Stephen Morton. *States of Emergency, Colonialism, Literature and Law*

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ces/5823>
DOI: 10.4000/ces.5823
ISSN: 2534-6695

Publisher

SEPC (Société d'études des pays du Commonwealth)

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2013
Number of pages: 103-104
ISSN: 2270-0633

Electronic reference

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, "Stephen Morton. *States of Emergency, Colonialism, Literature and Law*", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* [Online], 36.1 | 2013, Online since 16 April 2021, connection on 22 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ces/5823> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.5823>

This text was automatically generated on 22 July 2021.

Commonwealth Essays and Studies is licensed under a Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Stephen Morton. *States of Emergency, Colonialism, Literature and Law*

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré

REFERENCES

Stephen Morton. *States of Emergency, Colonialism, Literature and Law*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013. 249 pp. ISBN (hb): 978-1-84631-849-8. £70

- 1 Law and literature courses and interdisciplinary research at the crossroads of law, sociology, political science and literature have existed in Anglo-American academies since the 1970s, thus blazing the trail for the current emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches in postcolonial studies. While customary research in this field tended to focus on property litigation or criminality, recent trends revolve around issues of human and environmental rights. Stephen Morton's well researched *States of Emergency, Colonialism, Literature and Law* is a welcome addition to the field; it is both original and crucial in so far as it looks at the function of literature, especially fiction, as a record of democracy and dares to venture onto the slippery ground of state violence.
- 2 The book covers several geographical areas where England and France had primarily exercised their colonial sovereignty, *i.e.*, Ireland, India, South Africa, Kenya, Algeria and Israel-Palestine. The structure of the study is conventional with an introduction and conclusion, and three main parts. The introduction sets out the scope, structure, objectives, methodology and the seminal thesis of the book. It argues that "the state of emergency operated as a travelling concept that was part of a global imperial network of counterinsurgency" (9). The rhetoric of colonial governance consisted in imputing this state to "the specific historical and political circumstances of anti-colonial resistance and struggle in a given colonial situation" (9-10), thus deliberately underplaying the undermining of democracy and fundamental rights that it represented.

- 3 Part I of the book clubs British colonial experience in Ireland and India together. Éamon de Valera himself has compared the massacres at Croke Park stadium in Dublin with the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre in Amritsar. If *The Illustrated London News* and novels such as *Our Radicals* and *A Modern Dedalus* and the anthology *Tales of the R.I.C.* mirror the language of emergency legislation, Padriac Pearse, W.B. Yeats and Eavan Boland propose the imagery of sacrifice to affirm the agency of the colonized. But by so doing they ambivalently re-inscribe violence in the political foundations of the new state, argues Morton. Bengali revolutionaries in colonial India imitated IRA tactics. The British retaliated by passing laws against sedition. In Chapter Two Morton sets Edmund Candler's novel *Sri Ram Revolutionist*, which claimed to have demystified the causes of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal, against Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Pather Dabi*, which challenged that colonial gaze through the enigmatic character of the Doctor.
- 4 The focus shifts to Africa in Part II. Chapter Three shows how novels such as Richard Rive's *Emergency*, Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* interrogate the apartheid government's practices of indefinite detention and torture by laying bare the conditions of writing in a state of emergency. The state of emergency in Kenya from 1952 to 1959 is considered in Chapter Four. The colonialist representation of the Mau Mau Land and Freedom Army in Rupert Ruark's *Something of Value* and Elspeth Huxley's *A Thing to Love* is counterbalanced by a study of the divisive legacy of colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *A Grain of Wheat* and *Matigari*. Chapter Five on Algeria is perhaps the most convincing one as it scrutinizes multiple sources. It starts with an analysis of Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. It then contrasts the French colonial state of emergency (1955-56) in the narratives of Pierre Leuliette and Jean Lartéguy, who spin a heroic mythology around the figure of the French paratrooper, with the Algerian and anti-colonial standpoint represented in the memoirs of Henri Alleg and Louise Ighilahriz and the novels of Assia Djebar and Soleïman Adel Guémar.
- 5 Part III retraces the colonial genealogy of Israel's political sovereignty by taking into consideration the English translations of novels by Emile Habiby, Ghassan Kanafani, Amos Oz and S. Yizhar. The conclusion draws parallels between the legal, political and military techniques of European colonial powers and the exceptional legal regime used in Guantanamo Bay in the US after the 11th of September 2001 attacks. If the Post-9/11 novels of Ian McEwan and Martin Amis participate in the dominant discourse on terrorism, Moazzam Begg's *Enemy Combattant*, Mohsin Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* deconstruct the colonial present by exposing the political economy of the war at the time of globalization.
- 6 Looking at the colonial order in the context of the changing new world order, the book naturally establishes parallels and continuities between colonial states of emergency and America's war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. This comparative approach draws from an impressive gamut of theories. Ranging from A.V. Dicey to Achille Mbembe through Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Frantz Fanon, Foucault, Derrida, Agamben, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and the subaltern studies historians, Stephen Morton's familiarity with theory gives the book a density of thought which is matched only by his knowledge of various oppressive legislative acts enacted by colonial and post-colonial governments that had the effect of making the suspension of the rule of law the norm.

- 7 Although theoretical, the volume is written in a clear and readable style. The bibliography is rich in theoretical references and literary works. Yet, the importance given to theory somewhat overshadows the role given to literature. It also seems difficult to understand, in the case of South Africa, why the exceptional legislation in the post-colonial period is examined, while the state of emergency declared in India (1975-77) by Indira Gandhi, which has also been seriously documented in Indian fiction, is not even mentioned. Perhaps an evaluation of the historical progress of democracy in post-colonial states would have been a better research outcome than the critical assessment of lawful violence against the touchstone of terrorism which reads like a variation of the familiar theme: one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist. Apart from these minor reservations, Stephen Morton's is a pioneering study that opens perspectives for further and stimulating research in international relations through the study of literary and cultural texts.
-

AUTHORS

GEETHA GANAPATHY-DORÉ

Geetha GANAPATHY-DORÉ is a research accredited Associate Professor of English at the Faculty of Law, Social and Political Sciences at the University of Paris 13, Sorbonne Paris Cité. She is the author of *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). Among the several volumes she has co-edited is *On the Move: The Journey of Refugees in New Literatures in English* (CSP, 2012).