



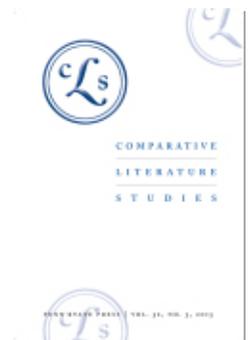
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**The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism,
and Multiculturalism ed. by Elleke Boehmer, Sarah De
Mul (review)**

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imaginative and interactive ways. Eshel also looks at Yigal Shtayim's *Tmunot archiyon* (*Archival Photographs*), paintings created from enlarged photographs projected onto deserted Palestinian houses in Haifa, Israel. He uses these art and memorial works to expand the discussion from literature to demonstrate the applicability of the past in the present and future in other media. Though Eshel includes an expansive selection of literature, there were very few texts written by female authors, posing questions about Eshel's choices or about the availability of such literature. *Futurity* is a compelling and evocative work that will be of interest to a wide range of scholars and anyone with an interest in how we engage with a past that determines our future.

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The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism, and Multiculturalism. Edited by Elleke Boehmer and Sarah De Mul. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012. 266 pp. Cloth \$90.00.

As the editors Elleke Boehmer and Sarah De Mul of *The Postcolonial Low Countries* rightly argue, little attention has traditionally been paid to Dutch-speaking areas in global analysis of the cultural legacy of Europe's colonial policies. In this respect, the publication of a new volume that attempts to reach a broad range of scholars interested in the legacy of Dutch and Belgian colonial policies in the contemporary Low Countries and their former overseas possessions in Africa, Asia, and the Americas should be welcomed. Several of the articles presented in this collected volume meet high academic standards. This is the case, for instance, with Henriette Louwerse's chapter on the Dutch–Moroccan author Hafid Bouazza, Ieme van der Poel's comparative study of Moroccan diasporic writing in Catalan and in Dutch, and Liesbeth Minnaard's article on the perception of Amsterdam in a short story by the Turkish–German author Emine Sevgi Özdamar. As these references indicate, however, the editors' choice for the term “postcolonial” in the volume's title is misleading. Although the book also includes a handful of contributions in the field of postcolonial studies, such as Pamela Pattynama's excellent study on “reflective nostalgia” among repatriates from the former Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia), the focus is primarily on the cultural and social effects on contemporary Dutch and Flemish society of the wave of immigrants from Morocco and Turkey who came to the Low Countries as “guest workers” in the 1960s and 1970s. It is remarkable that

a volume which the editors ambitiously present to readers on its cover as “the first book to bring together critical and comparative approaches to the emergent field of neerlandophone postcolonial studies” does not include a single contribution on the largest truly postcolonial minority group in Dutch society: Dutch–Caribbean people with roots in Suriname and the Antilles. This surprising omission makes the exaggerated claims about the editors’ innovative approach sound empty. The omission also substantially weakens the editors’ claim that there is no academic attention for “non-metropolitan neerlandophone cultures and literatures” in the Low Countries. When reading such blunt and unfounded criticism from editors who overlooked the nation’s Caribbean community, one wonders whether they are even aware of the existence of a journal like *OSO—Tijdschrift voor Surinamistiek en het Caraïbisch Gebied*, which has been publishing cutting-edge research on Surinamese and Dutch–Caribbean cultures and literatures since 1980.

The Postcolonial Low Countries was written at a time when the Netherlands was ruled by a right-wing minority government that had the tacit support of Geert Wilders’s populist anti-Islam party PVV. Although understandable in the tense political climate of the time, the decision by the editors and some of the authors to take a political stand in their contributions gave the book at times a pedantic undertone that is more appropriate for a political pamphlet than for serious scientific research. The same applies to the volume’s many over-dramatizations, such as the unfounded claim by Isabel Hoving that in today’s Netherlands “there are very few platforms left that allow for anything other than a punishingly negative view of migration and multiculturalization.”

Another unfortunate characteristic of this study is the disturbingly aggressive tone vis-à-vis existing journals and studies in the field of Dutch colonial and postcolonial studies. One of the victims of this iconoclastic approach is *Indische Letteren*, a highly respected journal that has been publishing groundbreaking research on colonial and postcolonial literature related to the former Dutch East Indies since 1986. Precisely because the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia are so often overlooked in the field of colonial and postcolonial studies, it is regrettable that Elleke Boehmer and Frances Gouda felt it necessary to launch such a vitriolic attack against one of the few prestigious journals on literature from that part of the world. This reaction is even more surprising since Gouda herself contributed to this journal and Pattynama, one of the contributors to *The Postcolonial Low Countries*, is a member of the journal’s editorial board. Boehmer and Gouda’s cryptic accusation that the journal’s “concerns with colonial *belletrie* are noticeably moved by a defensive nostalgia that expresses at times as anti-Foucauldian empiricism” is also contradicted by Pattynama’s

conclusion in the same volume that “colonial nostalgia . . . should not glibly be rejected as conservative and inauthentic” because it can also serve as “a dynamic, meaningful tool of identification.”

The editors’ self-proclaimed innovative approach to the analysis of literature, colonialism, and multiculturalism in the Low Countries can also be challenged by editorial decisions that contradict the book’s alleged focus on interculturality, multilingualism, and transnationalism. It is, for instance, difficult to understand why the editors, who claim to have overcome established borders between cultures, nations, and languages, present a work on the Low Countries that completely left out the second major language of that area: French. The omission of the French-speaking part of the Low Countries makes the editors’ “intercultural turn” feel as unconvincing as that of a study on interculturality in Canada that would limit itself to the country’s English-speaking provinces. The complete omission of French culture in a book on the cultural identities of the Low Countries aimed at an international reading public is unacceptable. Without, for instance, acknowledging the profound impact of French culture in Belgium and the country’s historical attachment to the principle of *laïcité*, crucial differences between the debate on the use of the headscarf in Belgium as compared to the Netherlands cannot be properly explained to readers who are unfamiliar with the Low Countries. *The Postcolonial Low Countries* suffers, in fact, from a lack of concern for the cultural and historical specificities of the different geographical areas composing the Low Countries. Without providing the necessary foundations, the editors’ self-proclaimed innovative approach to postcolonialism, hybridity, creolization, and multiculturalism in the Low Countries feels like building a new house by beginning with the roof. Due to this construction failure, Boehmer and De Mul’s collected volume fails to achieve its overly ambitious goal.

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Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel: Colonial Difference and Literary Form. By Ulka Anjaria. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012. x + 212 pp. Cloth \$99.00.

Ulka Anjaria’s *Realism in the Twentieth-Century Indian Novel* challenges conventional ways of understanding both realism as a form and the formal attributes of Indian fiction. Over five chapters, it details the emergence and