



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S20. Women's Transnational and Diasporic Writing in Contemporary Britain

Thursday 31 August: 9.30-11.30am

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The focus will be on diasporic writing produced by women within Britain, re-defined as the new motherland of a variety of newly postcolonial populations. Given the volatility of change within the field, the particular reference of the Seminar will be to the present millennium whilst recognising the longer history of the phenomenon. Contributions will be welcome on topics related to the negotiation and creation of transnational personal and communal women's identities, and new forms of a gendered Britishness, primarily through the medium of literary texts by women, but also in the filmic, photographic and other media.

“I can't believe how much connectedness and separateness I've attained”: a Reading of Post-Holocaust Identity in *The War After*, by Anne Karpf

Luisa Juárez Hervás (University of Alcalá)

Far from traditional autobiographical texts that emphasized linearity and progression towards the formation of a stable, definable self, Anne Karpf's *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (1996) follows the trend established by post-colonial and working-class autobiographical writing of the 1980s to produce formally experimental narratives of the self. Although mostly studied as an example of second-generation Holocaust writing because of its emphasis on trauma and memory, *The War After* can also be seen as an expression of diasporic literature in present multicultural Britain. This paper will explore autobiographical narrative as a vector of cultural/historical mediation between competing textual realities in contemporary Britain, namely the genre of survivor testimony and the collective memory fostered by the official discourse of Holocaust memorialization.

“The family are like water”: Omilara's Search for Identity in Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*

María Deseada López Fernández (University of Málaga)

Bernardine Evaristo's first novel *Lara* (1997) tells the story of a mixed-heritage British young woman who comes to terms with her hybrid identity by plunging into her family's past, an undertaking that culminates when she traces her roots in an emotional and

physical journey around the world. Although connected to the *Bildungsroman* tradition, this novel has been redefined as a British novel of transformation since it deals with the formation of the protagonist just as much as with the transformation of British society wrought up by multiculturalism. The fact that Lara returns to her homeland into a hopeful future suggests an optimistic rendering of such capacity of transformation.

“I am from Jamaica but England is my Mother Country”: Re-collecting World War II in Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*

Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso (University of Málaga)

Andrea Levy’s fourth novel *Small Island* (2004) captures World War II and its aftermath in Britain through the individualized language and perceptions of British and Jamaican participants, braiding male and female experiences of the war with stories from the battle-front abroad and from the home front in Britain. The novel reflects the racism of British society at the time and the strategies of survival of the first post-war immigrants, but it also tells about Jamaica during the war and Britain as perceived by the Jamaican RAF volunteers who participated in the war effort, young men who felt they were fighting for their mother country. Fictions such as *Small Island* enrich and complicate the concept of British literature and culture by incorporating voices rarely heard in narratives of the war and by showing Britain’s connection at the time with people that had been contributing to its history from the outside for a long time.

Reading Islam in Fiction: the Reception of Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* in Diaspora

John A Stotesbury (University of Joensuu)

The problematic of this topic will be developed in a discussion of the writing of the Sudanese author, Leila Aboulela. While Aboulela’s literary identity is primarily connected with the English language and with Britain, there is a potential division in the reception of her short fiction – *Coloured Lights* (2001) – and of her two novels – *The Translator* (1999) and (especially) *Minaret* (2005). These now possess a readership made up not only of members of diasporic communities in Britain (and elsewhere) but also of a growing Western readership largely unschooled in Aboulela’s personal cultural field, Islam. My present intention to explore some of the more accessible ramifications implicit in the reception of her work by readers such as myself – white, Western European, culturally post-Christian, male.