

Beyond Francophone postcolonial studies: exploring the ends of comparison

Charles Forsdick

[P]ostcolonial studies has the potential to assemble new communities and networks of people who are joined by the common political and ethical commitment to challenging and questioning the practices and consequences of domination and subordination. Anyone can do it. We all come to things from our own positions, of course, and we are each of us enabled and blinkered by the location of our standpoint; but we all have something to learn from, and contribute to, postcolonial studies.¹

Postcolonial studies is inherently comparative. The institutionalization of postcolonial studies in places like the US, UK and Australia, with all its Anglophone emphasis, often ends up erasing postcoloniality's comparative dimensions. But a course on postcolonial literature taught in an English department can read Aimé Césaire's uncompromising theoretical and biographical engagement with colonialism and imperialism and show how francophone postcolonial studies resonates and differs from an Anglophone model that starts with Edward Said's *Orientalism*. That same course could juxtapose Caribbean writers like George Lamming, Jamaica Kincaid, Andrea Levy, Simone Schwartz-Bart, Maryse Condé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Alejo Carpentier alongside Édouard Glissant, Benitez Rojo, Shalini Puri, and Belinda Edmondson. Translation would come up of necessity, and one could then highlight the impossibilities of a neat and tidy comparative trafficking in ideas enabled precisely by the possibilities of translation.²

This article is a reflection on the intersections between postcolonial studies and various critical practices considered to be somehow comparatist. It argues that, whilst much of the activity gathered under the term postcolonialism

- 1 John McLeod (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 6.
- 2 Sangeeta Ray, 'Postcolonial Studies', American Comparative Literature Association, '2014–2015 Report on the State of the Discipline of Comparative Literature', available at <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/postcolonial-studies>. This reflection is developed in 'Towards a Planetary Reading of Postcolonial and American Imaginative Eco-Graphies', in Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas (eds), *A Companion to Comparative Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 421–36.

emerged from the field traditionally known as Comparative Literature, those beginnings became increasingly remote as postcolonial criticism in its earlier manifestations tended towards the monolingual and even the linguistically mute. These issues are studied from the starting point of a particular perspective in French and Francophone studies (although the article seeks to extend beyond this towards that of Modern Languages seen as a wider field federating a range of different language areas). The starting point is nevertheless the uneasy engagement with 'postcolonial' thought and wider questions of postcoloniality evident in French intellectual life, and the associated struggle to understand the relationship between the 'French' and the 'Francophone' as apparently distinctive but ultimately overlapping, and possibly even synonymous, categories. As such, the article alludes to the relationship of postcolonial studies, comparative studies and (in its conclusions) Modern Languages more generally in terms of a shifting configuration of overlapping disciplinary areas, the core concerns of which would appear to be becoming increasingly convergent as they highlight what Sangeeta Ray has called 'the impossibilities of a neat and tidy comparative trafficking in ideas'.

The steady French accommodation with (and of) postcolonial thought has revealed the emergence of new and distinctive intellectual traditions in the postcolonial field (often seen in terms of a 'postcolonial studies *à la française*').³ This accommodation has emerged at differential rates within France itself, and also amongst communities of scholars who seek to explore the French-speaking world from external perspectives and attempt to situate France and the wider Francosphere within a postcolonial frame. It has also underlined the need for what John McLeod saw in 2007 as a move beyond any narrowly monolingual focus on the Francosphere (and similar monolingualizing units) and as a search for new intellectual communities, new networks and new approaches that might permit the deployment of more openly (and possibly more disruptively) comparatist practices. The aim of such a manoeuvre was to encourage engagement with social, cultural, religious and political formations that are themselves increasingly both transnational and cross-lingual. The implications of such shifts are presented in this article as two-fold: first, there is growing evidence in scholarship of a clear movement beyond the national spaces of cultural production that, for a long time, determined the boundaries of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature as disciplinary fields; but secondly, there is a growing and associated move to uncouple the customary linkage of nations to languages, a legacy in part of what could be seen as the cultural hegemonies that crystalized in Enlightenment thought

3 For use of this phrase, see Emily Apter, 'French Colonial Studies and Postcolonial Theory', *SubStance*, 76–77 (1995), 169–80 (p. 171).

and took on different forms in post-Revolutionary France.⁴ This uncoupling is a clear response to what McLeod calls, in the epigraph to this article, ‘the practices and consequences of domination and subordination’, meaning that we are seeing a more generalized ‘becoming-transnational’, and an associated awareness of post-monolingualism, across a wide-range of scholarly fields in the Arts and Humanities.⁵ Conscious that there have been considerable developments in the postcolonial field since the publication in 2007 of the volume edited by McLeod from which the opening epigraph is drawn,⁶ the article concludes by focusing on new and potential forms of postcolonial comparatism. This underlines their multi-directionality and attention to multi-lingualism. It suggests the role of such approaches in orienting and adjusting thinking to keep up with the challenges posed by the hypercomplexity of the contemporary world and the ‘unmooring’ of languages and the increased porosity of language worlds with which this is increasingly associated.⁷

Postcolonial studies à la française?

It is now a decade since various events in France in 2005 played a decisive role in discussions of postcoloniality within and also about that country. Debates concerning the legacies of Empire had been increasingly evident in France

- 4 For a recent discussion of the evolving universalism of the French language, and the differing historical and ideological niches in which the status of the language is to be situated, see Marie-Manuelle Da Silva, ‘Etudes françaises et mondialisation: éléments pour un état des lieux’, *Alternative Francophone*, 1.7 (2014), 38–55.
- 5 This shift, and the new disciplinary configurations that are emerging as a result, have been the subject of current academic debates about the value of the Humanities generally and specifically Modern Language studies. See, e.g., Philippe Lane and Michael Worton (eds), *French Studies in and for the Twenty-First Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), and also Charles Forsdick, “On the abolition of the French department”: the disciplinary challenges of *littérature-monde*, in Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds), *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 89–108, Emmanuelle Saada, ‘More than a Turn? The “Colonial” in French Studies’, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 32.2 (2014), 34–39, and George Ross, ‘Can French Studies Exist Today?’, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 32.2 (2014), 9–14.
- 6 Much work in the first decade of the twenty-first century has sought to challenge the perceived dominance of postcolonialism by foundational ‘Anglophone’ models, which is one of the stated aims of McLeod’s own *Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. The result has been a continued proliferation of ‘companions’, ‘readers’ and other collections in anthological form, although with these volumes revealing an increased diversification of content. See also Graham Huggan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 7 See Alison Phipps, ‘Unmoored: Language Pain, Porosity, and Poisonwood’, *Critical Multilingualism Studies*, 1.2 (2013), pp. 96–118.

itself since 1999, when the French state first officially acknowledged that the conflict in Algeria between 1954 and 1962 constituted a 'guerre' in its own right. This was a move that triggered controversies to be accentuated two years later, in 2001, when General Paul Aussaresses admitted in his memoirs, *Services spéciaux: Algérie 1955-1957*, the widespread use of torture in that war.⁸ These debates have recently acquired a new intensity in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in January 2015, with the legacies of empire deployed as one of the many optics used to understand radicalization.⁹

It was, however, in 2005 that these increasingly incendiary issues achieved a new public prominence: with the launch of the *indigènes de la République* movement in January; with controversy surrounding the *loi du 23 février* (and in particular its fourth clause imposing a responsibility on educators to teach 'le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer' [the positive role of the French overseas presence]); and with the search for explanations following the revolt in the *banlieues* during the month of November, themselves described in one subsequent analysis as 'révoltes postcoloniales'.¹⁰ These sudden shifts were reflected lexically as the term 'le postcolonial' suddenly became a keyword or common item of critical currency in France, no longer signifying the achievement of a chronological posteriority (that is, to be understood as 'prematurely celebratory', a reading of the word that Anne McClintock first usefully outlined in 1992).¹¹ They reflected instead a problematization of links between the colonial past and the hybridized cultural forms, and unevenly complex social structures of the present.

