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Newsletter der Gesellschaft für  
Anglophone Postkoloniale  
Studien (GAPS)

***IMPRESSUM:***

*ACOLIT* – Newsletter der Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien  
(GAPS)

Begründet von Prof. Dr. Dieter Riemenschneider

**Redaktion:**

Prof. Dr. Frank Schulze-Engler  
Dr. des. Karsten Levihn-Kutzler

**Unter Mitarbeit von:**

Annika Beer

Institut für England- und Amerikastudien  
Abteilung Neue Englischsprachige Literaturen und Kulturen  
Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main  
Norbert-Wollheim-Platz 1, IG-Farben-Haus \* D-60629 Frankfurt/Main  
Tel.: (069) 798-32354, -32353  
E-Mail: [schulze-engler@nelk.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:schulze-engler@nelk.uni-frankfurt.de)  
Website: [www.g-a-p-s.de/acolit.htm](http://www.g-a-p-s.de/acolit.htm)

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## In Memory of a Roving Scholar Geoff Davis (1943 - 2018)

In the early hours of 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2018, three days before his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, our teacher, colleague and friend Prof. Dr. Geoffrey V. Davis died in Aachen. He had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a few weeks before; he underwent an operation that could not save his life, and after a short, hard battle lost out against a deadly antagonist that had taken him by surprise and plucked him out of an exceptional *vita activa* led with seemingly indomitable energy also years after his retirement. Our thoughts are with his wife Ingrid, his life companion of many decades, who was also by his side during his last weeks.

One of many vivid memories I have of Geoff Davis is that of a lecture on the exploits of the 'roving reporter' Egon Erwin Kisch in Australia delivered at the Conference of the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English (ASNEL) in Kiel in 2005 (and published under the telling title "'One step on Australian soil and you're history': Nicholas Hasluck's novel *Our Man K.*, Egon Erwin Kisch and the White Australia Policy" in 2007). With his inimitable style combining scholarly erudition, political engagement and ironical humour, Geoff quickly had the audience roaring at the inept attempts of befuddled politicians to keep Australia safe from the 'communist threat' they saw embodied in the outspoken critic of Nazi Germany, and made the former marvel at Kisch's transnational engagement for social justice and his indomitable courage (having been banned from setting foot on Australian soil, Kisch jumped from the ship that had brought him to Melbourne, broke his leg after a six-meter fall, and later successfully engaged in a legal battle for his right to go on a nationwide anti-war lecture tour).

The connection Geoff set up in that talk between German literary history and Australian politics was by no means fortuitous; nor was his interest in social justice and the political role of literature and culture in countries like South Africa. Geoff actually entered academia through German studies; he wrote his PhD on the work of Arnold Zweig, the socialist-humanist writer persecuted by the Nazi regime who emigrated to Palestine and returned to the German Democratic Republic after the end of World War II. Geoff retained a vivid interest in German literature throughout his academic career which soon after came to focus on a quite different province of world literature, however.

Born in Birmingham in 1943 and educated at Oxford, Geoff Davis belonged to an initially quite small group of pioneer scholars who sought to establish the study of what was then still called "Commonwealth Literature" in Germany and internationally. His influence in and impact on this rapidly expanding field soon extended far beyond the position of foreign language lecturer that he held at Aachen University from 1966 onwards. He was one of the founders of the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English (GNEL/ASNEL, now GAPS) in 1989 and played a major role in the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies both on a European level (he was Chair of EACLALS from 2002-2008 and from 2011-2014) and as International Chair of ACLALS from 2007-2010.

He was co-editor of *Cross/Cultures: Readings in Post/Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English*, easily the most important and influential book series published in the field, and of *MATATU: Journal for African Culture and Society*, and author of a truly astonishing number of edited volumes, special issues and essays on African, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South Asian, indigenous and Black and Asian British literatures and cultures. The two-volume *Festschrift Engaging with Literature of Commitment* (Rodopi 2012) pays ample tribute to the extraordinary contribution that Geoff, the “worldly scholar” (as the subtitle of the second volume aptly put it), had made to postcolonial anglophone literary and cultural studies – and testifies to a truly worldwide network of friends, colleagues and mentees that he built up during his long academic career. This career had by no means ended with his retirement; if anything, he had seemed to have become even more energetic, taking on new commitments as editor, conference organizer, and keynote speaker, and continuing his innumerable journeys across the globe that had already turned him into a legendary roving scholar in the 1980s.

In all these years, Geoff Davis truly kept a window onto the world open for many of us in German academia. His cosmopolitan academic interests and his firm commitment to the social responsibility of literature as well as of literary and cultural studies constantly reminded his audiences and readers of the far-flung transcultural and transnational connections linking up Anglophone literatures and cultures across the globe – and of the extraordinary diversity of local and regional contexts in which these literatures have their being in a globalized world. As Arundhati Roy might put it, there is now a Geoff-shaped hole in the universe for all those privileged to have known and to have worked with him. But there is also an inspiring legacy of a scholarly life lived to the full, based on deep and loyal friendship, untiring conviviality and burning intellectual engagement. This we will need to recall as we grope towards understanding our loss.

**Frank Schulze-Engler (Frankfurt)**

## **My Memories of Geoffrey Davis as a Teacher**

In his vivid memory of Geoffrey Davis, Frank Schulze-Engler mentions that the “roving scholar” was a window to the world for many in the German scholarly community. I would like to take up this apt image and share my memories as someone who had the privilege of being taught by Prof. Davis as an undergraduate at RWTH Aachen.

Little did I know when I walked into the classroom of one of the ‘traditional’ Monday evening seminars he taught with Dr. Jürgen Jansen that this approachable, down-to-earth, humorous and even humble professor was a pioneer in his field and, as Frank so aptly put it, a worldly scholar. This I would only realize much later, after my Staatsexamen, because Professor Davis was never one to impress his worth on others and in particular, not on undergrads. But he shared

his enormous contribution which he broke down with great didactic and even pedagogical intuition. For a wide-eyed 20 year-old me, Geoffrey Davis opened a window to the world. In his Monday classes which he had started with Jürgen Jansen in an impulse to “read our way around the world, through books by authors from places we’d never been to, whose names we couldn’t pronounce” his teaching was driven by curiosity and by the willingness to take risks and do something new, to teach topics and texts that even he had only recently come across or developed an interest in. This also explains why his courses were always about something different and new; to my knowledge, he never taught a course twice. So “Southern African Women’s Writing” (“not South African!” he informed us, rolling his eyes) was followed by “East African Writing”, and by “Staging New Britain: Black and South Asian British Theatre Practice”. And because Professor Davis was also quite practically-minded, this meant that all his students bought copies of his collection *Staging New Britain* (2005, edited with Anne Fuchs). In this sense, he was truly committed to the ideal of a unity of research and teaching and he was also a very ‘German’ Anglistikprofessor in the sense that he was able to cover a very wide spectrum of his subject. As my classmate Esther put it: “bei dem kommt man endlich mal zum Lesen. Und bei den ganzen anderen Sachen, Shakespeare und so, da kennt er sich ja auch total aus.” This also meant, of course, that we really had to work. When I went to see him during his office hours to talk about the corpus for my Zwischenprüfung he walked through the library with me and I ended up with an intimidating pile of texts!

Geoffrey Davis was a committed teacher. Yes, he was very mobile internationally, but he was also very present at the department and he was there for his students and generous with his time. If he had to cancel a class, he would teach on Saturday mornings or during the semester break, often putting a few notes into someone’s hand to go and get coffee and biscuits for the entire group. From his travels, he brought back books and stocked the library with all sorts of gems and he generously shared his personal copies with us. He took us to movie screenings (I still remember U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha) or showed African movies in the library after closing time (he even offered to sit in the library and work so we could stay on after closing time to watch a VHS on the department’s ancient TV without disturbing those who worked during the regular hours). He trusted his students and allowed us to pick our essay and theses topics freely, but he also offered ideas and suggestions for secondary reading if we got ‘stuck’. And he was a mentor and a facilitator. He wrote letters of recommendation for scholarship applications and helped me during the preparation for my stay-abroad. And a year or so after my *Staatsexamen* when I took the decision to look into opportunities for a Phd and shyly wrote him an email he promptly replied and helped me again, he even wrote to Frank Schulze-Engler on my behalf. I am deeply saddened by his loss but grateful for the privilege of having been his student and of benefitting from his vast knowledge, his enthusiasm and kindness, and I am sure that many of his former students feel the same.

