

Book Reviews

Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human

By JOSEPH DREXLER-DREIS and KRISTIEN JUSTAERT, eds.

Fordham University Press, 2020, 303 pp.

doi:[10.1017/pli.2020.43](https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2020.43)

Man, as a notion, a construct, a Western invention, is the crux of *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*, a thoroughly appealing book edited by Joseph Drexler-Dreis and Kristien Justaert. In this volume of essays, Drexler-Dreis and Justaert reiterate their commitment to decolonizing Eurocentric modes of ontology and epistemology, having themselves been the authors of *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity* (2018) and *Theology after Deleuze* (2012), respectively. Where Drexler-Dreis advances the potential of decolonial theology, Justaert emphasizes the significance of liberation theology in a world rife with antihuman flourishing. Nonetheless, both authors' shared interest in the decolonization of Christian theology frames their vision in the volume, defining the stage for the contributors' critique of Western conception of humanity. In the introduction, Drexler-Dreis and Justaert write that their contributors not only creatively and critically contend with the problem of man but also "uncover alternative ways of being human." How to redefine the human. The question of the human is invariably the question of life. This latter question informs the degree of (mis)recognition we accord those we deem (non)human. In deconstructing the genre of man valorized by colonial modernity, the contributors "open up a space for creating new ways of life." As such, how we define what lives matter, whose life is worth preserving or not worth mourning, all constitute questions about humanity.

Beyond the Doctrine of Man charts the genealogy of anti-Blackness in Western thought through the centuries, thus expanding the fields of Christian theology, Black and diasporic studies, and decolonial poetics. The book is divided into three parts. The first, "Sylvia Wynter and the Project of Unsettling Man," and the third, "Biopolitics and the Project of Unsettling Man," have three chapters each. In contrast, the second part, "Religious Cosmologies and the Project of Unsettling Man," has four chapters. In all, there are ten contributors from diverse disciplinary fields. The strength of the book lies in its rhetorical lucidity, transdisciplinary range, and broad theorizations that accentuate the urgency of redefining the human. By engaging an array of literary, cultural, and philosophical productions, the book proposes a new humanism devoid of Eurocentrism. It therefore makes an important intervention in delinking Christian theology from its colonial entanglements. In her influential essay, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," Sylvia Wynter, the Jamaican decolonial intellectual, challenges "the present order of discourse" that positions the European man as the universal signifier of humanity, while engineering the enslavement of Blacks and the genocide

against the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Wynter's radical ideas on decoloniality provide the framework by which the contributors in *Beyond the Doctrine of Man* attempt to reimagine man against its "overrepresentation" by Western episteme. In doing so, each contributor responds to, thinks with, or elaborates on Wynter's critique of the "Word of Man."

In "Where Life itself Lives," Mayra Rivera examines religious movements and Black creativity in Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron* and argues that the novel dramatizes "culturally grounded, life-sustaining forms of being." Where Rivera analyzes a literary text, Rufus Burnett Jr. considers music such as the blues and southern rap to uncover inventive models of Black selfhood. In "Unsettling Blues: a Decolonial Reading of the Blues Episteme," Burnett illustrates how Black Americans assert their peoplehood through the blues, thus staging a counter-discourse against the Eurocentric and Afro-Christian modalities of human subjectivity, while activating "an emergent indigeneity." Xhercis Méndez and Yomaira C. Figueroa introduce a decolonial feminist perspective in "Not Your Papa's Wynter: Women of Color Contributions towards Decolonial Futures." Méndez and Figueroa study poetry, drama, and novel alongside critical texts to demonstrate that women of color have contributed to new paradigms of the human. In their critique of man, Méndez and Figueroa urge us to not disregard the way men of color tend to reproduce the coloniality of power in their communities. Further, they call for a devaluation of gender and sexuality and a new humanism that facilitates "more egalitarian modes of relating and determining value." Though Méndez and Figueroa briefly discuss Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, M. Shawn Copeland explores the novel in depth, underlining how it seeks to rehabilitate the Black body, hitherto demonized by racial slavery. In "Enfleshing Love: a Decolonial Theological Reading of *Beloved*," Copeland employs a decolonial political theological perspective to likewise underscore how Morrison emphasizes "the enfleshing of love" or "Black self-love" as a means to instigate the emergence of alternative Black selfhood.

