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Ananda Devi and Dany Laferrière: The Culture Industry, Poverty Discourse, and Postcolonial Literatures in French

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ABSTRACT

In response to Sandra Ponzanesi's call to devise better tools of analysis for understanding how postcolonial literature operates as both commodity and aesthetic, this article claims that one of the roles of the postcolonial novel in the early twenty-first century is to counter the notion that culture and poverty exist in a cause-effect relationship. Drawing on novels by Ananda Devi and Dany Laferrière, this article considers how using poverty as a category of analysis might allow us as readers to better understand more recent dynamics of the literary postcolonial culture industry.

Sandra Ponzanesi's *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies* (2014) questions the relationship between market forces of the culture industry on the one hand, and the creative independence of the writer on the other. She ponders whether or not postcolonial literature is able to transcend "Western demands" for a certain standard of literary aesthetic norms (4), or if it succumbs to serving "a booming 'otherness industry' that thrives on the invention and admiration of exotic traditions" (1), doing nothing more than constantly reproducing new modes of exoticizing itself, creating what Ponzanesi points to as the circumstances for a "new Orientalism" (2). Ultimately, Ponzanesi argues that the postcolonial literary culture industry does affect the canons of "the West," reshaping the very notions we have about the binary that constitutes "the West" and "the non-West," as well as our notions of the aesthetic. That said, Ponzanesi is not just interested in whether or not transformations are taking place, but to what extent there exists veritable "resistance" to this change (7).

While Ponzanesi's work deals primarily with Anglophone postcolonial literature, in this article, I contribute to Ponzanesi's deliberations using the case of what is broadly labeled as "postcolonial francophone" or alternatively "francophone" writing. Particularly, I want to pay attention to "poverty" as both a "topic" that fulfills a Western audience's penchant for the exoticization of the other, yet also as a literary "trope" that has the potentiality to make an intervention into how Western readers perceive and make sense of postcolonial subjectivities. I distinguish here between "topic" and "trope" because the word "topic" suggests an issue addressed in varying disciplinary contexts, notably in the social sciences, and more generally in mainstream media, referred to in the academia as "poverty discourse." The word "trope" instead invokes the literary; a creative disposition of words so that they may be read non-literally, becoming figures of speech. In considering how Ananda Devi and Dany Laferrière, two successful writers considered to be "postcolonial" or "francophone," have incorporated "poverty"—both as "topic" and as "trope"—into their writing, I hope to illustrate how postcolonial literature is asserting itself in shaping the ethical landscape of a French intellectual public sphere.

A Fraught Intellectual Sphere

To understand just how successful Devi and Laferrière have been in achieving not only success but also respectability in the literary world, it is necessary to describe the level of control, and even hostility, at times exhibited by the French literary establishment. In 2012, Richard Millet, author and former editor at Gallimard, wrote in *Langue fantôme: Essai sur la paupérisation de la littérature, suivi de Éloge littéraire d'Anders Breivik* ("Phantom Language: Essay on the Pauperization of Literature, followed by Literary Eulogy to Anders Breivik") an invective of French literature as one that "se tiers-mondise par le sous-développement linguistique" ("through linguistic underdevelopment, 'Third-Worldizes' itself") whereby "littérature parle souvent petit nègre" ("literature often speaks Pidgin") (*Langue fantôme* 39). These phrases use the metaphor of material poverty (i.e. "underdevelopment"; "Third World") to describe the degradation of literary practice. More offensively, they associate the degradation of aesthetics to blackness ("petit nègre"). In one sentence then, race, poverty, and cultural ruin are implied as existing in a relational, if not co-dependent relationship.