**Magdalena Pfalzgraf (Frankfurt/Saarbrücken)**

## GAPS Graduate AWARD 2018

### Citations

After individually reading all the submissions, we, the members of the jury, arrived at one unanimous conclusion almost instantly. There was not a single submission that would not have been prizeworthy in principle. In other words: all submissions were clearly far above average in their respective categories (BA thesis or MA thesis). This is clearly good news, as it testifies to the healthy state of the field of (Anglophone) postcolonial studies. *Der Nachwuchs ist gesichert!* – as one Anglophone member of the jury put it succinctly.

Then, however, came the trickier bit, choosing the *primes* or *prima inter pares* from the lot. Surely, each of us had arrived at his or her own provisional shortlist after reading the submissions, but of course etiquette – particularly in proceedings largely conducted by e-mail – requires that you do not impose your own shortlist on your fellow jury members. So the e-mail assessments of the submissions went back and forth in numbers – with guarded suggestions, lots of praise and minor critical remarks in all directions – until our chairman finally did his duty and pointed out to us that the most laudatory phrases – such as “exceptional degree of originality,” “intellectual independence and maturity far beyond what can be expected from an MA thesis,” “possibly the best I’ve had the pleasure and privilege of reading during the whole of my stint on the jury” – tended to cluster in passages devoted to one work. This is: Rufaro Bakare: “The Madman, the Woman and the Child (de)liberate the Nation of Zimbabwe: Counterdiscursive Readings of Dambudzo Marechera’s *The House of Hunger*, Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* and NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.” And it is this work, submitted in Frankfurt (Main) and supervised by Frank Schulze-Engler, which is the winner of this year’s GAPS *Nachwuchspreis*. Congratulations!

Why did we think that this work should be awarded the prize this year? There are two major reasons. First, there is the scope and topicality of the subject matter: the limited advances and tragic setbacks in the process of postcolonial nation-building in Zimbabwe, as reflected in the three landmark works mentioned in the title. What impressed us even more, however, was the mature way in which this topic was handled: the care which went into formulation and editorial matters, the competent use of the scholarly literature, and an overall approach which kept the appropriate balance between the three motivating forces which drove the author to this achievement:

- (1) a deeply personal urge to explore the causes of Zimbabwe’s stymied quest for an independent future – a quest which started well amid high hopes more than 40 years ago, but then deteriorated to the depressing levels of stagnation which we have witnessed in the recent past, and is now very slowly moving forward again towards an as yet uncertain future;



- (2) the cool and rationally inquisitive mind-set of the true scholar, who brings to bear the terminological and methodological toolkit in the systematic advancement of knowledge;
- (3) the creative urge of the literary writer, held in check throughout most of the work, but shining through in several places, for example the impressive narrative vignette which concludes it.

The breadth of the treatment and the complexity of the argument notwithstanding, the text maintains an exceptionally clear argumentative line throughout. The greatest achievement in our view, however, is that this work reaches beyond the specific Zimbabwean case study and touches on a major dilemma and paradox encountered in numerous postcolonial constellations throughout the world: the systematic (mis-)appropriation of the anticolonial discourse of liberation by the new elites which – through their corruption and craze for power – do everything to prevent the dream of liberation from coming true.

A recognition award goes to Annika Gerfer's MA thesis "White appropriations of Jamaican Creole in Reggae music," submitted in Munster and supervised by Dr. Michael Westphal. Annika presents an empirically meticulous and theoretically extremely well-informed study of the phenomenon. Her study is an original contribution to the sociolinguistics of globalisation and reminds us that English is not just a world language because Standard American English has become the default *lingua franca* of international politics, big business and big academia. The world's changing ethnoscaples and mediascaples (Appadurai) have also sustained the globalisation of several nonstandard forms of English, in spite of continuing stigmatisation in their historical territorial home bases. Jamaican Creole is a case in point. Analysing performances by seven artistes or groups:

- Collie Buddz (yes, insiders, the name is slang for *ganja*),
- Groundation, Matisyahu ("gift of God" in Hebrew), Tribal Seeds, all from the US
- Natasja (Denmark)
- Gentleman (Germany) and
- Alborosie (Italy)

this thesis shows both how Jamaican Creole and Dread Talk have globalised and how these linguistic resources have acquired new local meanings in new contexts of use. The mode of presentation is crystal-clear, linguistically and cognitively lucid.

As we know, postcolonial studies tend to get some critical flak now and again, in academia and beyond. As I was writing up these notes, I happened to come across an article in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a review of Claudia Rankine's "Citizen" by Juliane Liebert. She says:

Die aktuelle Tendenz in der postkolonialen Gesellschaftskritik ist, sich auf einen bequemen Kulturrelativismus zurückzuziehen, der auf der einen Seite um Selbstkritik [der ehemaligen Kolonisatoren, CM] kreist und der sich auf der anderen in BlackPanther-Fantasien ergeht. Es ist ja auch schwieriger, sich

mit der Tatsache auseinanderzusetzen, dass es das rein Gute in der Kultur nicht gibt. (SZ, 4. 5. 2018, p. 12)

Lazy cultural relativism and Black Panther fantasising is as far away as can be from the work of the two young scholars we are honouring here tonight. Rufaro and Annika: I wish Juliane Liebert could read what you wrote. She will be able to do so once you publish it. Please do!

**Kylie Crane, Christian Mair, Peter Marsden**

## GAPS Dissertation AWARD 2018 Citations

Three dissertations were submitted to the GAPS Dissertation Prize committee this year. The committee members (Susanne Mühleisen – Bayreuth, Frank Schulze-Engler – Frankfurt, and Anja Schwarz – Potsdam) were faced with the difficult task of selecting the winner of the GAPS Dissertation Prize from a group of contenders that was smaller than two years ago, but comprised three highly innovative studies from the fields of linguistics and literary studies that each made an original contribution to their field of studies, met the highest professional standards to be expected from a PhD dissertation and engaged with challenging topics that are also of considerable interest beyond academia. So, once more, the jury had a lot to read and a tough decision to take.

Before presenting the winner of this year's GAPS Dissertation Prize to you, we would like to provide a brief summary of the other dissertations we received in order to allow you a glimpse into the creative workshop of excellent young scholars who have already left their mark in their fields of study and from whom, we hope, we will hear more in the future.

Sarah Knor's dissertation on "Narrative Performances of Mothering in South Asian Diasporic Fiction" was supervised by Janet Wilson and Sonya Andermahr at the University of Northampton. Her study opens up new perspectives for diaspora studies by engaging in a critical re-examination of what she calls "mothering" – a set of social, cultural and performative practices that might also be called "doing motherhood". The idea of the maternal – that, as Knor notes in her abstract, occupies a "liminal position between nature and culture" – is ideally suited to take a fresh look at concepts such as mother tongue or mother country that are themselves liminally located between diaspora and gender studies.

The main part of Sarah Knor's thesis is a sustained exploration of the performance of motherhood in selected texts ranging from Bankimchandra Chatterji's famous ode in praise of mother India, "Vande Mataram", and Kipling's poems on India and Empire to 'classical' South Asian diasporic texts such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*, Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Her study unravels narrow essentialist understandings of "motherhood" that often characterize South Asian nationalist as well as nostalgic diasporic discourses of "home" and shows the productivity of the trope of motherhood as well as the wide variety of uses it can be made of in texts staging literary performances of "mothering" that are, as she puts it, "less concerned with beginnings or origins than with relationships, affiliations and adopted mothers". While the main part of her study is dedicated to South Asian British (and, in the case of Sidhwa, South Asian American) literature, her concluding chapter surveys literary performances of mothering in Indo-Caribbean writing and indicates how the critical concept of "mothering" (that, as she puts it in her conclusion, "will hopefully continue to cause both

mother and diaspora trouble", 202) might be applied to other settings. Sarah Knor's elegantly written dissertation throws new light on well-known Anglophone texts, opens up important dialogues between diaspora and gender studies, and provides an excellent example of critical scholarship that not only enriches our understanding of literary texts, but is also vitally interested in the transformative potential of literature and literary studies.

