



## ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

### S19. Diasporic Literature and Theory – where now?

Saturday 2 September: 9.30-11.30am

Convenor: Mark Shackleton (University of Helsinki)

Email: [mark.shackleton@helsinki.fi](mailto:mark.shackleton@helsinki.fi)

Co-convenor: James Procter (University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne)

Email: [j.r.procter@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:j.r.procter@ncl.ac.uk)

The theoretical input of Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, James Clifford and others has in recent years vitalized postcolonial studies, challenging ways in which we understand “culture” and developing new ways of thinking beyond the confines of the nation state. Has diaspora theory, however, reached an impasse? Are such notions as “hybridity”, “in-between identity” and “border crossing” now empty categories? Which aspects of diaspora theory should be retained and which abandoned? What new paradigms can be applied? This seminar will chart the direction in which the field of diaspora literature and theory is moving worldwide today, and invites contributions of a theoretical kind as well as literary case studies.

### **The Collision of Languages as a Shift between Cultural Codes: Bilingualism in Sandra Cisneros's *Characters Inhabiting the Border***

M. Antonia Alvarez-Calleja (Spanish National Distance Learning University)

The stylistic strategy of collision of languages in Chicana literature produces a linguistic conflict which ramifies to spiritual, political, practical, and aesthetic aspects. Sandra Cisneros situates her *tejana* short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek* on the *border*—the regional South Texas tradition of geopolitical resistance. Some stories in the book explain the advantages and difficulties of living in *the borderlands*, a zone between Anglo and Mexican cultures, where the perpetual clash and collision of two sets of signifiers and two systems of social myth can throw any one culture's gender ideology into question.

### **Taking Directions: Passing through the Impasse?**

Eleanor Byrne (Manchester Metropolitan University)

‘Nothing is more dispersed in intellectual life today than the concept of diaspora, nothing more nomadic than the concept of nomadism’. (John Durham Peters) Concepts of mobility appear to be matched by the mobility of concepts, a series of perpetual departures and migrations of diasporic linguistics across borders of every conceivable kind. Invoking the threat of impasse, a figure of absolute blockage, might be understood to produce a vertiginous crisis, an abrupt coming to halt, faced with a blocked exit, an

impassable road; a nightmare for a range of concepts invested in movement. However, whilst we might intuitively understand an impasse as involving the most profound threat to the tropes of mobility that inhabit diasporic writing and theorising this may be a misrecognition of the role of the impasse in diasporic literature and theory. The impasse might be understood as an interminable experience, one like Derrida's figuring of aporia, (a term he sees as interchangeable with impasse) that can 'never simply be endured as such' but which must paradoxically be passed through. Aporia is an important concept for Homi Bhabha, one he leans heavily on in modelling the 'Third Space'. In this paper I will examine the ways in which postcolonial writing and theory has frequently figured the impasse/aporia as structuring the modes of existing understood as hybrid or in-between, with reference to the work of Sam Selvon, Jean Rhys and Homi Bhabha.

### **Diasporas of Terror in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown***

Stephen Morton (University of Southampton)

Discourses of counter-terrorism in the early twenty-first century have clearly articulated the war against terrorism and the struggle for global security to the control of immigration, as well as the criminalisation of Muslims. As A. Sivanadan puts it in "Race, terror and civil society", "the war on asylum and the war on terror have converged to produce a racism which cannot tell a settler from an immigrant, an immigrant from an asylum speaker, an asylum speaker from a Muslim, a Muslim from a terrorist" (Sivanadan 2006: 2). In response to this conflation of discourses of counter-terrorism and the biopolitical control of migrant populations, this paper starts by examining what is at stake in Salman Rushdie's call for a reformation of Islam in response to the July 7th bombings. As a middle-class migrant writer, who is often associated with the western liberal ideology of secularism and free speech, and a secular Muslim, who was also the victim of the death sentence issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, Rushdie occupies an ambivalent position in relation to the contemporary convergence of the war on asylum and the war on terror described by Sivanadan. But how is this ambivalence registered in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, a novel that was published at the same time as Rushdie's call for a reformation of Islam? This paper seeks to address this question by examining how *Shalimar the Clown* explodes the conventions of national allegory that he established in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* to represent the conflict in Kashmir, and its impact on late twentieth-century geopolitics.