In the same year, Richard Millet published the essay *De l'antiracisme comme terreur littéraire* ("Antiracism as Literary Terror"), in which he writes: "What we call literature today and more generally culture is nothing but the hedonistic face of a nihilism for which antiracism is its terrorist offshoot" (11). Millet argues that those who are "antiracist," that is those who assert that racism is a discriminatory social phenomenon, are engaged in a form of anti-humanism: "contemporary antiracism isn't but a hysterical and cold manifestation of hate of the other" (*De l' antiracisme* 12–13). Like many intellectuals, Millet supports the idea that a true humanity should be "indifferent" to "race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality" (51). Millet makes the link to literature and more generally culture through his criticism of the generation after the French civil unrest in 1968. He accuses the intellectuals of the generation of 1968 of romanticizing the "Shoah" so that an experience of victimhood comes to replace any legitimate consideration of aesthetics. As such, Millet perceives newer cultural production as a fetishization of all experiences considered

genocidal: "the Gulags, Cambodia, My Lai, Sabra and Shatila, Rwanda, Hiroshima, Oradour, Lidice, the Armenians…" (82).

Millet's *De l'antiracisme comme terreur litéraire* then takes the entire culture industry to task for (over-)romanticizing the experiences of victimhood of persons whom Millet suggests are "not European," at least as he understands Europeanness. He uses terrorism as a metaphor for the degradation of literary (and more generally cultural) production, and later accuses European intellectuals of mistaking fascination with suffering for literary aesthetics. Millet claims that the fetishizing of victimhood impedes "the purity of language that we call style," becoming mere "Propaganda" (92). The argument is similar to what John B. Thompson identifies as contemporary readers' fondness for "misery memoir" (xiv). In other words, for Millet, the narrative of victimhood short-circuits the very possibility of focusing on art for art's sake: the "purity of language" is contaminated by the pervasiveness of anguish. In *Langue fantôme*, Millet explains that Breivik's killing of over sixty young Norwegians in July 2011 can be justified by what Millet surmises is Breivik's frustration with a Europe that he perceives as less and less European, thus extending the metaphor to include an actual current event, the act of terrorism by a white European on other young Europeans.

In response to Millet, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio and Annie Ernaux wrote editorials. Within a week of the publication of their editorials, Millet resigned from his position as editor and member of the highest-level reading committee at Gallimard, France's most esteemed publishing house. Obviously, as intellectuals and scholars, we must make clear, as Ernaux and Le Clézio did, that Millet is no longer welcome in the public sphere, and yet his dismissal does not necessarily mean that his ideas have been expelled from it. Despite their crassness, Millet's assertions cannot be outright rejected, and they must be taken seriously, especially in the context of a Europe whose ability to tolerate supposedly non-heritage Europeans is currently put to the test. As critics, we are called upon to examine Millet's statements with sobriety, because his assertions might in fact express what a larger public does not dare overtly articulate: notably, issues of the fraught relationship between privilege, lack of privilege, national citizenship, class, and race, which many intellectuals skirt or outright dodge.

Poverty and Culture

How is it that someone like Millet, with such a racist form of snobbism was allowed to occupy an important place in the public sphere? Many are the responses to this question, and certainly in the wake of the assassinations of *Charlie Hebdo*'s employees and the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015, more reflected reformulations of this question are being posed. In this article, I focus on one possible way to better understand how someone such as Millet, until very recently, still enjoyed credibility and was afforded decision-making powers in the culture industry. More specifically, I consider how poverty discourse has been and is still embedded with assumptions that—while not necessarily racist—continue to suffer from faulty and highly racialized interpretations that must be scrutinized.

For example, after the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, in the oft-cited column for the *New York Times*, journalist David Brooks stated, "It is time to put the thorny issue of culture at the center of efforts to tackle global poverty;" and in the same paragraph, he suggests that Haiti's culture makes the island poorer than Barbados or the Dominican Republic.[1] For someone as cosmopolitan as Brooks to assert that culture is a cause, if not *the* cause of poverty, is astounding. This statement shows that even someone as pedigreed as Brooks can be unaware of the historical and present-day geopolitical dynamics that have contributed to centuries of aggressive abuse and/or utter neglect of Haiti. While Millet's writing in *Langue fantôme* is self-consciously offensive, Brooks's *New York Times* column on Haiti rather suffers from a lack of knowledge; yet, such ignorance is no less inflammatory, no less hurtful.