Michael Westphal's dissertation "Linguistic Variation in Jamaican Radio" was supervised by Dagmar Deuber and submitted to the Westphälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. Westphal's integrative approach to analyzing the interplay of different influences on the speech in various genres in Jamaican radio is highly innovative in its consideration of perspectives from sociolinguistics, creole studies as well as media studies. With his meticulous empirical research which makes use of detailed quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, Westphal is able to give a comprehensive overview of language use and language attitudes in contemporary postcolonial Jamaica which are not only shaped by the dynamics of a Creole-English continuum but, with the presence of U.S. American English, also by other imported players in the field.

One of the insights from media studies that Westphal incorporates in his study is the idea of audience design, i.e. an "anti-essentialist notion of authenticity" (p. 3), which helps to see the language of newscasters as self-reflexively constructed toward the expectations of their audience. This addition of a reception perspective and the implicit conflict of language norms in a public language domain closes a research gap in the study of language variation in a postcolonial context. With his highly ambitious data collection of news and phone-in radio shows, complemented by an additional language attitude study, Westphal sets impressive empirical standards for both the range of data sets as well as the depth of their analysis. He also manages to refute earlier impressionistic studies on any unilateral direction of language change towards either decreolization or recreolization. In a more global context, Westphal's comprehensive and well-written study helps to understand the complex dynamics of multilingual and multi-dialectal postcolonial language situations. In a highly sensitive language ecology such as the Jamaican one, an exemplary study on the language use in a popular medium is not merely an end in itself but may also serve as an indicator of language ideological transformations and changes. Westphal's study is to be highly commended for increasing our insights into these transformatory processes in this exciting and culturally rich anglo-creolophone language context.

This brings us to this year's winner of the GAPS Dissertation Prize: Geoff Rodoreda. Early in his thesis on "The Mabo Turn in Australian Fiction", written at Stuttgart University under the supervision of Renate Brosch and published in 2017 with Peter Lang, Geoff Rodoreda acknowledges that literary histories have little going for them. He quotes Graham Huggan, who argues that there are "few pursuits less fashionable yet more contentious", only to throw this kind of warning to the wind and to embark on a literary history of his own.

Based on an in-depth study of Australian fiction writing from the last quarter of a century, Geoff Rodoreda proposes a re-assessment of Australian literary his-

toriography to account for what he describes as the ‘Mabo turn’ in contemporary Australian fiction. Central to this assessment is the observation that in the quarter of a century since the Australian High Court’s historic Mabo decision of 1992 “the peripheral literature of the 1970s and 1980s [that is: novels examining ‘Indigenous/non-indigenous’ relations] has now moved to the centre of Australian literary discourse” (vii).

How did this change come about?

In 1992 the Australian High Court had ruled in favour of a claim by a group of Indigenous Australians to customary, legal title to land. The decision radically altered the foundation of land law in Australia and rejected the notion of *terra nullius*, the idea that Australia legally had belonged to no one before British occupation in 1788. While the ruling has had limited legal ramifications, Geoff Rodoreda argues that it nevertheless has crucially impacted on ways of thinking about land, identity, settler belonging, and history.

While a ‘Mabo effect’ has already been acknowledged as significantly shaping Australian public discourse, as well as many arenas of cultural production, this assessment has so far not been fully extended to the literary field. With his thesis, Geoff Rodoreda traces the way in which “a post-Mabo literary imaginary [...] works to describe, articulate, reflect, and ultimately represent” this impact in Australia today (4). Fiction, he argues, not only records or registers these but actively co-produces this transformation. Geoff Rodoreda’s thesis can rightfully claim to be the first full-length review of the fiction that has merged after and in the shadow of the Mabo decision – Geoff examines 19 novels in depth and assesses many more in passing. It offers a careful reading of the Mabo decision itself, as well as a magisterial overview of the impact of Mabo on Australian public consciousness – all elegantly-written and buttressed by an enormous range of references.

What is new and truly exciting about Geoff Rodoreda’s thesis is the way in which he detects a Mabo turn also in Indigenous prose writing. Different from non-indigenous writing, these texts do *not* respond to what Mabo affirmed (i.e. Native Title) but to what the actual Mabo decision was very careful not to address: a foundational Indigenous sovereignty that was never ceded. Based on this finding, the author proposes the trans-generic category of a literature of sovereignty: writing which occupies a space outside of white Australia. And he coins the term ‘Sovereignmentality’ to describe the “utopian literary-conceptual sovereignty” that is asserted by these texts: “a sense of connection to and responsibility to country, regardless of juridical attachments to it” (269).

The topicality of Geoff Rodoreda’s analysis is evident, not least, from a range of increasingly determined assertions of Indigenous sovereignty that have been made after he submitted his thesis in 2016. Alexis Wright, for instance, award-winning writer of the Waanyi Nation and one of the writers whom Geoff discusses in depth, has responded to this year’s Australia Day celebrations on 26 April with the following comment: “One day! What for? That’s nothing in the scheme of time that my mob been sitting here, looking after all this traditionally interwoven law country, keeping it strong, every day. [...] That’s real sovereignty kind of thinking.

True ownership. Comes with responsibility. Caring. Respect." (*The Guardian*, 26 April 2018). There are many other recent declarations of Sovereignmentality one could name: last year's "Uluru Statement from the Heart", for instance, or the Stolenwealth Games protests of the past weeks with their banners asserting "Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land."

Let us congratulate Geoff Rodoreda wholeheartedly for this achievement. Befitting our conference's preoccupation with the role of nationalism in the colonial past, as well as the postcolonial and neo-colonial present, his thesis offers insights into the Australian context. Here, a white settler nationalism is predicated on an amnesia of colonial violence but also faced with increasingly determined assertions of ongoing Indigenous sovereignty: "Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land."

**Susanne Mühleisen, Frank Schulze-Engler, Anja Schwarz**

## Call: GAPS Graduate Award 2019

### **Purpose of the Graduate Award:**

Each year, the Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien/ Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies (GAPS, formerly ASNEL) confers the GAPS Graduate Award for young academics. The aim is to honor outstanding theses (undergraduate and master's theses as well as state examination theses) on Anglophone postcolonial literatures and cultures as well as on the varieties of English submitted to universities and colleges in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Theses that were submitted outside of these countries are eligible for consideration if written by a student member of GAPS. The award winners are chosen by a three-person jury composed of university instructors. The Graduate Award for young academics was first conferred in 2008.

### **Who can nominate candidates?**

Thesis advisors who are GAPS members are entitled to nominate candidates. Eligible for proposal for the Graduate Award to be conferred for 2019 are works submitted in connection with examination procedures that were completed between January 1, 2018, and January 1, 2019. The deadline for submission is January 15, 2019.

### **How does the nomination process work?**

Nominations are to be sent to the GAPS Board of Directors, which then forwards them to the jury. For its work, the jury requires the examination thesis and report both in electronic form (CD or email attachment) and as a hard copy. Please send nominations to:

### **Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien**

**Attn: Prof. Dr. Annika McPherson**

**New English Literatures and Cultures**

**Universität Augsburg**

**Universitätsstr. 10**

**D-86159 Augsburg, Germany**

**annika.mcpherson@philhist.uni-augsburg.de**

### **What is the award's endowment, and where is it presented?**

The GAPS Graduate Award is endowed as follows:

€ 500 prize

Payment of travel expenses (second-class train travel) and one night's hotel accommodation for attending the award presentation at the GAPS annual conference as well as the fees for the conference

Free GAPS membership (including yearbook) for two years

Payment of conference fees by GAPS for two additional GAPS annual conferences  
Opportunity to publish the thesis on the GAPS website

In addition to the Graduate Award, two **recognition awards** are conferred. These are endowed as follows:

€ 50 book voucher

Payment of travel expenses (second-class train travel) and one night's hotel accommodation for attending the award presentation at the GAPS annual conference as well as the fees for the conference

Free GAPS membership (including yearbook) for two years

Payment of conference fees by GAPS for one additional GAPS annual conference

The GAPS Graduate Award and the two recognition awards will be presented in connection with the GAPS annual conference which, in 2019, will take place in Bremen.



