

## PREFACE

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### **Cultures Under Negotiation: Discourse, Identity, and the Reconfiguration of Meaning in Global Contexts**

Nadia Idri | LESMS Laboratory, University of Bejaia, Algeria | [nadia.ahouari@univ-bejaia.dz](mailto:nadia.ahouari@univ-bejaia.dz)

Philippe Viallon | University of Strasbourg, France | [viallon@unistra.fr](mailto:viallon@unistra.fr)

Leila Hammoud | Laboratoire PCMS, University of Bejaia, Algeria | [leila.hammoud@univ-bejaia.dz](mailto:leila.hammoud@univ-bejaia.dz)

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The contributions assembled in this special issue of JSLCS engage a set of questions that are simultaneously ancient and urgent. How do societies sustain, contest, and transform the symbolic practices through which they constitute themselves? Under what conditions do representational forms retain their cultural authority, and under what conditions do they fracture, migrate, or become sites of political struggle? These questions, long central to cultural studies, sociology of culture, and discourse theory, have acquired new analytical urgency in the context of accelerating digital mediation, resurgent nationalist politics, and the deepening asymmetries of a globalised knowledge economy. This issue does not attempt to resolve them. It attempts, rather, to situate them with greater precision — and to demonstrate their productivity across a range of disciplinary traditions, geographic locations, and empirical objects.

The issue intervenes at a moment of significant epistemological reorientation in the humanities and social sciences. Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship has challenged the universalist claims of metropolitan theory, insisting that knowledge production is itself a cultural practice embedded in specific power relations (Mignolo, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Digital humanities and platform studies have complicated inherited assumptions about cultural transmission, foregrounding the role of algorithmic architectures in shaping what can be said, circulated, and remembered (Bucher, 2018; Viallon & Trestini, 2019). And comparative literary and discourse studies have expanded beyond their traditional Euro-American corpora to engage with texts, voices, and genres from across the Global South (Huggan, 2001; Wa Thiong'o, 2009). The twenty-two contributions gathered here are situated within, and contribute to, all three of these reorientations.

The special issue is organised around four thematic axes that emerged inductively from the submitted corpus. The first concerns the relationship between literary and visual representation and the exercise of cultural power — an axis that encompasses post-apocalyptic ecocriticism, feminist deconstruction of patriarchal institutions, satirical interventions in postcolonial national discourse, and the ideological analysis of digital cartoon content. The second addresses identity construction, satirical resistance, and counter-narrative practice in postcolonial and diasporic contexts — with contributions engaging Nigerian literary culture, Arab dystopian fiction, African development discourse, and the transnational politics of visual satire. The third axis examines the technological and algorithmic mediation of cultural memory, from the colonial management of radio broadcasting in mid-twentieth-century Algeria to the contemporary algorithmic curation of collective cultural narratives. The fourth gathers contributions that attend to the institutional, ritual, and sociolinguistic dimensions of cultural practice: luxury language, ritual heritage, educational theatre, intercultural intelligence, bureaucratic culture, and scholarly representations of Islamic Sufism.

Across these axes, three conceptual tensions recur with sufficient regularity to warrant identification as structural features of the collection. The tension between authenticity and constructedness — the question of whether cultural forms can ever ground claims of genuine identity, or whether authenticity is always a retrospective and politically motivated achievement — runs through the issue's literary and sociolinguistic contributions alike. The tension between continuity and rupture — whether cultural transmission preserves, transforms, or inadvertently betrays its objects — is most directly engaged by the issue's contributions on heritage, digital culture, and postcolonial literary form. And the tension between resistance and co-optation — the recurring discovery that counter-cultural and subaltern forms are perpetually at risk of absorption by the structures they oppose — cuts across the issue's satirical, postcolonial, and platform-critical contributions.

We do not claim that this collection is comprehensive. Cultural expression is irreducibly various, and any thematic issue necessarily involves principled exclusions. What we claim, more modestly, is that the contributions assembled here represent a productive sample of current interdisciplinary work on the conditions under which cultures endure, migrate, and are remade — and that they make, collectively, a scholarly contribution that exceeds the sum of their individual parts. We are grateful to the contributors, the reviewers, and the editorial board of JSLCS for making this issue possible.

**Nadia Idri, Philippe Viallon & Leila Hammoud**

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University of Bejaia, Algeria | University of Strasbourg, France

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