viable alternatives. She argues that such demands, like (or as a technique of?) late liberal governance, defer remedies and reinforce inequality by placing burdens on those who are harmed rather than on those who benefit from the order of things. This temporalization of critique strikes me as a more powerful rejoinder to normative demands than the paralysing, if true enough, claim that any normative project will usher in new injustice. Following her previous writing about alterity and engaging with theories of immanence, Povinelli describes the work of this book as an 'anthropology of the otherwise' (10); she takes the otherwise to be emergent, not remnant. Anthropology long has drawn analytical force, political edge and creative inspiration from the examination of social worlds not simply other but otherwise, not grist for the mill of cheering human diversity but potent reminders of the political and ethical ties that bind (even as they may bracket or abandon) ways of being and becoming. I'm left with questions about the relationship between critique and the anthropology of the otherwise. What tense does critique favour, and with what effects? What is the temporal and political relationship between critique and potentiality/immanence? When does the very spectre of critique halt alternative projects – from fear of sharks in the water – or instead fuel them?

In the acknowledgements for *Economies of Abandonment* Povinelli refers to her editor's hope that 'my prose will one day reach beyond the whirligig of my mind' (xiv). Whirligigs add festiveness and whimsy, emit soothing sounds, convey weather information, or even transmit

vibrations for the purpose of repelling rodents. It can take a whirligig of a mind to build an anthropology of the otherwise. Still, this book would have benefitted from a more expansive rendering of the lived 'otherwise' that compels Povinelli's arguments, not for the sake of ethnographic thickness but in order to motivate and strengthen her critical-theoretical project. I hope and suspect that this is just where the trilogy's next book, an exploration of an indigenous mixed-media mobile project, will take us.

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Response

One should never take for granted the generous stewardship shown by *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* that makes an exchange like this possible, nor the careful and insightful readership Ken George and Jessica Cattelino exemplify. And so I would like to reciprocate by addressing not only George and Cattelino's specific critical commentary but also the worries of others who, since the publication of *Economies of Abandonment*, have pushed me to clarify one or another aspect of my thought. And so let me say a few things about the analytics of the trope of abandonment; the paradox of the hope of immanent critique; and the tense ethics and politics of the otherwise.

- (1) Why do I foreground abandonment, given its discursive function in late liberal governmentality; namely, that the world historical difference of liberalism, across all of its governmental variations, is its

desire to care for (save) the disadvantaged and abandoned? Characterizing the spacings and immanent forms of life that interest *Economies* as 'abandoned' implies I believe that care is the self-evident ethical and political response to them. Clearly, if I were saying this I would have to unwrite much of what I have written over the last two decades. Instead, my emphasis on abandonment (and other cognate conditions: disregard, neglect, exile, extinguishment) means to puncture the grounds on which liberals make claims about liberalism's historical exceptionalism – namely, that it seeks to better everyone's life; that it abandons no one even when it intentionally or unintentionally lets or makes certain forms of life die. How does late liberalism accomplish this trick – transforming a disregard into a form of care-giving – thereby creating it as a world historical form of governance? The book provides some answers: the brackets of recognition; the location of harm's source; sacrificial imaginaries. But if the first task is to puncture late liberalism's self-accounting, the second is to show how alternative forms of obligation, belonging and endurance proliferate within late liberal forms of abandonment. And this second task changes the optics of analysis. When we 'open the brackets' we do not see 'the abandoned'. We see a multiplicity of life forms each with their own immanent forms of belonging, enduring, disregard and obligation. The child in the broom closet, Stan, and those of us on and off the boat characterize different tactics by which late liberalism converts harm into care – the creation of a degree zero (closet, bracket); the capitalization of difference (the wages of

whiteness); and the territorialization of power (settler colonialism) – and different forms of life within, beside and emerging from these tactics.

