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creolizing the metropole, migrant Caribbean identities in literature and film

H. Adlai Murdoch, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2012, 408pp., ISBN: 978-0-253-00120-7, \$30.00 (Pbk)

Murdoch's scholarly discussion of the representation of migrant Caribbean identities in literature and film focuses on the post-war period 1948–1998, during the earlier part of which thousands of West Indians migrated to the former colonial capitals, London and Paris. Murdoch's central concern, as he outlines it in his introduction, is with locating the 'situation of the Antillean citizens of the DOM (*départements d'outre-mer*)' who migrated to Paris, in parallel with the experiences of those 'colonial commonwealth citizens of an English-speaking Caribbean on the cusp of independence' who made their way to London. Interested in how notions of difference, nationality and belonging have been 'disturbed' by 'these migration-based demographic and cultural shifts', and how the 'disturbing' is expressed in literary and cinematic production by the European-born second and third generations of urban-based West Indian populations, Murdoch finds that '[M]any of the most striking recent attempts to come to terms with new patterns and themes of difference, hybridity, national identity, self-definition, and self-representation in contemporary French and British literature and film have been produced by authors and directors hailing from formerly colonized French and British Caribbean territories'. The authors examined range from mentions of the canonical (e.g., Laming, Brathwaite, Selvon, Walcott) to longer discussions of the work of contemporary Black British writers Andrea Levy and Zadie Smith and French Caribbean novelists Maryse Conde and Gisele Pineau, and of the possibly less well-known film-makers, Horace Ove and Pascal Legitimous, whose films are set, respectively, in London (1986) and Paris (2000). Hybridity, in the hands of all of these writers and film-makers, is both subject and strategy, as Murdoch's wide-ranging discussion reiterates. In Murdoch's analysis, there are no simple categories or singularities—rather the old certainties of who/what is 'British' or 'French'; who/what a 'foreigner' is; where 'home' or 'the centre' is; and how the past informs the present are increasingly complicated, transformed and interrogated by the cultural expression of French Caribbean and Black British Caribbean artists who are together providing 'a multivalent reservoir of the experiences of exile' (p. 357).

Taking a multi-disciplinary approach that draws on Lacan, Bhabha and Glissant, among others, Murdoch attempts a wide-ranging project in locating

how these two post-war migrant communities and their descendants differentiate themselves. Murdoch demonstrates how closely this period of creolised literary and cinematic production, with its expressions of diasporic identities, interacts with important sociological and cultural discourses of the period (Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Harry Goulbourne, Aimé Césaire), as well as with the changing legal and political specificities of France and Great Britain in the immediate post-war period to the present day. This is a tall order indeed, and makes for a densely written, and therefore challenging, treatment of its subject, 'the discourses of resistance and identity' (p. 216). Murdoch's carefully (and on occasion repetitively) argued discussion demonstrates how historical, legal, political and social preoccupations with anxieties relating to identity, belonging, urbanisation, migration and hybridity are the sites of many of the themes, storylines and techniques used by the writers and film-makers under scrutiny.

Chapter 1 (the title 'Caribbean Diasporic Identity, between Home and Away' suggests the breadth and depth of the discussion that follows) grapples with the concept of diaspora and traces the complex patterns of French and British colonialism in the West Indies, outlining the distinctively differing roles of the two colonial states in defining and regulating the movement and categorisation of migrant groups to the capital centres after the end of the Second World War. In his second chapter, Murdoch describes the 'creolization' of the two metropolises, as Caribbean voices and cultural expression (visible, for example, in food, music, Carnival, poetry, linguistic registers), and the continuing growth and presence of the French Caribbean and British Caribbean communities, impact on the host cities.

Subsequent chapters turn their attention to contemporary literary and cinematic production, and here Murdoch's close readings of the texts, all of which he signals as playing a significant role and function as narratives that 'disturb' the social and gendered hierarchies of the contexts in which they are set, really shine. Chapter 3 discusses Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* as 'two temporally, thematically, and stylistically different representations of this migrant experience in London' (p. 16). In Chapter 4, Murdoch 'reads two counterparts to this experience from a Parisian perspective', Maryse Conde's *Desirada* and Gisele Pineau's *L'Exil delon Julia*. In the detailed readings, Murdoch pays close attention to how themes of fragmentation, exile, displacement, social and geographic mobility, and nomadism are expressed and links this to the structural strategies employed in the texts; for example, use of multiple narrative voices, use of different linguistic registers, non-linear time frames, figures of excess who are difficult to regulate or contain, characters with outsider status, use of free indirect discourse and internal monologue. All of the texts include representations of the experience of racism and bigotry, of characters feeling sidelined by the background of colonialism, of the elasticity of multi-lingualism and of the continuing project of re-inventing a self that is linked to a history of

immigration. He also argues, and demonstrates, that all of the texts bear the imprint of the creolised contexts in which they were produced, thereby carving out new narrative spaces. The past, he suggests, functions in these texts as both an anchor and a constraint—in any case, something that inevitably catches up with you. He concludes that new patterns of creolised identity, based on hybridity and the concept of transnationalism, are being established in these narratives, reminding their readers and viewers that identity itself is a transformative practice, and giving 'rise to new themes of exile and identity, transformation and continuity whose creativity both extends and illuminates migration's subversion of fixed metropolitan modernities' (p. 17). Murdoch's book will reward advanced readers and scholars wanting to engage with the expanding boundaries of the study of post-war West Indian migration and its cultural expression in contemporary Paris and London.

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