### **Diaspora and Genre**

James Procter (University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne)

The study of migration has tended to prioritise *subjectivity* as a locus of meaning in diasporic, and postcolonial studies. One effect of this identitarian logic has been an evasion, not so much of the textual composition of migrant subjectivities (for we are perhaps only too aware of their discursive constitution) as of their literary specificity. It is with this ontological bias in mind that this paper asks what literary genre (a category that raises quite distinct questions of identity, type, kind) might contribute to an understanding of those more familiar, self-centred migratory concepts – hybridity, schizophrenia, nomadism, dislocation. The fetishisation of difference in relation to migrant identity and ethnicity has resulted in a relative indifference to certain formal distinctions between, for instance, the novel, poetry and the short story. Focusing on the

short story, this paper will consider what the privileging of formal/generic questions might contribute to our understanding of diaspora, and vice versa.

### **Resisting Terminal Creeds - The Trickster and Keeping the Field of Diaspora Studies Open**

Mark Shackleton (University of Helsinki)

Diaspora theory has been fertilized by many fields and thinkers but would now appear to be in need of developing models and studies that are flexible and open to multiple approaches. One such approach would be a study of trickster figures in aboriginal and postcolonial literature. Tricksters are part of the imaginative self-perception of all cultures, and have been studied from multiple perspectives. They are boundary-crossers that resist authoritative definitions (“terminal creeds”, G. Vizenor), challenging fixed notions of identity, genre, ethnicity and gender. They can be regarded as symbols of diasporic movement – transforming and changing within themselves and from culture to culture. They are culturally specific yet offer global comparisons – as I will show with literary examples from Native North American, Caribbean and Maori writers.

### **Violence and Postcolonial Theory: Non-violence and Violence as Comparative “Ethics of Resistance”**

Neelam Srivastava (University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne)

How is the re-humanization of the colonized self effected under colonialism and in the period after decolonization? This paper aims to offer a reflection on different conceptualizations of the (de)colonized/postcolonial subject in relationship to violence, by focusing on two works that recast Gandhi’s and Fanon’s anti-colonial principles in textual and cinematic form. It establishes a comparison between two modes of anti-colonial theory and practice, violence and non-violence, as competing “ethics of resistance”(Leela Gandhi) that have become dominant in postcolonial studies. Raja Rao’s novel *Kanthapura* (1938) and Gillo Pontecorvo’s film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) are both choral works that narrate the birth of a national consciousness with a focus on the transformation of the self. *Kanthapura* effects a “textual decolonization” through the Indianization of English and the translation of Gandhi’s notions of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* into novelistic form. *The Battle of Algiers* represents the French colonizer’s violence against Algerians during the war of liberation, and the resultant “counter-violence” (Fanon) that emerges as a “logical” response on the part of the colonized. At the basis of two different notions of anti-colonial resistance, violence and non-violence, reside two different notions of “re-humanization” in Gandhi and Fanon. For Gandhi, “Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by means of personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force” (Gandhi 1997: 90). For Fanon, on the other hand, “The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence” (Fanon 1963: 66). Violence versus non-violence as responses to colonialism are seen to be profoundly linked to the contrasting realities of decolonization in India and Algeria, as well as to the intervening event of the Second World War.

### **Kazuo Ishiguro’s Otherhood: Redefining the Margins**

Pascal Zinck (University of Cergy-Pontoise and Paris 4 Sorbonne)

This paper explores the trauma of exile and deracination in Kazuo Ishiguro's fiction, particularly the *Doppelgänger* figures in *A Pale View of Hills* and the significance of orphanhood in *When We Were Orphans*. Reflecting the writer's sense of his own alienation, the narrator's exilic condition is presented in the wider context of diaspora discourse. ["My lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan [...] forced me into a position of [...] thinking of myself as a kind of homeless writer. I had no obvious social role, because I wasn't a very English Englishman and I wasn't a very Japanese Japanese either. And so I had no clear role, no society or country to speak for or write about. Nobody's history seemed to be my history."] With the ubiquitous, yet subservient butler struggling to author *The Remains of the Day*, identity politics challenges the notions of 'hegemonic centre' and 'margins', racial as well as sexual stereotyping. In Ishiguro's latest fiction, hybridity writ large is not confined to geographical or historical border crossing. It includes genre crossing, what Walter Benjamin refers to as "translation", in the guise of crime fiction in *When We Were Orphans* or science fiction in *Never Let me Go*. The metaphor of cloning allows Ishiguro to review and reconfigure the boundaries of identity.