

Sibyl Adam

PhD candidate in English Literature, University of Edinburgh

Many PhD and Early Career Researchers that I've encountered working in the broad field of postcolonialism don't actually work on texts from the colonial era or that feature colonial relationships. That's because one underlying understanding of the field is that the modern world is shaped by and profoundly influenced by the history of European colonialism. Present day relationships between countries, and levels of migrants within certain countries, cannot be divorced from imperial histories. This in turn influences the way British and European people come to understand national identity, as well as former colonial countries' conceptions of nation and history. Many scholars working in postcolonialism (including those critical of such a title) interrogate notions of, for example, diaspora, trauma, eco-criticism, transculturality, spatiality, queerness and sexuality alongside or in answer to traditional postcolonial texts and theories. Indeed, the participants in the seminar come from a wide range of academic backgrounds and have very different interests, yet all express an interest that seems to correlate to fundamental concerns of power, identity and politics.

With this in mind, the aim of the seminar is to both familiarise participants with the established postcolonial texts and ideas whilst opening up avenues into broader questions of contemporary identity. My own research looks at the history of representations of Muslim women migrating to Britain, and so although I do use postcolonial theories and texts, I am also familiar with scholarship relating to 'British Muslim fiction' and migration. This contentious field of 'British Muslim fiction' investigates authors' engagement with contemporary political characterisations of Muslims in Britain since the Rushdie Affair, 7/7 and 9/11. It's controversial nature stems from its grouping of texts about Muslims together, despite the different backgrounds of authors including country, class, gender, etc. This is indeed problematic, yet one could argue its existence is predicated on a political urgency to rebalance the systematic islamophobia existent in both cultural and media depictions of Muslims, as well as the political decisions and laws of recent governments.

Much of the seminar will revolve around notions of diaspora, transculturality and migrant identity. I am very interested in how the history of migration to Britain informs contemporary debates and ultimately how literature shows migration to be a normal, everyday entity. My research draws on affect theory to explore how migrations 'feels' in different historical contexts.

The seminar is structured in such a way that we cover the canon of postcolonial theory, yet the bulk of discussions will be on questions of diaspora, multiculturalism and migration as well as postcolonial pedagogy and publishing. The group presentations will revolve around the transection of hybridity, cosmopolitan, multiculturalism, diaspora and transculturality. These inter-related issues will be broken down in order for us to consider the distinctions. One group will present on postcolonial pedagogies and publishing. It is very important we have an awareness of our place as scholars in a Western elite university and within postcolonial scholarship and education, especially in terms of how we may be implicit in the exotisation and commodification of texts by diasporic or migrant writers through our analysis of them.