

(post)Colonial conversations
Introduction and Interviews by Samantha Cohen

I unwittingly began drafting these interview questions several months ago, while working on my applications for Ph.D. programs in postcolonial literature. The thoughts that I articulated during my conversations with Bapsi Sidhwa and Ania Loomba—conversations I then could not have even imagined having—informed (admittedly in sketchy and uncertain ways) my writing sample and statement of purpose, two documents upon which I knew the future of my professional life rested.

Looking back over these two interviews in April, while looking forward to the start of a new journey at UC Irvine next fall, I realize that the significance of these questions and answers has never been more clear to me—and not only in terms of my academic interests, but in terms of the changing and troubled world in which I live. Postcolonial studies—and, frankly, the humanities more generally—have never been more relevant than they are right now, on a planet that, though shrinking in size via technology and “globalization,” is also increasingly divided by ideological difference. And perhaps most frightening of all is the success with which these differences have been masked by or ignored in favor of seemingly benevolent (or at least harmless) agendas.

What these women—one a fiction writer with an impressive background in politics, the other a distinguished professor and scholar of postcolonial, feminist, and early modern studies—ask us to do is to look beyond the simple and obvious, to explore Other (with a capital “O”) perspectives—particularly those we have not noticed before, and to explode preconceived and received notions about our identities and the identities of those around us. While this is not a simple task, it is a necessary one, and it is the task upon which the field of postcolonial studies is founded. But beyond being fundamental to this field, it is a necessary part of what we might call *human* studies: a “discipline” that trains us to realize that, as Bapsi Sidhwa says, “we are all brothers and sisters under the skin”—that we are all human.