## Joint Annual Conference of GAPS and IACPL

30 May-2 June 2019, University of Bremen

### Organisers:

Prof. Dr. Kerstin Knopf (GAPS, INPUTS<sup>1</sup>, WoC<sup>2</sup>, U Bremen)

Prof. Dr. Ingo Warnke (IACPL, CULCC<sup>3</sup>, WoC, U Bremen)

Prof. Dr. Anna-Katharina Hornidge (ZMT<sup>4</sup>, WoC, FMS<sup>5</sup>, U Bremen)

Prof. Dr. Michi Knecht (IFEK<sup>6</sup>, WoC, U Bremen)

Prof. Dr. Thomas Stolz (IACPL, CULCC, U Bremen)

### Postcolonial Oceans – Contradictions and Heterogeneities in the Epistemes of Salt Water

Postcolonial studies have a vested interest in embodied and discursive, social and political, historical and ecological dimensions of oceans. They foreground histories of colonization, imperial wars, the dispossession of territories, enslavement of people, and circulation of goods and ideas, in their entanglements with contemporary postcolonial societies, substantially shaping decolonial knowledge production, postcolonial literatures and academic discourses until today. In his interview on the third space, Homi Bhabha (1990) has pinpointed the inherent contradiction in the genesis of Western modernity: the progressive development of Western societies, individuals and thought traditions according to ideas and values that were monumentalized as the “Enlightenment” on the one hand, and the history of the West as despotic power pursuing various forms of colonial aggression and possession, on the other. Walter Mignolo (2000) and Paul Gilroy (1993) have likewise defined histories of colonization and enslavement as Western modernity’s well-concealed darker side. Studies of oceans and coasts have generated a variety of heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory academic and public discourses from a range of different disciplinary perspectives, including postcolonial studies, the sociology of knowledge, anthropology, literary studies, linguistics and social studies of science and technology. A more systematic perspective on the relations between colonialism, postcolonialism, oceans and lands, rejecting and/or complementing one-sided terrestrial perspectives, emerged only gradually. Rupert Emerson, for instance, defines colonialism as “imposition of white rule on alien peoples inhabiting lands separated by salt water” (1969, 3), understanding salt water – in line with widespread Western ideas of seas and oceans – as *separating* lands, cultures, people and ideas. In contrast, Gísli Pálsson (1991, xvii) argues that different and isolated worlds were connected by colonial sea voyages into a “global but polarized network of power-relations”. Epeli Hau’ofa (1994; 2008),

<sup>1</sup> Institute for postcolonial and transcultural studies

<sup>2</sup> Research network “Worlds of Contradiction”

<sup>3</sup> Former Creative Unit “Koloniallinguistik – Language in Colonial Contexts”

<sup>4</sup> Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research

<sup>5</sup> Research network “Fiction Meets Science”

<sup>6</sup> Department of anthropology and cultural research

working from a perspective grown in a marine epistemology, understands diverse Pacific islands, cultures and environments as a network, not separated but *linked* by the ocean – a “sea of islands”. Extending this idea, Édouard Glissant’s (1997) “archipelagic thinking” shifts understanding the entire world as a connected archipelago, an epistemic shift that is a counterpoint to insular thinking and allows registering the heterogeneities and myriad entanglements and creolization processes in our globalizing world. Early anthropology saw the sea as “atheoretical”, while it became an explicit category of study in environmental history (Gillis 2004, 2011; Bolster 2012; Kehrt/Torma 2014), in geography (Steinberg 2001; Peters 2014, 2015) and maritime anthropology (Astuti 1995; Helmreich 2011). In the construed nature/culture divide, water appears as natural form and “uncontainable flux” as opposed to culture imagined as “land-based idiom”, or it is perceived as materiality to channel (nature) as opposed to being a medium of pleasure, sustenance, travel and disaster (culture) (Helmreich 2011). The nature/culture divide implicates water as one domain “open to control and colonization by the other” (Strathern 1980). Critical maritime history grappled with the opposition between a fully historicized land vs. a supposedly atemporal, “ahistorical” sea that is “outside and beyond history” and researches oceans as polymorphous and transnational contact zones (Klein/Mackenthun, eds. 2004). Indigenous seascape epistemologies are often approaches “to knowing through a visual, spiritual, intellectual, and embodied literacy of the *‘āina* (land) and *kai* (sea)”, explicitly stressing the nexus between sea and land, and knowing the ocean, wind, and land as interconnected system (Ingersoll 2016). Colonial exploration, colonization and (forced) migration via oceans have created cultural, linguistic and epistemic contact zones where transcultural processes, creole and pidgin languages, and pluriversal knowledges and narratives emerged, however implicated in a hierarchical power matrix (Pratt 1992; Warnke/Stolz/Schmidt-Brücken 2016). The sea prominently features in colonial literatures as both facilitating sea voyages and sustaining colonial myth-making (e.g. Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe), whereas in postcolonial literatures it often appears as lethal force enabling colonization and enslavement (e.g. Fred D’Aguiar, George Lamming) or life-giving force and as life itself, integrating all elements and beings (e.g. Eden Robinson, Patricia Grace, Linda Hogan, Alexis Wright). Contradictory and heterogeneous views and ideas of the ocean are commonplace, while knowledge production on and with oceans and saltwater appear to be under-researched through multidisciplinary scholarship. We want to extend the study of oceans and salt water as “theory machine”, an “object that stimulates theoretical formulation” (Galison 2003), and research saltwater knowledge systems, knowledge production and narratives from various epistemological, geographical, cultural and disciplinary perspectives. We are particularly interested in:

- imaginaries of the seas and oceans in various discourse formations as well as colonial, postcolonial and decolonial genealogies of ocean, coastal and marine spaces;
- contradictory and heterogeneous concepts of marine spaces; likewise pluriversal ocean and coast-related epistemologies;
- entangled colonial histories of oceans with regard to the Black, Red and White Atlantic, the Black Pacific, and early non-Western cross-ocean contacts; the circulation of ideas and goods and their role in shaping ocean-related epistemes;
- salt water spheres as zones of epistemic and cultural contact, neo- and postcolonial communicative practices and linguistic smoothness;
- linguistic overlaps and language contact, the universalist spread of colonial languages and their status in contact zones, the threat of local languages;
- the role of European Atlantic port cities (e.g. Bremen, London, Rotterdam, Antwerp) in colonial histories of oceans and the role of port cities outside Europe (e.g. Dakar, Cape Town, Dubai City, Hong Kong) in world trade and global relations, incl. changing discourses constituting such port cities;

- the ship as vessel enabling and as metaphor for colonization, enslavement, migration, global trade, scientific exploration and various forms of harvesting marine and ocean floor resources;
- ecological and resource-related aspects of oceans such as rising sea levels, hurricanes, earthquakes, overfishing, resource extraction, and ocean pollution;
- symbolic oceans in colonial literary and non-literary texts and postcolonial constructions of oceans and salt water epistemologies in literature, theatre, film, electronic and other media.

### Keynote Speakers:

Anne Collett (U Wollongong)  
Robbie Shilliam (Johns Hopkins U)  
Anne Storch (U Cologne)

Karin Amimoto Ingersoll (U Hawai'i)  
Bill Ashcroft (UNSW Sydney)  
Nicholas Faraclas (U Puerto Rico)

Please send abstracts outlining your theoretical approach, subject of study and argument (max 400 words) and short bios (max 150 words) to [woc@uni-bremen.de](mailto:woc@uni-bremen.de) by **31 Oct 2018**.



## Conference Reports



### “Nationalism and the Postcolonial” GAPS Annual Conference (May 9-12, 2018, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany)

#### Conference Report

Annika Macpherson’s opening remarks highlighted the ambiguities of nationalism – a recurrent theme over the coming days – and the particular, uneasy relationship of postcolonial studies to nationalism: the postcolonial as a “hostage of nationalism,” in the words of Thomas King. Rainer Emig drew our attention to the gulf between the desires of many self-identified transnational postcolonial scholars for the era of nationalism to be over and the current resurgence of nationalisms around the world, calling for interdisciplinary scholarship across culture and politics to ask, who is included and excluded by these nationalisms? What manifestations do the new nationalisms produce?

