intact, that situation arose as a result of British unwillingness to invest in the region rather than from any enlightened commitment to indigenous welfare, undermined by local conservatism. Again, though, this is a passing comment rather than a fundamental criticism of this publication. Lewis has long been and remains an authority on Somali culture, an avid follower of events, and a sympathetic voice with a genuine love for the people he has so long written about.

This book provides an excellent introduction for anyone wishing to gain an insight into the richness and complexity of Somali society, and Lewis's recommendations are challenging, insightful and sensible.

**Michael Walls**

BRENDA COOPER:
*A New Generation of African Writers: Migration, Material Culture and Language.*
ix, 192 pp. Woodbridge: James Currey/Boydell & Brewer, 2008. £45.
ISBN 978 1 84701 507 5.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X10000339

Brenda Cooper's latest work *A New Generation of African Writers* meticulously draws out the links between material objects, metonymy and migration in works by five contemporary African writers in English: Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and short stories, Jamal Mahjoub's *The Carrier*, Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Cooper groups together these writers from Nigeria, Uganda and Sudan on the grounds that they constitute a distinct "new generation" of African writers in English who have spent time away from their countries of origin, have attracted an international readership, and write about migration or "multiple worlds and languages" (p. 1). Cooper's timely work is a useful companion to what critics are indeed conceptualizing as a "new generation" of African writing. Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, for instance, have identified a "third generation" of Nigerian literature characterized by its "multicultural and transnational frame" as well as a "generic shift from poetry to the novel" (Adesanmi and Dunton, "Everything good is raining", *Research in African Literatures* 39/2, 2008, vii–xii).

Cooper devotes a chapter to a detailed close reading of each writer's work (except Adichie, who receives a chapter for each of her novels), while the introduction and conclusion discuss metonymy, material culture and the idea of a "new generation" more broadly, as well as making cross-continental connections between the writers. She bases her approach loosely on the politics of the everyday, as espoused variously by Njabulo Ndebele, Lefebvre and Bourdieu. She deftly and imaginatively unravels how writing about "the everyday of material reality" (p. 6) enables these writers to think between "multiple worlds", and to resist and overcome difficulties inherent in the English language.

Cooper's writing is rich and dense, the ideas complex yet accessible as she convincingly spells out the wealth of material objects populating these texts: corkscrews, coats, telescopes, perfume, bobbins, ceramic figurines, furniture, a roped pot, cars, to name but a few. She argues that these writers deploy material objects so heavily for two (interlinked) reasons. First, this is a useful

way to represent migrant experiences, and to explore the nature of living in "multiple worlds". The chapters on Aboulela's *The Translator* and Mahjoub's *The Carrier* illustrate this premise most clearly: everyday objects can be "read as a code for the liberating possibility of cultural translation through material culture" (p. 49). A detailed discussion of a soup prepared in *The Translator*, for instance, reveals:

> [t]he soup is an everyday item of life, apparently trivial, but of immense importance. Its significance lies in its potential to enable Sammar to translate her feelings for Rae into material reality; it also enables her to translate from Sudanese into English in the supermarket as she searches for the exact ingredients. [. . .] In this sense, the soup is quite classically a "boundary" or translation object. [. . .] These are objects which allow for "naturalization" between different cultures (p. 49).

Second, Cooper argues, these writers use material objects to wrestle with the English language, which is suffused with "imperialist and patriarchal tropes and symbols" (p. 1). By anchoring their texts with objects, these writers privilege metonymy (a figure of speech in which an attribute of something stands for the thing itself: "crown" for "king", for example) and their everyday realities over potentially dangerous metaphors. This enables "a new, concrete language to emerge" (p. 49):

> These writers are challenged to find an English into which to translate their more than one culture, language and knowledge base, without being sucked into some of those older tropes and imperial metaphors. The solution that these writers sometimes craft is to become quite concrete and literal, including focusing on the shape and rhythm of words themselves as objects, or by incorporating words and wisdoms from their indigenous languages. In doing so, they rely quite heavily on the enabling potential of the rhetoric of metonymy (p. 1).

Cooper's discussion of metonymy is particularly convincing in the Conclusion – entitled "The rifle is not a penis" – in which she argues that these texts' reliance upon descriptions of objects represents an "aesthetic politics" (p. 156) which reclaims objects as objects, rather than metaphors.

Cooper argues that the significance of the "migration" to which the book's subtitle refers is not limited to the texts' subject matter alone; these writers' own experiences of migration also influence their use of language. While Aboulela, Mahjoub, Bandele and, to an extent, Isegawa write directly about literal migration, Adichie does not. However, Cooper argues that Adichie, too, has a place in the "new generation" that uses language as an "aesthetic politics", and this is due in part to her migrant background. Indeed, Adichie uses objects and metonymy to depict Nigeria's "multiple worlds" (such as the "syncretised world" of "Igbo customs and language [and] Catholic ritual" in *Purple Hibiscus* (p. 110)), though not always reliably so: *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Cooper argues, "falls back on the dominant metaphors at the expense of depicting the concrete richness of material culture" (p. 133). However, while Cooper makes a convincing case for Adichie writing in this distinctive way, readers may find the suggestion of biographical determinism uncomfortable, particularly since the book is otherwise strongly textually focused.

Cooper acknowledges that *A New Generation* covers only a very limited selection of African writing in English, let alone in other languages, and that it considers works only by "privileged, mobile, middle-class intellectuals" (p. 21). It would be interesting now to see a similar analysis of material objects and metonymy in locally published, less internationally renowned and studied, and non-English language texts, and to interrogate the "new generation" thesis by thinking about whether non-mobile writers write in a similar way.

*A New Generation* is overall an intelligent, compelling and carefully written work which embraces theoretical complexity while remaining strongly textually-focused. The Introduction and Conclusion's discussion of postcolonial studies, metonymy and metaphor is particularly stimulating and wide-ranging. Cooper constructs a complex and valuable argument about contemporary African writing, language and material culture.

**Rebecca Jones**

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X10000339 Published online by Cambridge University Press