Justin Izzo, *Experiments with Empire: Anthropology and Fiction in the French Atlantic*.

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Whether literature borrows from the social sciences or the social sciences owe their existence to the emergence of the novel, as Jacques Rancière has suggested, can be discussed. But the fact that there is a link between the two has been indisputable ever since Mme de Staël claimed that literature is the expression of society. Justin Izzo's *Experiments with Empire* is one of the latest contributions to the theorization of the intersections between fiction and the social sciences, specifically anthropology. The main argument is that for anthropologists and literary authors alike, experimenting with fiction and anthropology opens up both ways to rethink aesthetics and social forms, and alternative approaches to knowledge construction in the wake of French imperialism.

Dealing with Africa, the Caribbean, and Marseille, various genres (field studies, journals, novels, bildungsromane, crime fiction, documentaries) and materials (film, literature, anthropological studies), the book's scope is bold and impressive. In Chapter 1, French surrealist/ethnographer Michel Leiris's self-reflexive notes from the Dakar-Djibouti expedition of the 1930s are read alongside Hampâté Bâ's didactic approach to ethnographic fiction. Chapter 2 is entirely devoted to French anthropologist and film maker Jean Rouch, focusing on his work in West Africa. Chapter 3, on Haiti, deals with the way Jean Price-Mars, Jacques Stephen Alexis, René Depestre, and Dany Laferrière used ethnographic fiction to reimagine the nation. Chapter 4, about Martinique, argues that Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant reconstruct literary history by turning to ethnographic fiction as a means to gain local knowledge. The book ends with a somewhat surprising focus: an entire chapter on crime fiction by Jean-Claude Izzo (no relation) set in contemporary Marseille.

Izzo's approach to the French Atlantic is indeed inclusive. The point is not to show historical or archival links, but rather to sketch out the French Atlantic as a particular time-space where ethnographic fictions play a crucial role in reimagining and knowing the social on global and local levels. In structuring the book both chronologically and regionally, Izzo captures the variety of experimental ethnographic fictions; they operate in different ways, but always at the intersection between literature and society, and always playing with genre. These are hybrid works that "mobilize anthropology's imperial roots to establish new epistemologies, generic forms, historical narratives, and political imaginaries" (p. 7). Izzo guides his readers in making critical comparisons to previous discussions throughout the book, and lets Michel Leiris act as the spider in the French Atlantic web, not only because he did field work in both Africa

and the Caribbean, but because of his attempts to reconceptualize anthropology aesthetically and politically.

Inescapably, such a vast project has its pitfalls. The major issue with this book is its key concept, “empire.” Arguably, it allows us to rethink cultural productions related to French colonialism beyond the nation, which is liberating since there is a tendency to fall back onto France, *la mère patrie*, in research on colonial and postcolonial literature in French. However, Izzo turns “empire” into an agent, which ultimately makes it politically and aesthetically empty. In sentences that would be impossible to translate into French—or into any other variety of English across the world for that matter—we learn that “empire” “demands” and “tells stories about itself” as if it was something that acted without the interventions of humans and history. I am not saying that this understanding of empire is wrong—Izzo knows his Hardt and Negri—but it must be argued for and not merely presented as given, especially since the chapters actually contradict this conceptualization of the term. In his readings, Izzo does indeed carefully contextualize each author, region, and work, even if subtle but crucial differences sometimes escape the analysis. Perhaps this is inevitable when one wants to make larger claims about how writers reimagine social forms “beyond empire.” Nonetheless, it seems to me that the book would have benefitted from critical distance toward its own hypothesis and concepts.

But this is a minor critique. Izzo’s study is an important contribution to research on the French Atlantic and on speculative forms in general, and it offers a fresh look at the crossings between ethnography and fiction that go beyond questions of truth and veracity, mimicry and resistance. Izzo is right in claiming that there is a radical potential in the merging of anthropology and fiction that is particularly urgent in a (post-)colonial setting. The transcultural moment of cultural production that draws on this radicality speaks to us even more acutely in an increasingly globalized world, as Izzo suggests in the conclusion. Ethnographic fiction is perhaps *the* modus of literature today, as the lines between national and global, and between vernacular and cosmopolitan, are called into question.

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