

Welcome

Name: Georgia Stabler

PhD: Postcolonial Literature

Thesis Title:

Thesis Description: **Spaces & Places of Representation: Contemporary British BAME writing at UK Literature Festivals**

The original statement for this research project was entitled 'Marketing Texts of Alterity at UK Literature Festivals'. As this research has continued to develop over the last year, a revision to this title was necessary in order to reflect how the project has been honed in scope and direction. The term 'alterity' has become inaccurate in the context of this research which is more specifically concerned with contemporary black, Asian, minority ethnic (BAME) British writers than specific concepts of 'otherness'. Although this project remains interested in the marketing of literature festivals and the texts they promote, it is principally preoccupied with exploring and interrogating the representation of BAME writers at UK literature festivals. As such, the most recent working title is 'Spaces & Places of Representation: Contemporary British BAME writing at UK Literature Festivals'. The addition of 'Spaces & Places' identifies an overarching theme that links the components of this project in interesting and original ways.

These revisions highlight the research project's natural progression as I have become more specialised in this field. However, the central concepts and general outline remain relatively unaltered. The project aims to offer the first systematic examination of literary texts by British BAME writers as they are received, represented, and circulated within the context of UK literature festivals. Its primary areas of investigation consider the underlying reasons behind poor representation of BAME writers at mainstream festivals, and also analyses how BAME writers and their creative work is marketed and presented at literary events, both in festival programming and at live events. Further, this research seeks to interrogate the context of UK literature festivals as an area of the literary marketplace that has received little academic attention despite its continuing growth and success across Britain. In order to address the primary concerns of this research, the project is organised into four chapters which look at regional writing, genre and theme, poetry and performance, and technology respectively.

Chapter one, entitled 'Beyond London Landscapes: Promoting Regional Literature by British BAME writers' responds to a range of literature by BAME writers who depict central cities and the surrounding regions outside of London as the centre of their own postcolonial experiences. The key texts in this section include Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996), Sathnam Sanghera's *Marriage Material* (2013), Zahid Hussain's *The Curry Mile* (2006), Joe Pemberton's *Forever and Ever Amen* (2008), and Sunjeev Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* (2015). The significance of location in terms of inviting new perspectives to a contemporary postcolonial discourse is summarised by James Procter who suggests that '[t]he proliferation of difference that has seen black re-energised and rendered multiple has left Britain a homogenous unified flatland, as if it somehow the same to be black in London as it is in Llandudno.'^[1] According to Procter, black British writing has not been satisfactorily 'placed' in relation to the landscapes and discourses within and alongside which it has been produced, disseminated and consumed.^[2] From London-centric publishers concerned with international readerships, to accessibility of elite literary circles, this chapter explores some of the reasons *why* regional authors and their work has not been suitably 'placed', and crucially, how literature festivals across Britain engage with and promote regional literature by British BAME writers. The discussion in this chapter signals a need to attend to local and regional differences in literature written by BAME writers in Britain outside of London, and investigates the function that place plays in BAME British cultural production.

In addition to exploring how a writer's regional identification can affect how they articulate their own experiences and/or perspective in literary texts, this chapter considers the nuanced ways in which local literature can enrich the cultural literary scene in a given area, strengthen a region's identity and generate economic growth through literary tourism. Literary tourism has grown into a commercially-significant phenomenon, evidenced in part by the rapid proliferation of literary festivals across the UK. A recent study highlighted the important role that a sense of place plays to literary tourism and it is suggested that a place's connections to authors or literature can be used to promote destinations more proactively. ^[3] This chapter argues that literary tourism is predominantly concerned with the interaction of 'real and imagined' worlds, and as such is a mixture of 'fact and fiction', the 'real and the metaphorical'.^[4] Furthermore, it examines literary events which interact with local literary heritage and/or local literature and consider the ways in which they allow the reader to experience the physical location associated with a certain piece of literature. Finally, it will investigate the extent to which local writer development groups, independent publishers, and literature festivals aim to showcase local talent and generate publicity which is economically beneficial to both the writer and the area.