With its potential for a nimble and timely reaction and response, the periodical publication played as ever a key role in this rapid acceleration of debate. There was a proliferation of special issues of journals providing, in 2006 and 2007 (and indeed more recently), forums for exchange, celebration

8 See Neil MacMaster, 'The torture controversy (1998-2002): towards a "new history" of the Algerian war?', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 10.4 (2002), 449–59.

9 See, for instance, Robert Fisk, 'Charlie Hebdo: Paris attack brothers' campaign of terror can be traced back to Algeria in 1954. Algeria is the post-colonial wound that still bleeds in France', *The Independent*, 9 January 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/charlie-hebdo-paris-attack-brothers-campaign-of-terror-can-be-traced-back-to-algeria-in-1954-9969184.html>.

10 On the wider context of these events in colonial memory, see Pascal Blanchard, 'Histoire coloniale: la nouvelle guerre des mémoires', *Cultures sud*, 165 (2007), 30–35. On the November events in the *banlieues*, see Charles Tshimanga, Didier Gondola and Peter J. Bloom (eds), *Frenchness and the Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), and, with a direct deployment of the terminology of postcoloniality, Malika Mansouri, *Révoltes postcoloniales au coeur de l'Hexagone* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013).

11 Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"', *Social Text*, 10.2-3 (1992), 84–98.

and dissent.¹² At the same time, several classics of Anglophone postcolonialism appeared for the first time in French translation, most notably works by Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Spivak, as well as Neil Lazarus's edited *Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, tellingly repackaged under the title *Penser le postcolonial*.¹³ Although, as Claire Joubert has explored in a detailed article on the subject of Homi Bhabha's appearance in translation, the critical response to a number of these French versions was characterized by a sense of 'inaudibilité française', their publication nevertheless occurred in a changing political and intellectual frame shaped in particular by globalization and Europeanization:

[...] cet étrange 'retour' de la 'French Theory' en terrain francophone, ce retour qui n'en est pas un et qui se fait (au moins) dans le dissensus, se fait aussi dans un contexte où le rapport entre théorie et société, les formes sociales d'usage, et leurs dimensions internationales ont été métamorphosés.¹⁴

- 12 On this subject, see Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, 'Introduction: Situating Francophone Postcolonial Thought', in Forsdick and Murphy (eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 1–27 (pp. 16–17). For a hostile reaction to the emergence of postcolonialism as an item of critical currency in France during this period, see Jean-François Bayart, 'En finir avec les études postcoloniales', *Le Débat*, 154 (2009), 119–40. A version of Bayart's article was included in English translation as 'Postcolonial Studies: A Political Invention of Tradition?' in an important issue of *Public Culture* devoted to 'Racial France', guest-edited by Janet Roitman (23.1 [2011]; Bayart's piece is pp. 55–84); in this context, it attracted sustained criticism from other contributors such as Achille Mbembe ('Provincializing France?', pp. 85–119) and Robert J. C. Young ('Bayart's Broken Kettle', pp. 167–75). The special issue not only reveals the clear tensions within French- and English-language debates about postcolonial criticism, but also the importance of translation in enabling those debates to take place.
- 13 Homi K. Bhabha, *Les Lieux de la culture: une théorie postcoloniale*, trans. by Françoise Bouillot (Paris: Payot, 2007), Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialiser l'Europe*, trans. by Olivier Ruchet and Nicolas Vieillescazes (Paris: Les Éditions Amsterdam, 2009), Partha Chatterjee, *Politique des gouvernés*, trans. by Christophe Jaquet (Paris: Les Éditions Amsterdam, 2009), Stuart Hall, *Identités et cultures: politiques des cultural studies*, trans. by Christophe Jaquet (Paris: Les Éditions Amsterdam, 2007), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Les Subalternes peuvent-elles parler?*, trans. by Jérôme Vidal (Paris: Les Éditions Amsterdam, 2009), and Neil Lazarus, *Penser le postcolonial: une introduction critique*, trans. by Marianne Groulez, Christophe Jaquet and Hélène Quiniou (Paris: Les Éditions Amsterdam, 2006). Earlier material, of increasing importance in postcolonial criticism, was also made available again, most notably C.L.R. James, *Les Jacobins noirs: Toussaint Louverture et la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, trans. by Pierre Naville (Paris: Les Éditions Amsterdam, 2008).
- 14 Claire Joubert, 'Théorie en traduction: Homi Bhabha et l'intervention postcoloniale', *Littérature*, 154 (2009), 149–74 (p. 172). On the impact of globalization and Europeanization on France (and French studies), see George Ross, 'Can French Studies Exist Today?', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 32.2 (2014), 9–14.

A serious and informed thinking-through of 'le postcolonial', drawing on knowledge of this shifting context, emerged in a number of new collective works, particularly Marie-Claude Smouts's *La Situation postcoloniale*, Catherine Coquio's *Retours du colonial?*, the ACHAC publication *Culture post-coloniale*, the same association's volume on *Ruptures postcoloniales*, as well as more recent publications such as the Collectif Write Back's *Postcolonial studies: modes d'emploi*.¹⁵ At the same time, a special issue of the journal *Littérature* (154 [2009]) devoted to 'Passages. Écritures francophones, théories postcoloniales', co-edited by Zineb Ali Benali, Martin Mégevand and Françoise Simasotchi-Bronès, brought together work by French-speaking authors and scholars with major Anglophone critics Elleke Boehmer and Robert Young, suggesting that an active dialogue, bridging intellectual and linguistic divides, was becoming possible.

A focus on 2005 (and on its major intellectual repercussions) invites those interested in the institutional history of postcolonial criticism and, perhaps more importantly, in its national or language-specific variations, to track and then analyse both in detail and *in situ* the emergence (or otherwise) of what Emily Apter dubbed some twenty years ago as a possible 'postcolonial studies à la française'. There is a persistent risk that those observing French thought from outside tend to indulge in misguided and self-congratulatory celebration of the advent of an openly 'postcolonial' debate in France,¹⁶ although it is striking nevertheless to read Yves Clavaron's recognition of the benefits of belatedness: 'Etre un "late-comer" présente finalement le double avantage: ne pas céder à l'effet de mode et éviter les errements des prédécesseurs.'¹⁷ The following section of this study will reflect on the ways in which a critical practice always already informed by awareness of the condition of postcoloniality, with roots in anti-colonial thought, arguably existed in the French-speaking world long before this adoption of the vocabulary of postcolonialism. For the various events in France of 2005 illustrate the ways in which such socio-political developments invite a wider process of (self-)reflection regarding, (i) postcolonial studies as an extended, increas-

15 See Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.), *La Situation postcoloniale* (Paris: Les Presses Sciences Po, 2007), Catherine Coquio (ed.), *Retours du colonial? Disculpation et réhabilitation de l'histoire coloniale* (Nantes: L'Atlante, 2008), Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel (eds), *Culture post-coloniale, 1961–2006: traces et mémoires coloniales en France* (Paris: Autrement, 2006), Mbembe Achille et al. (eds), *Ruptures postcoloniales. Les nouveaux visages de la société française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), and Collectif Write Back (eds), *Postcolonial studies: modes d'emploi* (Lyon: PUL, 2013).

