

Special Issue: *Glocal Imaginaries* Preface

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This Issue of *Postcolonial Text* takes as its focus ways of conceptualizing local and global interfaces, particularly as these are influenced by postcolonial histories.¹ In selecting the “glocal” as our problematic and site of enquiry, we set ourselves the challenge of keeping a spectrum of locations—local, national, regional, transnational and international—simultaneously in play. As Diana Brydon has recently argued, “local and global are now intermeshed in ways that we are still struggling to understand” (112). Our intention is to illuminate some of the ways in which the two ends of the spectrum—local and global—are shown to clash and/or to mutually inform each other in the constitution of subjectivity and identity and in the construction, translation and reception of creative traditions. How do creative writers explore the paradigm of the glocal? How might the relationship between the glocal and the postcolonial be conceived? What tropes, forms, styles and perspectives do writers deploy in attempts to imagine this paradigm and that relationship?

“Glocal Imaginaries” joins attempts to move beyond the limits and exclusions of nationalism, reified notions of the local and facile celebrations of globalization, testing, as it does so, the continued potential and limitations of a postcolonial rubric. Similar recent efforts are collected in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (2010), edited by Janet Wilson, Cristina Șandru and Sarah Lawson Welsh. The introduction to that attempt to take stock of the postcolonial field at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century questions the “crisis” that globalization might represent for postcolonial studies, the overcoming or exceeding of which is suggested in the title of Ania Loomba et al’s *Postcolonialism and Beyond* (2005). *Rerouting the Postcolonial* draws attention to thematic, formal, conceptual, historical and ideological continuities between the two domains (1). As the editors argue, a postcolonial framework is not only retrospective in its cast: it also provides a pre-emptive understanding of territories as “defined, perhaps even constituted, relationally and/or rhizomatically, through global networks” (2; original emphasis). European colonialism and trans-Atlantic slavery also drew the local and regional into global capitalist and cultural economies structured by gross inequity but stimulating diverse forms of resistance. Such histories continue to inform narratives in spaces that range from the finely localised to the cosmopolitan and worldly, as

the articles collected in this Special Issue make clear. Glocal networks discussed include “Black Atlantic” links between Africa, the Caribbean, the UK and/or the US (Nakai, Smith); African, South Asian and British (post)colonial trajectories (Buonanno et al, Nakai); and South Asian, British and North American diaspora routes (Ridda).

The Issue also suggests that articulations of the local with the global increasingly bypass or attempt to transcend the national as a key organising category for identity, in comparison with early postcolonial formulations. It would be premature to foreclose upon the national as a (provisional or partial) framework for self-determination—one thinks of ongoing, if perhaps tragically futile, Palestinian struggles to achieve nation-state recognition; it is also worth recalling Elleke Boehmer’s considered defence of a reconceptualized nation as a potentially enabling *habitus* for women (2005). It is evident, though, that nations have historically been characterized also by whom they exclude, marginalize and persecute, a fact made manifest in relatively new postcolonies as well as in former metropolitan sites. For this reason, Arjun Appadurai emphasizes the hyphen of the nation-state as an icon of disjuncture (34). Building on such seminal formulations of the local/national/global nexus as Appadurai’s, Bill Ashcroft contrasts the “striated” space of state regulation and categorization and its uncanny, provocatively excessive double. According to Ashcroft, the “smooth” space of the “transnation,” characterized by unpredictable affects, symptoms, intensities, embodied experiences and reterritorializing tactics, “challenges, because it mostly ignores, exceeds, surrounds and interpenetrates, the striated space of the state ... *it is the medium of the glocal*” (80; my emphasis). Ashcroft’s formulation is reflected particularly well in Kolodziejczyk’s contribution to this Issue, which illustrates the haunting effects of multicultural and multiply vernacular local and provincial knowledge on artificially homogenous state formations, in this case the legacy of Communism. Sensitive to the way in which the local is drawn into, indeed is partly the effect of, materialist as well as cultural and political relations, Kolodziejczyk makes a persuasive case for expanding the remit of postcolonial studies to encompass sites such as central or—as she ironically terms it—“lesser” Europe.

Another relevant paradigm is that of diaspora.² Avtar Brah’s depiction of the scattering (*speirein*) through (*dia*) space that produces a “continual, transitional growth of roots” remains compelling, as the implicit (and to British ears homophonic) reference to rooting/routing in the title of *Rerouting the Postcolonial* suggests (18). As Anna Ball observes in that collection, in a timely analysis of Leila Aboulela’s fiction, roots both ground and produce proliferating networks, while rhizomes also produce roots (Ball 119). In this Issue, Ulrike Tancke returns to the dilemma of grounding and perhaps artificially cohering identity narratives in Aboulela’s and other work, considering their gendered resonance. Maria Ridda, exploring Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction, notes her selective disposal of root and host culture in terms of the variegated performative tactics of first and second-generation diaspora subjects.

