

Dr James Procter

**Devolving Diasporas: Migration and Reception in Central Scotland, 1980
- present**

End of Year Report for 2007

- The establishment of additional project partners and collaborative links: The **British Council**, **Encompass**, **Penguin Books**, **The Achebe foundation**, and **Small Island Reads 2007**. The British Council helped us establish reading groups through their offices in New Delhi, London and Nigeria. BC's Encompass website allowed us to network these readers through chat rooms and live links. ('Devolving Diasporas' now has narrative and a link on the British Council site.) Penguin Books donated 120 free copies of *White Teeth* to the project. The Achebe foundation invited us to participate in the 50th anniversary celebrations for Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This involved a live link up between readers in Nigeria and London sharing their thoughts on the novel. This discussion was recorded and transcribed and it will be discussed on a panel at a conference being held in London in 2008 (to be attended by Achebe). Small Island Reads, the largest mass read event ever held in the UK, donated 50 free copies of *Small Island* along with the accompanying brochure. They allowed us to record 8 reading groups across the UK from Cornwall to Glasgow. (Devolving Diasporas is acknowledged on the Small Island Reads site.)
- Macrobert performance of *The Adoption Papers* (dates and details on our website) sold out. Macrobert performances of *The Adoption Papers* reported in **Big Issue** (June 2007). Performance and discussion of *The Adoption Papers* recorded by **BBC Radio 4** as part of 'The House I Grew Up In' programme following Jackie Kay. This was broadcast on 27 August 2007 and featured the Jackie Kay's reading at the Mitchell library – a project event (see below).
- Show attended by both Jackie Kay and her adoptive parents. Aftershow discussion with Kay, parents, cast, dance and drama artist, Education officer of Macrobert, Scottish reading groups, other audience members, including local children in foster care.
- Secured new writing for project website from two writers based in Scotland – **Suhayl Saadi** and **Siddharth Chaudhury**, with more on its way from Namrata Bhawnani (latter two are the Charles Wallace Writers in Residence at Stirling University).
- Invited project papers delivered at SOAS, Oxford University (Wadham College), Dundee University, Strathclyde. We were participants in a data session at Edinburgh University (Edinburgh Discourse Group).
- Devolving Diasporas team formed a panel at the international "Beyond the Book" conference, Birmingham
- Established links with related AHRC projects: **Beyond the Book** (Birmingham) and **Moving Manchester** (Lancaster). This has led to sharing related data with Birmingham, and a meeting at Lancaster to discuss future collaboration.
- Project group membership of the **Scottish Migrations Network** (led by Eileen Yeo of Strathclyde). We are presenting a paper in this forum in December 2007.

As stated on the full application, the project co-investigators began working on this project 6 months in advance of the formal start date (January 2007). This allowed us to make any necessary refinements to the reading group network, and to distribute final information and timetables to reading coordinators in Scotland, Canada, Africa, India and the Caribbean. During this period we worked on collaborating with the British Council. This paid off, giving us access to pre-existing reading groups outside the UK and a tried and tested means of networking them (through their Encompass website). The only change to our original network here has been a shift from Morocco to Nigeria. (Although we hope to do some one off readings with the Moroccan group next year.) This was partly due to a lack of local British Council support in Morocco, and partly because the francophone context presented us with difficulties given our choice of English language texts.

The project has progressed well in its first year. Between January and March the 3 academic investigators visited the reading group co-ordinators in Trinidad, New Delhi and Ontario. In addition to demonstrating the equipment and reiterating the project aims, the investigators conducted initial research into the reading cultures of these locations, investigating libraries, bookshops, and the presence (or not) of local reading groups. The website (www.devolvingdiasporas.com) and 'reception' area are now live. Archival research on the database has started, and the database itself (in partnership with Netskills) will go live before the end of the year. The recordings in India, Scotland, Canada, Trinidad and England are completed, and are stored on a secure data storage site (dreamhost). *The Adoption Papers* performances were a success at the Macrobert theatre, as was Jackie Kay's visit to Scotland to see the performance and to speak to the Scottish reading groups. The call for papers for next year's international conference has been written and invitations sent out to potential keynotes. A public call for papers to be sent out shortly.

We are particularly pleased with the number of additional areas in which the project has delivered over the past 12 months, over and above those specified in the original application. Notably, the project made links with the largest mass read event in the UK: 'Small Island Read 2007'. Given *Small Island* is also a set text on Devolving Diasporas, this represented an excellent opportunity to gather additional data (we recorded 8 groups in total) and to 'devolve' further by looking at regional readers in England (e.g. in Liverpool and Cornwall). Similarly, many of the activities listed under highlights (above) have been delivered on top of the things promised in the original application. The links we've managed to establish with the British Council, the Achebe Foundation and so on, will help raise the profile of this project and increase our contact with non-academic stakeholders.