

## **Postcolonialism—Reviewing the Discipline Today**

**Talk given to University in Lucknow 21 February 2017**

**Professor Janet Wilson, University of Northampton , UK**

- 1. 9/11: Terror and the postcolonial (New work)**
- 2. Mobile cultures (Diaspora and what it means- rise of Diaspora studies)**  
**Diaspora studies reader**

Changes to postcolonial theory- diaspora with effect on

“ **nation vs diaspora**

Metropolitan migrant communities, cosmopolitanisms—elites

### **Citizenship and state control**

- 3. Refugee Crisis: (1<sup>st</sup> page of paper)**

sahota

- 4. Borders closing with refugees and new modes of citizenship state control**  
troll australis

### **Emphasis on home and belonging (uncanny places)**

**(Also reasons for movement new insights and perceptions on refugees, migrants, etc mobile figures,)**

**Defining the state of the nation**

**Digital diasporas.**

## Introduction

This lecture is about the new directions in postcolonial studies since the beginning of the new millennium, prompted by events of global consequences which has led the discipline to reshape itself. It argues that postcolonialism has developed a new understanding of contemporary political and social change and built on earlier paradigms for addressing injustice, inequality, identity formation, resistance, neoliberalism, and colonialism.

In this lecture I will range over some of the issues confronting the field of Postcolonial Studies, and will refer to my own work as editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, on diaspora studies, migration and refugees, on globalisation in relation to the nation, urbanisation and cosmopolitanism.

I will outline the steps already taken in raising the collective consciousness of postcolonial scholars and students, about changing political, social and economic problems insofar as they are being integrated into the reading practices of this discipline. These are developed out of responses to urgent problems and issues such as the war on terror following 9/11 and the rise of globalised terrorist networks like El Quaeda and ISIS associated with Muslim fundamentalism. They include the growing importance of diaspora studies since c 1991 and theories of diaspora as an adjunct to postcolonial studies, which have been triggered by the massive growth of migration this century and most recently by the refugee crisis; and they extend to changes in the concepts of citizenship and the new legislative powers promulgated by the nation states in dealing with this crisis, These are all new trends since the discipline of postcolonial studies first emerged towards

the end of the 1980s and which arise from a shift of attention to urgent issues stemming from the changing political/economic climate of this new millennium.

### **I. Terror and the Postcolonial**

The new century has been dominated by the threat to western nations' autonomy and security posed by terrorist /suicide bombings -- of the NY trade centre of 9.11, the Madrid bombings of, 2003 and the London Bombing of 7/7/05 which have all been associated with Muslim fundamentalism in the media. Postcolonial critics are less concerned with religious fundamentalism **as a cultural category**. In fact, they would want to separate fundamentalism from religion, and see it, rather in the words of Stephen Morton, as 'a dogmatic attitude to the inviolability of particular actions and practices' 0 a view which can be seen as much relevant to some western secular practices as muslim one

Attention was devoted to the Western reprisals, state-sponsored terrorism in the form of the War on Terror, and the war in Afghanistan , the military occupation of Iraq, There are also related disciplinary measures against terrorism such as the British and American continuing support of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Lebanon, and in some national states the extension of laws of detention, surveillance procedures and the suspension of habeas corpus (CHECK, p. 11 B&M) to keep out so called terrorist suspects and some refugees. The so called unquestioned rightness of the War against Terror based on neo imperial orthodoxies, was challenged by the sceptical postcolonial critic who asks why should the postcolonial state propagate terror? What national and transnational agendas do such a practice and discourse mask? Edward Said drew attention to way that discourse of terrorism has been

exploited to serve the interests of the Israeli state and its policies towards other (Palestinians) in an article in 2002 in which he complained at the media focus on suicide bombings in Palestine. He argued that it 'obscured something that is far worse,' the official Israeli evil that has been visited so deliberately and so methodically upon the Palestinian people'— gesturing towards an historical relationship between imperialism and the discourse of terrorism

To postcolonial critics, Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton in their introduction to a volume essays called *Terror and the Postcolonial* (2010) terror is becoming the western zeitgeist of 21<sup>st</sup> century,, and is the object of new study. Questions asked include, What is postcolonial about every day terror, and how is terror colonial or neo imperialist (as critics see it in these anti-terrorist formations as a demonstration of western power ) ? Critics see these as timely reminders of the fact that the discipline has not heeded sufficiently the continuing inequities, of globalisation such as labour exploitation of third world subjects and exclusion of subaltern subjects who might be migrants and diasporic from certain national formations. Nor has it addressed the relationship between present day violence and terror and that of imperialism, colonisation in the contemporary post colony (i.e. the social space left after colonial power has retreated leaving the post-imperial nation despite its flag independence (i.e. many nations still carry neo imperialist structures).