The diversity of the keynote lectures gave a good indication of the topics which would dominate the conference. Bruce Berman’s talk on “Ethnic Nationalism and the Global Crises of Capitalist Modernity” emphasized the complexity of pre-colonial African societies, marked by extensive mobility and cultural interaction and often significantly stratified, as well as the modernity of African ethnicities in recent decades, grounded in the political economy of colonial and post-colonial states. While Berman followed Benedict Anderson in arguing that African ethnicities came into existence in print, he also pointed to numerous other influential factors shaping African ethnicities, including arguments over land tenure, whether land could be bought and sold, labour conditions, wages, differentiation of wealth and gender, especially when women began to participate in market economies and thus gained financial independence. These factors point to the importance of internal class divisions, so that – contra the traditional Marxist claim that Africans have tribe *or* class – analyses of African societies and African nationalism must understand African modernity as part of global experiences and Africans as being shaped by both ethnicity *and* class.

On the evening of the first day, Laura Chrisman spoke on “‘That place of bubbling trepidation’: Reflections on Nations and the Transnational Turn”. She argued that we are currently witnessing a new generation of African writers take up the intellectual self-interrogation of nationalism demanded by Fanon. These writers are often termed Afropolitans, but most are not hostile to national identity; they show a “compassionate curiosity” towards nationalism and offer nuanced reflections on, for example, the interlocking forces of gender, nationalism and race

in contemporary African societies or consider the uneven global effects of US imperialism on postcolonial countries. Chrisman then offered a close reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) to illustrate some of these points. Chrisman sees the novel, which traces Zimbabwe's loss of sovereignty over three generations, as offering a "qualified nationalism" that drives its critique of the neoliberal world order. The novel offers strong parallels with the work of Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah, especially *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). While for Achebe, colonialism succeeded due to a confluence of Western invasion and local tensions, for Bulawayo, it is crucial to understand the confluence of e.g. IMF and World Bank policies with Mugabe's implementation of those policies. Bulawayo's vision of the nation which might emerge from this devastated land has echoes of Fanon, but is firmly anchored in the *body* of the people, understood not as a myth of origin but "bluntly corporeal". Again echoing Fanon's claim in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives", Bulawayo's vision of the nation can also encompass diasporic communities and partnerships between various Africans and African Americans in the text. Chrisman concluded by highlighting the narrative structure of the novel, in which vignette chapters create a fictional totality, suggesting that the gradually revealed connections between the various vignettes demand other models of reading – and in consequence create other models of nation – than the realist novels analysed by Benedict Anderson. Chrisman's keynote thus offered an inspiring model for literary scholars to generate nuanced readings of the complex interplay of nationalism, cosmopolitanism and diaspora in recent African and African diasporic fiction.

The second day began with Nikita Sud's keynote, "Indian Nationalisms as Encountering and Othering". Sud reminded us of the intertwined histories of India's two main nationalist traditions: the supposedly inclusive, secular 'Congress' nationalism which dominated after independence, which promised unity in diversity and focused on economic development, and the exclusive Hindutva nationalism of the RSS and BJP, instead focused on a form of Hindu revivalism which claims to recover traditions lost in the colonial encounter. In understanding contemporary Indian nationalisms, it is important first to acknowledge that despite its claims, Congress nationalism also had its marginalized others; they were and are excluded from this so-called inclusive nationalism and are now seeking alternatives. Secondly, we should aim to understand the affective charge offered by exclusive nationalisms and think about how a more inclusive nationalism can appeal to those attracted by the frisson of encountering and othering that exclusive nationalism generates.

These themes – theorizing nationalism, new literary visions of the nation, and Indian nationalisms – were taken up in numerous panels over the conference days. Frank Schulze-Engler's paper pointed to an alignment – certain to provoke discomfort for postcolonial scholars – between some radical right-wing groups, including the Identitarian movement, and some versions of postcolonial studies, such as between the critique of globalization in which a hard right thinker like Martin Lichtmesz embeds his call for racist nationalism in postcolonial claims and

calls for resistance to capitalist globalization. Rather than denying such an alignment, or closing our eyes to examples of authoritarian regimes bolstered by anti-colonial nationalism, Schulze-Engler argued that we should abandon any nostalgia for a supposed golden age when anti-colonial nationalisms were clearly 'good', and instead look to the history of anglophone literatures which have long combated claims of a "single identity" (Amartya Sen) or the "danger of a single story" (Adichie) with their visions of multiple identities and cultures.

In the first of two panels on nationalism in contemporary India, Sayan Dey and Shameer Ta offered case studies of the emergence and effects of nationalism on small communities. Dey's talk showed how the colonial history of Anglo-Indians as supposed "faithful spokespersons" for colonial rule and the numerous advantages they enjoyed over 'natives' continues to reverberate today. He suggested that the controversial term 'reverse racism' could be useful here to understand how Anglo-Indians are viewed as a social and cultural threat by a significant section of the population of Kolkata – and thus face significant discrimination in the school system and workplace – because they are not prepared to give up their accent, cuisine or dress in order to assimilate with the dominant culture, as Indian post-colonial nationalism generally demands, and because, in the eyes of many Indians, Anglo-Indians continue to observe the practices of the former colonizers. Shameer Ta's paper on "Print-capitalism and Colonial Governmentality: Constructing Community consciousness among Mappilas of Malabar" examined how, in line with Benedict Anderson's work, print capitalism and other technologies of the colonial state, including the census, generated a sense of community among the sometimes geographically separated Mappilas of Malabar, a Muslim community in Kerala, during the colonial era.

In the session on "Nationalism and Nostalgia", three papers examined the workings of nostalgia and its connection to colonialism in quite different types of literary texts. Manasi Gopalakrishnan spoke on "Nostalgia for the Empire? British Nationalism in the Spatial Representation of Colonial India in Contemporary Romantic Novels". Gopalakrishnan's project concerns contemporary romance novels being written in both English and German today, with striking similarities to the colonial romance novels of the nineteenth century, like Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* which imagined a place for British women in empire building. She aims to show how colonial agency plays out in these novels and to see how colonial territorial domination is justified. Ralf Haekel's paper, "Nationalism and the Photographic Gaze: Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*" examined the interesting form that nostalgia takes in Cole's work, which critically reflects on the particular gaze of its protagonist – that of the native conditioned by colonial expectations and norms – and the ambiguous form of nationalism that is thereby created. Lukas Lammers then spoke on "Nationalism, Postcolonialism, and the Historical Novel National Nostalgia in Jane Gardam's *Old Filth* Trilogy". He argued that Gardam, dubbed the "laureate of [the British Empire's] demise" by Elizabeth Lowry in the *Times Literary Supplement*, offers a vision of a moderate empire, not perfect, but a part of British heritage, in which the withdrawal from empire is seen as a victory, a homecoming. The trilogy offers its readers a chance

to reflect on the loss of empire and the crimes of empire, but from a safe distance, insulated in particular from those crimes. Instead of revealing the traumas caused by colonization, the novels posit British colonists as the victims of empire, and it is this sense of victimhood that enables the trilogy's nostalgia for the last decades of the British Empire, demonstrating once again the apparent difficulty of curing Britain's 'post-imperial melancholia'.

Unfortunately I myself was sick on the last day and could not attend. The following comes from my colleague Florian Schybilski: "Men wanted women with some education to show they had embraced modernity" is one of the ways British-born and Nigerian-educated playwright Oladipo Agboluaje framed perspectives on female education in Nigeria in his talk on Saturday. Cancelling out the actual educated person, female education figures as a marker of supposed male (not female) modernity and social prestige. It features as a commodity, a special accessory worth the extra cost and upkeep in a wife. The story Agboluaje decided to tell with the help of the audience working as a chorus he prompted to finish his sentences, however, presents a wholly different, female, perspective on education. The story follows a young Nigerian girl whose aspirations are thwarted when, as the result of an altercation with her teacher, her parents decide to discontinue her education. The resolve that she, too, should have a proper education is so strong that she eventually takes refuge with her older sister and her brother-in-law who wholeheartedly support her decision. This provides a strong counterpoint to education as a property that makes women marriageable and that tolerance thereof makes husbands 'modern'. Quite to the contrary, education does not only feature as a *tool of* but also *reason for* emancipation – an emancipation that would be impossible to harness within the confines of domesticity or existence as a trophy.

