

Pavan Kumar Malreddy, Birte Heidemann, Ole Birk Laursen and Janet Wilson, eds. *Reworking Postcolonialism: Globalization, Labour and Rights*. Hampshire, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Xii + 253 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-43592-7.

Postcolonial criticism at one time was regarded as the harbinger of a new ethical framework in the cultural studies, especially in the western academy. With the rise of the discourse of globalisation in the 1990s postcolonial discourse appeared to lose much of its currency and critical energy, since its central issues such as coloniser/colonised, East/West and centre/margin, the cornerstone of postcolonial criticism, were no longer applicable to the global era with the blurring of national boundaries. Globalisation is a transformation of the entire world system, and it affects not only the metropolitan centres of the world but also its most remote margins. On the other hand, it effects a levelling out of heterogeneity or difference. Consequently, this results in a diminishing capacity of the nation-state to perform its role of representing the cultural particularity or difference that renders a people distinct from others. The discourse of globalisation, of course, breaks with the earlier modernisation discourse in abandoning a Eurocentric teleology of change, which in many ways has been compelled by real economic, political and cultural challenges to Eurocentrism. With the emergence of new centres of economic and political power, one can also find assertions of cultural diversity in the midst of apparent cultural commonality.

Reworking Postcolonialism: Globalization, Labour and Rights – edited by Pavan Kumar Malreddy, Birte Heidemann, Ole Birk Laursen and Janet Wilson – focuses on the multiple trajectories of globalisation that accompany capitalist globalisation, and the production of new forms of precarity, marginality and subalterneity, that call for a realignment of contemporary discourses on citizenship and rights. The central argument of the book, as the editors point out, is to seek “to extend the conventional coordinates of postcolonial theory to the uneven trajectories of globalization within and among European and other Western societies” (3).

The book is divided into three thematic parts, and deals with “Globalization, Modernities and Other Histories,” “Global Displacements: Exile, Movement and Migration,” “Globalization, Labour and Work,” and “Globalization, Rights and Citizenship.” Frank Schulze-Engler in his essay “Once Were Internationalists? Postcolonialism, Disenchanted Solidarity and the Right to Belong in a World of Globalized Modernity?” places postcolonial studies within the matrix of interdisciplinary studies which require constant monitoring and reorientation which accounts for the urgency implicit in the revisionary exercises of “Reframing Postcolonial Studies,” “Revisioning

Postcolonial Studies,” “Rerouting the Postcolonial” and “Postcolonial Studies and Beyond.” In Engler’s view it is symptomatic of the crisis in the field of postcolonial studies, which had over the last two decades recorded phenomenal institutional success in a wide number of academic disciplines and discourses.

When cultural criticism failed to address the exclusions of postcolonial theory evident in texts such as Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie* (1936), Witi Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story* (2000) and Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *By the Sea* (2001) the theory became an insufficient tool for literary studies. The problem is compounded with the difficulty of locating an objective viewpoint since global capitalism with its globalised modernity is so widespread that it is difficult to locate a vantage point outside its frame to address the exclusions of postcolonial theory.

If “post” in postcolonialism is a temporal marker, it raises questions about historical time which can be problematised in terms of spatial disruptions and mutations that characterise the passage of globalisation as argued in “The Postcolonial Condition: A Few Notes on the Quality of Historical Time in the Global Present” by Sandro Mezzadra and Federico Rahola. It is certainly not past the “post” in which domination and exploitation can be said to have disappeared.

Melissa Kennedy’s essay “Urban Poverty and Homelessness in the International Postcolonial World” questions the globalising and homogenising impulse of postcolonial theory, which has also been debated by critics such as Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik. Arif Dirlik takes a sharp dig at its discursive methodology that “excludes the many ethnic groups in postcolonial societies (among others) that, obviously unaware of their hybridity, go on massacring one another” (59). Kennedy endorses Arun P. Mukherjee who criticises what she considers the co-option of texts to the narrow needs of postcolonial studies: “When postcolonial theory constructs its centre-periphery discourse, it also obliterates the fact that the post-colonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominants and marginal. It erases the Bakhtinian ‘heteroglossia’ of literary and social discourses in post-colonial societies that arises from conflicts of race, class, gender, language, religion, ethnicity and political affiliation” (59).

One of the most important transformations witnessed by the modern Indian city is polarisation of spaces – the marking out of separate spaces for the rich and the poor, and isolation of the socio-economically marginal groups from the inner city to the urban fringes. As global cities emerge as centres of the various forms of power, in the new worldwide networks of economic, political and information activities, which transcend the borders of the nation-states, new global hierarchical relationships are being shaped. Unfortunately, the urban poor, with non-status of illegal slum dwellers never form part of city imaginaries on the national level and are not even remotely touched by the technological advancement associated with cosmopolitanism. While planning the city space

there is an urgent need to pay attention to surmount the existing structures of inequality to revision the city space so that the new global hierarchical relationships do not lead to further fragmentation of society. Citizenship, after all, is a matter of emancipation, of successively realising the three aspects of political, legal and socioeconomic participation for all people who find themselves on the territory of the state.

Malachi McIntosh examines the fiction of V.S. Naipaul and Kiran Desai in terms of the exigencies of exile and dialectics of flight. The migrants in Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* are in a constant search for belonging. But it is a search that is always frustrated. Both the novels assess the gains and freedoms of migration and the ways in which a migrant presence challenges the perceived wholeness of the nation-state.