So although the dominant paradigm of empires and colonies—the political binaries of coloniser-colonised, metropolitan centres and colonial peripheries -- might seem to have little relevance into day's increasing globalised political and fiscal landscapes, with border crossing and transnational flows of people and

products, (Arjun Appadurai—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes)) there is reason to return to the colonial archive of violence, repression and surveillance in the records of colonial formations of sovereignty to establish how these practices continue into counter terrorist formations. For as Boehmer and Morton remind us in their introduction to *Terror and the Postcolonial* and, historical, cultural and literary studies have devoted too little time to the scrutiny of contemporary imperialism and the traditional colonial and terroristic forms it takes:

Mohsin Hamid's novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), for example, shows a link between the new official state controls of transnational migration and the perceived terrorist threat to the security of the nation. This has in more recent years been magnified by the refugee crisis as migrants from war zones in the middle east like Syria and from underperforming parts of African continent in the global south have flooded into Europe through Turkey and the Mediterranean-- it has proved overwhelming for many nations, whose borders have been closed or made more rigid by various methods of control, such as detention camps, checkpoints, surveillance mechanisms. Refugees and the threat of terrorists, have also contributed by the xenophobic rhetoric of extremist Right Wing groups like Le Pen's party in France and the British National Party in England, Golden Dawn in Greece and the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, which implies that all foreigners will /immigrants are a threat. The adoption of new, often exclusionary immigration policies, overrules the individual's social and political rights upon which the liberal democratic state is based. These new debates about immigration and terrorism, and new

representations of migrants in the cultural political legal discourses of terror, lead Stephen Morton points out in recent issue of JPW, (2010), that there is a need for informed scholarship and further debate about the competing narratives, cultural histories and legal arguments that frame immigration and terrorism. (WHERE?\_

## **II. The Discipline of Postcolonial Studies**

Postcolonial literature like Moshin Hamids' novel offers a critical subversive scrutiny of the colonial relationship and sets out to resist neo-colonial perspectives . As postcolonial critics our role is to introduce reading practices which identify such oppositional literary strategies, in the way that I have just done, and assess their effectiveness in pointing to a need for a reconsideration of social, political and cultural inequities -- in the case of Hamid's novel between east and west, Pakistan and the USA. It is taught within English departments, but often from an outsider, resistant position through engaging with texts and cultures which are not always included within the established English canon . In seeking to challenge the canon it has also initiated a critical scepticism as well as a self reflexive revisionism.

These modes of enquiry and critique pave underpin the response to the encroachment of globalisation, a field that is associated with the social sciences, and which threatens to displace postcolonialism as a discipline, because to many people globalisation constitutes the dominant perspective through which to view the contemporary moment. As Ania Loomba et al argue in their introduction to *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, 'it is important to go beyond a

certain kind of postcolonial studies in order to engage with the imperial formations and ideologies associated with globalization’.

Yet as the investigation of the relationship between postcolonialism and terror which I have just pointed to, indicates, many of today’s socio-political formations like terrorist networks, the travelling cultures of migration and diaspora, are a product of globalisation. The greater flows of people, cultures, finance and information that the global sphere encourages means that the discipline is having to adapt its traditional discourses of resistance and politicised critique to the new demands of globalization and neo-imperialism. Citizenship, for example, is delinked from the ideals of the state and can be related more to the universalist values such as Human Rights, or the International Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights, or in Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The conceptual and disciplinary challenges posed by globalisation and related movements like terrorism, diaspora, environmentalism, have led to a readjustment in the last two decades as postcolonial practitioners focus more on **the neo-imperial practices** that mark out the global condition—showing a shift away from the earlier predominantly literary critical explorations of the 1980s and the vogue for the theoretical and cultural which marked out the 1990s. The temporal horizons of the field now focus less on ‘the narrative of decolonisation’ (Gikandi), than on neocolonial imbalances in the postcolonial present—inequalities, poverty and oppression. In these ways the field is showing a reinvigorated engagement with these same forces -- resistance and liberation -- which traditionally constituted its strength when it was mainly

concerned with the resistant identities of the newly independent nations to the British imperial centre, or to the voices of the indigenous peoples which had been submerged during colonisation