16 For a recent discussion of the 'stranger's gaze' in French (cultural) studies, see Michael Kelly, 'Le regard de l'étranger: what French cultural studies brings to French cultural history', *French Cultural Studies*, 25.3/4 (2014), 253–61.

17 Yves Clavaron, 'Histoire d'un retard', in Clavaron (ed.), *Etudes postcoloniales* (Paris: SFLGC, 2011), pp. 7–17 (p. 14).

ingly globalized critical practice and, more particularly, (ii) the potential of recognizing comparatism as a commonly constitutive even problematically foundational element of the field. The growth of 'alternative' modes of postcolonial criticism, tailored to the complexities of different national and linguistic manifestations of postcoloniality, forces a relativisation of the orthodox and often alinguistic tendencies and assumptions evident in the postcolonial field. At the same time, such a development encourages a shift from reductive, teleological accounts of emerging critical practices to a more unwieldy reflection on the genealogies of thought.¹⁸ What Sangeeta Ray dismissed as 'neat and tidy comparative trafficking in ideas' is replaced by an adoption of transcolonial approaches that reveal both the enabling potential of comparison and the persistent presence of entanglements.

Recent French engagement with 'le postcolonial' is a firm reminder that no particular disciplinary field has a monopoly on postcolonial studies. Whereas the area in the Anglophone world has emerged primarily in literature and cultural studies departments, postcolonialism in France (with notable exceptions, such as in the work of Dominique Combe and Jean-Marc Moura) has been situated initially in the social sciences and history.¹⁹ Moreover, these shifts are also a reflection of the ways in which explicitly postcolonial debates can have a prominence in public discourse that they often seem to lack in the English-speaking world. It is significant, for instance, that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq triggered talk of dislocation between theory and praxis and of a crisis in postcolonial studies in North America. This shift is suggested by the title of the 2007 *PMLA* dossier on "The End of Postcolonial Theory?" in which Jennifer Wenzel (among others) despaired that 'our critiques have proved inadequate to obstruct or reroute the imperialist, racist logic of fighting over there to maintain power over here'.²⁰

18 Although this article focuses on Francophone contexts, a similar process occurs in Latin American engagements with postcolonial thought. See, for example, Fernando Coronil, 'Elephants in the Americas: Latin American postcolonial studies and global decolonization', in Mabel Morana, Enrique Dussell and Carlos A. Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 396–416, and J. Jorge Klor de Alva, 'The postcolonization of the (Latin) American experience: a reconsideration of "colonialism", "postcolonialism" and "mestizaje"', in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 241–75.

19 See the pioneering work of the postcolonial *passer* [literally, a smuggler of ideas] Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: PUF, 2007 [1999]).

20 See Patricia Yaeger, 'Editor's column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu and Jennifer Wenzel', *PMLA* 122.3 (2007), 633–51 (p. 634). On such debates in the French context, see David Murphy, 'Beyond Anglophone Imperialism?', *New Formations*, 59 (Autumn 2006), 132–43 [special issue: 'After Iraq: Reframing Postcolonial Studies', ed. by Neil Lazarus and Priya Gopal].

The task for those observing and contributing to an explicitly ‘postcolonial’ debate in and about France is not only to note such current divergences and convergences. It is also to reflect on the context from which, as has been suggested already, these new critical tendencies did not appear *ex nihilo* in 2005. It is no surprise that many of the concepts and themes guiding criticism of postcolonial literature in France were very similar to those informing postcolonial studies in the Anglophone world.²¹ Central to that frame of reference was the field of Francophone literary studies, an area that first emerged, alongside studies in Commonwealth literature in the 1960s and 1970s, in the pioneering early work of French-based scholars such as Yves Benot, Jacques Chévrier, Lilyan Kesteloot and Bernard Mouralis, and that of their Anglophone colleagues, including Dorothy Blair, Denise Ganderton, Peter Hawkins, Bridget Jones and Roger Little. At the same time, postcolonial theory is a decidedly French phenomenon, the result of ‘travelling theory’, a reflection of the creative potential of translation and of the transatlantic melding of thought as anti-colonial writing (the work of Césaire, Fanon, Glissant, Khatibi and Memmi) encountered the poststructuralism (most notably of Derrida and Foucault), discovering in the Anglophone academy commonalities previously obscured.²²

It would be an oversimplification to present *études francophones* as evolving towards poetics and aesthetics whilst (Anglophone) postcolonial studies has tended towards political and ethical concerns. It is clear, however, that under the relative influence, or indeed lack of influence, of the postcolonial project, a degree of bifurcation occurred in ‘Anglophone’ and ‘Francophone’ approaches to the literary production of formerly colonized cultures. Dominique Combe has written incisively about this process, taking Hugh MacLennan’s notion from a Canadian context of ‘two solitudes’ (Anglophone and Francophone) in order to reflect on the distinctiveness of postcolonial approaches. For Combe, whereas much Anglophone criticism ‘forgets the textuality of literary

21 The point regarding an apparent ‘reinvention of the wheel’ is made by Jean-François Bayart in his critical account of postcolonialism, *Les Etudes postcoloniales: un carnaval académique* (Paris: Karthala, 2010). See also Jean-Loup Amselle, *L’Occident décroché: enquête sur les postcolonialismes* (Paris: Stock, 2008).

22 For a discussion of the (Francophone) genealogies of postcolonial thought, see Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), and Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas, ‘Postcolonializing France’, *Public Culture*, 23.1 (2011), 217–31 (pp. 221–24). Robert Young, in his response to Bayart’s assault on postcolonialism, nevertheless seeks to diversify such an account by providing a remarkably diverse catalogue of anti-colonial figures from whose writings and example postcolonial studies has developed (‘Bayart’s Broken Kettle’, p. 173); he also draws attention to the role of the international anticolonial organizations he studied in his own *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), making it clear that the genealogies of activism and thought constantly cross national, cultural and linguistic boundaries.

works', the opposite is arguably true in recent French interventions in the field, such as the *littérature-monde* manifesto on 2007, in which he senses a failure 'to break with an "atavistic" conception of literature, which [its signatories] continue to consider from a "French" center'.²³ Combe's solution is to look at the potentially creative encounter between postcolonialism and genetic criticism, evident in recent studies of authors such as Aimé Césaire and Ahmadou Kourouma:²⁴ this is a convergence that, in Combe's terms, 'in addition to its heuristic significance, allow[s] for a critical examination, from a distance, of the contributions of postcolonial theory and thus bring[s] the traditions of Francophone criticism closer to Anglophone studies'.²⁵ At the same time, however, one only needs to compare Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (1998) with Michel Beniamino and Lise Gauvin's *Vocabulaire des études francophones: les concepts de base* (2005) to confirm the existence of much common ground between these distinctive linguistic and national traditions.²⁶ There is a need, however, to highlight one significant distinction: in France, the study of postcolonial literature in French was initially associated not with an institutional home in departments of national literature or *lettres modernes* but with Comparative Literature (or *littérature générale et comparée*). This matter of context is essential to any understanding of the nature of the 'postcolonial studies *à la française*' on which this section has focused. Far from serving exclusively as a source of divergence, it also provides grounds for reconsidering postcolonialism's critical project, both in terms of its emergence, but also of its possible future directions.

France in a postcolonial frame

In exploring the enabling interconnections of postcolonialism and comparatism, it would be rash to ignore the ways in which this particular French

23 Dominique Combe, "'Two Solitudes": Francophone Studies and Postcolonial Theories', in H. Adlai Murdoch and Zsuzanna Fagya (eds), *Francophone Cultures and Geographies of Identity* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), pp. 367–86 (pp. 382, 371).

