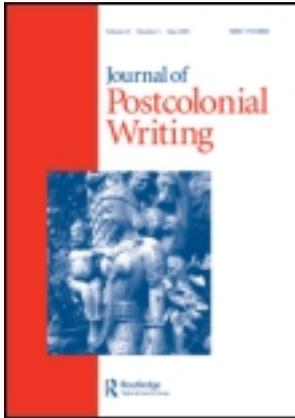


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Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of Postcolonial Writing

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjpw20>

Le su et l'incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien

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Published online: 22 May 2013.

To cite this article: Natalia Bremner (2013): Le su et l'incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49:3, 368-369

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2013.802098>

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national purity or cultural authenticity, or “transcolonialism”, a concept that underscores the importance of employing comparative strategies to examine relationships among “minority” cultures, languages and genres from around the world.

This volume reveals the extent to which literature is not and cannot be confined or defined according to geographical, linguistic or temporal terms, and in its attention to literary echoes and subtle rewritings sheds particular light on intertextuality in a postcolonial context. As the title suggests, *Writing Women* focuses on the work of women from Mauritius, including Nathacha Appanah, Marie-Thérèse Humbert, Lindsey Collen and especially Ananda Devi, to whom four chapters are devoted. Lionnet is concerned with the ways in which women engage in critical dialogues with women of other literary traditions, such as Jane Austen, but also with men, such as Baudelaire or even Senghor, whose poems depict “woman” as the exotic “other” from the colonized land.

Much of Lionnet’s groundbreaking work on women writers over the years has brought critical attention to “narratives that succeed in deconstructing many cultural taboos about race, class, and gender with their complex portrayals of female protagonists” in a variety of francophone postcolonial settings (45). Her new publication continues this focus but is also innovative in the central place it accords to Mauritius, a particular location “where colonial tensions are spread across multiple traditions” – leading to what Lionnet identifies as “this alternative tradition of *francophonie*” that serves as a model for “experimentation with genre and form” that could ultimately “open up new avenues for understanding the much more global and historical grounds of contemporary postcolonial poetics” (312). Lionnet’s compelling study allows her to “come full circle”, to delineate in erudite terms how her own experience in the specific space of her native island has fashioned her critical sensibilities and sensitivities to the global implications and inspirations of the literature of Mauritius.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2013.780816>

Le su et l’incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l’océan Indien, by Françoise Lionnet, Essais et critiques littéraires, La Pelouse, Trou d’Eau Douce, Île Maurice, L’Atelier d’écriture, 2012, 316 pp., Mauritian Rs. 800, ISBN 9 9903 3669 5

Despite attracting increasing scholarly interest, Indian Ocean studies does not (yet) exist as an academic discipline. This is undoubtedly connected with the fact that the western Indian Ocean is not thought of as a region in the same way as other archipelagic areas such as the Caribbean. In *Le su et l’incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l’océan Indien*, however, Françoise Lionnet makes a thorough and convincing case as to why we should pay more attention to what she calls the “creole cosmopolitics” of the multi-ethnic postcolonial societies of Mauritius and Réunion, exploring a series of wider dialogues which challenge taken-for-granted ideas about global centre(s) and island peripheries.

The title reflects Lionnet’s epistemological approach, situated between the “known” – that which is documented in archives but which gives a necessarily partial view – and

the “uncertain”, represented by literary imagination and the popular or national imaginary. It is precisely this liminal position between historical, literary and cultural analysis which, for her, holds the possibility of revealing new perspectives and new forms of knowledge (13); for example, this position facilitates Chapter 1’s rereading of Bernadin de Saint Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie*. Lionnet challenges the role the story has traditionally played in the Mauritian national imaginary by privileging literary creativity and analysis of the “footnotes” of history which show us glimpses into subaltern lives which otherwise would not have been recorded.

Readers familiar with Lionnet’s work will recognize that the rest of the monograph groups together a selection of previously published articles, which have, however, been re-edited and updated in line with the work’s general argument that “la créolisation et le cosmopolitisme sont les fondements mêmes des cultures de nos régions insulaires et archipéliques” [creolization and cosmopolitanism are the very founding blocks of the cultures of our island and archipelagic regions (my translation)] (22). She thus brings together two concepts – creolization and cosmopolitanism – which are rarely discussed together in academic literature. Chapter 2 argues that there is much common ground between the two concepts, but that our own prejudices prevent researchers from recognizing that Creole societies are also necessarily cosmopolitan ones.

The book’s second, more ambitious aim is to demonstrate that “le monde du XXI^e siècle aurait beaucoup à apprendre aujourd’hui encore de nos dynamiques créolisantes” [to this day, the 21st-century world still has a lot to learn from our creolizing dynamics (my translation)] (22). This is achieved in part through refusing neat categorical distinctions and searching instead for connections and dialogues between canonical texts which are purported to be of universal relevance, and the “particular” cultural output of peripheries like Mauritius and Réunion. Indeed, what we think of as the “western” literary canon is shown to be in some cases indebted to these peripheries, which is demonstrated in, for example, Lionnet’s rereading of Baudelaire’s poetry in relation to Mauritian and Réunionese cultural and historical specificities (see Chapter 5). Moreover, the problematic notion of the universal and the particular is directly addressed in Chapter 7, where Lionnet critiques both American and French approaches to multiculturalism “in favour of a model of Creole solidarities based in an understanding of ambiguity and opacity”, drawing on the work of historian Megan Vaughan and Caribbean theorist Edouard Glissant (242).

Lionnet’s argument might have been further strengthened by a consideration of possible dialogues and spheres of influence *between* Réunion and Mauritius. Chapter 6, the only chapter to truly consider the cultural politics of Réunion and Mauritius in a comparative perspective, has been significantly reworked – but it appears to have missed opportunities to explore possible parallels, as well as contrasts, between the 1991 Chaudron riots in Réunion and the 1999 Kaya riots in Mauritius. The monograph nonetheless represents a significant addition to the burgeoning field of Indian Ocean cultural studies, and will also be of interest to those researching multiculturalism, postcolonialism and the politics of culture in other contexts.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2013.802098>