

PHD APPLICATION SERVICE ELEMENT NINE



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PRACTICE QUESTIONS PHD ADMISSION INTERVIEW

At the end of your research period, what will your original contribution to knowledge be?

Break down how you will spend each of your 3 research years; what do you plan to have achieved by the end of your first, second, and third year? Will you undertake academic activities outside of writing your thesis?

Does your work offer any opportunities for public-facing engagement? How can it be applied outside of academic discourse?

Considering that the methodology and literature review chapters are likely to be relatively short, you say that the thesis will be split into three main chapters. This seems very large: is it realistic to claim that you will spend ~30,000 words on three topics each, especially given the relatively narrow historical period under review (2015-2022)?

The “interiority of domestic space inhabited by women” is a common theme - is this original enough? What makes your take on the topic different to the many who have written before? How does, for example, Bachelard’s concept of space move the discussion beyond the usual feminist themes of the public-private binary?

You say that the research will involve close reading, but also a theoretical aspect. Why? How will you reconcile these two - very different - approaches? Why choose theory to complement your close textual analysis rather than, for example, ethnographic or archival research? What does theory offer?

Your theoretical approaches are ‘postcolonial studies’, ‘feminist spatial theory’ and ‘memory studies’; while the former is a large area of study, the latter two are relatively minor - how can you justify allotting so much critical weight to these fields? Will you have enough material to achieve your research ambitions?

Why did you select these five novels, and how representative do you think this corpus is of contemporary British postcolonial fiction? Could the exclusion of, for example, Caribbean, Australasian or Middle Eastern diasporic voices limit your scope?

Furthermore, why restrict the time frame to 2015 - 2022? You say that "[t]he eight-year time period between 2015 and 2002 has been selected as it was a time of rapid change in British society, including political upheaval, Brexit and increased media representation of immigration and issues of multiculturalism." A few issues arise here: as this is the relatively recent past - how does your engagement with memory studies - which ostensibly deals with histories stretching back thousands of years - become relevant? Is it really the case that there was 'political upheaval', or has establishment politics always suppressed the narratives of minorities and diaspora? Similarly, was there really 'increased media representation of immigration', or has it always been this way? Representation implies sympathy or identification with migrants - was this the case? If so, how?

What does a 'framework of intimate cartographies' mean - and how, specifically, does it help to 'interpret' domestic space? This appears to be a critical and original concept; how would you respond if someone were to claim that this was just theoretical jargon?

How will you reconcile the more sexual-difference-oriented writers, such as Irigaray, with the more intersectionality-oriented writers in your bibliography, such as Bhabha? Do you see any tension between third wave feminism and, for example, postcolonial queer theory e.g. in the conflict between theoretical 'third spaces' and a kind of feminine essence qua domesticity?

Furthermore, for a thesis focused on feminist interpretations of domesticity, do you have enough women theorists or philosophers contributing to the discussion?

You say that '[t]he work of Parikh, which focuses on the imagination of American writers in connection to race and ethnicity, is adopted to consider how British writers conceive of race and ethnicity in relation to domestic space' - is this a 1:1 conversion? Why adapt American writers, who potentially have a very different experience of the domestic - and certainly do to race relations - than British?