24 See, for example, A. James Arnold, 'Césaire's *Notebook* as Palimpsest: the text before, during, and after World War II', *Research in African Literatures*, 35.3 (2004), 133–40, and Patrick Corcoran and Jean-François Ekoungoun, 'L'avant-texte des *Soleils des indépendances*', *Genesis*, 33 (2011), 101–18. See also Arnold's edition of Césaire's works: *Poésie, théâtre, essais et discours. Édition critique* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2014).

25 Combe, "'Two Solitudes'", p. 382.

26 See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), and Michel Beniamino and Lise Gauvin (eds), *Vocabulaire des études francophones: les concepts de base* (Limoges: PULIM, 2005). It is nevertheless important to note that although Beniamino and Gauvin's volume was published in France, Gauvin belongs firmly as a *Québécoise* to a tradition of North American scholarship.

comparatist perspective has been rigorously questioned by many critics. These detect in any such distinction between (national approaches to) 'French' and (comparative approaches to) 'Francophone' literatures an effort to protect French cultural production from seemingly harmful influences emanating from elsewhere: that is, a process of marginalization, a perpetuation of the relative hierarchies of literary importance and merit as well as of the binaries of metropolitan and non-metropolitan cultural production, and a defense mechanism to protect 'les beautés de la langue française'.²⁷ Whichever of these explanations is accepted, postcoloniality has had an obvious impact outside France on a traditional, 'Hexagonal' (that is, exclusively French, with that epithet understood in reductively national terms) object of study. This has implications all the more pressing as French institutions often ignore the implications of the status of French itself as a variegated world language (as opposed to a regional one), and also the role of France itself as the site of an increasingly globalized culture, 'hybridized', in Thomas Spear's terms, 'by its "own" Francophonía'.²⁸

Some scholars, such as Sandy Petrey, have previously defended a Hexagonal focus in studies of France against what he saw as potentially 'Francophobic inquiry'. Others, such as Mireille Rosello, have performed a provocative reversal, suggesting that 'Hexagonal literature is a branch of Francophone Studies'.²⁹ The latter approach offers a French-language illustration of what Chakrabarty calls the 'provincialization of Europe', a process also implied in Christopher Miller's claim, in *Nationalists and Nomads*, that France may become an overseas territory of Africa.³⁰ Such a reversal of poles, however tempting it may appear, ignores the persistent dynamics of *la Francophonie*, the ambivalent but lasting presence of the DOM-ROMs, the systematic historic underdevelopment of colonies, and the development of their subsequent

27 For a questioning of this French comparatist focus, see David Murphy, 'De-centring French studies: towards a postcolonial theory of Francophone cultures', *French Cultural Studies*, 38 (2002), 165–85.

28 Thomas Spear, 'Introduction: Alié-nations françaises', in *La Culture française vue d'ici et d'ailleurs* (Paris: Kathala, 2002), pp 9–37 (p. 12).

29 Sandy Petrey, 'French Studies / Cultural Studies: Reciprocal Invigoration or Mutual Destruction', *French Review*, 68 (1995), 381–92, and 'Language Charged with Meaning', *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 133–45 (p. 135). See Mireille Rosello, 'Unhoming Francophone Studies: A House in the Middle of the Current', *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 123–32 (p. 131).

30 See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), and Christopher L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). On the specific provincialization of France, see Frederick Cooper, 'Provincializing France', in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (eds), *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press; Oxford: James Currey, 2007), pp. 341–47.

neo-colonial dependency.³¹ It is important not to fall into the wish-fulfilling temptation of compensating for geo-political realities by erasing, through epistemic or symbolic manoeuvrings, their material implications. What is perhaps a more pragmatic starting point is the possibility of recognizing a non-hierarchical interdependency that remains difficult to unravel, that is of a Francosphere or complex French-speaking space whose geography has moved beyond that of centres and peripheries.³²

Dorothy Blair, in her pioneering early study *African Literature in French* (1976), already pointed to a genealogy that belied any *ex nihilo* emergence of a discrete new literature. She saw African Francophone writing in dialogue with colonial literature,³³ an observation supported by the rationale behind Roger Little's still expanding 'Autrement même' series for L'Harmattan: that is, 'mettre à la disposition du public un volet plutôt négligé du discours-postcolonial' [making available to the reading public a rather neglected aspect of postcolonial discourse].³⁴ This progressive imbrication of what are known as the 'French' and 'Francophone' led to their alliance in what Peter France, two decades ago now in his *New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (1995), helpfully identified as 'literature in French', in what Roger Little described as the 'Francographic', and in what Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman have more recently classed as 'French global'.³⁵

None of these terms is wholly satisfactory, but each underlines the need to avoid exoticization or marginalization and to acknowledge the radically disruptive force of the opening up of the 'French' field that they imply. From a recognition of such interdependency emerges an awareness that the activity

31 Jacques Attali's 2014 report 'La francophonie et la francophilie: moteurs de développement durable', with its fifty-three recommendations for fostering dynamic economic exchange amongst French-speaking countries, reveals the continued role of the institution in France's soft power overseas. See <http://www.elysee.fr/assets/Uploads/Rapport-Jacques-Attali-la-francophonie-conomique.pdf> [consulted 18 October 2014].

32 For a discussion of the 'Francosphere', see Charles Forsdick, 'The Francosphere and Beyond: exploring the boundaries of French Studies', *Francosphères*, 1.1 (2012), 1–17. *Francosphères* is the title of a journal published by Liverpool University Press for the University of London Institute in Paris, the aim of which is to 'define and question the presence of French language and culture across frontiers and borders'. See <http://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk> [consulted 18 October 2014].

33 Dorothy Blair, *African Literature in French* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

34 <http://www.editions-harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=collection&no=239> [consulted 18 October 2014].

35 Peter France, *New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Roger Little, 'World literature in French; or is Francophonie frankly phoney?', *European Review*, 9.4 (2001), 421–36, and Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman (eds), *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

uniting most of those interested in Francophone postcolonial questions is an investigation of the gap between – in Mary Gallagher’s terms – what is understood by ‘France’ and what is meant by ‘French’.³⁶ From an initial analysis of the status of France itself, we move to a globalized, transnational object of inquiry, a recognition, according to Dubois and Mbembe, that ‘nous sommes tous francophones’.³⁷ Resistance to such an approach persists. A history of French literature published just over a decade ago, for instance, justified maintenance of a primarily national focus by describing its subject as one of a number of ‘great cultural monuments, go[ing] back at least a millennium’, and allocating, in a section entitled ‘Beyond the Hexagon’, five of its 300 or so pages to a corpus of non-European French-language works.³⁸ What is not immediately apparent in such a move is any clear acknowledgement that enlargement of the canon is bound up with a thorough transformation of the ways one reads. In other words, a newly emergent yet increasingly coherent field of study, addressing the ‘Francosphere’, or the interlocking regions, countries and communities in which French is actually or historically a primary means of communication, requires, again as John McLeod suggests in the epigraph to this article, new, post-national communities and networks that permit us to move beyond a focus on single nations, languages and cultures and encourage engagement with very different configurations.

