



Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging Symposium on

Visual, Literary and Cultural Representations

23rd April 2014

12.00 Registration

12.15 Welcome – Professor Janet Wilson

12.30 Dr Sri Kartini Leet – Talk on her photographic essay, 'A Passage through Place: Migrant Homes in London'. Chair: Professor Janet Wilson.

1.00 Introduction to our new CoHaB Early Career Researcher, Alba de Bejar and presentation on her current research which compares Chinese-Canadian author Larissa Lai's diasporic novel, *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) with Ridley Scott's science-fiction film, *Blade Runner* (1982). Chair: Professor Janet Wilson.

1.30 Lunch

2.00 Dr Rajinder Dudrah, 'An Audio-Visual Cultural Study of British Bhangra Music Album Sleeves and Ephemera'. Chair: Professor Janet Wilson

2.45 Panel 1: Visual and Cultural Representations and the Indian Diaspora.

Chair: Dr Gerri Kimber.

Anna Maria Everding, 'Two of a Kind? – Cinema on the Diaspora and Diasporic Cinema: Comparing Popular Hindi and British South Asian Cinema'.

Ruby Rana, 'Perspectives on Difference: Breaking Down Robert Lieberman's film *Breakaway*'.

3.35 Tea and Coffee

3.50 Panel 2: Cultural Politics and Baltic Diasporas

Dr Dace Dzenovska, 'Relations of Indebtedness and Latvian Diaspora Politics'.

Chair and Respondent: Dr Larissa Allwork.

4.30 Panel 3: Literary and Cultural Representations and the Black British Diaspora

Chair: Dr Jumai Ewu.

Elizabeth Syrkin, 'Inhabiting Diaspora: A Literary Phenomenology'.

Dr George Watley, 'Ebony Magazine and the Northampton Caribbean Diaspora'.

6.00 Dinner at Les Olives Restaurant, Northampton.

Speakers

Alba de Bejar, CoHaB Early Stage Researcher, The University of Northampton

'Re-Synthesizing Identities in *Blade Runner* and *Salt Fish Girl*: Exploring the Liminality of the Posthuman'

This presentation will focus on an exposition of my work in progress over the figure of the cyborg/Replicant as a trope for the exiled, the migrant, and/or the outcast in contemporary globalized and hypertechnological societies in the West. Through the study of Ridley Scott's acclaimed masterpiece *Blade Runner* (1982) vis-à-vis Larissa Lai's second novel, *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), my research aims at showing how the cyborg is a pertinent figuration with which to approach questions of identity, belonging, technology, gender, or ethics in contexts that exceed the confines of the allegedly science fictional.

Although the figure of the cyborg has been profusely exploited in mass culture in the last few decades, a comparative analysis of *Blade Runner* and *Salt Fish Girl* allows us to realize how many of the cyborg's most alternative and liberating facets remain underdeveloped in mainstream representations of the figure. Thus, by reading Scott's film alongside Lai's novel, I intend to elucidate some of this figure's most empowering aspects; for, unlike in Scott's film—where the representation of the cyborg follows rather anthropomorphic and heteronormative standards—Lai's novel truly investigates what it means to be posthuman in contexts where difference is either rapidly absorbed and commodified, or else, completely eliminated.

Alba de Béjar is a *Marie Curie Early Stage Researcher* at the University of Northampton. Her PhD focuses on a comparative analysis of Ridley Scott's 1982 science fiction film *Blade Runner* and Larissa Lai's 2002 speculative fiction novel *Salt Fish Girl* by paying attention to each work's articulation of the concepts of home, identity, the border, and the body. She has worked as an Adjunct teacher of English at the Department of English, French, and German Philology at the Universidade de Vigo, Spain, where she also completed her M.A. studies, and as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant of Spanish at Willamette University, Oregon. She is a member of the research group 'Feminario de Investigación: Teorías e Prácticas' and of the 'South Atlantic Modern Language Association'.