**Gigi Adair with Florian Schybilski (Potsdam)**

## Conference Report

Nationalisms, while seemingly omnipresent, are varied, complex and specific. With the arguably renewed widespread rise of nationalisms becoming ever more apparent, they also prove to be persistent, which is why the decision to discuss the topic under the auspices of the Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies in Mainz in 2018 was no doubt a timely one. As if to underline this, "Nationalism and the Postcolonial" attracted participants based on six continents.<sup>7</sup> This makes perfect sense given the operating principle of colonialism but should be gratefully mentioned here nevertheless. The conference's geographic range was at least as impressive as that of its topics. Talks approached nationalisms from a range of

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<sup>7</sup> Please forgive me if I have overlooked anyone from Antarctica. I should add that I consider South America covered purely because Trinidad is much closer to Venezuela than to Tobago, as Arhea Marshall informed us.

different angles, including linguistics, political science, sociology, anthropology, activism, cultural studies, literary studies, theatre, and music, providing disciplinary expertise at the same time as, to quote keynote speaker Nikita Sud, being “undisciplined” in a very productive way. Let me begin with the obligatory warning-cum-apology that the present report cannot pretend to cover the conference in its entirety. What follows is a series of observations on the talks I attended, loosely structured by the idea put forward by Rose Marie Beck that nationalisms, in the vein of Enlightenment scientific principles, seek to produce bounded objects.

This was discussed on the panel “The Languages of Nationalism”. According to Rose Marie Beck nationalism, a concept which arose out of Enlightenment thinking, still adhered to Enlightenment principles in its drive to produce bounded objects. This goes for concepts of languages as well as for territories, cultures, and communities. Michael Westphal talked about a monolingual bias in qualitative linguistic research into African languages which ties in neatly with this notion of nationalist boundaries, more so than academic research should. However, analyses of language use show much more flexibility in strategies as well as attitudes towards codeswitching and entirely new formations, as Natascha Bing’s research on what she terms Vi-Swahili indicates, defying nationalist categorisations of Kenyan languages. Practice thus stands in stark contrast to nationalist rhetoric.

Such contradictions are, of course, the mark of artificially bounded objects and appeared frequently throughout the conference. In fact, nationalisms exhibit a capacity for tolerating or rather ignoring ambiguities and contradictions which borders on the absurd. Perhaps Nikita Sud presented the most striking and indeed alarming examples of this in her keynote lecture “Indian Nationalisms as Encountering and Othering”: Prime Minister Narendra Modi sees Ganesh as proof of plastic surgery, and a striking similarity between an ancient face painting of a few curved lines on the forehead and the universally employed WiFi symbol supposedly show that these things were already around in ancient India. Such claims to originality, conveniently lending greatness to an ancient nation on contemporary grounds, exist next to the employment of Hitler and the Third Reich as a model for a purely Hindu India.

Such incongruities also show up in gender discourses and practices where nationalisms are played out. On the panel “Gender and Nationalism”, Lavanya Shanbhogue discussed how Hindu nationalism instrumentalises women, making them the gatekeepers to a ‘pure’ Hindu society and turning them into vulnerable targets through holding them accountable for their chastity. The elevation and adoration of Mother India and her metonymical representatives does not extend to the hate campaigns and rape punishments women suffer in the name of Hindu nationalism. Pavan Malreddy presented two divergent and gendered national narratives of Burma, a country ostensibly led by a woman, which raised the question whether there can actually be a subaltern national narrative that does not adhere to masculine forms of narration and modes of publication.

The fault lines of ideologies aside, nationalisms may actually appear sensible when they serve specific political purposes. In conflict zones, where territorial belonging is contested, a nation state with all its including and excluding bounda-



ries still seems to be the way forward, providing recognition and agency on the world stage, as Idreas Khandy, who discussed nationalism and pop culture in Kashmir, suggested in the final paper of the conference. The issue is obviously a bigger, a global, a world-systemic one. Bruce Berman's keynote lecture, which opened the conference, addressed this very topic: land and ownership. African moral economies in which land was distributed based on merit were fundamentally changed by colonial intervention and the buying of land with money. Territorial boundaries and hierarchies were quite clear before that, but a capitalist market economy changed the way land was valued and who decided over its distribution, creating new and different stratifications and resulting in conflicts based on claims to territory, thus creating nationalist enterprises. Accordingly, as Berman spelled out, nationalism came to the fore whenever changes in economies, like the recent financial crisis, caused struggles over wealth, jeopardising the clear-cut boundaries a stable economic order had provided before.

While there is a definite connection between the capitalist world system and the omnipresence of nationalisms, it is important to note that the boundaries themselves and the processes by which they are renegotiated are quite varied. Interestingly, Trinbagonian narratives of nationhood, according to Arhea Marshall, view Britain as home, not the islands the country consists of. The arguably randomly connected Trinidad and Tobago could be seen to extend the spatial boundaries beyond the territory of the nation state. And as Laura Chrisman showed in her keynote lecture, it is in transgressive practices, in overstepping boundaries, that the characters in *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi take possession of their country, while the novel's rejection of a realist narrative allows new concepts of nationhood to emerge. The result is a synaesthetically experienced world that emphasises integration. Aesthetically, home as belonging without locking in or out is thinkable in the latter example, while in the former example a reconciliation with the coloniser without a historic grudge is achieved. It should, however, be noted that these two examples do not foreground nation but deal with home and country, two concepts that play major but at times quite varied roles in nationalisms. And while these two examples stress a renegotiation of boundaries, the boundaries themselves seem to remain, even if they adhere to different parameters.

In each case, the creation of bounded objects seems to go hand in hand with notions of belonging, either as being bound to something or possessing something. That thought fits in nicely with the idea that a capitalist world economy, which relies on the creation of possessions in order to exchange and accumulate them, is also closely connected to the rise and fall of nationalisms. What will have become clear from the above observations is that nationalisms, even if all of them share a postcolonial context and function on the same Enlightenment and capitalist principles, differ greatly in their claims and aims, their forms, and the reactions they cause. Rainer Emig's provocatively generalising statement in the opening address to the conference that nationalisms were applauded in postcolonial nations while in Europe and the West they were generally denounced will have triggered the same reaction: close observation of political, social, economic and historical con-

texts is key when dealing with cultural products, which underpins the need to approach them with care and expertise from a variety of disciplines and emphasises the necessity of continued widespread exchange.

**Johanna Marquardt (Mainz)**

## Conference Report

This year's Annual Conference of GAPS "Nationalism and the Postcolonial" took place from May 9-12 in the picturesque city of Mainz. In their Call for Papers, the 2018 organizing team led by Rainer Emig (Gutenberg University, Mainz) argue that nationalism is an "ambivalent phenomenon" which, by some intellectual positions, was considered a relic of a modernity that has been replaced by the 'open minds' and permeable borders of liberal post-nationalism. In the aftermath of what is deemed 'traditional colonialism', nationalism was made out to be 'a thing of the past' and an instrument of colonial and imperialist oppression. Yet, and as the Call further outlines, nationalism has played a key role in identity politics in supposedly postcolonial countries. The conference organizers thus direct our attention to the conundrum that an engagement with the recent surge of nationalist discourses produces: On the one hand, nationalism lends expression to a misguided essentialism that seems to have lost its right to exist to the untamed, yet liberating forces of globalization. On the other hand, nations are symbolic representations of constructing (national) identities which enable a differentiation from the colonizer. National formations, in these contexts, are considered as achievements, as tangible results of liberation, and indicative of a change in power paradigms.

