

BOOK REVIEWS

A Passage to Globalism: Globalization, Identities, and South Asian Diasporic Fiction in Britain. By Bidhan Roy. (New York: Peter Lang, 2013). 208 pp. Hardcopy, ISBN 978-1-4331-2026-8

As critical volumes like *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005) and *The Post-Colonial and the Global* (2008) indicate, postcolonial studies has for some time been under pressure from a variety of emergent theoretical trends. Indeed, as Ania Loomba et al. argues it in their introduction to *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, 'the new global reality has made the analysis of imperialism, in all its historical variants, more pressing, but also more difficult, than ever before' (1). Accordingly, as is implied by the 'beyond' of *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, it has been suggested that it is perhaps time to sideline or perhaps altogether jettison the postcolonial in order to focus on issues more pertinent to the twenty-first century.

One such alternative to postcolonial studies is offered by globalization and globalization theory, a concept and a theoretical paradigm that have become ever more popular in recent years. In sociology, political science, law, geography, as in a host of other disciplines, a wide range of academics have argued that we need to construct new theoretical models that fit an increasingly globalized world. With once powerful concepts like nation, colony and empire hollowed out by the flows and mobility of globalization, critics of postcolonial studies claim it is time to shift gears and discard the dichotomies of centre and periphery, colonizer and colonized, self and subaltern that proved so important to postcolonial studies. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued it in *Empire* (2000) more than a decade ago, 'postcolonial theories may end up in a dead end because they fail to recognize adequately the contemporary object of today, that is, they mistake today's real enemy' (137). Still, as the editors of both *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* and *The Post-Colonial and the Global* object, it is perhaps a little too soon, and a little too convenient, to abandon the postcolonial altogether. However global it may be, 'today's real enemy', whether it is perceived as excessive use of fossil fuels leading to global warming, of the greedy speculations of global capitalism undermining the world's financial system, or it is that of laborers forced to move across continents in order to find work thousands of miles away from home, the shadows of nation, colony and empire continue to haunt the global in all its many guises. As argued in both the studies mentioned in the above, the postcolonial and the global should therefore be perceived as presenting a highly complex coupling rather than a case of one paradigm (globalization) superseding the other (postcolonialism). The challenge, though, as Revathi Krishnaswamy phrases it in the introduction to *The Post-Colonial and the Global*, is that 'the question of *how* postcolonialism should engage globalization, on what terms and to what ends, remains unclear' (2).

Bidhan Roy's *A Passage to Globalism: Globalization, Identities, and South Asian Diasporic Fiction in Britain* (2013) offers an attempt at making this complex relationship a little clearer. With a focus on South Asian diasporic fiction in Britain,

Roy asks whether ‘the assumption of South Asian diasporic writers “writing back” to a British center remain relevant in an age of globalization?’ (2). With his attention focused on a (former) single ‘center’ of empire, namely that of Britain, Roy has in *A Passage to Globalism* limited himself to a manageable case study through which he proposes to answer the question of whether ‘such literature [is] best characterized as globalized British literature or a literature of globalization?’ (2). Yet Roy’s ambitions go further than this in that he also intends to address the broader question of ‘how South Asian diasporic fiction in Britain might extend and challenge theoretical explanations of globalization’ (3). While the most obvious purpose of *A Passage to Globalism* is to deepen our understanding of the particulars of contemporary South Asian fiction centered in or around one particular region, namely Britain, the grander goal of Roy’s study is thus to try and attempt to answer some of the more general questions raised by studies like *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* and *The Post-Colonial and the Global*. In this, Roy’s ‘passage to globalism’ can be seen not simply to illustrate the ‘passage’ undertaken by South Asian diasporic fiction in recent years. Rather, *A Passage to Globalism* is itself engaged in a ‘passage’ that admirably succeeds in weaving in the particular with the general, the local with the global, the intimate with the distant. And, perhaps most significantly, of reading postcolonial studies *alongside*, rather than *against*, globalization theory.