Dr Rajinder Dudrah, The University of Manchester

'An Audio-Visual Cultural Study of British Bhangra Music Album Sleeves and Ephemera'

Abstract: British Bhangra is a genre of popular music that fuses Punjabi beats, music and lyrics, UK pop, RnB, reggae and other world sounds. Its history in Britain dates back to the post-war period when migrants from the Punjab, resettled their lives and homes in the UK. In the post-2000s the music can be heard across the soundscapes of multicultural cities around the globe, to mainstream fashion and advertising, and even in the songs and music of Bollywood films. Whilst a number of studies now exist charting the rise of the music, its music and lyrical meanings and audience interpretations, very little work exists on decoding the content in and contexts of the art sleeves and other related publicity and ephemera that is also part of this musical culture. This presentation will offer a reading of British Bhangra music album sleeves and associated ephemera as a popular art form and advertising medium for the music and artistes. It will aim to do this by providing a cultural study of the visual aspects of the design and content of some of the images and connecting these to their audio aspects – the soundscapes – of which they are a part.

Dr Rajinder Dudrah is Senior Lecturer in Screen Studies at the University of Manchester. He has researched and published widely in international journals in film, media and cultural studies. His books include, amongst others, *Bollywood Travels: Culture, Diaspora and Border Crossings in Popular Hindi Cinema* (Routledge, 2012); *Bhangra: Birmingham and Beyond* (Punch Records and Birmingham City Council, 2007); *Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies* (Sage Publications, 2006); *The Bollywood Reader* (with Jigna

Desai, Open University Press, 2008); and *Theorising World Cinema* (with Lucia Nagib and Chris Perriam, IB Tauris, 2011). He is the founding co-editor of the academic journal *South Asian Popular Culture* (Routledge), and has been Visiting Scholar at the National University of Singapore and at the University of Technology Sydney, and Visiting Professor at the Center for Humanities, Temple University, USA. He also has a weekly Monday night slot on the BBC Asian Network radio, discussing Bollywood films where he is known to listeners as Doc Bollywood.

Dr Dace Dzenovska, CoHaB Experienced Researcher, The University of Oxford

‘Relations of Indebtedness and Latvian Diaspora Politics’

Labour migration to Western Europe, or ‘the Great Departure’, as it is commonly known, has conjured up morally urgent calls for self-reflection in Latvian public and political life. During the early phases of what is now a mass social phenomenon, nationally inclined politicians, academics, and members of the general public spoke about labour migrants as traitors. Now, in the later phases of outmigration, the rhetoric of betrayal has been replaced with a rhetoric of diaspora, which construes labour migrants as diasporic subjects still part of the Latvian nation. Both discourses, however, assume and produce a relation of moral indebtedness as a relation thought to link individuals in the present—whether as traitors or as diasporic subjects—with a collective past and a collective future. In this paper, I examine the construction of this relation of indebtedness in the context of Latvian diaspora politics and consider whether and to what effect walking away from, ignoring, or denying this relation of indebtedness can be thought of as political.

Dace Dzenovska is a Senior Researcher / Marie Curie Fellow at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley and an M.A. in Humanities and Social Thought from New York University. Her research focuses on developing Eastern European perspective as method for analysis of contemporary forms of political life in Europe. To that end, she has studied tolerance promotion initiatives within the context of postsocialist democratization in Latvia and the politics of migration in Europe after European enlargement. She is currently completing a book manuscript entitled “Tolerance Work: Coloniality and Europeaness After Socialism.” Her articles have been published / are forthcoming in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Anthropological Theory*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Ethnos*, and *Social Anthropology*. She has also published a Latvian-language book on the politics and ethics of mobility in the context of post-EU enlargement migration.

Anna Maria Everding, The University of Northampton

‘Two of a Kind? – Cinema on the Diaspora and Diasporic Cinema: Comparing Popular Hindi and British South Asian Cinema’

Abstract: The Subjects of this paper are cinematic representations of South Asian diaspora communities in the UK. Since 1974, when *A Private Enterprise* (dir. Peter K. Smith) was released, the South Asian diaspora has been subject of over thirty feature films made in the UK, adding to the diversity of British cinema. At the same time, popular Hindi cinema has been looking at the same South Asian diaspora communities at least since Manoj Kumar’s 1970 film *Purab Aur Paschim*.

This paper will give an overview of portrayals of the Indian diaspora – in a pre-Partition sense of this term – in both popular Hindi and British South Asian cinema and detect similarities, differences and historical changes of these representations. The focus will lie especially on films of the past ten years, such as *Shoot on Sight* (2008, dir. Jag Mundhra), *It’s a Wonderful Afterlife* (2011, dir. Gurinder Chadha), *Cheni Kum* (2007, dir. R. Balki) and *Patiala House* (2011, dir. Nikhil Advani).