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Chapter two's original aim was to explore the ways in which genre classification and festival theming is linked to the representation of BAME at literature festivals. However, after drafting the first version it became clear that this chapter required much more specificity and focus in order to make an original contribution to the field. As such, the chapter was then split into two sections, each exploring a specific literary subgenre: British Muslim memoirs and black British crime writing. Both British Muslim and black communities in the UK have frequently been the subject of sensationalist reporting in the mainstream media. Following the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks, British Muslims have often been positioned to represent a hybridised kind of threat that combines both realistic (e.g. physical well-being) and symbolic (e.g. cultural) threats to the dominant ethno-national ingroup,^[5] whereas the members of the black community (particularly young black males) are often linked in the media to violent crime, and particularly murders involving knives and/or gangs.^[6] These dominant stereotypical portrayals in media discourse inevitably effect the marketing and promotion of literary products produced by members of these communities, particularly if these literary texts appear to confront this discourse directly.

The first section, 'Peering inside 'God's House': British Mosques & Islamic spaces in contemporary British Muslim Memoirs' explores significant spaces of worship encountered in four examples of British Muslim life-writing published in the 2000s. ^[7] As the scope for research within this area widened however, this section began to function better as a standalone chapter that would also contribute to an overarching discussion about genre, theme, space and place. Therefore, chapter two incorporates close textual analysis from four memoirs and reveals significant parallels between the writers' treatment of formal, public religious sites (i.e. mosques) and informal, private domestic spaces, such as the domestic kitchen. In addition, it compares moments of intersection in the texts between public and domestic religious spaces, for example, during the Islamic forty day period of mourning, and the Night of Power. These episodes often inspire revelatory or profound reflections, despite the writers' differing religious perspectives. The texts also provide various insights into the ways in which Muslim spaces and institutions have been shaping the British landscape, and how different writers respond to these spaces. Discussions of these texts at festival events at the time of publication was overwhelmingly framed by how the authors draw on their responses, and the responses of their communities, to 9/11 and 7/7. Outside of this, reviews and marketing material advertising individual writers at literature festivals have tended to focus on the main narrative thrust of each text, which have to a certain extent become popular thematic clichés of second generation British Asian (particularly Muslim) writing. Typical focus points taken from the selected memoirs include Yasmin Hai's discussion of assimilation and her father's 'becoming British project', Zaiba Malik's reconciliation of being simultaneously 'British', 'Asian', and 'Muslim', Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's journey through the practise of arranged marriage, or how Sarfranz Manzoor's embrace of popular culture became a part of how he defined himself against his immigrant father, but also how he came to understand him. By analysing the diverse representations of Islamic spaces in British Muslim memoirs, this section attempts to say something more specific about the Muslim experience in Britain, and explore the nuanced geography of Muslim identity.

The second section, 'Spaces of Criminality in black British crime writing', will also be developed into a chapter and will look at the role crime fiction has played in mapping changing economic, social, and geographical urban environments. Not only will this chapter follow the shifting spaces of criminality in contemporary British crime writing, but more importantly it will discuss how the texts imagine cityscapes in terms of race and class, or black and white spaces. It will pay close attention to the volatile spaces where acts of violence are perpetrated against black characters from different backgrounds. It will consider public crime scenes found in the texts that feature black victims, which are often places that also evoke a sense of safety for white characters, such as areas that have undergone a process of gentrification. The novels chosen include several subcategories in crime writing, such as detective fiction (both private investigation and police procedurals) and elements of psychological thrillers and urban noir. It identifies three authors who despite their involvement and recognition at genre specific festivals have received little exposure at mainstream literature festivals. Dreda Say Mitchell for instance, has acted as a programme chair at Theakston Old Peculier Crime Festival, and her debut won the CWA's John Creasey Dagger for best first time crime novel in Britain in 2005, yet there is little evidence which suggests she has presented her work at a general literature festival. Similarly, Courttia Newland, and Pete Kalu are accomplished writers of crime fiction who have been involved in specific literature festivals and have chaired literary prizes, yet have had little opportunity to promote their own work at mainstream literature festivals. However, crime writing as a genre is represented at major book festivals, with many showcasing established white writers who've secured their place on the literary circuit, for example, Ian Rankin, Peter James, Val McDermid, and Martina Cole. The discussion in this section will therefore question why so few BAME writers who produce work outside the genres of literary fiction, poetry, or to a lesser extent, children's literature, are invited to mainstream literature festivals.