Considering the novel as the quintessential medium that puts into narrative how a nation sees itself, I argue that poverty might be used as a category of analysis for the postcolonial novel. I do so by examining the work of Ananda Devi and Dany Laferrière. While Devi and Laferrière partake in a culture industry that allows them to be published as postcolonial (or in France, as francophone) writers. Their novels thus engage with a French (and more generally cosmopolitan)

1. See the *New York Times* op-ed titled "The Underlying Tragedy" (Jan. 15 2010).

public sphere, as well as with their specific national space: in the case of Devi, Mauritius; and for Laferrière, Haiti. They write both to counter offensive discourses about what it means to be from the Third World, and to endow their birth country with what Gina Ulysse calls "new narratives" (240).

Even a cursory glance comparing the first title and a more recent title of Laferrière's novels shows that the culture industry has expanded the discursive sites to which the postcolonial writer is allowed to contribute: *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985) (*How to Make Love to a Negro*, 1987) and *L'énigme du retour* (2009) (*The Enigma of the Return*, 2011). The first appeals clearly to the racial as sexual, while with the latter, it is not really clear into which affective space the novel will play, unless the reader is familiar with Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*). In the case of Devi, as Julia Waters has argued, only in the past decade and a half, since 2002, "the literary, rather than exotic, worth of Devi's work" has been emphasized in her move from Éditions Gallimard's *Continents noirs* series to its most esteemed imprint, the *Collection blanche* (71). In full agreement with Waters, I propose that in the present moment, there is a specific trope through which Devi and Laferrière engage in the literary—the trope of "poverty."

Devi's From Eve Out of Her Ruins

Devi's *Ève de ses décombres* (2006) (*From Eve Out of Her Ruins*, 2016) is narrated through the first-person viewpoints of four adolescents—Ève, Clélio, Sad (Sadiq), and Savita. They live in Troumaron, a neighborhood that Sad explains is imprisoned by its poverty: "Everybody knows that poverty is the unkindest of jailers" (26).[2] It is a ruined *cité* (housing project) dominated by cement and tar within the Mauritian capital of Port-Louis. In his own first-person

2. The page number refers to the French text published with Gallimard. The English translation comes from an online excerpt of the English translation of the text by Jeffrey Zuckerman, forthcoming in 2016, published with Deep Vellum.

narrative, Sad explains that he hovers between a self-destructive reality and an aspirational one:

> They tell me I will succeed. But success does not mean the same thing for everyone. It's a wide-ranging word. In my case, it simply means that locked doors could open just a bit and I could, if I sucked in my stomach, slip through and escape Troumaron's watchful eye. Everybody knows that poverty is the unkindest of jailers. Still, the teachers say everything is possible. They tell me that they learned their lessons by candlelight. But I can see in their eyes how cloudy their thoughts have become. (26)

In their study of poverty titled *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (2012), economists Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson dedicate the second chapter to refuting the hypothesis that has dictated much of poverty theory: the hypothesis that culture is at the origin of poverty. Nevertheless, the title of their book could appeal to those like Brooks or Millet, who think of impoverished spaces as failed spaces. As Sadiq's internal dialogue reveals, the very notion of failure—the failure of an entire nation no less—is woven into all aspects of a national space, including its national narrative.

In invoking the notion of success and failure, Devi's novel consciously participates in a larger global dialogue on what it means for individuals, especially individuals coming of age, to devise narratives that allow them to aspire for success, even in what appears both to outsiders and to themselves to be the most dismal of spaces. However, dismal does not necessarily mean "failure," for as Sadiq points out: "success does not mean the same thing for everyone. It's a wide-ranging word" (26). Sadiq's success revolves around remolding his space into a livable one; and such re-arrangement of his reality is predicated on the poetic. At once a gangster and an exemplary high school student, he begins by writing to and for Eve on the walls of his bedroom (28), and expands onto public walls. Sadiq composes:

Garce, garce, garce.
C'est un beau mot.
Plus tard, je copie une autre phrase à son intention sur le mur du palier, devant son appartement:
Voilà le mouchoir de dégoût qu'on m'a enfoncé dans la bouche.
Je ne sais pas si je parle d'elle ou de moi. Ou bien de Troumaron. (37)

Minx, minx, minx.
It's a fine word.
Later, in front of her apartment, on the wall of the corridor, I copy another phrase meant for her:
Herewith the disgusting kerchief that they stuffed into my mouth.
I don't know if I'm referring to her or to myself.
Or to Troumaron.