### **III. *Rerouting the Postcolonial* (2010)**

In our volume *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*, we aim to show how the field is developing under the impact not just of globalization, but also of environmentalism, religious revival, and transnational formations which may either be political and economic (terrorism, neo liberal ideologies), or cultural (the transnation, the glocal or the cosmopolitan). The 'rerouting' of the title plays on **the roots/ routes homophones** (roots associated with origins, location and place, and routes (travel with its attendant meanings of uprooting, rerooting, new directions and reconceptualisations of space). This is particularly relevant to Diaspora Studies, another expanding field that encompasses the social science disciplines that are traditionally concerned with migration studies like sociology and anthropology, as well as the humanities disciplines of literature and history; the study of diaspora and transnational movements of uprooted communities has a marked relation to the postcolonial insofar as they are concerned with issues such as the economic inequalities, masked by neo liberalism, the challenge to sovereignty and identity of the nation state, the rights of the displaced and mobile populations. In diaspora discourses the homophones have been blended together, to construct alternative 'public spheres'- the rooted place of home and belonging, and the routes – passages and pathways of travel by which migrant people arrive at new destinations in the host land. The inter-related but oppositional meanings of the



terms roots/routes encapsulate the way that transformative ideas of relocation –stemming from the discourses of migration, diaspora, and the new mobile spaces offered by cosmopolitan travel— require new approaches and methods of investigation that go beyond the identifications of national time and space, showing, e.g. how diaspora communities build a new consciousness and solidarities allowing them to live inside the new nation of the hostland -- but with a difference. And there are two views of diaspora: one constructed out of a sense of nostalgia for the homeland and based on a discourse of a fixed return (associated with William Safran) the other which is more deterritorialized, about constructing a homeland in the diaspora, rather than longing for the original homeland (associated with Avtar Brah). A third angle is that of the multi-locational concept of diasporas a transnational encounter- which allows us to see diasporas as ‘the exemplary condition of late modernity’ (Tololoyan)

I and my coeditors argue in the introduction that topics and issues commonly associated with the discipline-- diasporic and minoritarian subjectivities, global networks of terrorist activity and anti-terrorist formations, **metropolitan immigrant communities**-- are now being treated now in ways that assure us that the postcolonial project has come to embrace a much larger set of intellectual positions than is commonly presumed and that it brings into dialogue diverse scholarly agendas and scholarly practices. In fact as Canadian critic, Diana Brydon says, the decolonizing energies of postcolonial studies are being dispersed within much broader fields of engagement, to the extent that in some cases a project may be informed by postcolonial thinking without actually categorizing itself as postcolonial or acknowledging postcolonial influences as

such (174)—there are different fields of endeavour many of which grapple with related questions within different frames of reference.

#### **IV. Global imaginaries vs fixed national entities**

Running throughout the collection is a renewed engagement with global imaginaries, **and subjectivities**; as social reality is being transformed by imagination the influence on that imagining process- these are changing due to the spread of the electronic media, and their impact on the construction of the self, provides the individual with new spatial and imaginative independence and flexibility (creating highly reflexive awareness). According to the French/Martinican theorist, Edouard Glissant, this means the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world, and which implies definitions of community and culture as constantly under construction rather than fixed in nature-- although there is an ongoing tension between conceptualisations of community as fluid and emergent constructions or as more fixed and static. These are in particular played out in the tension between the diaspora community and the nation state. This tension shows that the current globalising of culture and society has brought to the fore problems which in being addressed require the translation of terms like 'imaginaries' across different geospatial locations, disciplinary formations and frameworks of theoretical allegiance I ways that acknowledge and respect these differences.