- (2) Is *Economies of Abandonment* a hopeful and redemptive sociography – and does this hope uncover a paradox in immanent critique? *Economies* argues that immanent critique locates the source for new political thought in the spacing of radical undecidability and indeterminacy – say Rancière’s distinction between politics and policing; or Agamben’s between *zoe* and *bios*. It *also* argues that immanent critique is cosseted rather than wrong. On the one hand, it can be too certain of who is the part who has no part (who is and is not the ‘lumpen-proletariat’; and what potential the lumpen-proletariat once had); on the other hand, it does not consider the phenomenological conditions of dwelling in, or being, radically undecidable. As a result immanent critique can seem hopeful, even redemptive – that there is a part and that it *will* play a part. George’s point about the plotless narratives that proliferate in *Economies of Abandonment* and the methodological shift to sociography is critical here. To be neither one thing fully nor another, even as the sustaining sources of life depend on being so, can be exhausting. It is for this reason that politics and ethics in these spaces are often situated within practices of endurance. (Note: many alternative projects don’t seek to endure – they practise an ethics of the ephemeral.) The plot-starved nature of these narratives mirrors my argument. Things go along and then they stop. Very little builds up. Very little resolves. This condition of non-resolution (rather than the irresolute) is the condition in which people I know live

(rather than *all* indigenous people or *all* radical environmentalists). And so it is little wonder that the theories I gravitate towards play against the sense of an ending.

But my quoting of Rancière doesn’t mean I am advocating his political theory anymore than my engagement with Agamben and Deleuze signals my allegiance to their writing. They indicate where I think we need to apply critical pressure – thus my interest in tense and quasi-events (rather than the spectacular instances of the Musulman or Karen Quinlan); in endurance and exhaustion (rather than undecidability alone); and in the ethical intuitions of immanent obligation (rather than normative adjudication). To be sure, enduring is not simply a dreary state – cold and grey and lifeless. It can be exhilarating. (In other words, enduring is more than ‘merely’ enduring even when it is only enduring – *à la* Cattellino’s colleague.) But even when it is not, acknowledging that spacings of radical undecidability are, at one and the same time, spaces in which a new political thought *would* emerge and a space in which nothing is likely to emerge is not a contradiction. If these spacings can endure, then thicken, expand and become a dominant form of circulation, then, in being unable to be either one side or another of a ‘division’, these spacings will be the source of a new political space. But everything is stacked against them. This may be a paradox from the perspective of thought; but from the perspective of world building it is merely a material fact.

So is George right to see *Economies* as hopeful – and redemptive? My main response is: definitely not! Hope seems too weak and uncompromised an affect and redemption demands some form of deliverance. All sorts of affects circulate through these spaces. And

they can be very lively. But they are also, almost by necessity, as compromised as they are exhausting. They are, as George puts it, ‘messy localized visions of justice’ that ‘take shape in people’s everyday struggles to persevere’. But there is another reason it would be wrong to see these spacings as redemptive. When an alternative social project emerges as an alternative social world it necessarily extinguishes the previous world. To deliver itself it must alter, if not kill, its mother, which makes it hard to feel anything as muscular as redemption.

- (3) And this takes me to the tense ethics and politics of the otherwise. Cattelino pointedly asks, ‘I would like to know where Povinelli’s critique of late liberal governance and her exploration of possibility in the brackets of recognition could take us towards a theory and politics of obligation that is not built on sacrifice or debt.’ Answering such a question demands unpacking some first assumptions – herein between immanent understandings of multiplicity and liberal politics of pluralism. Theories of multiplicity posit that, in any given arrangement, multiple potential otherwise exist internal to that arrangement. In this sense the multiplicity of the otherwise is in the actual – e.g. the glass that could fall once it is elevated; the shove back that could happen when a police shoves. The question critical theory asks is what releases one or another of these potential otherwise into the actual. Theories of political pluralism (pluralization), on the other hand, focus on how a set of existing diverse social groups can be related in such a way that they can coexist peacefully side-by-side – and so that one can imagine that dominant and emergent forms never touch each other. *Economies* assumes that if immanent social projects

