

Postcolonialism and World Literature, Group 6



Bringing together students of world literature from institutions in Canada, Germany, the United States, Belgium, Egypt, Austria, and Iran, the Colloquium on Postcolonialism and World Literature convened four times in Copenhagen at University of Copenhagen and Aarhus University during July 2017, participating an exciting and provocative conversation about the way intellectual and political territories and identities are negotiated in different ways in our projects.

During our first session, held on July 4, we started our conversations off by broaching certain questions about the framework of world literature and the place of postcolonial critique within it. During this session, ideas about space, the globe, the environment, temporality and discrimination were explored and discussed. Laura Gerday began the conversation by offering a survey of the linkages and disconnections between the disciplines of linguistics and literary studies with regard to postcolonial critique. Her paper, "Shifting to the 'Global' in Linguistic and Literary Studies: Where Does the 'Postcolonial' Stand?" Provocatively, she suggested that the recent shift toward globalizing discourses, such as English as a Lingua Franca in linguistics and World Literature in literary studies, tended to displace the strong political critique of the 1970's and 1980's undergirding these discourses. Austin Hetrick continued the interrogation of the framing of world literature by exploring the history of the environmental imagination starting from the 1960's and developing in the decades following. Exploring the implications of these globalizing discourses that increasingly took a critical-ecological turn, Hetrick focused on implications of the seeing the

globe as a precarious representational object. Finally, F. Delali Kumavie delivered her exciting paper, “On Beginnings and Continuations: Airports, National Anxieties and Transitory Transnational Female Characters,” exploring the airport as a site of both discrimination and politicized seizure. Drawing on Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* and Nana Nyarko Boateng’s “Swallowing Ice,” her literary explorations directed our conversation towards travel in hypermodern spaces, with the airport as a privileged site of flows and arrests of racialized and gendered bodies.

Our second session, held on 11 July, continued the critical exploration, begun towards the end of our first session, of bodies and subjects that are racialized and gendered in works of literature. This session, exploring postcolonial literary representations of identity, laid out the important stakes postcolonial and anticolonial critique has in world literary studies. Rebecca Forney offered a reading of the complex systems of naming and forms of self-translation in one of Assia Djebar’s short stories. Her paper, “Negotiation/négation of double names and attempted hybridity in Djebar’s ‘Le corps de Félicie’” situated this complex negotiation both within and outside of the subject’s own purview, being also influenced by familial and communitarian ties. Parisa Adlifar presented, “A Study of Identity Crisis and Otherness in V.S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* and *A House for Mr Biswas*,” exploring diasporic Indian identity in a Trinidadian setting. Finally, Aya El-Bably delivered her humorous exploration of Mohja Kahf’s poetry, “Contemporary Scheherazades: Arab American Women Writers Fashioning a Distinctive Hybrid Identity.” This last paper explored the negotiation of hybrid identity as both a project invoking and transforming literary misreadings, especially through the figure of Sharazhad, as well as one of unapologetic refusal of the Orientalist imaginary.

The third session of the colloquium was held on 18 July, which explored colonialism and imperialism in historical settings not generally considered within postcolonial studies. For this reason, it was an especially interesting discussion. This conversation extended significant insights about negotiating complex identities amidst forms of racialization and stereotypes from the last session. However, it took postcolonial analyses to geographies not typically associated with its critique. In Daniel Nagelstutz’s “Origin and functions of stereotypes in Peter Høeg’s *Miss Smilla’s Feeling for Snow*,” this entailed the exploration of the theme of Orientalism, explicitly referenced in Høeg’s novel, in Greenland, where 19th century scientific discourses of race aided and abetted the Danish colonial project there. The partnering of racial, ethnographic, and linguistic sciences to articulate the physiognomy and mental capacity of the native Greenlander for the greater knowledge of Danish explorers in the 19th and early 20th centuries emphasized the continued significance of Edward Said’s critique of similar practices in the Middle East and its applicability in other spaces. This discussion turned to what has been termed, by Maria Todorova, the “semicolonialism” of the Balkans in the first part of the 20th century. Exploring different literary approaches to nationalism in writers of former Yugoslavia, Manuel Bahrer presented, “Andrić, Crnjanski & Krleža – Balkan Authors and their literary struggle with imperial heritage.” This paper raised interesting questions about the role that literature plays in mobilizing nationalisms and their role in the perpetration of violence after the collapse of the republic. Bahrer was careful to distinguish between the attitudes towards nationalism and its role in their literary work held by each of the authors, separated by their different ways of imagining their identities within divergent and sometimes antagonistic traditions.

Finally, for our last session, held on 24 July, the conversation took a turn towards modes and practices of conscription, resistance, and adaptation. Our session, “Resistance, Critique and Adaptation” began with Charlotte Speilman’s postcolonial reading of young adult novels and plays adapted to supposedly relatable “New Landscapes—Processing Social Trauma Through Young Adult Adaptations of Shakespeare.” In her research, she found young adult adaptations of classical works of the Western canon to fulfill multiple functions. While they may open students to a familiarity with that venerable canon, they also play an important moralizing function, which can be exploited in critical ways or be mishandled to confirm young readers in false categorical modes of thought. For example, she highlighted how Alan Gratz’s *Something Rotten* actually tended to reify class stereotypes. Then, Alexander Aguayo discussed his fascinating research on the Black Lives Matter movement, criticizing the way black bodies are fetishized as objects in debates around BLM. Significantly, he argued that demands for greater visibility as black members of the American community, while framed as necessary for recognition and dignity, might also feed into the historical reduction of black subjects to the flesh; that is, to the visible dimension of suffering as exteriority. Considering flesh as a site of politics, Aguayo offered as a corrective to the framework of bare life, fleshiness as that dimension of experience and relationality that is tied inextricably to subjectivity and interiority.

Our diverse interests allowed us to engage with each other’s projects in a way that highlighted our shared intellectual commitments to reading widely, politically, critically. The ideas of resistance, of the continued relevance and renewed significance of postcolonial thinking, of considerations of space and subjectivity, of coercions and false projections, of the complexity of identities, emerged in our discussions as important markers for developing our lines of critique. It was an exciting conversation that I hope will continue.

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