Anna Maria Everding is an Associate Lecturer in Film and Screen Studies at the University of Northampton, currently finishing her doctoral thesis in Postcolonial Cinema. She studied at the University of Muenster, Germany, where she received her BA in German and English literary and cultural studies and MA in National and Transnational Studies. Anna Maria has published on home and identity in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and constructions of belonging in British South Asian Cinema. Her main interests are representations of identity constructions in Postcolonial Cinema, World cinema, representations of gender in media and the influence of globalization on constructions of home and belonging in modern societies as well as race and ethnicity in theory and society.

Dr Kartini Leet, The University of Northampton

A Photographic Essay: 'A Passage through Place: Migrant Homes in London'

Abstract: Focusing on a series of migrant experiences in London, this photo-essay seeks to explore the complexities of being 'out-of-place', and the experience of setting up a 'home' outside of one's homeland. The research involves photographing the interiors of their newly established homes, both in relation to their experience as displaced persons, and in the way a domestic space is set up (with particular focus on the ways in which visual imagery and cultural icons are used in a private context) as representations of their identities and sense of cultural belonging.

Kartini Leet is a Senior Lecturer in Photography and Subject Leader for BA (Hons) Photographic Practice at the University of Northampton. Having studied photography at Goldsmiths College, University of London, she extended her knowledge of photographic practice and theory towards a PhD (2001), which examined the significance of the photograph in relation to a series of issues that surround its status as both an arbiter of 'the real' and as an icon of personal memory and identification.

In 2012 she won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award for her book, *Reading Photography: a Sourcebook of Critical Texts, 1921-2000*. This edited collection of more than 100 essays explores the ambiguous 'meanings' of photography that are tied to its roles and functions within a variety of cultural contexts, covering a diverse range of image production and consumption.

Ruby Rana, CoHaB Early Stage Researcher, The University of Mumbai

'Perspectives on Difference: Breaking Down Robert Lieberman's film *Breakaway*'

Abstract: Robert Lieberman's film *Breakaway*, also called *Speedy Singhs*, is a fictional feature length film about an all-Punjabi-Sikh ice hockey team in Toronto, Canada. The main plot in this film involves a second generation Canadian of Indian ancestry, and his search for acceptance and belonging for who he is - and not necessarily who his father wants him to be. The key source of tension in this film are seen in the intergenerational conflicts and different cultural worlds of the father Dharvesh Singh and his son Rajveer Singh. It is in this paper that the interactions of these different cultural worlds will be examined, with a particular focus on how Dharvesh and his own experiences differ from those in relation to him – and how those points of difference are represented and at times internalized.

Ruby Rana joined CoHaB as a Doctoral Fellow and Early Stage Researcher in October 2012. Earning both a BA degree in Psychology and a post-graduate diploma in Intercultural Education and Training from the University of Victoria, she focused on social and cross-cultural psychology, identity, and biculturalism. Outside of her academic pursuits Ruby spent four and a half years working at the University of Victoria's English Language Centre (ELC) in the areas of intercultural leadership, socio-cultural facilitation and recreation. Working with upwards of two thousand young adults from approximately twenty different countries every year at the ELC, Ruby's interest in intercultural and international dynamics increased. She

went on to complete an M.A. degree in Intercultural and International Communication from Royal Roads University; where her M.A. research was presented as an ethnographic narrative of a transnational Diasporic Indian negotiating belonging between India and Canada. Ruby's related writings regarding: diversity within the Indo-Canadian community; the social context of Sikhism in British Columbia; and interviews she held with Canadian Diasporic Indians, have been recently published in a Canadian post-secondary textbook titled *Diversity, Culture, and Counselling: A Canadian Perspective, second edition*. As a member of the Indian Diaspora, Ruby is keen on questioning socially constructed cultural norms and exploring how these widespread conceptualizations impact feelings of home, belonging, and identity. Ruby's current research interests include: exploring personal narratives; identifying points of similarity and difference within the Indian Diaspora; and writing in support of diasporic members who are navigating their own sense of connectedness and belonging.