New communities, new networks, new frames

In identifying and building these new communities and networks, and in asserting the rationale by which they are underpinned, comparatism seems to play an increasingly prominent role. The word has previously recurred in some of the definitional and more ambitious state-of-the-discipline interventions I have mentioned above, which suggest for instance – to borrow a term from Emily Apter’s study of Spitzer in wartime Istanbul – a clear ‘comp-lit-ization’ of the postcolonial field.³⁹ In French studies itself, Laurence Kritzman called over a decade ago for ‘hermeneutic strategies that are both comparative and dialogic in nature’. This may be seen to imply a wholesale integration of the

36 On this subject, see Mary Gallagher, ‘Revisiting the “Others’ Others”, or the Bankruptcy of Otherness as a Value in Literature in French’, *Women’s Studies Review*, 6 (1999), 51–59 (p. 51), cited by Roger Little, ‘World Literature in French; or Is Francophonie Frankly Phoney?’, p. 425.

37 Laurent Dubois and Achille Mbembe, ‘Nous sommes tous francophones’, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 32.2 (2014), 40–48.

38 See Sarah Kay, Terence Cave and Malcolm Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 1, pp. 301–06.

39 See Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

study of national literature into openly comparative and interdisciplinary programmes, both of which would allow the creation of connections across Francophone spaces.⁴⁰ Some may balk at these suggestions, for it is after all the institutional alliance in the French academy, already addressed above, of *littérature comparée* and *littérature francophone*, which may be seen to act as a defence mechanism to protect the coherence of national literature. However, it is comparatism as an investigative and ultimately disruptive process and method, rather than as an institutional product or publishing phenomenon, that is at stake.

At the same time, it is important not to forget that the role of Comparative Literature in the emergence of postcolonial studies was fully and illuminatingly explored at an early stage in the development of the field, not least by scholars such as Emily Apter in their responses to the 1993 Bernheimer report on 'Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century'.⁴¹ Moreover, the role of Edward Said, often glibly cited as the 'founder' of postcolonial theory, is perhaps more accurately understood in the light of his training in the traditions of German and Romance philology and of the comparatist practices, often applied to the contrastive reading of French-language texts, that dominates much of his critical practice.⁴² What Said casts as the 'pleasures of exile', that is, 'originality of vision' enhanced by a 'plurality of vision', are combined in the contrapuntal approach that characterized his later work.⁴³ Counterpoint becomes the methodological underpinning of *Culture and Imperialism*, implying a shift in systems of knowledge with potentially major epistemological implications. Like *Orientalism*, this 1993 text has been absorbed into the narrative of the emergence of postcolonialism and granted pre-eminence in its critical canon. What this process ignores, however, is the fact that Said's self-distancing from critical theory in the 1980s was followed by a more focused flight from and disavowal of postcolonial theory in the decade before his death. One of the clearest statements of this uneasiness with postcolonialism is in the 1995 'Afterword' to the new edition of *Orien-*

40 Laurence D. Kritzman, 'A Certain Idea of French: Cultural Studies, Literature and Theory', *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 146–60 (p. 154).

41 Charles Bernheimer (ed.), *Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

42 On Said and postcolonialism, see Fred Poché, *Edward W. Said, l'humaniste radical: aux sources de la pensée postcoloniale* (Paris: Cerf, 2013). For a discussion of Said's debt to French-language material (and a telling analysis of the eclecticism of his approach), see Dominique Combe, 'Edward W. Said, Frantz Fanon et Aimé Césaire', in Claire Joubert and Emilienne Baneth-Nouailhetas (eds), *Le Post-colonial comparé: Anglophonie, Francophonie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Vincennes, 2014), pp. 113–23.

43 Edward W. Said, 'Mind of Winter: Reflection on Life in Exile', *Harper's Magazine*, September 1984, pp. 49–56.

talism. Claiming that the text was written as ‘a partisan book, not a theoretical machine’, Said welcomes his critics’ attacks on what they (accurately, in his opinion) see as his “residual” humanism’ and claims that Orientalism operates according to ‘a combination of consistency *and* inconsistency’.⁴⁴

What, then, was Said’s relationship to a wider comparatist project? From it, he drew a catholicity of both subject matter and approach as well as the advantages of operating outside the stable language of a single, clearly defined field, of – to borrow a phrase from the conclusion of his own memoirs – ‘wander[ing] out of place’.⁴⁵ Yet what he did not share was the sense, widespread in *Building a Profession* (a 1994 study of the history of Comparative Literature in the United States), that the discipline is under threat in a particular, disciplinary sense from Cultural Studies and in a more general sense from the implications for its object of study of globalization and decolonization.⁴⁶ These were the issues, perceived less as sources as anxiety than as potential means of renewal, that underpinned Charles Bernheimer’s edited volume, *Comparative Literature in an Age of Multiculturalism*, published at around the same time. Among the contributions to this, Emily Apter’s paper already suggests a pedigree of postcolonialism that roots the field directly in Comparative Literature. What Apter saw in the strategic self-positionings of postcolonialism and comparatism was a struggle to ‘define and lay claim to the material and psychic legacy of dislocation’, a struggle that disguises a marked disavowal of the two fields’ clear resemblances.⁴⁷ ‘Who,’ she asked, ‘lays claim to the exilic aura of Comparative Literature’s exilic past[?]’.⁴⁸ Her answer then seemed to suggest that postcolonialism would eclipse comparative literature in much the same way that Susan Bassnett had also suggested in the early 1990s that translation or intercultural studies would become the new form of comparatism.⁴⁹ But underpinning this is a recognition that what such struggles for disciplinary dominance, as well as the allied debates over nomenclature, disguise is a more important series of shifts in the objects of knowledge (increasingly inter- or transnational, and also digital) and the ways in which we construct that very knowledge (in increasingly inter- or

44 Edward W. Said, ‘Afterword’, in *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 [1978]), pp. 329–54 (p. 340, p. 341).

45 Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 294.

46 See Lionel Grossman and Mihai I. Spariosu (eds), *Building a Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the History of Comparative Literature in the United States* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

47 Emily Apter, ‘Comparative Exile: Competing Margins in the History of Comparative Literature’, in Bernheimer (ed.), *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, pp. 86–96 (p. 86).

48 Apter, ‘Comparative Exile’, p. 94.

49 See Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

trans-disciplinary, inter- or transcultural ways). It is therefore the activity of comparison that has become revitalized in the world today and it is here that the contribution of Said will ultimately prove most valuable.

His contrapuntal reading – this ongoing attempt to present comparatism with an unrestricted field of enquiry and without any implicit hierarchies – remains largely undeveloped both by Said himself and by his subsequent interpreters.⁵⁰ Central to it, however, was the desire to elaborate a critical practice that is ‘neither completely at one with the new [...] nor fully disencumbered of the old’.⁵¹ In exploring the interval between what we understand by ‘France’ and what is designated more generally by ‘French’, such a nuanced approach would seem invaluable. From a polarized, imbalanced, even falsely dichotomized view of the relationship between France and its former colonies or current *dependencies*, we move to a more flexible approach to intersections and *interdependencies*.⁵² From work on the Francophone Caribbean, a clear sense of such connectedness has emerged. Jean Jonassaint has explained the ways in which ‘French’ and ‘Francophone’ in a Caribbean context are ‘to a certain extent, part of one another’. Michael Dash has explored the subtle intersections of Caribbean and French travel writing around World War II. Similarly following Haiti’s ‘celebration’ of its bi-centenary of independence, the role of the island in the formation of French republican identity – already mapped out by historians such as Laurent Dubois in ‘La République métisée’ – has become increasingly apparent.⁵³ Such arguments have been developed more recently by Dubois again, in association with Achille Mbembe, who have envisaged an approach to France, French, Frenchness and the wider French-speaking world that is actively decolonized and reflects the full implications of the postcolonial project.⁵⁴

50 For one of the few focused volumes on ‘counterpoint’, see May Telmissany and Stephanie Tara Schwartz (eds), *Counterpoints: Edward Said’s Legacy* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

51 Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), p. 49.

