

Colloquium 6: Postcolonialism and World Literature 2

IWL 2019 – Harvard

The group was made up of 15 scholars, mostly undergraduate and graduate students, an Associate Professor and a Lecturer. We came from many universities around the world such as China, Germany, India, Japan, Portugal, South Korea, but the majority of participants came from US universities.

We had four two-hour sessions and there were three or four communications each session. Every participant had 20 minutes to present a paper that was followed by an intervention of five minutes made by a respondent who would point out some of the strongest ideas and set the field for the group's discussion. Presentations would conclude with the group's discussion.

The sessions were structured by the main topics introduced by the presentation proposals sent by every participant. The sessions were organized into three major topics that reflected the common interest in the problematics of translatability, text circulation, the literary canon, memory and embodied subjectivities in the context of postcolonial literature and studies. The four sessions were divided into three groups under the following titles: 1) (un)translatability: re-appropriations in postcolonial circulation; 2) (un)doing the selves: embodying postcolonial subjectivities; 3) (in)visibilities: (dis/re) placing memory.

July 2nd – (un)translatability: re-appropriations in postcolonial circulation

In the first session the presentations focused on issues related to literary circulation in translation and on the production and reproduction dimension and its manifestations, namely the literary canon in a postcolonial framework.

Eiji Yasuhara started our discussions with a presentation titled "Beyond Agonism: The Genealogy of Chilean Avant-Garde Poetry from Vicente Huidobro to Nicanor Parra" where he explored the connections between literary center and periphery in the critic reception of the Chilean avant-garde poetry movement. The case was made for the uniqueness and non-dependency of the European canonical literary center.

Lu Zhang introduced us to the relevance of Arthur Miller in China with a presentation intitled "Arthur Miller's Drama in China: Production and Reception". As the title indicates, this presentation focused on the circulation and appropriation of Arthur Miller's work in the drama genre in China after the cultural revolution.

Yeonwoo Koo explored issues related to legibility and readability of colonial memory and archive in a disruptive time-space framework as it is problematized in the postapocalyptic novel *Cloud Atlas* (2004) by David Mitchell. The main focus was on the possibility of decolonizing memory by a non-linear chronological dimension of digital archive. The

presentation was intitled: “Technological and Time Beings: Decolonizing the Archive in the Post-Apocalypse Pacific”.

In “Reading Giacometti in Baghdad Iraq: On the Feeble Untranslatability of figures in Sinan Antoon’s *The Corpse Washer*” Tasnim Bishara questioned the untranslatability of figures presented in this novel as a promise of political resistance and a way to explore new worlds and subjectivities. This presentation focused on the tension presented in the novel between, on the one hand, being an agent of disruption and resistance through linguistic untranslatability, and on the other, being subjected to the laws of market circulation.

July the 9th and 16th – (un)doing the selves: embodying postcolonial subjectivities

The second part had as major guidelines the postcolonial political subjectivities as embodied and problematized in the specific literary genre and manifestation. Gender, queer, posthumanism and afro politics and its futures where some of the perspectives enunciated in this section.

Deniz Gundogan Ibrism presented a paper intitled “*Manjun* in the Garden: Unsettling the Lure of Rainbow Subject and Postcolonial Land Politics in Kafka’s Curse”. This paper focused on the figures of the posthuman as a way to reinforce a site of resistance to the processes of obliteration and enslavement of Indian Muslims in South Africa. By focusing on the idea of laying roots in a specific historical reality this paper made the case for a necessary ecology of postcolonial bodies against the phenomenon of subjects’ disembodiment and displacement.

In “Speculative Histories of Slavery and Settler Colonialism” Smaran Dayal explored speculative fiction, especially in Afrofuturism, as a way to engage with colonial and Atlantic slave trafficking memory by examining examples of the seminal work of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany.

As for Emma Stanley, the paper that explored the liminal spaces between physical and figurative realms as a way to redefine the postcolonial self through parody. The presentation was intitled “Powering the Parody of Tituba: Exposing the Scenes of Subjection”.

The presentation “Is there a Self in this Text? Satire, Passing, and Life in Caucasia” given by Myers Elbow showed how the binary racial stance is implied in passing novels. The focus of this presentation was on the problematics of biracial conscious presented in Danzy Senna’s novel *Caucasia*.

In “Queer Stories form the Islands: The Role of Queer Theory in Philippine Literature” M. Antonio N. Lizada introduced us to a historiographical approach to the production of gender and sexuality as a consequence of the processes of colonialism to which the Philippines was subjected.

Amrita De presented “The Global South as Method and the Act of Writing Itself into Being: Locating The White Tiger in Literary Imagination” which focuses on Adiga’s *South Tiger*.

This presentation focuses on the dynamics and parallelism between the peripheral status of South Asia literatures in the world larger context and its regional center-periphery dynamics between rural and urban India. Amrita explored how this novel explores the urgency to decolonize the past by analyzing the forces that lead to self re-writing and becoming as a way to emancipate from its masters by the possibility of appropriating their name and language.

July the 22nd – (in)visibilities: (dis/re)placing memory

The third and last part was dedicated to the location of memory in its political dimension. There was a focus on how the literary renders visibility to political tensions in postcolonial migrancies and diasporas and its ability to problematize issues related to national identity and boundaries.

In this session, Ryunosuke Komuro presented a paper on the Anglo-Irish tension in Elizabeth Borwen's *The Last September*. Srinita Bhattacharjee presented a paper intitled "Diaspora/Immigrant: Mapping the Subaltern Immigrants in Contemporary Literature" that explored the importance of class, gender and race to read the search and accomplishment of belonging in migrancy narratives, as a way to problematize the notion of diaspora and the implied invisibility of those that do not belong to the stable categories.

We closed our last session with a discussion of the main problematics raised throughout our colloquium. The general impression was that of an emphasis on questions related to the critical commitment of this field of studies. We also talked about the negotiation between intellectual interests, academic career opportunities and department expectations for scholars in this field of studies. There was also some debate on the need to discuss issues related to positionality and the role played by center and periphery universities in setting the framework for postcolonial studies. There was a shared feeling that there is a serious need to approach theory critically, avoiding reductionisms and the exoticism that reinforce the very same stereotypes and problematics that postcolonial studies aim to question and criticize.

I hope that future collaborations will emerge from this space of discussion, and I am sure that our paths will cross again in the future.

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