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Postcolonial Witnessing Trauma Out of Bounds

Stef Craps

Shortlisted for the 2014 ESSE Book Award

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Stef Craps is Associate Professor of English at Ghent University, Belgium, where he directs the Cultural Memory Studies Initiative. He is the author of *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift: No Short-Cuts to Salvation* (2005).

'Stef Craps's excellent study calls for the decolonizing of trauma theory and begins from the premise that its founding texts have failed to live up to the promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement. In a carefully argued thesis, he accuses trauma theory of Eurocentric bias in four crucial ways . . . Overall, this short book advances an eloquent plea to rethink trauma from a postcolonial perspective in order to listen to the suffering of Others beyond the western purview and, thereby, in Craps's words, "remain faithful to the ethical foundation of the field".' - *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*

'Despite the seriousness of the topic, the clarity and flow of Craps's writing makes *Postcolonial Witnessing* a joy . . . This is a book that engages with current debates in a lively and interesting way and is sure to be of interest to scholars of trauma, postcolonialism, cultural memory studies and related fields. Its clear structure and thorough consideration of foundational and recent literature, including an excellent index and bibliography, will also make it a useful text to those who are new to the topic. In fact, the book's strong argument, clear structure and engaging prose make *Postcolonial Witnessing* an example of what an academic text should be.' - *Dialogues on Historical Justice and Memory*

About the book

Despite a stated commitment to cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory - an area of cultural investigation that emerged out of the 'ethical turn' affecting the humanities in the 1990s - is marked by a Eurocentric, monocultural bias. Now in paperback and with a Preface by Rosanne Kennedy, this book takes issue with the tendency of the founding texts of the field to marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority groups, and to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity. Moreover, it questions the assumption that a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia is uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and criticizes the neglect of the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. Combining theoretical argument with literary case studies, *Postcolonial Witnessing* contends that the suffering engendered by colonialism needs to be acknowledged more fully, on its own terms, in its own terms, and in relation to traumatic First World histories if trauma theory is to redeem its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement.

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CONTENTS

Preface; Rosanne Kennedy
Acknowledgements
Introduction
The Trauma of Empire
The Empire of Trauma
Beyond Trauma Aesthetics
Ordinary Trauma in Sindiwe Magona's
Mother to Mother
Mid-Mourning in David Dabydeen's
'Turner' and Fred D'Aguiar's Feeding the
Ghosts
Cross-Traumatic Affiliation
Jewish/Postcolonial Diasporas in the
Work of Caryl Phillips
Entangled Memories in Anita Desai's
Baumgartner's Bombay
Conclusion
Notes
Bibliography
Index

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