52 Nicki Hitchcott commented on the need for a major reappraisal of such divisions at a time when the novels of Camara Laye, having been presented to perhaps thousands of undergraduates as the epitome of an African Francophone author, were revealed to be the work of Belgian ghost writer. See ‘The Death of the Native’, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 1.2 (2003), 70–71.

53 Jean Jonassaint, ‘Literatures in the Francophone Caribbean’, *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 55–63 (p. 58); Michael Dash, ‘*Caraĩbe Fantôme*: The Play of Difference in the Francophone Caribbean’, *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 93–105; and Laurent Dubois, ‘*La République métisée*: citizenship, colonialism, and the borders of French history’, *Cultural Studies*, 14.1 (2000), 15–34. On the increasing importance of Haiti in postcolonial debates more generally, see, for example, Nick Nesbitt, ‘The Idea of 1804’, *Yale French Studies*, 107 (2005), 6–38.

54 Dubois and Mbembe, ‘Nous sommes tous francophones’. For recent work exemplifying such an approach, see Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Bergson postcolonial* (Paris: CNRS, 2014),

Comparatism and 'becoming-transnational'

Such examples of enhanced intercultural and comparative consciousness and of growing cross-cultural literacy remain central to the Modern Languages field more generally as it undergoes a process alluded to at the outset of this article, that Françoise Lionnet has described as 'becoming-transnational'.⁵⁵ These practices provide clear disciplinary coherence at a time when the area appears to be threatened by dispersal. In his excellent study of translation and globalization, Michael Cronin has stated: '[T]he general decline in foreign-language learning in the English-speaking world in recent years can be attributed in part to the ready identification of English as the sole language of globalization but also to the desire to maintain the benefits of connectedness without the pain of connection'.⁵⁶ The comparatism inherent in what is often cast as a specifically Francophone postcolonial studies – comparatism within Francophone spaces, between Francophone spaces and then beyond, with those of other language areas – is, I would suggest, a constant reminder that in the study of cultural connectedness, this 'pain of connection' positively and challengingly persists.

At a conference held at the Institut Français in London more than twenty years ago, the proceedings of which were published by Peter Hawkins and Annette Lavers as *Protée noir*, Daniel-Henri Pageaux had already actively warned against any bilateral comparatism or exclusive Anglo-French dialogue. He encouraged instead a multi-directional comparative practice, drawing in particular on the cultural production of Hispanophone cultures, of which much of his own work is an exemplary illustration.⁵⁷ This article suggests in its concluding sections that a shared commitment to multi-directional comparatism should constitute a key area in explorations of the encounter between postcolonial and French and Francophone studies and, by extension, between postcolonialism and research on Modern Languages more generally. It is an essential element of the dialogues and conflicts that have already occurred or, perhaps more importantly, might yet develop.

as well as Bernard Mouralis's *Le Sud du Nord. Presence et Usages du Sud Chez Racine, Mallarmé, Daudet et Loti* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014).

55 Françoise Lionnet, 'Introduction', *Modern Language Notes*, 118.4 (2003), 783–86 (p. 784) [themed issue on 'Francophone Studies: New Landscapes', edited by Françoise Lionnet and Dominic Thomas]. See also the major AHRC-funded project, linked to the 'Translating Cultures' theme, on 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages'. Details available at: <http://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/> [consulted 15 October 2014].

56 Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 49.

57 See Daniel-Henri Pageaux, 'Francophonie d'Afrique et perspectives comparatistes: propositions pour une relance des études francophones', in Peter Hawkins and Annette Lavers (eds), *Protée noir: essais sur la littérature francophone de l'Afrique noire et des Antilles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), pp. 37–44.

Comparative approaches allow expansion of the postcolonial canon beyond the relatively narrow range of authors to which it sometimes appears to have been reduced. They permit the sophisticated, flexible, tailored and open critical manoeuvres inevitably required in the transcolonial analysis of entangled imperial histories and the multilingual postcolonial cultures in which these have resulted. They encourage recognition of the ways in which literature and other cultural production often reflects the processes of transnational co-colonialism that often characterize geopolitical asymmetries of power in an increasingly globalized world.

The resistance that a general 'postcolonial turn' has triggered in France during the last decade, most notably in the work of Pascal Bruckner and Daniel Lefevre, is part of a wider counter-reaction that has been evident since the emergence of postcolonial criticism, epitomized by Bernard Lewis's early attacks on Said in the late 1970s for 'expiation for empire'.⁵⁸ It is equally evident in the anxieties constantly articulated by postcolonial critics themselves, suggesting that there are few fields of inquiry more 'anxiogenic' than postcolonial studies. As Terry Eagleton quipped in the first issue of *Interventions*, 'there must surely be in existence somewhere a secret handbook for aspiring postcolonial theorists, whose second rule reads "begin your essay by calling into question the whole notion of postcolonialism"'.⁵⁹ The institutional history of postcolonialism, and the associated status of this body of thought as a *phénomène d'édition*, from which several publishers have drawn considerable profits, continues to attract sustained attention. Since the turn of the millennium, Peter Hallward's *Absolutely Postcolonial* has warned against the universalizing ambitions of the field. Graham Huggan's *Postcolonial Exotic* has aimed to highlight the risks of commodifying otherness in critical practice. And David Scott, in a series of key interventions, has explored the mismatch of the anti-colonial romanticism underlying much postcolonial criticism with what he sees as the tragedy of contemporary postcoloniality.⁶⁰

58 For more recent examples of such tendencies, see Pascal Bruckner, *La Tyrannie de la pénitence* (Paris: Grasset, 2006), and Daniel Lefevre, *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006). For an English translation of the former, see *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

59 Terry Eagleton, 'Postcolonialism and "Postcolonialism"', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1 (1998), 24–26 (p. 24).

60 See Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), and David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

These examples all signal and constitute creative interventions from within the field. Yet a growing sense of external animosity towards postcolonial criticism has persisted. Drawing on a corpus of non-metropolitan literature in French, the United States comparatist Richard Serrano's polemical *Against the Postcolonial* (2005) contributed to this, variously presenting, for instance, the body of work he sought to interrogate as ill-informed, outmoded or simply in need of thorough reform.⁶¹ Serrano's conclusion was that (Francophone) postcolonial criticism could only be salvaged through a rigorous engagement with comparatism. The flaw in his argument, which parodies postcolonial criticism as 'sprinkle a little Spivakian subalterneity on Soyinka and stir', was that it failed to recognize the already existing and enduring presence of the 'comp-lit-ization' of the postcolonial field – a process that has merely been amplified in the decade since the publication of his work. This tendency is particularly evident in the indebtedness of the postcolonial project, from the outset, to comparative methodologies. It is equally apparent in the rapid re-assertion of comparatism as a means, on the one hand, of redefining postcolonialism in the twenty-first century and, on the other, of repositioning it in relation to emergent disciplines such as transnational cultural studies, World Literature, diaspora studies or globalization studies. These developments suggest the ways in which terms such as 'postcolonial', 'transnational' and 'global' are far from synonymous, but in fact signify a range of creative interrelationships that help collectively to elucidate the spaces, moments and contexts (political, religious and cultural) in which we currently travel and dwell.

