

## The Parapostcolonial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and New Approaches

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This special issue emerges from the *Living Beyond Theory: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Postcolonial* conference, a two-day event for postgraduate and early career researchers held at the University of York in February 2011, in association with the Postcolonial Perspectives reading group. The key objective of this conference was to consider whether there might still be a future for postcolonial studies, and what this future might look like—an objective that emerged out of our increasing awareness, as early career researchers in modern British history, Middle Eastern studies, and South African studies, of how dramatically both the world and the academy have changed since the emergence of postcolonial studies into mainstream academia, as well as a growing uncertainty about how far its founding theories might productively be stretched beyond their original frames of reference.

*Living Beyond Theory* epitomized the excitement and anxiety that so often defines key moments of intellectual reflexivity. In this, it shared a common goal with higher-profile events, such as the *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say* conference held in York in July 2010. What distinguished *Living Beyond Theory* from these events, however, was the position its participants occupied, and continue to occupy. This position is defined not only by the transition from student to independent researcher, but, crucially, by a relationship to postcolonial studies that differs significantly from that of our immediate precursors. As children of the late 1970s and early 1980s, we quite literally grew up alongside postcolonial studies, and in the midst of radical changes in the systems that governed the globe. Amongst our earliest memories can be found grainy analogue images of the fall of the Berlin wall and the release of Nelson Mandela from Victor Verster Prison, images imbued with significance that, though not yet able to define, we felt keenly.

Many things were at work in this temporal moment, and the inchoate political awareness it instigated in us was vague. By the time we entered university, however, our interests had gravitated not towards the theory and practice of democracy, nor the workings of economic systems, but towards the vast and complex relationship between colonialism and the configuration of knowledge, society, and power. Postcolonial studies offered us the opportunity to understand this relationship more fully, and perhaps one day to participate in its

rethinking. This choice was no doubt influenced by the fact that, by the time we entered university in the early years of the twenty-first century, the discipline's foothold in the academic mainstream was well and truly secure, with centres for colonial and postcolonial studies popping up in many institutions across the UK and beyond from the late 1990s onwards.

To us, as undergraduates, the field seemed rigorous, exciting, and profoundly relevant to the world whose systems and discourses we were now learning more precisely to define and to navigate. And yet, as we embarked on postgraduate study, something seemed to shift. Across the humanities, we found ourselves watching from the shoreline as a powerful current of self-reflection coursed through postcolonial studies. This shift was not entirely unexpected: the Postcolonial Perspectives reading group emerged out of our anxieties about the "fit" of postcolonial studies proper with our own fields of interest, and the very first meeting focused on essays by Anne McClintock (1992) and Ella Shohat (1992), in which the term "postcolonial" is extensively critiqued. While excited about the possibilities of this shift, however, we were also uncertain whether to let ourselves get swept away, aware of what we would be flowing away from but not where we might be heading.

What, after all, was at stake in this re-visioning of postcolonial studies? Was its chief objective merely to continue the process of "incessant self-questioning and ramifying autocritique" that has come to define the field—a process manifest in projects that self-consciously seek "to correct the sin[s] of omission or commission by earlier scholars" (Shohat and Stam 88)? Or was it rather to re-energize the field altogether, by developing approaches both better suited to the concerns and demands of twenty-first century contemporary scholarship, and more accommodating of contexts that fall outside of the foundational case studies of the field? If, as we hoped, this revisioning was driven by the latter impulse, then how might we, as early career researchers, contribute in meaningful ways to the development of modes of analysis and interpretation capable both of keeping faith with the principles and practices that had fundamentally shaped our thinking thus far, and of accommodating fully the idiosyncrasies of contexts that fall not so much outside, as at an angle to, the paradigms on which these principles and practices are based?

This dilemma lies at the heart of our special issue. Herein, we have brought together a selection of the papers first presented at *Living Beyond Theory*, so as to sketch out a possible future for postcolonial studies in which these moments of paradigmatic dislocation are not peripheral, but centre stage. Our purpose in doing so is thus not to fill in the gaps of postcolonial studies—to correct any sins of omission or commission—but to showcase new work that worries away at its borders: the points at which the definitively postcolonial shades into something that is, methodologically and contextually speaking, almost, but not quite, that. We call this the *parapostcolonial*, a term that signifies a relationship to the postcolonial defined not by temporality or sequence, but by proximity, and which thus forms a useful rubric,

we feel, for contextually-rooted work whose significant interdisciplinary implications are in jeopardy of being overlooked.