The last sentence of the above citation, which concludes one of the chapters that Sadiq recounts, suggests that the entire novel takes place in the mode of the synecdoche, whereby the part represents the whole, and conversely, the whole refers to the part. The resulting effect is a lack of clarity as to which variable composing the metaphor is meant to serve as the ultimate point of reference.

The plot of *From Eve Out of Her Ruins* recounts the story of a mystery that has taken place around Eve. Unless one considers Devi as the ultimate narrator, the novel removes all authority from the text, for there is neither an omniscient nor an external narrator. As such, the truth of the intrigue surrounding Eve remains indeterminable. Similar unresolvability characterizes the plot of many postcolonial novels. What makes Devi's novel particularly elusive is that each narrative agent (the human protagonists, the built environment, the names of the characters and of the locations)[3] may be read as a metaphor for something else. In other words, are Ève, Célio, Savita, and Sadiq "real" human protagonists, or are they figures of an overall allegorical

3. For example, the location name, Troumaron, is composed of the words "*trou*" meaning "hole" and "*maron*," which phonetically sounds like the word for "brown," but also refers to a history of maroons: both as places cut off from the rest of the world, and also as slaves based in the Black Atlantic who escaped.

narrative? Does Devi's novel personify a built environment; does it inscribe human agents to the anonymous graffiti written on the walls of the buildings of Port-Louis? And, if veritable human protagonists are meant to populate her novel, do the protagonists take control of and redefine their poverty? Or does a poverty that refuses to differentiate "an impersonal mass" (Appadurai 117) eclipse them? Is the dismalness of their built environment a projection of their inner state or are they literally part of their ruined landscape? Do they rise out of their ruins, or are they ruined by them? And what exactly are their ruins? The text is forced into the figurative by the very fact that each narrative agent may be read as constituting an integral part of a whole, and also serving as an overarching whole to the other parts. Regardless of how readers deal with these questions, as readers, we are obliged to think poverty discourse into national discourse through Sadiq's reflections: "They say, you must seize your opportunities, you shouldn't prevent your country's growth. Who is *you* anyway?" (26). Devi's novel, particularly through its metonymic representation of poverty's human and inhuman protagonists, questions the role of poverty in conceptions of national identity.

Laferrière's The Enigma of the Return

Here, I turn to Lafferière's discussion of poverty, and more particularly to hunger as characteristic in his novel as a means of narrating—or resisting reductive notions of—nationhood. In *The Enigma of the Return*, the first-person "autofictional" narrator (Munro 183) recounts a conversation about novels with another Haitian writer, Gary Victor:

> I talked with him for a while about what the subject of the great Haitian novel might be. First we reviewed the obsessions of other nations. For North Americans, we thought it was space (the West, the Moon landing, Route 66). For South Americans, it's time (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*). For Europeans, it's war (two world wars in a century alters the mind). For us, it's hunger. The problem, Victor told me, is that it's difficult to talk about it if you haven't known it.

> And those who've seen it up close aren't necessarily writers. We're not talking about being hungry just because you haven't eaten for a while. We're talking about someone who has never eaten his fill in his entire life, or just enough to survive to be obsessed by it.
>
> […] Starving people don't read, don't go to museums, don't dance. They just wait to die. (*The Enigma,* 105)[4]

As I have suggested elsewhere, Laferrière's discussion of the Haitian novel and its relationship to poverty is one that at once seduces its reader and increases the reader's awareness. On first read, Laferrière's narrator associates Haiti's extreme poverty with a lack of "culture." Not too far from this surface, however, the narrator sardonically makes fun of those readers who might really buy into thinking that starving people can't also be producers and beneficiaries of the aesthetic (Benedicty 169–73). Laferrière concludes the chapter with a prose poem, evoking the memories of a man he had encountered earlier, with whom he did not speak, but had only made eye contact: a man without food, too proud to beg, with "big liquid eyes that so resembled those of my mother," the eyes of hunger:

> In this land the mother of the poet
> must work through to her final days
> to assure that roses flower
> amongst the verses of her son.
> And the latter would rather to prison go
> than to work. (*L'énigme* 142, my translation)

Much of Laferrière's writing may be characterized as lighthearted irony, creating a fast-paced and entertaining read. Readers more familiar with Haitian history and Vodou representational systems, particularly the role of the Gede lwas (spirits), understand that far more is going on below the surface. But what about those readers who miss this second level of meaning? Laferrière is known mostly for writing about

4. Unless indicated otherwise, the English citation comes from David Homel's published translation.

sex, and more particularly about interracial relationships. In much of Laferrière's writing, it is necessary to have some prior knowledge of both a specific Haitian intellectual context and French and francophone literary traditions to arrive at readings that identify the painful realities of his protagonists. However, in putting in play poverty discourse in *The Enigma of the Return*, Laferrière ventures away from sardonic and highly entertaining narratives about sex. He allows himself to move, to affectively disturb his reader. In producing an unpleasant emotional reaction, Laferrière confronts his reader with a serious situation that is presented as such (rather than as sarcastic): he continues to offer his reader the possibility of marveling at his brilliant witticisms, but he also forces his reader to deal directly with the discomforts of traumatic realities.

Poverty as a Category of Analysis

Read comparatively, *From Eve Out of Her Ruins* and *The Enigma of the Return* contemplate narratively, poetically, and philosophically what it means to belong to national spaces not generally considered as wealthy as France or the U.S.A. In line with contemporary social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's recent writing, Devi's and Laferrière's early twenty-first-century novels are illustrative of a discourse of poverty that reflects

> [t]oday's understandings of poverty and the poor [as] closely tied up with the emergence of demography, development studies, and twentieth-century applications of census techniques and approaches. One result of this is that poverty has come to be seen as largely an effect of failed policies, and the poor, especially the urban poor, have been turned into an impersonal mass […] (117).

The two novels demonstrate what Appadurai identifies as an ever-prevalent consciousness of poverty. For example, in Laferrière's *How to Make Love to a Negro*, the descriptions of the first-person narrator's poverty as a Haitian immigrant in Montréal are of a completely different register than the poverty described in *The Enigma*

of the Return. In the first novel, poverty is that of the starving artist: an immigrant student partaking in the joys of bohemian life, bartering his exoticness for food and conversation given to him by middle-class, white female university students. Poverty in *Enigma* is instead described as pertaining to, on the one hand, individual humans, who might eventually overcome this poverty, and to the overwhelming destituteness of an entire cityscape and the denizens who occupy it on the other.

Similarly, the surprising pleasures promised in Devi's 2001 *Pagli* are a far cry from the *décombres* (ruins) of her 2006 *From Eve Out of Her Ruins*. To date, Devi's titles have been translated into English by publishing houses that target Indian audiences. *From Eve Out of Her Ruins* is instead due for publication by Deep Vellum Publishing, a small editor based in Texas that publishes translations of "contemporary international literature (high literary fiction and creative nonfiction) preferably by living authors, men and women alike, from all countries and language groups" (Deep Vellum).[5] In other words, her work is being translated because it is deemed to be of "high literary" merit, not because it fits into a popular genre of the postcolonial culture industry, which Ponzanesi characterizes as "Indo-chic" or "postcolonial chick lit" (34, 156).

