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David Farrier’s Postcolonial Asylum is the latest addition to Liverpool University Press’s series “Postcolonialism Across the Disciplines”, which makes a valuable effort to widen the parameters of postcolonialism to include and promote cross-disciplinary critique. Farrier’s analysis of the problematic of asylum and asylum-seeking in the UK, continental Europe and Australasia provides a perfect focus for such a cross-disciplinary endeavour.

One of the crucial questions that structures Farrier’s analysis is how the practice of asylum-seeking complicates postcolonial assumptions about transnational mobility that situate the traveller as a creative subversive in the encounter with the fixity signified by international boundaries and national identities. How does the figure of the refugee provide a sobering alternative to the celebratory rhetoric of transnational movement as “route-ed” rather than “rooted”, as embracing a liberatory hybridity as a form of decolonized agency? It is in this context that Farrier considers “the asylum seeker’s candidacy as the new subaltern who initiates the step beyond postcolonial discourse – both describing its limitations in relation to the new globalized formation and indicating the direction of its advance, redrawing lines of engagement with deterritorialized sovereignty” (5).

In this theoretically sophisticated and astute study, Farrier draws upon the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Paul Gilroy, and Achille Mbembe. Interestingly, from the perspective of scholars working on the interplay of legal and literary discourses in postcolonial studies, is Farrier’s deployment of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life” to articulate the condition of the asylum-seeker who is deprived of political and ethical status; he then complicates notions of community, and Homi Bhabha’s influential work on hybridity, with reference to the “politics of disagreement” (8) developed by philosophers such as Jacques Rancière and Etienne Balibar. How the law decides the validity of an asylum claim, thus distinguishing the authentic refugee from the false asylum-seeker, is seen by Farrier as an exercise in nation-state sovereignty. The state works through the law to determine the legality or otherwise of the migrant in terms of the categories of refugee-as-potential-citizen versus the illegal immigrant. The power of the state to decide the status of the asylum-claimant is, for Farrier following Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy, a powerful instance of what Agamben calls the “state of exception” in which the state exercises power over the individual but offers no protections under the law. Through this paradoxical exercise of legal authority, the state performs its sovereignty by enacting the right to create an exception to the rule of law.

In a wide-ranging discussion of texts that both explore these issues and offer possibilities for resistance, agency and subjective “reconfiguration” Farrier engages literary works including J.M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians, Caryl Phillips’s “Northern Lights” (from Foreigners: Three English Lives) and A Distant Shore, Kate Adshead’s The Bogus Woman, Herman Melville’s “Bartleby”, Abdulrazak Gurnah’s By the Sea, and Leila Aboulela’s Minaret; films including...
Stephen Frears’s *Dirty Pretty Things*, Pawel Pawlikowski’s *Last Resort*, and Michael Winterbottom’s *In This World*; as well as the work of such artists as Melanie Friend, Christoph Schlingensief, and Misha Myers.

*Postcolonial Asylum* makes a valuable contribution to theorizations of the dynamics of cultural inclusion and exclusion, complementing the body of scholarship that addresses such spaces of ambiguous non-belonging as the contemporary detention facility at Guantanamo Bay and historical native reserves/reservations, as well as other spaces of detention like the concentration camp. Other areas of concern that are enriched by Farrier’s work include border studies, most obviously, as well as the study of migration, diaspora, cosmopolitanism, and globalization.

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