As the essays collected in this issue demonstrate, this proximity creates moments of intense friction, but also of startling symmetry. In this way, thinking parapostcolonially allows for an acknowledgement of shared histories and thematic continuities, while simultaneously seeking to articulate and preserve the idiosyncratic natures of individual sources and contexts, in ways that highlight—rather than omit—that which does not fit. This same ethos has elsewhere driven theory-heavy interventions, particularly in the field of literary studies, as Janet Wilson and Daria Tunca’s recent special issue on “Postcolonial Thresholds: Gateways and Borders” for the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* attests, and the coming year promises yet more, with the publication in June of an edited collection based on the *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn’t Say* conference as part of the Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures series. The articles in this special issue not only contribute to this debate, but in many ways provide an essential entry point for those new to the field, and particularly the next generation of scholars. By taking the specificity of their sources and contexts as a primary focus, and by allowing the theoretical dimension of their arguments to unfold behind the scenes, their authors successfully render their research engaging and accessible to readers unfamiliar with the regions, periods, and intellectual frameworks on which they draw.

Crucially, then, this special issue brings together diverse geographical and temporal contexts—ranging from early twentieth-century Nigeria to pre- and post-partition India to the present-day Philippines—to re-imagine postcolonial studies both from within its paradigmatic case studies and from without. It introduces contexts shaped by idiosyncratic colonial dynamics to the field; while also drawing attention to the hitherto unrecognised complexity of mobility and communication networks that operate both within more commonly studied locations—such as India and Nigeria—and across international boundaries, in ways that bypass the archetypal metropole/colony binary. In doing so, the issue develops and tests a range of cross-disciplinary approaches, reconsidering postcolonial theory in the light of methodologies drawn from museum and heritage studies, psychoanalysis and history, alongside literary criticism.

Before outlining the interventions made in each of these contributions, however, it is worth noting the process through which we worked with the authors to develop their conference papers into full-length articles. When planning the original *Living Beyond Theory* event, we took especial care to maximize opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-exchange involving all participants, primarily by juxtaposing traditional conference panels and provocative keynotes from Dr Ruth Craggs (then St Mary’s, now King’s College London) and Dr Simon Obendorf (Lincoln) alongside open workshops facilitated by Dr Zoe Norridge and Dr Sarah Turner. The success of the latter in particular encouraged us not only to develop the special issue before you, but to offer our authors ongoing feedback and

support with their individual contributions through a series of open peer review workshops. These workshops allowed us to develop the special issue through an intensive, collaborative process based around realtime participation, in which our authors were each paired with an established academic and a postgraduate/early career researcher to share drafts and implement feedback over the course of several months. This model closely resembles that employed by journals such as *Kairos*, a refereed open-access online journal that utilizes an innovative three-tier review process involving evaluations of submissions by individual editors, discussion by the editorial board as a whole, and a final stage mentoring process to support authors in implementing revisions where necessary. Our publication workshops sought to emulate and even build on this process by making it possible for contributors and reviewers to meet and discuss feedback over the course of one day, a process that proved to be both enjoyable and exceptionally effective.

The issue is organised chronologically, beginning with Rebecca Jones's essay on local travel writing in 1920s Nigeria and concluding with Aine Mangaoang's exploration of popular music and prison culture in twenty-first-century Philippines. This structure not only spans almost a full century, but traces a path across the globe, from West Africa to the Philippine archipelago via Pakistan, London, Bombay, Germany, and Israel. This scope allows us to gradually uncover a cultural history and geography of the "parapostcolonial," while allowing the authors' detailed emphasis on specificities and particularities both to ground the often abstract concerns of postcolonial theory and to make these contexts and concerns accessible to those without prior knowledge.