In "Nat Turner's Orientation beyond the Doctrine of Man," Drexler-Dreis recasts the (mis)representation of the enslaved African American Nat Turner, an icon of Black masculine resistance, to demonstrate that "Turner's life offers one historical instance of unsettling Man within the larger protest of contesting the coloniality that constitutes Western modernity." While Andrew Prevot, in "Mystical Bodies of Christ: Human, Crucified, and *Beloved*," draws upon theological anthropology to posit that the divine (God) is enfleshed in all human bodies and that every human being belongs to "this world of shared flesh," Patrick Hayne illuminates how Yoruba indigenous religion conceives of the human "as fundamentally relational" in his analysis of "African Humanism: Between the Cosmic and the Terrestrial." In "Bodies that Speak," Linn Marie Tonstad queers our understandings of the human to analyze "bodied acts" advocates for alliances rooted in a "we" consciousness and a queer prophet emblematic of "a future different from the present." Similarly, Kristen Justaert undertakes a queer reading in "Life beyond the Doctrine of Man: Out of This World with Michel Henry and Radical Queer Theory" to nuance the subjects of queer negativity, antisocial politics, and auto-affectivity, or the life "grounded in flesh." Academics in queer studies, in particular, will find the theorizations on queer agency by Tonstad and Justaert significantly reinvigorating. Lastly, Alexander G. Wehelie's "Black Life/Schwarz-sein: Inhabitations of the Flesh" explores the representations of Black life in relation to the nonhuman and

inhuman, contending that Black bodies are usually bound up with “the labor of being-somebody-else.” Embodiment recurs in many of the essays.

Beyond the overall critique of a generic typology of the human, the contributors are cognizant of the urgent project of decolonizing man and its attendant technologies of racialization and precarity. Equally important, these scholars are interested in the subject of world-making or futurity, delineating a future that is all inclusive and unbounded by neoliberal capitalist logics. In this way, we can read *Beyond the Doctrine of Man* as an avowal of the variety of ways of being human in the world, a motley humanism—a decoloniality of ontology. More broadly, life is the overarching focus of the book. Consequently, upcoming and established critics in philosophy, religion, literary, gender, and sexuality studies will find the extensive notes at the end of each chapter to be a very relevant critical resource. Although much of the analysis distinctly focuses on African American experiences, it would be useful to read how a few other Black literary and cultural producers, for example, from the Caribbean and Latin America have contested and reconstructed man. How might we reconceive humanity from analyzing the narratives of writers such as Maryse Condé, Quince Duncan, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat, Elizabeth Acevedo, and Mia Sosa? How do indigenous articulations of humanity challenge the Eurocentric genre of man? These questions are worth considering in further inquiry into the constructions of the human.

Despite the aforementioned lacunae, *Beyond the Doctrine of Man* impresses as a timely text responding to the angst and anomie of the (m)Anthropocene. It asks that we dismantle the present hegemonic social order, while forging a new ethics of relationality receptive to the precariousness of all human life.

Funding. This work was supported by a grant from the Intersections of Gender, University of Alberta.

UCHE PETER UMEZURIKE 
 University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
umezurik@ualberta.ca

Colonizing Language: Cultural Production and Language Politics in Modern Japan and Korea

By CHRISTINA YI

Columbia University Press, 2018, 248 pp.

doi:10.1017/pli.2020.44

Christina Yi’s *Colonizing Language: Cultural Production and Language Politics in Modern Japan and Korea* is a welcome addition to English scholarship in Korean and Japanese studies that examines language and literary ideologies under Japanese colonialism through a postcolonial, transnational lens. Joining important works such as Nayoung Aimee Kwon’s *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (2015) and Serk-Bae Suh’s *Treacherous Translation: Culture, Nationalism and Colonialism in Korea and Japan from the 1910s to the 1960s* (2013), Yi