I now turn to my work on diaspora for the *Diaspora Studies Reader* which is being published by Routledge

Researchers in globalization and transnational studies some decades ago questioned the view that the nation-state was the most appropriate framework for studying society, and cultural studies theorists pointed to the multiplicity of voices, layered temporal dimensions, and fertile interaction within and beyond the space of the nation from the dispersed groups of the diaspora. One of the most famous theorists of the nation and narration is Homi Bhabha, who celebrates the in-betweenness of minority cultures as a liminality that disrupts the temporality of the nation by embracing the contentious performative space -- arguing that by presenting that which cannot be incorporated, and highlighting multiple markers of cultural difference, their unruly presence is a source of energy and potential change. Bhabha's title *Dissemination*, alludes to the features of dispersion and scattering that define the movements of populations from nation into exile, and that focus his critique of the modernist idea of the state. Another critique is Paul Gilroy's (1993) conceptualisation of the diaspora of the Black Atlantic in his seminal study *The Black Atlantic and Modernity as Double Consciousness*. Gilroy's argument is based on the nation-state's implication in systems of colonialism and slavery and in defining the zone of the Black Atlantic as a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural international formation" (REF). Gilroy implies the limits and irrelevance of the nation state. In his geopolitical reconfiguration, the transnational place of crossings and transitions emerges as an alternative to territorial locations: the contact zone of the 'middle passage', with its limited identifications of temporality or territory, is one of cultural production, transnational movement, and mobility, yet also of 'belonging': those who make such crossings identify themselves as a community, even though this is a mobile rather than a grounded one.

Yet today's world of globally interconnected frameworks, the nation continues to be a dominant category through which practices of sovereignty and citizenship are addressed. In the multiple contexts of its functionality, it continues to loom large in the everyday lives of its citizens and residents who are connected transnationally to different countries or regions through transitional movements of peoples, whether they are members of multiply-located diaspora groups and networks of communication or not (Quayson and Daswani 2013, 15).

In fact we might see that global movements and transnational formations are either in retreat or under threat e.g. since the global economic crisis of 2008 when individual nations had to legislate independently of the global banking system in order to recover some economic stability and growth, the increased measures of national security and surveillance especially in some nations like Australia, which are designed to stem the momentum of refugees and migration; or even President Trump's decision to impose a ban on migrants from 7 muslim countries; the threatened collapse of the EU with the Brexit vote in June last year.

The recent resurgence in many European countries and the USA of a divisive right-wing nationalism promoting sovereignty, economic protectionism, and 'authentic origins' points to a reevaluation of what seemed to be outdated concepts of fixed belonging, ethnic community and nationhood which had seemed to be outdated, as a backlash against contemporary transnational movements. This retreat from the global liberal order proclaimed after 1989 as heralding 'the end of history', is being forged through various democratic practices like political campaigns, referenda and elections. It suggests that transnationalism and its

cognate ideas of cosmopolitan citizenship and belonging are being increasingly questioned by large masses of people within precisely those nation states whose borders have become more permeable to migrations and diasporic formations. Even as the nation state continues to be reframed as inherently more mobile, and -- as people continue to flow back and forth across national borders -- subject to the negotiations of class, ethnicity, and citizenship, the spectre of isolationism, of retreating behind 'closed walls' and keeping the 'Other' out is looming increasingly large.

## **V. Cosmopolitanism and the urban imaginary**

Alongside the new thinking provoked by globalization, in relation to nationalism and, diaspora studies, is a fusion of postcolonial studies with sociology and urban studies to examine the phenomenon of new metropolises like Mumbai, Istanbul. Such new interdisciplinary approaches aim to locate the postcolonial in the urban imaginary that they represent—in order to open up to a broader understanding of transitional and transnational postcolonialism and the 21<sup>st</sup> century expression of the global scale of the urban. The new urban/cities consist of new forms of asymmetrical powers relations embracing social elites and third world societies, which become emancipated because they enter the system of global finance—these cities are at the heart of financial and telecommunication service—and are multicultural meeting places, compact diffuse urban webs, showing a new cosmopolitanism which resists the metropolitan roots of cosmopolitanism at large- i.e. a citizen of the world, or new cosmopolitanism (Helff, 26) , which according to Ulf Hannerz, shows 'an orientation, a willingness to engage with the other, It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of

openness towards divergent cultural experiences a search for contrast, rather than uniformity' (quoted in Helff, 22) ; yet these are not just new forms of cosmopolitanism, as the discourses on diaspora and migration also show ghettoization and enclavisation, of people living in a time warp, drawing on mythologies and old traditions