succeed in changing the world then they *change* the world – the form of life that previously existed in it is more or less altered and pluralization is revealed to be a form of denial. Moreover, it assumes that the world that is unmade has as equally valid a right to persevere in being as mine, even if it sees mine as detestable and seeks to eliminate me. One form of life can ‘sacrifice’ itself for another, but even in this case something is made and unmade. This is exactly why, *Economies* argues, the problem of adjudication is important. Those who assail immanent critique as having nothing to stand on are right that our deepest ethical intuitions and political reflexes are thoroughly saturated by normative commitments and prescriptive futures such that the form of ethics and politics that lacks these grounds and does not allow itself to be blinded by them to its own acts of unmaking and extinguishment is deeply disturbing. ‘Tell us’, they say, ‘where this will take us.’ How can this be answered when ‘us’ is no longer, because the world that made ‘us’ has been unmade? The quasi-concept of immanent obligation is meant to signal a space in which we might begin to cultivate a different form of ethical intuition and political orientation that presupposes a deep co-substantiality of social being knowable only in the belated discovery of commitment.

A postscript on whirligigs. I had a chuckle when reading Cattelino’s reading of my loving jab at my longstanding editor at Duke, Ken Wissoker. Clearly, I don’t think my mind is a whirligig. Nor do I think Ken does – though we could ask him. What I am saying to him is much deeper and more personal – an acknowledgement of affection in difference. But even if he or I did – what a lovely thought that would

be. How could anyone refuse the thought of a whirligig? It is at one and the same time the most simple and most complex of dynamic models for the forward motion of return – and how this return returns as a threat. It is a material that must be wound up, and ends only to be wound again. As the Bard wrote in *Twelfth Night* – ‘And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges’ (act 5, scene 1, 372–8).

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Reviews

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The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism, Multiculturalism. Edited by Elleke Boehmer and Sarah De Mul. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012. Pp. 260. ISBN 9780739164303. \$70 (hbk).

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In recent years it has been argued that postcolonial theory based on poststructuralist understandings of narrativity and textuality offers little in the way of a heuristic apt for the study of lived experience in the post-9/11 world. The need to move away from narrativity and textuality towards more materially and historically grounded analysis has been put forward by critics like Neil Lazarus and Benita Parry. At the same time, postcolonial studies has increasingly become described by scholars working outside of English literature as a field that is remarkably anglocentric (and to a lesser extent, francocentric) considering its focus on voices from outside the western hemisphere. The anglocentrism of postcolonial studies is of course not to be confused with the closed ideological circuits of Anglophone canonical literature, which have been an object of study

within the field since its formative years. It is an effect of the combination of most referenced works in the field having been produced within Anglophone academia and the tendency to conceive of diverse colonial and postcolonial contexts in accordance with theory developed in the study of the former British Empire. This has oftentimes led to insensitivity to context-specific aspects in studies of non-Anglophone contexts.

Against this backdrop, this recent anthology about the postcolonial present and the current state of postcolonial studies in the Low Countries is, in contrast to what the title may suggest, of interest not just to Neerlandophone academics but also to the field of postcolonial studies at large. The anglocentrism of postcolonial studies and concomitant theory has, as Boehmer and De Mul point out in an introductory chapter, ‘exacerbated the derivative way’ in which postcolonial concepts have been taken up outside of the Commonwealth and the former French colonial empire (4). This is true not only in the case of European countries like Belgium and the Netherlands, but also in that of countries like Norway and Sweden, whose colonial claims were of a different kind and closer to home.

In their co-written chapter on ‘Postcolonial Studies in the Context of the “Diasporic” Netherlands’, Boehmer and Frances Gouda identify some aspects in which the colonial history of the Netherlands differs markedly from that of nations like Great Britain and France. In Dutch East India, they point out, native languages rather than Dutch were used for administrative purposes, and according to Dutch colonial policy, colonized peoples’ cultural ‘authenticity’ was maintained. This may be one reason why the Netherlands has not seen large-scale immigration from its former colonies. Boehmer and Gouda show