This mix of the particular with the whole is prevalent throughout the book. In its overall structure as in its argumentative strategies, *A Passage to Globalism* presents a clear and highly convincing mix of specific and historically contingent textual readings with wider global perspectives. The study is split into five parts. With a theoretical Introduction followed by four chapters, each of which investigates three key texts in the light of a particular form of ‘identity’, Roy deploys a sophisticated theoretical apparatus against which his chosen texts are analyzed. With each chapter covering, respectively, national identity, class identity, Muslim identity and gender identity, *A Passage to Globalism* provides its readers with an overall global perspective of the current state of South Asian diasporic fiction. Accordingly, Roy is careful to present the specific problems of site and identity specific issues, for instance of being a Bangladeshi woman displaced to London’s East End as pictured in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003), while also managing to take in wider issues of the particular identity issues put under scrutiny. *A Passage to Globalism* therefore attempts to account not only ‘for the historical dimension of the flows of capital that produced localities such as the London suburbs’ (46), but also of answering questions like, ‘Why does a desire to identify with Islam persist in an increasingly secular British society?’ (110). In this, Roy demonstrates an impressive flair for combining the specific with the general, effortlessly presenting a rich and complicated palette of the many problems, but also the potential, of South Asian diasporic fiction to deal with a range of political and identity specific problems pertaining to globalization. Reading the works of writers like Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Hari Kunzru, V.S. Naipaul, Manzu Islam, Monica Ali, Farhana Sheikh and Nadeem Aslam alongside, as well as against, each other, Roy’s analysis combines a wide range of familiar names from the canon of South Asian diasporic writers with a range of less well-known

names. As a result, his study manages to cover a lot of ground, literally as well as figuratively.

Roy begins his study by framing South Asian diasporic fiction in Britain's new global context against a range of core of well-known theoretical approaches to globalization. With particular stress laid on Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974) and Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996), Roy thus lays the groundwork for a split approach to globalization. On the one hand, Roy suggests, it is useful to view globalization through the confrontational Marxist lens offered by theorists like Wallerstein, who tends to view globalization as representing but yet another step in the dialogics of a class struggle split along an axis of the privileged and the exploited. On the other hand, Roy claims, the more celebratory accounts of globalization as a potentially liberating, yet also far more diffuse, process given by critics like Appadurai can employed as a counter to the sometimes blinkered view offered by the likes of Wallerstein. This so in that Wallerstein, and other Marxist thinkers like him, tend to overlook question of race, gender and religion in favor of financial and class-based discussion of what is now undoubtedly a highly different world than that faced by Marx in the nineteenth century.

Throughout his study, Roy sticks fastidiously to Wallerstein and Appadurai as being emblematic of the two poles his study purportedly intends to effect 'a passage' between. With names like Frederick Jameson, Anibal Quijano, Manuel Castells, Naomi Klein, Bobby Sayyid, Saskia Sassen, John Tomlinson, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri cropping up regularly throughout the book, this is not to say that Roy ignores other theorists of globalization. Yet Wallerstein and Appadurai remain the staple referents around which the remainder of the theoretical framework is constructed. This is in a sense both the strength and the potential weakness of the study, for with the continuous return to Wallerstein and Appadurai, *A Passage to Globalism* risks the charge not only of repetitiveness, but also of being formulaic. In Roy's deft hands such persistence is however turned into a rigorous analysis that sheds new light not only on the primary fictional texts examined, but also points to both the pitfalls and the potentials of the theoretical texts that could so easily have been accepted as a mere framing. Rather than present the theoretical templates offered by Wallerstein and Appadurai as a latticework in which a range of texts either neatly fits or are rejected, *A Passage to Globalism* presents us with a dialectic tug of war between the more abstract theory and the specifics of the primary texts studied. Accordingly, Roy provides a rich and sophisticated approach to globalization and diaspora that proves a highly useful tool for prying open new and exciting prospects of globalization in general, as indeed of the specifics of South Asian diasporic fiction in particular.

My only real caveat with *A Passage to Globalism* rests with the editors rather than with the author. For while the book is clear both in its structure as in its argument, a range of unfortunate typographical slips suggest that Peter Lang should have invested a little more energy in copyediting the manuscript. Fortunately, these are only minor mishaps in a study that is otherwise lucidly and compellingly presented. In conclusion, *A Passage to Globalism* presents a welcome addition not only to the study of South Asian diasporic fiction in Britain, but to the debate of what

direction postcolonial studies in general should take in an age of globalization. Indeed, rather than reiterate that other and former passage to which Roy's book alludes, namely E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), it is not so much a case of Forster's (in)famous concluding passage of 'not yet', 'not there'. Rather than a 'swerving apart', the 'passage' performed by Roy is one that 'swerves across'. In refusing to dismiss one in favor of the other, or to claim the two as being in radical opposition, Roy suggests we should strive toward a combinatory reading of the global with the postcolonial that can provide us with 'a manageable point of departure for thinking through how we might navigate toward [a] more ambitious and utopian global future' (197).

Dr. RUNE GRAULUND, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

References

- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Krishnaswamy, Revathi and John C. Hawley (eds.). 2008. *The Post-Colonial and the Global*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota press.
- Lomba, Ania, and Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Anotinette Burton, Jed Esty (eds). 2006. *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.