Nevertheless, a skeptical critic might consider that yet again, a so-called postcolonial writer is playing out the most recent intellectual fad: in this case, depictions of what has come to be known as "poverty porn." Yet, the literary merit of Devi's and Laferrière's novels refutes such nefarious criticism. Even if the sarcastic critic insists on cynicism, it cannot be refuted that in these texts the postcolonial-as-exotically-other is completely trumped by the dismalness of poverty. That said, to posit poverty as a critical category is certainly not without problems. As the very term "poverty porn" suggests, many of the representations of poverty that are disseminated by the media, by humanitarian and philanthropic organizations, and even by the culture industry are degrading. These representations reduce bodies, especially bodies perceived as being from the global

5. Will Evans, publisher at Deep Vellum, in an email exchange dated 30. Sept. 2015, confirmed that the English translation is due for publication in 2016.re.

south, to entities that inspire pity, and as such are denied any real humanity.[6] In other words, if Thompson is correct in identifying current readers' fondness for "misery memoir"—especially in the global north, and out of which most of the publishing industry operates—a writer runs the risk of playing into readers' expectations for the stereotypical. Yet, as we have seen above, both Devi and Laferrière openly invoke the stereotypes, inciting the readers to at least become aware that these prejudices exist. For example, following his discussion of poverty in Troumaron, Sadiq explains, "Stereotypes were made for us. We fit into them all. We excel at them" (Devi 26).[7] Furthermore, Laferrière's discussion of how hunger supposedly should characterize the Haitian novel is also a rather obvious warning to the reader that Laferrière will subvert the typical images associated with Haiti.

What emerges from Devi's and Laferrière's *mise-en-scène* of poverty is a presentation of the postcolonial novel as the transnational novel. In other words, through a sort of call-and-response between on the one hand, an international human rights discourse (and humanitarian initiatives), and on the other hand postcolonial discourse (and newer literary production), the postcolonial novel is putting into practice what Appadurai names a "politics of hope":

> In short, any act of participation in the design of their own future habitations becomes for unhoused or insecurely housed citizens an act of building, and a step toward dwelling—not only as bare citizens—in the cities of the future. (129)

Poverty as trope, or even as a category of analysis, thus becomes a tool that enables alternative readings of the "postcolonial," or "francophone" novel, disrupting the notion that postcolonial literature is a mere product of exoticism.

The novels of Devi and Laferrière make manifest what Appadurai identifies as the "struggle of human beings to craft their humanity"

6. See Sibylle Fischer's "Haiti: Fantasies of Bare Life," Kaiama L. Glover's "New Narratives of Haiti; or, How to Empathize with a Zombie," and Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*.
7. I slightly adapted Zuckerman's translation here.

(116). In these narratives, there exists an aspirational space, where in Achille Mbembe's words, "unhappiness" carries with it "possibilities" (241). For example, Sadiq, who throughout Devi's novel is referred to as "Sad" embodies the unhappiness to which Mbembe refers. Similarly, Eve defies all of her acquaintances' understanding of her, but in the process of refuting social "categories" (21), she also in a sense loses herself. Seemingly in self-reflection, Eve writes:

> *Shadow or wing, what you were no longer is. You become something else. In the Troumaron neighborhood, a reflection suits you. It scoffs at you. It tells you you're walking the wrong way. It transforms your surfaces, inverts your trajectory, reveals the other side of your silence. The paper boat is leaking everywhere and you don't know it. You look at yourself flowing without seeing yourself. Erasers, papers, pencils, rulers, books, heart, kidneys, toes. One day, you'll see yourself in the mirror, and nothing at all will be yours.*
>
> *You see a face congealed under its lies. You ask yourself where you went. You looked for a key and you found a way to break in.* (23)

Devi's magic is to problematize the very ethical value of what Ritu Tyagi in her monograph of Devi characterizes as "an inhuman space" (14), whereby the degradation of Eve's being—physical, psychological, even ontological—is marked. Eve is (un-)marked by total erasure, but an erasure that nonetheless might promise an Mbembian possibility of "*effraction*" ("break in" 23).