In other contributions, Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) is returned to as a means of avoiding what Hazel Smith refers to as the twin pitfalls of "essence" and entirely contingent "performativity"; in related fashion, Smith negotiates notions of transcendent creativity and/or capitulation to the "white culture game." Smith's use of musical concepts—contrary motion, miscegenation and resonances—demonstrates, as does Gilroy's work, ways in which creative work can be simultaneously rooted in multiple histories and rerouted through hybrid traditions. Patrycja Austin's analysis of Amit Chaudhuri's poetics somewhat differently emphasizes sensuous, transcendent modes of "being at home in the world," repositioning what appears to be a modernist aesthetic in relation to both sustained local habitation and cosmopolitan modes of resistance to totalizing capitalism. Performance, as we see in Austin's and Smith's discussion of musical forms, provides rich sites for exploring a spectrum that spans the global (systemic and abstracted) and the local (concrete and embodied, yet also idiosyncratic and contingent) (Sieg 252, 255). This is clearly demonstrated in the first essay in the Issue, by Giovanna Buonanno, Victoria Sams and Christiane Schlote, which focuses on cultural relocation, tradaptation and revisionist intertextuality in British-Asian theatre texts. Such work, the authors argue, presents counter-memories memories of glocal histories which reconstruct points of production and reception; cultural translation is an instrument both of assimilation and resistance/asserted difference.

The end of the Issue—Tanke's article on British Muslim fictions and interviews with Fadia Faqir and Moazzam Begg—sounds a warning note about the relatively "utopian" tenor of diaspora criticism and related paradigms of deterritorialization. Various critics have cautioned against a too hasty embrace of globalization as a phase of post-nationalism. Appadurai, for example, flags up the influence of diaspora communities on the imaginary construction of new national homelands in response to the internal colonialisms of the nation-state (33). To cite a literary example, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) juxtaposes a proliferating national paradigm—in which new nations, freighted with historical yet renewable discourses of Othering, might almost infinitely emerge—with a global division of labor facilitated by diverse modes of bordercrossing.³ In related fashion, Simon Gikandi highlights the difference between cosmopolitan and other modalities of mobility impelled by postcolonial crisis (*Globalization* 110). Globalization, he reminds us—any analysis of which should involve consideration of ways in which colonialism has segued into neo-imperialism—is "a structure patterned by causal relationships" (114). During the writing of this Introduction, I was able to view Algerian artist Zineddine Bessaï's alternative map *H-Out (The Immigration Guide)* (2010), which marks a barbed-wire "houdoud" (frontier) between "le monde" (the world: a zone of economic power and points of arrival) and "le tiers-monde" (the third world: of climatic extremes, unemployment, poverty and metaphorically stopped clocks). As the map's iconography, clarified by the bilingual legend,⁴

illustrates, the line is nevertheless illegally traversed by *les clandestins/harragas* (illegal immigrants) in any vehicle available and also on foot. The map's elegiac function is to mark resulting watery and landlocked sites of death. Featured in an exhibition in Manchester, a city that was central to the imperial enterprise, the image has accrued an additional layer of irony. As the curator of the exhibition explains:

Despite strong support from [the exhibition venue] and appropriate credentials, [the artist] Zineddine [Bessaï]’s application for a visa was turned down by the UK Border Agency. Reading the letter he was sent, it is hard not to conclude that the main reason for rejecting his application is that Zineddine is young, male, unattached and Algerian. It’s a powerful irony—though one that might be lost on the UK Border Agency—that Bessaï’s work explores the contemporary phenomenon of clandestine migration from North Africa to Europe, and the desperate and tragic efforts made by young people in order to reach the promised lands on the northern shore of the Mediterranean.⁵

That mobility can be both enforced and contained in ways that undermine international human rights is a point made by both Faqir and Begg in their respective interviews.