This tension was well-reflected in presentations given at the 2018 GAPS conference. The panels "Celebrating the Nation", "Between Pleasure and Pain: Interrogating the Nation through Aesthetics" and "Nationalism and Nostalgia" paid tribute to the affective and uniting force that national unity promises, but is constantly unable to deliver. Laura Chrisman (University of Washington) aptly represented this state of (un)fulfillment in her keynote "'That place of Bubbling Trepidation': Reflections on the Nation and the Transnational Turn": a national fabric is ambiguous, active, and by default dependent on and interconnected with other national frames, yet lives off the fiction of homogeneity and insularity. The nation points its gaze inwards to create a sense of cohesion and continuity, whilst it also requires others to construct and affirm itself. The panels titled "Theorizing Nationalism" and "Teaching the Nation", for example, grappled with the question of how to approach this concept that is both caught in and reliant on "processes of discursive marking" of "similarity and difference", as Stuart Hall elaborately argues (128). A nation requires its counterpart, its "symbolic other" which defines its "constitutive outside" (Hall, 128).

Yet, as this conference has shown, this symbolic other is no longer confined to being derived from colonial identity-political constellations. 'Postcolonial' national

identities are no longer grid-locked in the colonizer-colonizer scheme that has left its mark on national discourses after independence, as the organizers rightfully argue, and have moved way beyond it. In her keynote, Nikita Sud (University of Oxford) directed our attention to the many shifts and rifts in post-independence Indian nationalism. Sud outlined that India's "inclusive nationalism" of the 1980s was characterized by the catchwords 'difference and unity', and seemingly managed to incorporate a wide range of differences under what Ernest Gellner has dubbed a "political roof", the Indian nation. Development was the rallying point which enabled this form of inclusive nationalism. Today's India under the Modi government has made Hindu nationalism India's primary framework of imagining national identity, and has sparked Hindu supremacy discourses. Encounter has been replaced by the rhetoric of exclusion, but Indian nationalism is an example of how national identities are *not* negotiated in relation to (post)colonialism(s) anymore.

This conference also represented perspectives on nationalisms which traditionally play a marginalized role in negotiating national narratives: The panel "Indigenous Nationalism" featured papers which engaged with modes of indigenous nationalisms and pursued the question of where indigenous peoples (are) position(ed) (themselves) in the overarching national frames. Under the headline "Nationals no More: Refugees and Exile", scholars showed how contemporary forced migrations leave their imprint on traditional national discourses. As the papers and discussions in the context of this year's annual conference have shown, 21<sup>st</sup> century nationalisms are characterized through imploding cultural confinements as well as transnational and transcultural entanglements.

GAPS 2018 marked a timely intervention into the discourses surrounding a nowadays ubiquitous ideology - nationalism - and gave us insights into how the nation is called upon, used and abused in varying contexts, and for different identity-political purposes. What might sound a truism has actually shed a prominent light on what the humanities can contribute to the discussion: Nations and nationalisms are first and foremost imaginary and imagined frameworks which are brought into being, disseminated and (de)constructed through cultural productions and encounters. The nation cannot be reduced to its capitalist provenance or industrial origins, and it is most certainly not a 'thing of the past'. Nationalism is very much alive and kicking. What I take away from this conference is the acknowledgment that contemporary nationalisms in postcolonial contexts have moved far beyond the colonizer-colonized paradigm. Yet, it is also 'our disciplines' that remain somehow confined to the colonial binary, it may seem. In the discussions that I witnessed, formative frameworks of how we as scholars approach and theorize national imaginations were called into question, particularly with regard to a persistence of heteronormativity and the dominant legacy of imperialism. It can and should be the task of organizations such as GAPS to research and make visible the links, entanglements and engagements between - for the lack of a better terminology - formerly colonized countries, and an independence of colonial power relations.

Finally, I would like to cordially thank the organizers for bringing together this wide range of papers, topics and positions in this intriguing and thought-provoking conference. The venue, Erbacher Hof, took excellent care of us conference guests and provided more than what was necessary to make the conference a success. The conference lunch room in particular proved to be 'the place to be' if one wanted to continue the substantial discussions that the papers evoked. The 'Under Construction' sections of the conference offered a glimpse at the futures of the field and possibly the organization. The reading by Oladipo Agboluaje, the walking tour of Mainz and the conference dinner were most welcome items on the already rich program.

I am very much looking forward to attending GAPS 2019 in Bremen.

**Hanna Teichler (Frankfurt)**

## Conference Report

At a time when far-right nationalism is becoming a matter of concern in the West, the theme 'Nationalism and the Postcolonial' seemed at first glance as an odd choice for convening the 2018 international conference of the Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien (GAPS). Not only did the pairing of nationalism and postcolonial immediately suggest a link between the postcolonial and nationalism; it seemed to place a focus on the postcolonial world and shift attention from resurgent nationalism in the West, a hemisphere that is ostensibly not part of the postcolonial world.

However, on reading the Call for Papers for the conference, the organizers and hosts at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz had been careful to draw attention to the ambivalence of the ideology of nationalism, noting how it functions differently in different contexts and can be put to different uses. Hence, the Call recognized that nationalism, at one point considered outmoded in the West and a relic of the emergence of the modern nation-state, was once again reasserting itself following a shift in global geopolitics that has seen countries such as Britain and the United States search for identity and national relevance in an increasingly globalising world. The above resurgence notwithstanding, the Call also pointed out how nationalism has been instrumental in decolonial processes in formerly colonised countries of the Global South; processes which, I hasten to add, have contributed to the global shifts whose results are now visible in the collapsing of national borders and the waning power of former empires such as the British.

The concerns raised in the CfP reverberated in the three keynotes and in most of the papers presented at the conference. Interdisciplinary in its scope and with speakers drawn from universities from different parts of the world, the conference had close to 50 paper presentations categorised in thematic panels. For example, the panel on "Theorizing Nationalism" featuring speakers Frank Schulze-Engler (Frankfurt), Ryszard W. Wolny (Opole), and Przemyslaw Górecki (Poznan) spoke

directly to the concerns raised in the Call, tackling questions of the meanings, dangers, and usefulness of nationalism as well as focusing on identities that are excluded from national discourse.

Some of the issues raised in the “Theorizing Nationalism” panel were also picked up by Nikita Sud (Oxford) in her keynote titled “Indian Nationalisms as Encountering and Othering”. While her focus was on India, Sud warned against conceptualizing nationalism as singular arguing that nationalisms exist in the plural thereby negating any ideas of a one type of nationalism. If Sud’s keynote focused on India, Bruce Berman’s keynote located in the field of Anthropology and titled “Ethnic Nationalism and the Global Crises of Capitalist Modernity,” focused on African contexts and the ways in which ethnicity intersects with nationalism. The exploration of the intersections of ethnicity and nationalism resurfaced in a paper delivered by two scholars from Mainz, Marie-Christin Gabriel and Konstanze N’Guessan, titled “Nationalist Ritual or Global Model? Independence Day Celebrations in West Africa.” The panel on “The Language(s) of Nationalism” featuring research from linguists Michael Westphal (Münster), Rose Marie Beck (Leipzig) and Natascha Bing (Leipzig) also engaged with questions of ethnicity vis-à-vis the nation while assessing the ideologies that inform national language choices especially in the context of Kenya.

Interdisciplinarity at the conference did not only manifest in the different fields represented at the conference, from anthropology to literary and cultural studies, linguistics and development studies, but also manifested in the different artistic genres that formed researchers’ objects of study. From Grime music videos to video games, YouTube clips, novels, and plays: the varied genres showed that the nation is ubiquitous as an object of artistic representation.

While this conference report only gives snippets of what occurred at the conference and reconstructs it through personal impressions largely ignorant of the behind-the-scenes that went into conference organization, the 2018 GAPS conference was all in all timely. The questions that the conference raised speak to contemporary times when ideas of how to make sense of nationalism and to delineate what constitutes the postcolonial take centre stage.

The conference was to a certain degree inclusive in the ways it blended the work of senior and junior scholars. The inclusion of two under construction panels gave an opportunity to young scholars to present their research projects and receive audience feedback. One can, however, also question the limits of this inclusivity when one considers the decision to hold the GAPS annual general meeting solely in German when the whole conference had been conducted in English. This risks inadvertently sending out a signal, especially to aspiring members who might have travelled from elsewhere to attend the conference, that GAPS membership remains confined to the boundaries of German speaking countries. In an epoch when, in Goethe’s words, “world literature is at hand” it would be unfortunate to send out such a signal.

