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Postcolonial Witnessing Trauma Out of Bounds

Stef Craps

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STEF CRAPS teaches English at Ghent University, Belgium, where he also directs the Cultural Memory Studies Initiative. He is the author of *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift: No Short-Cuts to Salvation* (2005).

"In this beautifully and clearly written book, Stef Craps leads trauma theory away from its Eurocentric past and towards a decolonized future. Arguing that the traumas of non-Western populations should be acknowledged for their own sake and on their own terms, *Postcolonial Witnessing* demonstrates through its exemplary discussion of literary texts including the works of Anita Desai and Caryl Phillips, how literary analysis can become a part of that process. Timely, provocative and destined to be widely read, this book makes a path-breaking contribution to memory, trauma, and literary studies."

- Professor Susannah Radstone, University of East London, UK

"Despite the seriousness of the topic, the clarity and flow of Craps's writing makes *Postcolonial Witnessing* a joy . . . This is a book that engages with current debates in a lively and interesting way and is sure to be of interest to scholars of trauma, postcolonialism, cultural memory studies and related fields. Its clear structure and thorough consideration of foundational and recent literature, including an excellent index and bibliography, will also make it a useful text to those who are new to the topic. In fact, the book's strong argument, clear structure and engaging prose make *Postcolonial Witnessing* an example of what an academic text should be." - *Dialogues on Historical Justice and Memory*

About the book

Despite a stated commitment to cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory—an area of cultural investigation that emerged out of the 'ethical turn' affecting the humanities in the 1990s—is marked by a Eurocentric, monocultural bias. This book takes issue with the tendency of the founding texts of the field to marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority groups, and to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity. Moreover, it questions the assumption that a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia is uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and criticizes the neglect of the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. Combining theoretical argument with literary case studies, *Postcolonial Witnessing* contends that the suffering engendered by colonialism needs to be acknowledged more fully, on its own terms, in its own terms, and in relation to traumatic First World histories if trauma theory is to have any hope of redeeming its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement.

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