The third chapter will analyse 'Poetry and Performance' events, which are a common feature at literature festivals and can refer to oral readings, theatre performances, poetry tours, and spoken word poetry. It has been suggested that the early twenty-first century developments in poetry in particular, such as the burgeoning performance scene and the new modes of literary transmission, are very much happening off the printed page.^[8] It is further understood that popular forms of poetry is becoming increasingly aligned with the entertainment industry as its performance dimension is particularly amenable to multi-media experiences and forums.^[9] This understood, the

'in performance' section of this thesis aims to explore how festivals facilitate acts of literary performance and how this promotes BAME writers and performers who have struggled getting their work published in printed anthologies. It seeks to explore the performer/audience dynamic at these events and track the rising prominence of literary performance, not only in the context of literature festivals, but in Britain as a whole.

The final chapter investigates the role of technology and social media in event promotion, festival organisation and the larger literary marketplace. The format of literature events lends itself to different forms of marketing, utilising both traditional and print media, as well as digital technologies in order to promote their events. This chapter will analyse the coextensive nature of literary festivals and the ways in which different marketing strategies impact on the circulation, reception and valuation of literary texts. In addition, the chapter will analyse how BAME writers utilise online spaces in order to exercise control over the marketing of their own products, appearances at literary festivals, and interactions with their readers. Audiences that attend literature festivals will also be focussed on in this section in order to gauge how readers encounter literature and interact with authors and events in increasingly digitised ways. Finally, this chapter will investigate the more recent phenomenon of online literature festivals which offer the opportunity to unite readers and writers from all over the world in an unconfined, online space.

[1] James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar black British writing* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press), p. 1

[2] James Procter, *Dwelling Places*, p. 4

[3] Hoppen, Anne, Lorraine Brown, Alan Fyall, 'Literary tourism: Opportunities and challenges for the marketing and branding of destinations?', *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 3 (2014) 37-47 (p. 39)

[4] Herbert, D. T., *Heritage, tourism and society* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1995)

[5] Rusi Jaspal, Marco Cinnirella, 'Media representations of British Muslims and hybridised threats to identity', *Contemporary Islam*, 4,3 (2010), pp. 289-310 (p. 289-90)

[6] Moore, Kerry, John Jewell, and Stephen Cushion, "Media representations of black young men and boys: report of the REACH media monitoring project.", (2011)

[7] Sarfraz Manzoor's *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), Zaiba Malik's *We Are A Muslim Please* (2010), Yasmin Hai's *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter: Becoming British* (2008), and Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf: Muslim Woman Seeks the One* (2009).

[8] Corinne Fowler, 'Publishing Manchester's black and Asian writers', in *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora space and the devolution of literary culture*, ed. Lynne Pearce, Corinne Fowler, Robert Crawshaw (Manchester; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 89

[9] Fowler, 'Publishing Manchester's black and Asian writers', p. 91

Supervisors and Institution(s):

Dr Jenni Ramone - Nottingham Trent University

Dr Corinne Fowler - University of Leicester

Publications (please include full details with page nos. or web links): TBC: 2015/2016

Scholarly / Public Engagement Activities:

March 2015

- **Annual Teaching and Learning Conference:** I presented alongside other student researchers and discussed the value of utilising the skills of undergraduates in research projects undertaken by academic staff. The presentation also demonstrated how useful the experience was for the research assistants in terms of developing their academic and professional research skills.

June-July 2014

- I was granted departmental funding to work as a research assistant on Dr Jenni Ramone's (NTU) upcoming monograph through the SPUR initiative (Scholarship Projects for Undergraduate Researchers). In this role I compiled research on the Onitsha book market in Nigeria and produced an extensive annotated bibliography of the documentation I found in this subject area including early bibliographic compilations, digitised versions of the literature and references of work by specialised scholars. This research fostered an ongoing interest in the global literary economy and the different contexts in which

postcolonial literatures are produced and circulated.

Other Research Interests:

- Postcolonial theory and literature
- Neocolonialism, globalisation
- Diaspora, exile, and migration literature
- Black British writing
- British Asian writing
- Gender studies