Rebecca Jones's "Journeys to the Hinterland: Early-Twentieth-Century Nigerian Domestic Travel Writing and Local Heterogeneity in Lagos and Beyond" offers an excellent introduction to this approach. Herein, Jones examines constructions of locality in the serialised Yoruba and English-language travel narratives that flourished in Lagos newspapers between 1910 and 1930. Travelling between Lagos and the Yoruba hinterland, the north, the east, and beyond, the travel writers—usually local intellectuals—wrote about the people and unfamiliar languages they encountered, and their experiences on the new trains, steamers, and roads. Jones discusses how, though the interests of Nigerian travel writers—difference, ideologies of 'civilisation'—often chime with postcolonial theory, they are not preoccupied with 'writing back' to the centre or with colonialism itself (though they are embedded in that context and often highly critical of it). Nor are their texts produced in dialogue with colonial travel writing about Nigeria. Instead, she argues, they are more interested in local and regional networks, and can be seen to engage with the particular demands of local print culture and the writers' desire to display their social and business networks. She concludes by asking how post-colonial criticism can theorise the heterogeneity of the local, and how we might begin to theorise the Lagos newspaper travel narratives as travel writing.

In contrast, Benjamin Poore's study of the Anglo-Pakistani psychoanalyst Masud Khan takes us from the local right into the heart of the global. Khan was one of the most controversial figures in British psychotherapy: a "snob, a liar, a drunk, a philanderer, an anti-Semite, a violent bully, a poseur and a menace to the vulnerable," but also a flamboyant 'Feudal Prince,' and a self-proclaimed exile. An immigrant from a privileged colonial background, Khan does not easily fit into pervasive postcolonial paradigms of subaltern or hybrid experience, nor, as a psychoanalyst, into clearly demarcated disciplinary areas of concern. But as Poore demonstrates in "'An Irish emigrant the wrong way out': Masud Khan reads James Joyce," his career as a psychoanalyst in Britain nevertheless offers a unique opportunity to look at the collision of psychoanalysis, Euro-modernism, and the end of colonization. Drawing on Khan's clinical writings; archival evidence concerning his library; and his personal diaries, Poore builds an account of how a non-European reader of Joyce gave shape to his own experience as an exile through a passionate engagement with a writer who fascinated him from the Lahore of 1944 to the London of the late-1980s, and reflects on the ways in which this engagement provided Khan with a framework for implicitly thinking through the problems of race and citizenship that troubled his time in London, with particular focus on his relationship with Jewishness.

Emma Bird then takes us back to the subcontinent in her discussion of Indian poetry from the 1960s and '70s. Bird's article, "'It's Missing': *damn you, Missing Person*, and the Material History of the Postcolonial Poem," seeks to contextualize the peculiar position of poetry in postcolonial studies, arguing that in spite of the expansive—and ever expanding—dimension of postcolonial theoretical discourses, poetry remains under-represented in critical anthologies, on conference panels, and in academic discussion. She demonstrates that Indian poetry in English—especially work produced in the 1960s and 1970s, prior to the institutionalization of postcolonial studies in the academy, and before the publication of later, well-known Indian novels—is particularly under-represented, with the work of innovative poets such as Arvind Mehrotra, Adil Jussawalla, Eunice de Souza, Arun Kolatkar, and Gieve Patel, rarely discussed. Bird seeks to redress this imbalance through an in-depth consideration of the role of the little magazine. Here, she demonstrates how close reading, formal analysis, and archival work—methodologies that might seem incompatible with interdisciplinary approaches—have a significant role to play in accentuating a critical understanding of postcolonial poetry, and ultimately point towards a vital reconfiguration of the way literary canons are formed and theorized. Looking specifically at two very different little magazines (*Poetry India*, which ran from 1966-1967, and *damn you*, the avant-garde magazine Mehrotra published from Allahabad along with Alok and Amit Rai between 1965 and 1968), Bird offers a theorization of the poetic archive, to demonstrate that these magazines constitute part of an archive that can offer critics the opportunity to revise their understanding of subsequent poetry

published. Broadly then, this paper focuses on methodological practice in postcolonial literary studies, arguing for an understanding of interdisciplinarity and disciplinarity as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, approaches.