As suggested above, it is worth noting that *The Empire Writes Back*, a foundational (and often unfairly demonized) text in the field, itself had already constituted a rigorous engagement with a revitalized comparative project, outlining for instance in its opening pages that 'the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies'.⁶² This initial commitment to a multilingual, globalized research practice was, however, progressively lost from view as a field that had perhaps expanded too rapidly, increasingly dominated by a star-system of critics and the risks of over-anthologisation. It risked backing itself into a monolingual *impasse* or at least associating itself with a series of discretely monolingual research

61 See Richard Serrano, *Against the Postcolonial: 'Francophone' Writers at the Ends of French Empire* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

62 Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 36–37. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's volume has subsequently (and arguably belatedly) appeared in French translation: *L'Empire vous répond: théorie et pratique des littératures post-coloniales*, trans. by Jean-Yves Serra and Martine Mathieu-Job (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2012).

agendas (Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, Germanophone, Lusophone, etc.) that have been critiqued as ‘un système d’apartheid jalousement gardé’ by theorists such as Robert Young.⁶³ It is striking, however, that current developments suggest that this dialogue between postcolonialism and comparatism – long in preparation – at last appears to be bearing critical fruit. An awareness of monolingual tendencies, as well as of the (admittedly often exaggerated) risks of an Anglophone imperium in the field, underpins recent evidence of a shifting centre of gravity. John McLeod’s *Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2007) drew equally, for instance, on the colonial histories of Britain, France, Spain and Portugal, and the postcolonial and diasporic cultures in which these resulted. This advocacy of a postcolonial project renewed by an engagement with comparative, interdisciplinary and cross-linguistic questions is also evident elsewhere, not least in volumes such as Robert Aldrich’s *The Age of Empires* (2007) or Edinburgh University Press’s *Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures in Continental Europe and its Empires* (2008),⁶⁴ both of which have served as invaluable sourcebooks for those seeking to explore colonialism and its aftermath across cultural contexts. Graham Huggan’s recent *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (2013), with its concluding section on postcolonialism ‘across the world’, also actively advocates and acknowledges the benefits of a comparative, multi-lingual approach. These interconnections have also become increasingly apparent in France, not least with the publication of Joubert and Baneth-Nouailhetas’s edited volume on *Le Postcolonial comparé*.

As the comparative historiography and attention to the mobility of ideas that underpinned Robert Young’s historical introduction to postcolonialism made clear,⁶⁵ even if postcolonial scholars are not necessarily comparatists by training, they have a tendency, out of increasing necessity, to practise various forms of cross-cultural criticism. Nowhere has this perhaps been clearer than in study of the Caribbean, the complex histories of whose islands reveal to such an extent the interconnectedness of imperial histories and of their contemporary aftermaths that they have been posited as the geographical basis for a new postcolonial paradigm.⁶⁶ There is a continued

63 Robert J. C. Young, ‘Littérature anglaise ou littératures en langue anglaise’, in Joubert and Baneth-Nouailhetas (eds), *Le Post-colonial comparé*, pp. 45–59 (p. 45).

64 Robert Aldrich, *The Age of Empires* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007); Prem Poddar, Rajeev S Patke and Lars Jensen (eds), *Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures in Continental Europe and its Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). See also Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (eds), *The Routledge History of Western Empires* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014).

65 See Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*.

66 Claire Joubert, ‘Le “postcolonial” à la différence des langues: culture, politique et enjeu de monde’, in Joubert and Baneth-Nouailhetas (eds), *Le Post-colonial comparé*, pp. 9–42 (p.

risk, however, of an enlightened dilettantism, of generalists replacing specialists, and of linguistic and intercultural expertise being progressively lost. It is with these concerns in mind that this article's conclusions address more fully the implications of the more general 'comp-lit-ization' we are currently witnessing.

Postcolonial comparatism: multi-directionality, multi-lingualism

Postcolonial comparatism may operate at a number of levels. It is important to acknowledge the complex set of research practices that such a term appears to designate. The first stage, dependent on intra-lingual comparisons, reflects in one form the historical starting point of postcolonialism in its earlier manifestations, such as Commonwealth or Francophone literary studies, the aim of both of which was to read 'peripheral' literary production in relation to a 'metropolitan' benchmark. Although such an approach risked perpetuating pre-existing value judgments and hierarchies relating centripetally to relative literary worth, it nevertheless served as the basis of the comparatism already mooted in *The Empire Writes Back*. The authors of that pioneering study still operated in what was essentially a monolingual, Anglophone zone but nevertheless suggested alternative vectors of comparison, often short-circuiting (and even erasing) the literary production of the metropolitan centre and creating unexpected connections across postcolonial space. With a growing awareness of Harish Trivedi's early warning that 'the postcolonial has ears only for English',⁶⁷ there has been a shift away from a comparative critical practice that was transcultural but essentially monolingual. A number of key interventions in the postcolonial field have illustrated the potential of critical approaches that draw on material from a range of language traditions.⁶⁸ Such an approach, however welcome it might be, fails nevertheless to address the full implications of Trivedi's mordant observation, the aim of which is to expand the postcolonial field beyond the

15). See A. James Arnold, *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, 3 vols (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1994–97).

67 Harish Trivedi, 'The Postcolonial or the transcolonial? Location and language', *Interventions*, 1.2 (1999), 269–72.

68 See, for example, Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), and Amar Acheraiou, *Rethinking Postcolonialism: Colonialist Discourse in Modern Literatures and the Legacy of Classical Writers* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), both of whom draw on corpora of Anglophone and Francophone material. See also Claudia Esposito, *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), which makes use of corpora of Francophone and Italophone texts.

inclusion of dominant European languages – what we might consider to be the postcolonial variegation of a tradition of Romance philology – in order to valorize equally cultures expressed in Creoles or indigenous languages. The genuine potential of a postcolonial comparatism is to decolonize the epistemological bases of a traditionally configured comparative literary approach and to elaborate multi-directional research practices. This means working across languages and creating connections that were largely absent in, for instance, the early formulation of a field such as Francophone postcolonial studies, whose resonance with parallel processes in the Latin American field was not fully acknowledged.⁶⁹ For scholars with postcolonial interests in the Modern Languages field, this means either the increasingly apparent and active engagement with other language traditions (for example, specialists of Maghrebi literatures in French engaging with material in Arabic or Caribbeanists ensuring that their study of literatures in the major European languages is complemented by work on cultural production in Creole), or it signals, at the very least, the need for an awareness of the potential shortcomings and blind spots of an approach – engaging for instance exclusively with Hispanophone and Francophone works – that, whilst no longer strictly ‘monolingual’, investigates only works in the traditional Romance languages.⁷⁰ Laurent Dubois and Achille Mbembe make this point firmly in the context of an article rethinking the distinction between ‘French’ and ‘Francophone’ studies and the linguistic bases of any reinvented form of the field:

Our understanding of the French language [...] itself needs to be more global and heterodox: most French speakers today live in Africa, and the forms of spoken and written French throughout the world are highly layered and creolized. A strong basis in French is essential to our work, but so too is instruction in and engagement with languages like Arabic, Wolof, Lingala, or Caribbean and Indian Ocean Creoles.⁷¹

In addition to McLeod’s ‘new communities and networks’ discussed above, I would suggest that the conditions for such developments are threefold:

(i) New Approaches. Richard Serrano’s *Against the Postcolonial*, published a decade ago in 2005, received a justifiably hostile response but there are appearing more constructive studies advocating postcolonial comparatism and developing a critical and conceptual vocabulary for this. Of these, to

69 For a discussion, see Charles Forsdick, ‘Postcolonializing the Americas’, in Graham Huggan (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 648–68.

70 See Emmanuelle Saada, ‘More than a Turn: The “Colonial” in French Studies’, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 32.2 (2014), 34–39.