As Gikandi also points out, though, subalterns in diaspora can themselves evince defensive illiberal or “fundamentalist” views (*Globalization* 115). In Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, underclass migrant workers—South Asian equivalents of Bessaï’s *sans-papiers*—reinforce nationalist and even racist cartographies. For example, when Biju, an otherwise sympathetic Indian character, encounters Pakistanis in restaurant kitchens that are “perfectly first world on top, perfectly third world... below” (152), potential affiliation in shared migrant experience is overwhelmed by antagonisms that are the legacy of colonial mapmaking: “‘Pig pigs, sons of pigs, *sooar ka baccha*,’ Biju shouted. ‘Uloo ka patha, son of an owl, low-down son-of-a-bitch Indian.’ They drew the line at crucial junctures” (25). But lines defining community are not always national and they do not tend to be *pre-emptively* exclusive. For example, Olivier Roy (1994) explains what he calls “post-Islamist neo-fundamentalism”—a topical mode of worlding—as the effect primarily of deterritorialization. When Faqir talks about a shift, in the aftermath of 9/11, in her own identification from predominantly Arab to (secular) Muslim, she emphasizes the need for principled solidarity with marginalized and persecuted groups. (I always feel compelled to point out that such strategies of oppositional mimicry are privileged in a novel whose destiny has paradoxically been to reinforce the lines it challenges: Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*). Aboulela’s fiction is the most sustained reflection in English, to date, on the complex routes that can lead to identification first and foremost as Muslim. Her work also shows that this need not be done in strident fashion. In *Minaret* (2005), the character Tamer expresses frustration with a perceived need, amongst British Muslim youth, to become politicized in order to be a good Muslim. Questioned about his self-definition, he responds: “My mother is Egyptian. I’ve lived everywhere except Sudan: in Oman, Cairo, here. My education is Western and that makes me feel that I am Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic ... I don’t feel very

Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity". The protagonist, Najwa, concurs: "I just see myself as Muslim" (110). Whilst she and her friend Shahinaz have different national and ethnic backgrounds, they share an elective affinity, aspiring "to become better Muslims" (105). Tancke argues, however, that we should read such modes of identification as somewhat compensatory and fragile.

By way of a provisional conclusion, I draw the reader's attention to the cover image of this Special Issue: a photograph taken in 2008, by Richard Hanson, of a Karen refugee (named here with the alias Nay Htoo) from Burma, by way of Thailand, living on the outskirts of Sheffield.⁶ The pathos of the image is exacerbated when we learn—by reading Hanson's accompanying blog—that the Karen-English dictionary, at first sight a recognizable motif of migration and attempted assimilation, is a somewhat ragged repository of already lived experience.⁷ It was used to teach in refugee camps, by the photographic subject who trained as a civil engineer but was unable, due to the discriminatory practices of the Burmese regime, to gain employment. The point is felicitously reinforced by the English words visible on the open page. "Nay Htoo" is the "aggregate" of his experiences of forced mobility, marginality and multilingualism. His presence has been and remains an "aggravation" to the powers-that-be in diverse locations (Burma, Thailand, the UK). As Gikandi says, refugees are "a mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism". As exemplary "signs of a dislocated locality," refugees/*les clandestins/harragas* haunt celebratory renditions of an increasingly connected world ("Between" 23). It is for this reason that Asako Nakai, in this Issue, approaches the notion of "autobiography of the [disenfranchised] other" with caution, even as she attends to complexly mediated (for example cross-ethnic classed) solidarities. As Susan Sontag recognized, however, a photograph is also an invitation to speculation (23). The series in which Hanson's image originally appeared explored the potential of visual and textual creative forms to re-present localities in the north of England as spaces mediated by international conflict, drawing attention to ways in which "other" spaces are in fact often simultaneously present, if in variously marginalized ways.

This Special Issue similarly emphasizes creative, oppositional constructions of history in its focus on ways in which writers connect local with global contexts. The example of "Nay Htoo" provides salient reminders: that, to varying degrees, the local (here the north of England) is usually to some extent already global; that putatively national contexts (here Burma) are often *multinational* with internal hierarchies and mechanisms of discrimination; and that "glocal" subjects ("Nay Htoo") can resist apprehension and reductive categorization. "Glocal Imaginaries" investigates a range of ways in which writers evoke identities and imaginaries forged from similarly complex negotiations of multiple contexts.

Notes

1. The Issue emerged from the international conference “Glocal Imaginaries: Writing/Migration/Place” held at Lancaster University, Lancaster, and the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK, in September 2009. The conference more broadly considered discourses of place that subtend postcolonial and related fields and that provide analytical frames for the production and circulation of creative work.
2. See also Moore (2010).
3. See Masterson (2010) for an analysis of Desai’s text.
4. The legend is not only bilingual, showing both French and Algerian Arabic terms; it is also (at least) diglossic, in that it uses both formal and colloquial French vocabulary, and transliterates *darija* (Algerian Arabic), a spoken language, into Latin script. The title involves a pun on the classic French ‘Guides Haut.’
5. See also Algerian director Merzak Allouache’s film on the same theme *Harragas* (2009).
6. Richard Hanson is a Sheffield-based professional freelance photographer.
7. http://www.transculturalwriting.com/regarding_war/blog5.html (accessed 20 June 2010). The image is part of a series of photographic images, taken by Hanson, and creative writing responses, by Fadia Faqir (interviewed in this Special Issue), commissioned as part of a project entitled “Regarding War” at Lancaster University, UK, in 2008.

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