In “Living the Postcolonial, Thinking it Neo-colonial, Calling it Cultural Cooperation Between Spain and the Philippines,” José Díaz Rodríguez reflects on Spain’s relationship with its former colony. From the promotion of the Spanish language in the archipelago to Philippine events with a Spanish flavour, Spain has steadily increased the amount of funding dedicated to boost cultural relationships with the Philippines over the last decade. Here, Díaz Rodríguez explores the links between these cultural activities and specific political objectives. He argues that Spanish cultural activity in the Philippines, which some diplomats have referred to as the exertion of cultural pressure, be seen as a form of symbolic power at work in the field of cultural exchange. This cultural pressure has led to a Spanish discourse that links a historical past of grandeur of the Spanish Empire with the current intentions of Spain to position itself as a major political player in Asia. Using *The Colonial Imaginary* (2006)—an exhibition of late-nineteenth-century photographs of the Philippines and its peoples—as his primary case study, Díaz Rodríguez argues that the web of encounters that characterizes Spanish cultural promotion in the Philippines in the early-twenty-first-century can be linked to both postcolonialism and neo-colonialism.

In “From Colonised to Coloniser: Reading the Figure of the Jew in Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* and Jurek Becker’s *Bronsteins Kinder*,” Isabelle Hesse argues that the idea of the Jew functions as a link between Jewish, Israel/Palestine, and postcolonial studies and puts these fields into a critical dialogue with each other through the ambivalent position of the Jew between coloniser and colonised. Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1977) and Jurek Becker’s *Bronsteins Kinder* (1982) focus on the history of European Jewish persecution as well as the creation of a Jewish nation-state to consider the links between Nazism, colonialism, and Zionism and they portray the “Jew” in a new light: as part of the hegemony and the dominant group in a Jewish state. Crucially, both authors critically engage with the shift from the Jew as “colonised” to “coloniser,” which questions prevailing geographical and ideological routes in postcolonial studies, tracing the move from Europe to the Middle East, and the transformation from persecuted and discriminated minority to achieving territorial control, political independence, and military power in Israel. As such, this article contends that these novels can be read as indicative of the future of postcolonial studies, as well as *Jewish* postcolonial studies by tracing the links between Jews and colonialism from Enlightenment Europe to contemporary Israel.

In the issue’s final article, Aine Mangaoang interrogates the use of new media in resisting domination and advocating independence in her analysis of pop-dance videos from a Philippine prison, “Performing the Postcolonial: Philippine Prison Spectacles after Web 2.0.” On July 17, 2007, a YouTube user named ‘byronfgarcia’ uploaded a homemade,

four minute-long video onto the video-sharing website. Within a week, his clip, dubbed the “Prison Thriller Video,” had been viewed almost 2 million times, gained the attention of international media, and had even broken a world record. The novelty of the video was clear: it featured over 1,500 orange-jumpsuit-clad inmates from the Cebu Provincial Rehabilitation and Detention Center (or the CPDRC) in the Philippines, dancing with such precision and passion to a recording of Michael Jackson’s 1982 hit “Thriller,” that one would be forgiven for thinking one was watching a professional, if not slightly unorthodox Broadway musical. Using research conducted at the Institute of Popular Music, the Institute of Philippine Culture, and inside the CPDRC facility, Mangaoang’s article examines the phenomenon of the so-called “Dancing Inmates of Cebu” in light of media claims, and situates their performances in the context of postcolonial studies and Web 2.0 theory. Mangaoang’s article highlights how digital media platforms have given a voice to postcolonial subjects, while simultaneously problematising the Filipino performers, presenting them as uniform, “highly trainable,” Orientalist stereotypes. With clearly marked Filipino prisoners as its focus, this quasi-MTV style video, Mangaoang argues, thus becomes a metaphor for twenty-first-century postcolonial Philippine attempts to assert her independence from the United States.

In the few years since the original *Living Beyond Theory* conference, the authors included in this issue have gone on to prestigious lectureships and postdoctoral fellowships, both in the UK and overseas. Together, then, the six contributions to this issue offer a timely and exciting introduction to new directions in the field of postcolonial studies, while demonstrating the potential of the parapostcolonial to act as a productive framework and shared point of reference for cross-disciplinary, transnational dialogue in the arts and humanities.

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