Elizabeth Syrkin, CoHaB Early Stage Researcher, The University of Münster

'Inhabiting Diaspora: A Literary Phenomenology'

Abstract: This paper opens with "Flight of Freedom," a short story by Courttia Newland that engages a basic tension in diaspora studies: between mobility and immobility, routes and roots. I will unpack this tension with an eye especially towards complicating the ways in which discussions of diaspora are framed through mobility. Mobility is not liberatory in itself, Hardt and Negri remind us, and indeed while the proverbial flows of people, goods, and ideas are often associated with agency, economic advancement, and epistemological insight, mobility is also vagrancy, crime, excess, threat. It is at times in need of aggressive (frequently governmental) control. At the same time, the immobile faces analogous complexity, from the problematic conflation of people and the soil they occupy, to the association of attachment to place with stasis and the female. My paper couples geographer Doreen Massey's search for a way to "dynamize" space with ways to approach or theorize diaspora as something more than a mere critical or rhetorical figment. I propose what may be called a literary phenomenology, informed by Yi-Fu Tuan's humanistic geography and Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology of home and habitation. In what way, my paper asks, is diaspora lived in the dwelling place, in the home? What is the role of the ordinary, the quotidian, in diasporic experience? And what is home if not the ability to or practice of inhabiting – to experience or feel belonging in a space? Probing these questions, I conclude by extending the space of intimate experience to the street and the neighbourhood in a close reading of Zadie Smith's recent novel *NW*.

Elizabeth Syrkin is a doctoral candidate in English literature at the University of Muenster and a Marie Curie Early Stage Researcher within the CoHaB ITN. She is currently on academic secondment at the University of Oxford. Elizabeth has a BA in English and French literature from the University of Virginia, and an MSt in English literature from the University of Oxford. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, and a Palgrave Macmillan collection on *Edward Said and Geocriticism*. She is also co-editing a double special issue of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* with Khachig Tololyan on the topic "Dwelling in Diaspora" (forthcoming 2015). Her research interests include diaspora studies; postcolonial literature; empire and modernism; utopian and dystopian studies; and theories of space, place, and the city.

Dr George Watley, The University of Northampton

'Ebony Magazine and the Northampton Caribbean Diaspora'

Abstract: *Ebony* magazine was the most popular nationally mass-marketed African-American periodical in America in the post-War era and it has been well documented how *Ebony* magazine profoundly influenced African-Americans from its inception in 1945. What is less well-known is how *Ebony* influenced people of

African origin outside of America. Using the example of African-Caribbeans in Northamptonshire from the 1960s to the 1980s, this paper will highlight many of the influences which made *Ebony* a valued and desired magazine for African-Caribbean people in this provincial location, particularly in an era before there was a fully developed Black British press. Also to be highlighted will be some cultural and identity-related differences between African-Caribbeans that were influenced by *Ebony* and those that were not. *Ebony* played a role in helping develop the positive ethnic identity of African-Caribbean people in Britain, with this paper delineating some of the rationale for this through delving into how Northamptonshire African-Caribbeans used and shared this African-American cultural icon.

George Watley recently completed his PhD on *Identity and Consumption practices of Northamptonshire Caribbeans c.1955-1989* and has taught Black British History modules at the University of Northampton. He is keenly interested in the role Black British history has (or does not have) in Britain as a whole, as well as genuine public history that is broadly shared. Also of interest is the role education plays in promoting ethnic equality and/or the racialisation of Black people in Britain. He is a Trustee of the Northamptonshire Black History Association (NBHA) and has worked to make this rich history publicly accessible.

Symposium Covenors

Professor Janet Wilson

Professor Janet Wilson is Director of Research and Professor of English and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Northampton School of the Arts. Her research interests are in white settler societies, particularly of New Zealand and Australia, and their literary and visual cultures. She has written on postcolonial and diasporic writers such as Fleur Adcock, Dan Davin and Katherine Mansfield; other interests include postcolonial cinema and fundamentalism and literature. She is editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and deputy chair of the Katherine Mansfield Society and the New Zealand Studies Network.

Dr Larissa Allwork

Larissa Allwork completed her PhD, *Holocaust Memory for the Millennium* while researching as a Thomas Holloway scholar in cultural history at the interdisciplinary Holocaust Research Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London. She has also studied at the University of Oxford and has lectured at the University of Northampton. Her book, *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and Transnational* has been contracted by Bloomsbury Academic. She currently works in the School of the Arts at the University of Northampton, where she assists Professor Wilson with the CoHaB ITN and also participates in Dr Sonya Andermahr's Working Group for Interdisciplinary Research in Trauma, Narrative and Performance.