71 Dubois and Mbembe, ‘Nous sommes tous francophones’, p. 42.

signal just one example from several years ago, Natalie Melas's *All the Difference in the World*.⁷² Melas's subtitle, *Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*, suggests the conclusion of one tradition and a simultaneous rediscovery of new critical purpose that would allow the comparatist project to make 'a robust entrance into the twenty-first century'.⁷³ Her overarching thesis is that a postcolonial comparatism worthy of that name must distance itself from the critical legacies of comfortable equivalence and explore instead the figures of incommensurability often associated with more radically different phenomena (transcolonial, transcultural and translingual). As such, it has links to Peter Hallward's pioneering (and similarly comparative) work in a study such as *Absolutely Postcolonial* cited above. The comparative becomes a means of teasing out connections without flattening distinctiveness.

(ii) New Structures. The institutional frames within which the work I have been describing is emerging often remain unclear. I do not underestimate the risks, notably within French studies, that what is euphemistically described as 'renewal crisis' will trigger disciplinary entrenchment and that signs of enriching diversity will actually be those of terminal fragmentation. Reed Way Dasenbrook comments on the slippage between a rhetoric of trans-disciplinarity and the practical challenges of delivering structures in which it is feasible:

The more complex the bridge you are trying to build, the more support you are going to need up the line. A collaboration between, say, French and Spanish involving the languages and literatures of the Caribbean might need nothing more than an outbreak of common sense; a collaboration on the same subject that also involves English should at least be mentioned to the dean and might need the dean's support; but a collaboration with other colleges, research units, and so on to create a Center for Caribbean Studies requires exponentially more support.⁷⁴

One of the advantages that structural changes in Modern Language departments, and in particular the creation of single Modern Languages units, has permitted is the possibility of working across linguistic zones. At the same time, given the nature of our subject, there are increasing possibilities for international collaboration, especially with scholars and communities in the cultures that are the objects of postcolonial study.

72 Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

73 Melas, *All the Difference in the World*, p. 35.

74 Reed Way Dasenbrook, 'Toward a Common Market: Arenas of Cooperation in Literary Study', *Profession*, 2004: 63–73 (p. 67).

(iii) New Debates. The developments to which I am referring are to be situated in a wider, often public field. In the French context, this was to be seen in the emergence in 2007 of *littérature-monde*, a literary movement championing a ‘fin de la francophonie’ [end of Francophonia] and a ‘naissance d’une littérature-monde en français’ [emergence of a world-literature in French], and actively exploring, not least through subsequent French and Francophone contributions to the Edinburgh World Writers’ Conference in 2013, the end of national literatures too.⁷⁵ Although such an approach lends itself to a transcultural comparatism within a loosely defined French-speaking zone – what Abdourahman Waberi has recently identified as the ‘denationalization of the French language’ (and not just of French-language literature) – a postcolonial engagement with such questions highlights the monolingual limits of such a project and the need to situate it within a set of debates already occurring elsewhere.⁷⁶

If there is still to be a meaningful cross-cultural debate around ‘le post-colonial’ – cross-Channel, trans-European, trans-Atlantic, intercontinental, and modulated according to a variety of other axes of exchange – then the shared but often obscured roots in transcolonial, transnational and transcultural comparatism constitute one of the most fruitful areas in which this might take place. Such an approach depends on a refusal to singularize. As Sangeeta Ray notes:

There is no single postcolonial. Thus, I want to indulge in the optimism that lies in the promiscuous use of the term itself. The term resides (not remains) adjacent to other categories, and flourishes there. Think of the postcolonial rubbing up against other terms – the transnational, the global, the planetary, (dare I say it?) the third world, the nation, the state, the city, the body. Promiscuity also allows the postcolonial to rear its not so accommodating

75 See Jonathan Bastable and Hannah McGill (eds), *The 21st-Century Novel: Notes from the Edinburgh World Writers’ Conference* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

76 On this new movement, and the paradigms with which it is associated, there has been considerable critical interest, including (to cite only some of the more recent publications) Valérie Cambon, Arlette Chemain-Degrange and Marc Gastaldi (eds), *‘Littérature-monde’ francophone en mutation: écritures en dissidences* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2012), Isabelle Constant, Kahiudi C. Mabana and Philip Nanton (eds), *Antillanité, Créolité, Littérature-Monde* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), Cecilia W. Francis and Robert Viau (eds), *Trajectoires et dérivés de la littérature-monde: poétiques de la Relation et du Divers dans les espaces francophones* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), Thérèse Migraine-George, *From Francophonie to World Literature in French: Ethics, Poetics, and Politics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), and Oana Panaïté, *Des littératures-mondes en français: écritures singulières, poétiques transfrontalières dans la prose contemporaine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012). On the need for cross-cultural approaches to ‘world literature’/‘littérature-monde’, see Charles Forsdick, ‘World Literature, *Littérature-Monde*: Which Literature? Whose World?’, *Paragraph*, 33.1 (2010), 125–43.

head in discussions that ignore or dismiss the myriad ways in which it has shaped academic disciplines.⁷⁷

It is in the nurturing of comparative consciousness and cross-cultural literacy, evident quite clearly of the intersections of postcolonialism with the Modern Languages field, that will provide what Mary Louise Pratt, in her response to the Bernheimer report, described as ‘an especially hospitable space for the cultivation of multilingualism, polyglossia, the arts of cultural mediation, deep intercultural understanding, and genuinely global consciousness’.⁷⁸ The traditional vectors of comparatism that this may seem to imply are, however, increasingly under threat, not least because the model of a multilingualism consisting of autonomous, co-existing languages is itself seen as increasingly redundant. Frames of reference have rapidly shifted even over the past decade, not least as a result of the recognition of phenomena such as translanguaging, the increasing and associated acknowledgement that the twenty-first century will be an age of post-monolingualism, and the identification of what Paul Bandia, focusing in particular on the work of Ahmadou Kourouma, has recently dubbed a ‘postcolonial literary heteroglossia’.⁷⁹ As the quotation from Sangeeta Ray at the opening of the article made clear, in studying this new context, an awareness of translation is essential, not least as a phenomenon that at once appears to enable but then underlines the impossibilities of a ‘neat and tidy comparative trafficking in ideas’.⁸⁰ The intersections of Modern Languages, postcolonialism and comparatism retain rich possibilities and permit the reinvigoration of all three fields. Work in this disciplinary ‘contact zone’ will not only permit new ways of engaging with the hypercomplexity of the contemporary world, in which, as Claire Joubert notes, ‘il n’y a pas de colonialisme moderne qui ne soit un co-colonialisme plurinational’.⁸¹ It also allow us to re-conceptualize the terms and retool the intellectual underpinnings of such an engagement.⁸²

77 Sangeeta Ray, ‘Postcolonial Studies’.

78 Mary Louise Pratt, ‘Comparative Literature and Global Citizenship’, in Bernheimer (ed.), *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, pp. 58–65 (p. 62).

79 Paul Bandia, ‘Postcolonial literary heteroglossia: a challenge for homogenizing translation’, *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 20.4 (2012), 419–31. See also Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Post-Monolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

80 For a recent collection of studies of the intersections of translation and postcolonialism, see Simona Bertacco (ed.), *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures: Multilingual Contexts, Translational Texts* (London: Routledge, 2014).

81 Joubert, ‘Le “postcolonial” à la différence des langues’, p. 15.

82 I am very grateful to my colleague Kate Marsh, who commented insightfully on an earlier draft of this article, as did the two anonymous readers for Modern Languages Open. This article was completed while I was Arts and Humanities Research Council Theme Leadership Fellow for ‘Translating Cultures’ (AH/K503381/1); I record my thanks to the AHRC for its support.