

# Magdalena Sitarz

---

## “Rethinking Global Mauritius — Critical Essays on Mauritian Literatures and Cultures”, Srilata Ravi, [b.m.] 2013 : [recenzja]

---

Romanica Silesiana 10, 398-400

---

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach  
dozwolonego użytku.

Srilata Ravi,  
“Rethinking Global Mauritius — Critical Essays on Mauritian  
Literatures and Cultures,” *L’Atelier d’écriture, La Pelouse,  
Trou d’Eau Douce, Île Maurice, 2013, 119 p.,  
ISBN 999-033-680-6*

Some books are written in order to express passion, interest, and admiration. Emil M. Cioran once included such emotions in his brilliant *Exercises d’admiration* (1986), a collection of essays devoted to diverse outstanding people who were significant to him. Today, Srilata Ravi writes her own Mauritian *exercices d’admiration*, entitled *Rethinking Global Mauritius — Critical Essays on Mauritian Literatures and Cultures*, to raise some very interesting questions about Mauritian literatures in terms of globalisation, colonialism, and modernity and to reveal admiration for their complexity. This brief yet powerful book of essays is a welcome addition to the critical literature on Mauritian writings and indubitably will satisfy the needs of advanced researchers in the areas of globalisation and culture, postcolonial studies, francophone literature, comparative literary and cultural studies, and will also delight readers who are only beginning their adventure with Mauritian literatures and cultures.

The author, Professor Srilata Ravi, who teaches French and Francophone Literature at the University of Alberta, Canada, is a tireless proponent of Mauritian literatures. She has written numerous articles on Mauritian national and cultural identities as well as two books on Mauritian transnational identities and the poetics of alterity, and has thereby contributed to the increase of interest and the significance of Mauritian writings in academic circles. It comes therefore as no surprise that she decided to continue exploring the great themes initiated in her work *Rainbow Colours — Literary Ethno-topographies of Mauritius* (2007), though her latest book is more theoretical, more mature and definitely denser. Ravi’s collection of four essays, as the title suggests, rethinks the notion of glo-

balisation and offers a deep analysis of literary interactions with modernity, incorporating history, memory, and identity.

It seems to be important for Srilata Ravi to immerse herself in the subject of her studies both intellectually and emotionally, and this is visible in her engaging autobiographical introduction to the collection. The literary triggers for her Mauritian passion were the books of Marie-Thérèse Humbert, *À l'autre bout de moi*, and Ananda Devi, *Le voile de Draupadi*, which evoked the complex image of the island and kindled Ravi's interest. The author admires the plurality, mobility and flexibility of Mauritian culture and asks about the significance of islandness, Creole identity and *francophonies*. She discovers that sensual experience together with emotional awareness help constitute Mauritian modernity and suggests that Mauritian literary and visual cultures can be conceived as "multicultural, counter-hegemonic and empowering forms of globalization" (16). By broadcasting the voices of Mauritian writers, Ravi's collection of essays illustrates the attitude of Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, the Nobel Prize winner, towards literature, which, in his view, has become a way of expressing identity.

The essay on strategic *Francophonies* is of great value to anyone interested in postnationalism, transculturalism, and cosmopolitanism in Mauritian literatures. Ravi presents briefly the history of the island's colonisation and the role of French and Creole languages in order to discuss *Francophonies* in various contexts, and gives literary examples to buttress her arguments. The postnational context is presented as a complex space, as is illustrated by the works of Pyamootoo, such as *Bénarès*, *Le tour de Babylone* and *Salogi's*, as well as by the feminist *Francophonies*, such as the works of Ananda Devi which show women's issues placed within a transnational frame, both forming a constructive friction according to Ravi. The author also presents different meanings of cosmopolitan *Francophonies* and focuses on a deep analysis of Le Clézio's *cycle mauricien* and his translation from the local into universal. Ravi argues that cosmopolitan *Francophonies* remain "imbricated in centre/periphery binaries" (40) while cosmopolitanism is regarded as a utopian space of fusion.

Ravi's discussion of the concepts of servitude, oppression and exclusion in Mauritian writing traces the slavery and indentured-labour roots of Mauritian culture. The author considers the meaning of forgetting and the role of memory, focusing on the Ricoeurian approach to memory as capacity. Her compelling analysis of what she calls "enchantment narrative" in Ananda Devi's *L'arbre fouet* and *Pagli* also points out that a postcolonial text is "a locus of mediation between cultures, between colonial history and postcolonial memory" (52). Although the essay refers to Ravi's earlier works, it has been enriched by new analyses and the context has been broadened.

Another elucidating essay by Ravi focuses on the role of sport as aesthetic as well as narrative and is entirely constructed on the basis of an analysis of

Carl de Souza's *En chute libre*, the story of a badminton player presented as an anti-sports-hero. Through a close and nuanced reading of passages from de Souza's text, Ravi examines the term *fair play*, which is understood as a way of arranging well-being in the context of a complex and evolving society. She compares sport as play with sport as athletics and discovers the athlete as ironist. According to Ravi, *En chute libre* suggests new ways of escaping the limits of literary islandness by means of the significant motif of amputation, which means the liberation of national narration. She also identifies uncertainties produced by globalisation and defines the postnational text as that which is "in constant tension between literature's national and transnational foundations" (88).

The essay entitled "The Absent City — Port Louis in Mauritian Visual Cultures" focuses on the representation of Port Louis in David Constantin's films *Bisanvil* and *Diego, l'interdite*. In Ravi's view, *Bisanvil*, a short feature film about a bus journey to Port Louis, presents the bus and the city as metaphors for Mauritian society. The variety of ethno-racial types and age groups of the characters travelling on the bus stands for the complexity of the society and global modernity. The essay also shows Ravi's great interest in the image of the quays of Port Louis which on the one hand stand for modernity and let Mauritius enter the world's economy, culture and politics, but on the other hand are the place of arrival of workers, slaves, and refugees. *Diego, l'interdite*, a documentary on exiled Chagossians in Port Louis, focuses on a portrayal of the city from the point of view of a single community of refugees. Through exploration of insular Creole utopianism and the film characters' disengagement from Port Louis, Ravi argues that Mauritians do not feel a strong connection with the nation.

Undoubtedly Srilata Ravi achieves the stated purpose of the book. Although she makes extensive use of the work of other researchers in the field of Mauritian literatures and cultures, such as Françoise Lionnet, Naseem Aumeerally, and Thomas Eriksen, her essays are meticulously written, vivid and characterised by quality of content and thematic unity. The readers will find deep analyses, thorough interpretations, extended footnotes and an accurate bibliography in her collection. Even the cover, which shows a work of mixed media on canvas by Mauritian artist Djuneid Dullo, contributes to the exposure of Mauritian culture and shows the complexity which Ravi tries to convey in her book. The essays are also great *exercices d'admiration* for readers who may admire Ravi's ability to arouse their interest in, enthusiasm and esteem for Mauritian writings.