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Editorial

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The student protests at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, which began in March 2015, were initially directed at calls to remove the statue of the imperialist Cecil Rhodes on the UCT campus. Rhodes (1853–1902), an ardent believer in innate white superiority, was one of the architects of racial segregation in colonial southern Africa, a mining magnate and “philanthropist” whose great wealth was founded upon exploitation, and a brutal imperialist whose “murderous actions”, David Olusoga has recently written, would today see him “charged […] with war crimes” (2016: n.p.). Protestors argued that this statue venerating him was a particular affront to black students and staff in a university which, 21 years after South Africa’s first democratic elections, still had far to go to redress pervasive institutional racism. Though this initial goal, the removal of Rhodes’s statue (about which students had been protesting for decades), was rapidly achieved, a wider student protest movement rallied under the banners of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall has developed and grown across universities in South Africa — led, in large part, by an inspirational swath of young black women activists — calling for the decolonizing of academic spaces, structures, and pedagogies, and for a democratization of access to higher education that could mark the genuine transformation of South African society. As their own struggle continues, the South African movements’ influence is currently being felt, too, in the #RhodesMustFall campaign at Oxford University in the UK, and on US university campuses such as UC Berkeley.

It is a considerable honour to be writing this, my first editorial as incoming co-editor of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. These ongoing student-led campaigns in South Africa have been in my mind as I prepare to take on the role, taking over from Susan Watkins and trying to emulate at least some of her marvellous qualities as an editor and colleague. It was in September, as I began to work with Susan and with Claire Chambers, who continues as my co-editor, that I also visited the University of Stellenbosch and Rhodes University. There I glimpsed the work of protest and the efforts at transformation that were then engulfing both campuses.

In the broadest sense, the student protest movement in South Africa aims at a reckoning with the histories of colonialism and apartheid, and their contemporary legacies within and beyond the university, from Eurocentric curricula to the huge economic obstacles faced by poor black students from townships and rural areas. These protests have seen notable victories — among them, both the removal of the Rhodes statue and the end of exploitative outsourcing of cleaning and other services at UCT, the demise of the official English/Afrikaans bilingual language policy at University of Stellenbosch, and Jacob Zuma’s commitment to a 0% increase in student fees for the next academic year. In the course of the protests students have faced tear gas, stun grenades, violence and arrest, and police armed with live rounds. Photos from the protests, with South African police ranged against black student protestors, have at times horrifyingly recalled not only the massacre of protesting miners in Marikana in 2012, but also the Soweto Uprising of 1976. The longer-term outcomes of these ongoing protests are unclear at this time. What is at stake, we

might hope, is the decolonization of the university, as defined for example by Achille Mbembe in a recent series of lectures (2015): the reformation of its spaces, the collaborative development of new pedagogies and new forms of knowledge, the abandonment of the neoliberal model in favour of a university genuinely open to all. From the outset— albeit not without conflict — radical black feminism has underpinned the movement. As Jodi Williams, a student activist at Rhodes University, puts it in a recent article:

> As a black, queer woman, the #FeesMustFall campaign was not without its challenges. Often platforms for social change incubate safe spaces for hyper-masculinity and end up being dominated by voices of cisgender, heterosexual black men. While the campaign was largely centred on socio-economic issues, there were clear intersections with questions of gender equality. (Williams, 2015: n.p.)

As editors of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Susan Watkins and Claire Chambers established from the very outset their commitment to the question of how gender and sexuality are "imbricated in colonialism", as a vital dimension of the journal's engagements with questions of power and oppression (Chambers and Watkins, 2012: 297). I very much look forward to continuing this work, and honouring Susan's legacy as an activist feminist scholar. Under their editorship, *JCL* has worked tirelessly to examine literatures from across those parts of the world touched by the British empire through its long history; to trace the relations, in literature, between older and contemporary forms of imperialism; and to maintain a sustained engagement with, and simultaneous critique of, the idea of "Commonwealth" in "a capitalist world order of immeasurable inequality" (Chambers and Watkins, 2015: 260).

This sense of ongoing engagement, flexibility, and critical self-reflection, is one of the journal's key strengths, and something which has marked it out throughout its 50-year history, as September 2015's anniversary issue made clear. It is important to ask how we should respond — as literary scholars, and as teachers and members of academic institutions — to movements in South Africa which call for the radical transformation of oppressive power structures and outmoded systems of knowledge; and I hope that this and subsequent issues of *JCL* can contribute, in however small a way, to these ongoing discussions. At the same time, the view from global north and south is dominated at present by ever-worsening violence in many parts of West and South Asia, in particular Syria but also Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and elsewhere; and the effects of a refugee crisis which is seeing the mass displacement of people on a scale unknown since the Second World War. As is well known, these are, at least in part, the unedifying effects and unintended consequences of older and newer forms of imperialism, from British policy in Mesopotamia through Cold War US interventionism to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and beyond. The growing prominence in *JCL* of literatures from many parts of the Middle East, in English and in English translation, seems particularly important in these contexts.

Claire Chambers

I too feel a sense of privilege, but in my case this comes from the prospect of writing with Rachael Gilmour in this, her inaugural editorial as co-editor. Rachael's unique blend of expertise on linguistic imperialism, the legacies of empire, and South African, Caribbean,

and Black British cultural production will be a significant asset to *JCL* as we move further into a twenty-first century already viciously scarred by neo-/colonialism and its residues.

This editorial prefaces an unusually full issue of the journal, which contains 11 articles and one obituary by leading scholars from around the world. Susan Watkins and I feared that after the completion of the UK's Research Excellence Framework in 2014 we might see a drop in submissions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The journal has if anything seen an increase in the number of manuscripts uploaded to our online system. It is heartening to see a surge in articles and special issue proposals on topics including gender, sexuality, post-9/11 culture, the Middle East, Dalit writing, and ecocriticism. Rachael and I continue to welcome submissions on these and many other subjects.