Lyn Dickens's "Shattered Racialised Person' and (Post)multiculturalism in Australia" looks at two Australian novels, *The Lost Dog* (2007) by Michelle de Krester and *The World Waiting to Be Made* (1994) by Simone Lazaroo, in which she highlights the limitations of Australian multiculturalism, particularly in relation to racially and culturally mixed families and subjectivities. Dickens firmly believes that Australian multicultural sentiment reinforces race and racial divisions, and disallows multiracial and transcultural identities. Through a reading of these two novels de Krester critiques negative aspects of multiculturalism without calling for an end to all its forms and manifestations, and argues for pursuing what Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage calls "a deeper commitment to a more far-reaching multiculturalism" (Hage qtd. in Malreddy et al. 87). The moral of the story is that the current postcolonial discourse needs to open up vigorously the heterogeneous discursive spaces of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism.

The Tibetan English-speaking diaspora in various parts of the world has largely remained ignored in the current literary and cultural studies, complains Enrique Gadvan-Alvarez in "Sliced Tongues: The Inconvenient Voice of Tibetan English Writers." The reason could be the dislocated location of Tibet in India which subsumes the resistant voices. The "transnation" needs to come out of the shadow of the nation to be seen and discussed in its own right.

Pavan Kumar Malreddy's "Labour, Pleasure and the Sublime: The 'Work' of the Dalitbahujans," calls attention to the recent phenomenon of the social and political ascendance of the dalits in India as they free themselves from the Brahminical hegemonising of Indian culture. It was Ambedkar who felt the need for the inclusion of Dalit labour in the fold of capitalist economy, and relocated Dalits from local histories of dehumanisation (caste) to "global histories of dehumanization" (subaltern/proletariat). Malreddy then shifts his focus from Ambedkar's Dalit category to Kancha Ilaiah's expansive category of Dalitbahujan, thus extending the social base of the dalits for more political power and representation.

Until recently, servants and domestic workers have had a marginal place in Indian English Novel, and the accounts were highly mediated from the perspective of those in control of economic and cultural capital, but of late new forms of self-identity find assertion in the so-called New India. Alex Tickell points out in his essay “Driving Pinky Madam (and Murdering Mr Ashok): Social Justice and Domestic Service in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*.”

Diana Brydon situates postcolonial studies within the discourse of human rights in her essay “Postcolonial and Settler Colonial Studies Offer Human Rights a Revised Agenda.” The essay tries to understand postcolonial and settler colonial studies from the perspective of human rights imaginaries to prescribe what reworked postcolonial studies can offer educational workers who are committed to advancing human rights, not only as a scholarly discipline or political discourse but also as an engaged social practice. Difference needs to be seen as a positive contribution to local and national resiliency and global survival.

“Human Rights, Security and Global Political Hinduism,” by Arun Chaudhuri, reflects on the tension generated by invocations of the discourse of “human rights” within the cultural politics of diasporic Hinduism (200). The suggestion that caste in India amounted to a violation of human rights drew the ire of a number of American Indian Hindus, who felt that describing caste discrimination as a human rights violation promoted a dangerous and misleading representation of India to a Western public audience. Human rights, as a normative and ethnocentric discourse was, thus, being imposed in India (199). The argument is in line with the view that the notion of “human rights” has been commonly criticised for its assumptions about an essential common humanity that disregards not only cultural and political specificities, but also the possibility that the very notions of ‘humanity’ and of ‘rights’ are themselves culturally and politically constructed.

Janet Wilson in her essay “Discoursing on Slums: Representing Cosmopolitan Subaltern” reveals that slum dwellers are among the most disadvantaged, socially excluded communities in the twenty-first century, for whom human rights are almost non-existent. Socially and economically deprived, they have hardly any recourse to justice as they find themselves outside national and international codes of justice. In India globalisation may have immensely benefited the rich and the powerful but it has also created enormous gulf between the rich and the poor and has led to widespread dispossession and forced displacement of marginalised communities. The state’s withdrawal from welfare programmes and provision of social security, have opened more scope for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international aid organisations whose intervention remains complicit with the free-market ethos. Wilson narrates how the conditions of inequality, precarity and limited rights – consequences of neo-liberal globalisation that have led to

new conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism and subalterneity focused on the everyday lives of non-elites – are articulated in contemporary representations of the disenfranchised, fragmented slum dweller (231). The essay’s focus is on Danny Boyle’s celebrated film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), which illustrates neo-liberal processes and globalisation’s facility to reward the subaltern’s mental endeavours, and Katherine Boo’s *Beyond the Beautiful Forever: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Slum* (2012), a “literary nonfiction” about the failure of social welfare provision in India. The two narratives can be read together as contemporary accounts, promoting images of self-empowerment and committed to documentary formats of social realism, notably in using social science methodologies of empirical research such as the interview, ethnography and case study. *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Beyond the Beautiful Forever*, reveal the limitations of liberal human rights practices in dealing with issues of collective and cultural rights; human agency in both narratives is individualised and is outside the political communities which would demand social change. The narratives also illustrate the multiple ways in which India is enmeshed in an unending process of cultural commodification.

The broad spectrum of essays in the collection addresses several issues connected with globalisation and the postcolonial predicament. The overall concern of the volume being with how we reconfigure postcolonial discourse as a critical mode of imagination in a world altered now by global capitalism, what makes the book particularly useful is that it combines theory and praxis and underlines the new forms of creative resistance against global inequalities and oppressions, overriding the liberal individualist ethos geared to the free play of the market. If we grant that colonialism’s power was never total, its history having been shaped by both indigenous resistance and accommodation and that it always had an unacknowledged traffic with the native’s discontents, postcolonialism can be reworked along the right direction. However, if postcoloniality elides the historicity of resistance and distances itself from the intervention of social subjects and collectivities in the shaping of their lives, its claim to bring about radical social change will be seen as being problematic.

Satish C. Aikant
H.N.B. Garhwal University, Pauri, India