Poverty as Postcolonial "Site"

I have contextualized my discussion of the relationship between poverty discourse and the postcolonial novel in the Millet affair because it is important to point out that Millet's outrageous assertions (even if considered sardonic) are not in fact so far removed from many intellectuals' disparagement of the postcolonial culture industry, especially in the French public sphere. In the French context, Millet's troublesome

snobbism has to do with a reluctance to accept that colonialism has had nefarious consequences, for which there needs to be some level of accountability in the public sphere. Charles Forsdick, an incisive reader of postcolonial theory, identifies for instance the late Daniel Lefeuvre (historian of Algeria) and Pascal Bruckner (one of the *nouveaux philosophes*) as intellectuals who resist the notion of the postcolonial (109-10). Mireille Rosello, reading texts from all around the francophone literary spaces, moreover explains that "[p]ostcolonial theories […] are under suspicion and the few French academics who choose to make use of them are likely to be seen as 'repentants'" for colonialism (8). It is thus essential that as literary critics we interrogate the "productive tensions and asymmetries" (Ponzanesi 3) of such a fraught cultural space; one that aspires to both represent the worst humanitarian crises of our time and to participate fully in the literary arts.

As scholars become more aware of the hypocrisies of the Enlightenment project and its ensuing supposed forward-thinking modernity, it is more and more clear that postcolonial literatures and theory are transforming all literary practice. Whether or not poverty is indeed a useful category of analysis remains uncertain. Nevertheless, Devi's and Laferrière's novels actively work against a culture industry, which at its worst, as in the case of Millet, creates messy correspondences regarding culture, race, and material poverty, and which at its best makes possible the very space in which "francophone" writers are published. As Waters points out, while Gallimard's most esteemed imprint *Collection blanche* is not necessarily racially connoted, it quite suggestively takes on racialized meaning next to the *Continents noirs* series, which is the name of the imprint Gallimard uses to publish many of the authors coming from "elsewhere." Moreover, the name *Continents noirs* is not an unfortunate inheritance from Gallimard's past, but a title launched in the year 2000 (Waters 58). In other words, as Waters further explains, "according to Gallimard's own reasoning, French writers are just writers, whereas other writers are African, Mauritian, Caribbean or, more generally, 'francophone'" (66).

In *Against the Postcolonial* (2005), Richard Serrano criticizes "practitioners of the postcolonial," describing us as "modernists at heart, dismantling the modernist, colonialist project not in order to

understand the specificities of particular peoples, cultures, writers, or texts, but in order to build their own monolithic ideological structures instead" (7). Serrano is entirely correct: the term postcolonial is one that has served the interests of a literary culture industry predominantly run out of the global north, using the global south to fill, in Trouillot's words, its "Savage slot" (19). That said, Serrano's work engages the discussion of the postcolonial as a temporal marker, in which the "post" refers to a time after colonialism. Writing in the presence of the contributions of *decolonial* thinkers such as Walter Mignolo or Enrique Dussel, Forsdick has offered a useful definition of the postcolonial that emphasizes the atemporal—or rather multi-temporal—notion of the term. Forsdick reflects on "postcolonial sites," which "resonate for both (former) 'colonizer' and (former) 'colonized,' bearing multiple and often conflicting memories that have been perpetuated, in often refracted forms, in the postcolonial era" (117).

As such, the postcolonial as a concept serves as a pragmatic space for considering how European modernity is inextricably linked to its relationship to global spaces with which it has interacted over the centuries. In other words, the postcolonial is the transnational *par excellence*: the postcolonial emphasizes that transnationalism will only work once all agents of society accept that legacies of colonialism constantly inform the realities of both the former colonies and the former empires. Ponzanesi asks, "how far and by what means can we establish whether the new mechanism behind globalization merely rehearses the colonial dynamics, or whether it tends to offer new differentiated forms of resistance and 'subversive misappropriation'?" (7).

In an intellectual literary sphere that has been so unwelcoming, even xenophobic, Ponzanesi's question is answered by the mere fact that Devi and Laferrière have succeeded not just to earn popularity (to produce bestsellers, and in Laferrière's case to be named to the *Académie française*), but to earn respect. They have done so, I argue, because they have understood how to aestheticize Forsdick's notion of "postcolonial sites." Using poverty as both a "topic" and as a literary "trope," their novels force their readers to contribute to a shared critical discourse on the legacies of colonialism.

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