The first article in the issue is Paul Sharrad's "The Lion, the Tiger, and the Kangaroo: A Tale of Transnational Networks". Sharrad is an editorial board member, and he further develops *JCL*'s interest in book history that emerged in recent years and was cemented by Sarah Brouillette's and David Finkelstein's special issue from 2013 entitled *Postcolonial Print Cultures.* Sharrad explores the neglected case of Indian writer Bhabani Bhattacharya and his relationship with the Australian publisher Angus & Robertson. Drawing on unexpected intra-Commonwealth connections, Sharrad unpicks the implications of the Australian reception of this socialist realist writer from India. Staying with Australia, in "For a Long Time Nothing Happened: Settler Colonialism, Deferred Action and the Scene of Colonization in Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*" Tony Hughes-d'Aeth examines Indigenous writer Kim Scott's 2010 novel from a psychoanalytic perspective. Hughes-d'Aeth argues that Scott's portrayal of the first contact between the Aboriginal Noongar people and European settlers is shaped by the Freudian principle of deferred action.

Next are two articles that deal with issues of literary form, Margaret C. S. Herrick's "Katabasis and the Politics of Grief in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" and Dougal McNeill's "*The Forrests* as Science Fiction". Whereas previous critics like Wendy Knepper and Yumna Siddiqi interpreted Anil's forensic investigation into Sri Lankan civil war crimes as a type of detective fiction, Margaret Herrick puts forward an alternative reading, that Anil's experiences in Sri Lanka represent katabasis, or descent into the underworld. McNeill, meanwhile, argues that *The Forrests* (2012) by New Zealand author Emily Perkins is more usefully seen as a postcolonial science fiction novel than, as in earlier analysis by critics including Patrick Evans, positioned as a global, even globalized text.

After that comes a cluster of three articles dealing with millennial Black British novels. In "Cultural Dislocation in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*" Ali Rezaie asks whether the migrant's in-betweenness should be viewed, as Monica Ali suggests through a liberal political lens, as freedom, or whether it in fact precipitates loss of the self. Alberto Fernández Carbajal adds the important dimension of sexuality in his essay "On Being Queer and Postcolonial: Reading Zadie Smith's *NW* through Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*". Carbajal brings together queer and postcolonial studies to uncover strong links between Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) and Virginia Woolf's modernist classic *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Whereas Rezaie's and Carbajal's articles focus on high-profile examples of "postcolonial London" novels (McLeod, 2004), Carla Rodríguez González moves beyond the capital, indeed beyond England altogether, to scrutinize devolutionary, multicultural depictions of Glasgow in "The Rhythms

of the City: The Performance of Time and Space in Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag*". González's urban studies approach to Saadi's 2004 novel *Psychoraag* is influenced by Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* and suggests that the Pakistani Glasgow portrayed in the novel is in sway both to linear and cyclical rhythms.

From South Asian Scotland, we move to analysis of two non-Anglophone South Asian texts by Sharon Pillai and J Devika. Pillai's "'Tell […] the Truth, but Tell it Slant': Form and Fiction in Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada*" concerns Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva's Urdu novel *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899), about courtesan culture in Lucknow around the time of the 1857 Indian Rebellion. In sprightly prose, Pillai challenges the dominant critical interest in *Umrao Jan Ada* as an exemplar of realism. Instead she positions Rusva's work as aesthetically experimental and formally circuitous. Pillai's Indian colleague J Devika is a feminist scholar who works with the languages of Malayalam and English. In 2015 her translation of K. R. Meera's novel *Hangwoman*, a fictionalization of the last hanging in West Bengal, was shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. As this issue was going to press, it was announced in Galle, Sri Lanka, that Anuradha Roy had won for her novel *Sleeping on Jupiter*. Nonetheless, it was a great achievement for *Hangwoman* to be nominated, the first time a novel from a language other than English has made it onto the DSC shortlist. In "Cochin Creole and the Perils of Casteist Cosmopolitanism", Devika positions Johny Miranda's Malayalam novel *Requiem for the Living* (2013) as challenging casteist stereotypes both of Keralan cosmopolitanism and of hybrid communities. Through his portrayal of the Parankis of Cochin, Miranda problematizes categories such as "Anglo-Indian" and "Luso-Indian" in order to forge what Devika views as a new kind of Keralan subaltern cosmopolitanism.

In "'Local' and 'National' Transformations: Cultural Globalization, Heterogeneity, and Malaysian Literature in English", Sharmani Patricia Gabriel argues that Anglophone Malaysian literature by such writers as K. S. Maniam and Tash Aw stems from the Malaysian state's endorsement of globalization and of English as a *lingua franca*, but that it represents resistance to hegemonic ideas of Malaysian national identity. Jessica M. Howell's "Nurse Going Native: Language and Identity in Letters from Africa and the British West Indies" examines the life writing of "CC", who worked as a nurse in British Honduras and Uganda during the interwar period. Howell takes us into the relatively under-explored area of postcolonial medical humanities and charts entirely new territory for *JCL* by publishing this, our first open access article under the SAGE Choice scheme.

Finally, in December *JCL*'s editors and board were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Bart Moore-Gilbert. *JCL* ordinarily does not publish obituaries for academics, only for creative writers, but Moore-Gilbert was a central member of our editorial board and was such a key postcolonial scholar that we decided to make an exception. Another board member and close friend of Bart's, Dennis Walder, wrote the obituary that closes this issue and commemorates the Goldsmith's professor's substantial legacy, both intellectual and political, for postcolonial studies.

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