

Anglistentag 2015
University of Paderborn



SECTION 1: UN/MAKING HOMES IN ANGLOPHONE CULTURES

Organised by Stella Butter (Gießen) and Dorothee Birke (Freiburg)

Abstract Section 1

‘Home’ is arguably one of the most cherished concepts and values in contemporary times. In the age of globalization with its increased flow of “people, images, ideas, technology, money and commodities” (Appadurai), home continues to hold the promise of being a safe haven against forces of change. At the same time, notions of home are shifting as individual lifeworlds transform. The ongoing fierce debate on cultural ideals of home is fuelled by the intimate connection between home and identity politics. The political currency of home can be seen when looking at the sensationalist representation of the ongoing migrant crisis in European media: for example, headlines in British tabloids shout that Britain must ward off the “invasion” by firmly “closing its doors”. The easy slippage between home/house and homeland hence gives rise to loaded questions such as ‘whose home is this, who is a welcome guest and who is perceived as an intruder’?

The past years have witnessed a surge of critical interest in home, as is reflected in the establishment of the Centre for Studies of Home (University of London) and the Marie Curie Initial Training Network on “Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging” (Münster University). The panel contributes to these ongoing research activities by exploring makings and unmakings of home in a broad range of contemporary media, from the perspective of literary and cultural studies as well as linguistics. Contributions range from the analysis of linguistic home-making in cyberspace to representations of home in British TV shows such as *Benefits Street*.

Thursday, 24 September 2015

11.00-11.15 am

Introduction

11.15am-12.00noon

Janine Hauthal (Brüssel)

**Travelling with Ghosts – Diasporic Negotiations of Europe
as Imaginary Homeland in Contemporary Transcultural Narratives**

Blurring the distinction of past and present, the figure of the ghost is a recurring feature in postcolonial Anglophone writing and tends to indicate a crisis of home, identity and belonging (cf. e.g. Gikandi (1996) on the ‘ghosting of colonialism’). Likewise, journeys in search of identity and (colonial) origins often inspire, or feature prominently in, contemporary postcolonial writing (cf. e.g. Nyman 2009; Edwards/Graulund 2011). As a continuation of, and in contrast to, such postcolonial encounters, contemporary diasporic negotiations of Europe as imaginary homeland are, according to John McLeod (2009), increasingly characterized by a transcultural shift. Taking up McLeod’s claim, the proposed paper aims to explore the impact of this shift on received

notions of home, origin, and belonging by comparing Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* with Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe*.

Both novels combine the figure of the ghost with the motif of the journey in order to indicate a crisis of nationalist imagination to which the recourse to Europe as a transcultural community provides an alternative. In both novels, however, this recourse is complicated by Europe's colonial and racist legacies. As will be demonstrated, the two novels contest received notions of Europe and European history, negotiate conflicting European identities and, respectively, envision utopian and dystopian transcultural European futures. The paper is particularly interested in how this transcultural shift in Evaristo's and Tsiolkas's literary imaginations of Europe contributes to 'un/making' and 're/thinking' home in contemporary Anglophone cultures. Differentiating the notion of the 'transcultural' from both that of the 'intercultural' and that of a presumably homogenizing cosmopolitan 'third space', the paper seeks to demonstrate how the two novels initiate a reconsideration of notions like home, origin, and belonging in a way that allows for the maintenance of identity and difference.

12.00noon-12.45 pm

Caroline Lusin (Mannheim)

'Home Matters': Home, Family and Community in the Contemporary Anglo-Jewish Novel

'Home' is a particularly resonant concept in the context of a religious culture whose rituals rely in crucial ways on narrow circles of family and community. Home and the family are at the core of various Jewish celebrations, such as the Shabbat, the Passover Seder, which is centred on the Exodus from Egypt, or Rosh-Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The very notion of home gains added significance through the Jewish experience of diaspora, which includes the myth of an eventual return to the lost homeland of the past, thus assigning present homes provisional status only. The concept has become yet more prominent by the 21st century, when upholding the community with the Jewish home at its heart and safeguarding the intergenerational perpetuation of Jewish traditions have turned into key concerns of Anglo-Jewry (see Gidley/Hahn-Karris 2010).