**Deborah Nyangulu (Münster)**



**“Moving Centers and Travelling Cultures”  
Sixth Postgraduate Forum *Postcolonial Narrations*,  
Goethe University Frankfurt, October 10-12, 2018**

**Conference Report**

During this year’s graduate forum “Postcolonial Narrations”, twenty young aspiring scholars gathered at Goethe-University Frankfurt. The theme of the sixth annual conference, “Moving Centers, Travelling Cultures”, promised to conjure up current academic debates located at the intersections of anglophone literary and cultural studies as well as memory and media studies. As the Call for Papers already indicated, the organizers, Hanna Teichler, Magdalena Pfalzgraf, and Silvia Anastasijevic, were especially interested in exploring how “contemporary forms of movement and their representations in the domains of art, literature, and media transform received notions of nation and culture”. The diverse panels, among others “Minorities in Movement and Displacement”, “Challenging Migration”, and “Shifting Axes in a Globalized World”, attested to and embraced various forms of movement across spaces in an ever-globalizing world. In so doing, the forum challenged predominant notions of migration from East to West, and/or from South to North, while interrogating the so-called ‘Global South’ as a trans-cultural space with its own gravitational pull. The presentation topics were as wide-ranging as im/mobilities in Maori literature, African and South Asian entanglements in Suriname, spatial representations in British grime culture, materialities of travel, and shifts towards Eurasia as a global centre. It was especially well received that the forum opened up to international scholars, including both experienced keynote speakers and PhD candidates. Adhering to the idea that “Postcolonial Narrations” should also provide research training and career coaching, the forum also featured a roundtable discussion with the two keynote speakers Delphine Munos and Alex Tickell, during which both of them shared their most valuable career advice with the young scholars.

“We need to talk about Camus”, Dr. Delphine Munos (Liège/Goethe-University Frankfurt) declared in the title of her poignant keynote that analyzed intertextuality beyond postcolonial narration in Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation*. In her talk, Munos excavated how Algerian writer Daoud gives voice to the silenced character of Mersault in Camus’s classic *L’Étranger* and spins intertextual entanglements between the two works that invite readers to evaluate the category ‘postcolonial’ anew. It was especially the interactive format Munos had chosen that created a collaborative and stimulating atmosphere among the participants.

Munos invited the audience to critically reflect on two journalistic articles by Daoud, which they then compared to a text passage from his novel. Dr. Alex Tickell, Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the Open University, delivered a second thought-provoking keynote on “Infrastructure and the Global Novel: Arundhati Roy’s ‘Threatened History’ Fiction”. In his current research project, Tickell takes insights on infrastructures from research fields such as actor-network-theory and area studies to the literary text; he is interested in how South Asian texts – and in case of his talk Arundhati Roy’s recently published second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* – can be approached through underlying base structures. The novel, in Tickell’s reading, is not only set in New Delhi but presents itself to the reader *as* a city, encapsulating distinct infrastructural elements of said Indian metropolis. Tickell himself was not hesitant to ask the participants for peer feedback on his project, which was taken up gladly by the audience.

Many of the issues raised in Frankfurt will travel well into 2019, when the forum moves its center to Münster. Under the title “Postcolonial Quotation Marks: Terminologies – Taboos – Transgressions”, the forum will deliberately put vocabularies and theoretical concepts, such as ‘the postcolonial’, into question. Simultaneously, the conference title allows for young scholars to critically reflect on their own academic practices, in which they might be using quotation marks to shy away from using certain terms; to distance themselves from them; to indicate a stance they see as problematic; to deliberately question them. The seventh annual graduate conference will be hosted by Julian Wacker, who now takes over from Hanna as chair of the forum, Felipe Espinoza Garrido, and their organizing team.

**Julian Wacker (Münster)**

## Conference Report

The sixth meeting of the Postgraduate Forum *Postcolonial Narrations* took place on 10-12 October 2018 at Goethe University in Frankfurt. Its title read “Moving Centers and Travelling Cultures”, suggesting in its openness also a political urgency of rethinking various contemporary debates of global mobility, displacement, and migration. Indeed, the panels did not disappoint in their diverse arrangement; without being too eclectic, they travelled geographical, cultural, discursive, and theoretical distances.

After I had come across the call for papers on the notice-board of my home university, the only hurdle to be overcome was the application process during which technological complications with the conference’s email account required participants to re-apply – a piece of information that went unnoticed in Münster. From then on, however, the electronic and personal communication was very smooth and accommodating. The organising committee consisting of Hanna

Teichler, Magdalena Pfalzgraf, and Silvia Anastasijevic created an evenly balanced and stimulating programme which focused on interdisciplinarity in its approaches and internationality in the speakers' cultural backgrounds. Their well-planned panel organisation allowed for extensive dialogic exchanges both inside and across the individual panels. Examples ranged from discussions of concrete cultural phenomena such as crossings of the Bangladesh-Myanmar border on the one hand, to more overarching musings on terminology such as the postcolonial on the other.

In order to problematise forms of movement in migration, border crossings, displacement, and touristic modes of travelling, the conference invited contributions from diverse research areas including literary and cultural studies, sociology, and cultural anthropology. The talks interrogated travelling cultures not only through cultural narratives in the form of literature such as novels, comic books, and folktales, but extended to studies of media advertisements and art forms such as sculptures, music, and performance. This vibrant mixture was testimony to the social fabric of text in its different forms, notably in two cases: One contribution discussed the intersection of performance and text in Shailja Patel's work on South Asian transoceanic movement, which examined the different levels of the sari's materiality and suggested an alternative space of transoceanicity through its use on stage. Another talk focused on the interplay of literature and music in the study of grime culture regarding the potentials of the novelistic form to reconceptualise the use of silence and to destabilise notions of masculinity prevalent in the music genre. Other interesting interactions between papers included different takes on the transnational movement of memory, in that they analysed travel as self-discovery in private contexts as well as forms of memory citizenship in national contexts – both voluntary and involuntary, romanticised and realistically portrayed, optimistic and pessimistic in tone.

Another superb treat was the interactive format of Dr Delphine Munos's keynote that provided both theoretical input and hands-on textual work with several prompts of Kamel Daoud's writing, which actively engaged the audience. Based on problematising the intertextuality in Daoud's *The Mersault Investigation* in connection with Camus's works, Munos's talk complicated the term postcolonial in a French-Algerian context and invited the listeners to raise questions regarding the term's productivity and its function as serving the ends of particular political groups.

Additionally, Dr Alex Tickell's keynote stimulated new ways of conceptualising infrastructure as intimately connected to humans and their responses. In highlighting the material and relational dimensions of infrastructure as a kind of network, Tickell illustrated both infrastructural breakdowns as well as creative responses to failed infrastructure. As he moved from the Mumbai metro as a real-life example of the 'cost of infrastructure' involved in routine violence sanctified by the state, to literary examples of Arundhati Roy's fiction, he thus suggested ways in which infrastructure also operates in literature.

As an M.A. student, I found the Postgraduate Forum to be a remarkably open and collegial environment without any hierarchical structures. This cordial atmo-



sphere allowed for constructive feedback and discussions which were both informative and emotionally engaging. On that note, the forum's format of smaller and more intimate group dynamics succeeded in opening a platform that encourages young researchers to participate in academic dialogue. Its framework left room for social gatherings, especially through the joint trip to the Frankfurt Book Fair as another great opportunity for networking. Moreover, the round table discussion on professional futures provided inspiring insights into Munos's and Tickell's personal experiences in academia, its bureaucratic pitfalls, as well as its potentials. Without glossing over various hurdles, their optimistic and enthusiastic stance added to the overall very productive atmosphere.

**Alisa Preusser (Münster)**

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- Rond, K.: *Representing the African Diaspora: A Genealogy of Politically-Engaged, Feminist Writings by Diasporic Women from the Caribbean and West Africa (Nigeria) in America*. Dissertation. (Winnett)

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