Cosmopolitanism exists at an interface between the postcolonial and theories of globalization, because of its implications of citizenship, civilised conversation 'conviviality' and heightened political responsibilities. Rerouting the postcolonial as one contributor says, requires the deliberate cultivation of **cosmopolitan allegiances**, because the resistance to colonialism requires more than ever the encouragement of complex, provisional and itinerant loyalties, -- **resistance must be global**. Secondly cosmopolitanism is being redefined in relation to the new articulations of transnationalism and neoliberalism as a way of addressing the mobility, contingency and varied cultural positions of subjects in an increasingly globalized world, that is by using globalized forms of travel , communication , languages and technology to position themselves in motion, at least with two homes, and dual forms of citizenship, always in multiple locations (Helff, 20) . There is a call to expand the term from its association with elite privileged western minorities by critics like Simon Gikandi and Anthony Appiah, in the recognition that the occupation of spaces outside national territories in the current global mobilisation of peoples requires new discursive modes. Speaking of cosmopolitanism in relation to locality, Gikandi draws attention to the limitations of the current theoretical vocabulary to articulate the experiences of postcolonial lives lived beyond national boundaries both in the midst, and

paradoxically at the margins of the global international system; the experiences of refugees, nomads, asylum seekers who are often excluded from western cosmopolitan discourses such as diaspora theories—

## **VI. Future Directions?**

The consolidation of the discipline has meant that there has been some undermining of the sense of historical urgency that came from the oppositional political energies that animated the decolonising intellectuals of the twentieth century. Yet as I have shown, these issues- terrorism, refugees, threats to the world order, cultures of globalization are equally pressing, So, I wish to briefly outline a snapshot for the future, of areas where the postcolonial enterprise might develop new areas of enquiry and cross disciplinary modes of engagement

**Widening the canon;** 1. the postcolonial should reroute into a multi lingual field, because non-Anglophone writers and vernacular literatures are underrepresented, due to the favouring of a relatively small range of postcolonial 'cosmopolitan' writers whose work is published in largely metropolitan-based critical journals. This is true of India where there are many works in diverse languages not yet available to the English reader- current translation project based at the School of Translation Studies at Indira Gandhi Open University in Delhi, called Critical Discourses, (with Avadesh Singh, and Ganesh Devy\_) aims to publish 52 volumes of works of Indian indigenous languages. This entails a greater investment in translation studies and an embrace of languages other than English, Spanish or French. 2, Engage more with the visual arts, graphic art and design, photography and film. 3. Opening up to time frames earlier than the contemporary, and continue the project of cultural recuperation with a more

historical awareness; seeking to recover erased voices and moments of rupture which have been written out of historical narratives.. 4. Continue to challenge the premises of regional or area studies, which often privilege national concerns and/or networks of empire as found in the concept of commonwealth literature, by arguing for comparativist approaches, and the inclusion of minoritarian groups. **5. Strengthen the interface between environmentalism and globalisation:** there is a need to reinvigorate the ethical and aesthetic engagement with questions that historically constituted postcolonial theory's theoretical and political strength, such as to develop an ethics of responsibility in relation to major issues like global warming, and essentialism in its various guises (e.g. terrorism and the war on terror). There is a need to decouple globalisation from its neo-liberal, neo-imperial structures and to embrace for example an alternative, social ecologically aware position in considering ecology, and the environment

**CONCLUSION** The beginning of the new millennium saw predictions of the death of postcolonialism ; there were complaints about its exhaustion as a theoretical paradigm, or of a crisis in postcolonial studies **as the MLA**

**Roundtable addressed in 2007.** I hope my discussion of the new directions—the discourse on terror, postcolonialism and globalisation, diaspora studies and nationalism, new urbanism,, postcolonial cosmopolitanism, translation studies -- makes clear that postcolonialism is far from having expended its energies and in many cases these new concerns have entailed reconfigurations of its earlier preoccupation with resistance and liberation. It has a positive future, and one in which, postcolonialism should be able to speak about what it is **for**, rather than



what it is against (although we should not be complacent about this). In the last two decades it has begun to redirect its theoretical energies and its critical enquiry in ways that preserve its dynamism, flexibility, critical force and ultimately its cultural relevance; the critical project of regrounding of the discipline in a changing and increasingly globalized contemporaneity, is ongoing, made with the view to strengthening and enhancing its theoretical and pedagogical impact in a comparative context.