In 21st-century Anglo-Jewish literature, home accordingly plays a prominent, albeit highly ambivalent role. Novels like Naomi Alderman's *Disobedience* (2006) and Charlotte Mendelson's *When We Were Bad* (2007) take stock of the elevated status assigned to the home as the basis of family and community in Jewish culture and religion in a highly subversive manner. Home, this paper is going to argue, figures in these novels as a site of intractable conflict between institutionalisation on the one hand and individualisation on the other. What ritual and spatial practices, then, are involved in constructing 'home' in these texts? How does the concept of 'home' relate to the concept of 'diaspora'? Where and to what end do the texts situate the individual in relation to the collectivities of the family and the community, which are encapsulated in the notion of home? And finally, which larger issues are at stake in conceptualising 'home' in these novels?

4.00-4.45pm

Christian Mair (Freiburg)

**Digital *yaads*, Cyber-Naija, and Homeboys on the Web:
Using Pidgins and Creoles to Create Place in Cyberspace**

Colonialism and globalisation have helped establish numerous diasporic communities in the urban centres of the Global North, for whom the definition of what is ‘home’ is fraught with obvious problems. Referring to the results of the loosening of traditional ties between territory, community and identity in her study of Jamaica, Thomas has formulated the pointed conclusion that “Jamaica is now wherever Jamaicans are” (2004: 259). This is true as a factual observation on the conditions in which “Modern Blackness” (cf. the title of her study) must be defined, but it does not answer the deeper question of how diasporic individuals find or construct their ‘homes.’

For a partial answer to this question, I will study language practices on the World Wide Web developed by second- and third-generation immigrants to the US from the Caribbean and West Africa. For these communities, the question of what is ‘home’ is present explicitly, as an important topic for discussion, but also implicitly, in the way they creatively use resources from African American Vernacular English, Jamaican Creole and Nigerian Pidgin for self- and other-styling.

As I hope to show, the findings of the study have relevance beyond sociolinguistics and World Englishes research in two ways. First, they shed light on the changing ‘ethnoscape’ and ‘mediascape’ of contemporary North America, and, secondly, the digital literacy practices developed in these web-based forums can usefully be compared to the techniques used for writing pidgins, creoles and nonstandard Englishes in postcolonial printed fiction.

4.45-5.30pm

Sarah Heinz (Berlin)

**Unhomely Spaces and Improper Houses:
Representations of Whiteness and Class on British Television**

Ideas of home and house are often conflated in Western discourse: if we talk about ‘going home’, we often talk about material buildings we inhabit. Simultaneously, home has to do with how we present ourselves to others, how we can experience ourselves and how we can relate to the larger public.

The paper will connect these two notions of home as a cultural discourse and a material practice. My thesis is that there are dominant and idealised versions of ‘house-as-home’ (Blunt and Dowling) which reflect norms of ideal subjects. Property and propriety, i.e. owning a home and inhabiting it in specific ways, converge in normative ideas of a white, heterosexual and middle-class subjectivity. As a consequence, such normative subjectivities shape our sense of how to ‘do home’ in terms of privacy, domesticity, intimacy and comfort.

The issue of who is ‘properly capable’ of making and owning a home therefore tends to be problematic, and national television makes and re-makes such norms and ideals by representing and often stigmatising practices and discourses of home that are seen as excessive or deviant. I will look at two British television series that present deviant houses-as-homes and the improper subjects inhabiting them. Firstly, I will discuss documentary television and its attempt at portraying non-normal homes in the Channel 4-series *Benefits Street* (2014 to the present), a series that follows the residents of two streets where most inhabitants claim benefits. Secondly, I will look at fictional representations of ‘deviant’ subjects and how they do home in the popular series *Misfits* (2009-2013), where the viewer follows the lives of five teenagers who acquire

superpowers while on community service on their estate. In very different ways, both series disclose normative and normalising notions of ideal homes and subjects, either by reinforcing or criticising them.