

**“Re-Inventing the Postcolonial (in the) Metropolis”,
24th Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of
New Literatures in English (ASNEL/GNEL), Chemnitz
University of Technology, 9-11 May 2013**

As it is always the intention of the GNEL/ ASNEL conference to bring together well-established and young academics, teachers, students and authors, this year's conference was, with its over 60 speakers from at least 15 different nations, no exception. Academics from the fields of literature, cultural studies, sociology and urban studies came together to discuss the topic of the postcolonial metropolis. The 2013 conference was held in Chemnitz and bore the title “Re-inventing the Postcolonial (in the) Metropolis”. This topic was not only conveyed through numerous paper presentations but also through the venues of the conference. A vast number of presentations took place in the “Old Heating House” and the seminar rooms of the main building of Chemnitz University of Technology. However, all participants joined a wine reception and a reading with Amit Chaudhuri in DASTiez, the town library of Chemnitz, while the second keynote lecture by Prof. Dr. Rolf Goebel (University of Alabama, Huntsville) was held in the Gunzenhauser Museum. This variety of venues reflected the topic of the conference in a geographical sense.

The conference was opened by rector Prof. Dr. Arnold van Zyl, who shared his own experience with the notion of the postcolonial. Although he is not active in the field of literary or language studies, because he studied engineering, he made clear that the postcolonial affects everybody. His appearance then was followed by a welcoming speech by Prof. Dr. Cecile Sandten (convener of this year's GNEL/ ASNEL Conference and Head of the English Literature Department at Chemnitz University of Technology), who warmly welcomed all participants and briefly introduced the agenda of the three-day conference.

The first speaker on Thursday was Prof. AbdouMaliq Simone (Goldsmiths College, University of London), who gave his keynote lecture on “Black Beach: Just the City”. In his very dense and essayistic paper he not only uncovered the geographical challenges Black Beach – an area situated in the North of Jakarta – has to face, but also the diversity and urbanization processes, as well as movements taking place in this particular area.

Following the keynote lecture, several panels were offered, where interesting insights were shared with a wide range of scholars from all over the world. The panel “Reframing the Australian Metropolis”, chaired by Peter Mardsen, presented papers by four scholars who in their current works focus on the Australian Metropolis. Marijke Denger (University of Berne) concentrated on Michelle de Kretser's novel *The Lost Dog* (2007) in her work about the formation of identity in Melbourne. Sue Kossew (Monash University) talked about “Contested Spaces: Representation of Sydney in Recent Australian Literary and Cultural Texts”. She claims that Sydney “becomes a mobile postcolonial space of ‘transition’ (or even

translation)" and that these ideas are also used by Bill Ashcroft in his work on Singapore and Hong Kong. Kylie Crane and Anja Schwarz (University of Mainz and University of Potsdam) then took a closer look at "Broome, Western Australia. Cosmopolitan Confluences". Broome is a city not really considered a metropolis, but an urban space that has a cosmopolitan past and a transnational present and, can therefore, be considered a metropolis, nonetheless.

Apart from literature, linguistics was also a field of study covered during the three-day conference. In the panel "Linguistics and Discourses in the Postcolonial Metropolis" chaired by Katrin Berndt (University of Bremen), Michael Westphal (University Münster) presented his research on "Emancipation from and Reinvention of the Linguistic Metropolis in a Post-Colonial Speech Community". In the frame of his dissertation, he analyzed Jamaican radio newscast speeches in order to find out which accent is most frequently used in Jamaican radio and which accent is most positively perceived by the audience. The results reveal that Jamaican English and American English are gaining more influence in Jamaica, but British English still holds its prestigious status. Furthermore, Eric A. Anchimbe (University of Bayreuth) in his presentation talked about "Pidgin Goes Public in Urban Space in Cameroon: Language in the Expanding Postcolonial Metropolis", concentrating on the pidgin language in Cameroon as a conflicting phenomenon. He stated that on the one hand pidgin in Cameroon is dying out as it is forbidden to use it in formal domains like schools or universities, but on the other hand, its public use on radio and TV is increasing. Parallel to the panels just described, there were also two further panels held, called "Modernity & Market Economies in the Postcolonial Metropolis" and "Political Change in/and Contested Spaces in the South African Metropolis", which focused on economy and politics in metropolises.

After the panels, the ongoing debate on renaming the GNEL/ASNEL into GAPS, Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien, was on the agenda. Although there were some concerns about not reflecting the literary part, since literature is not present as such in the association's name any longer, almost all members agreed on its renaming. After this, all conference participants walked over to DASTietz, the town library in Chemnitz, to enjoy a wine reception, followed by the GNEL/ASNEL Graduate Award. Maike Lengeman received the Award for her outstanding thesis "'De powa of de word in the riddum of de word': Local Cultural Resources for a Global Market in Trinidadian Rapsomusic." The evening was nicely concluded with a reading and talk with Amit Chaudhuri (Kolkata; University of East Anglia) from his most recent book, an autobiographical diasporic travel journal, titled *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (2013).

The second day started in the Gunzenhauser Museum with the keynote lecture "From Postcoloniality to Global Media Culture: Reflecting on Metropolitan Topography" given by Prof. Dr. Rolf Goebel, who talked about "an important paradigm shift from postcoloniality [...] to the digital media society of late consumer capitalism today". Parallel to this lecture a teacher's workshop, titled "Teaching the Metropolis in the EFL-Classroom", was carried out with a mix of papers as well as creative approaches to teaching the New English Literatures. Jörg Heinke (University of Kiel) demonstrated how to approach "Sydney... the Metropolis in

the Bush". Unfortunately, the section on "Postcolonial Perspectives on the Metropolis: A New Approach to School-trips to London" was only presented via the material given by the two absent speakers.

A very interesting and entertaining break was provided by the so-called Brown-Bag Reading, which combined Lunch from Subway to go-boxes and a poetry reading by the two London-based poets Sean Bonney and Stephen Mooney (University of Surrey). Bonney, whose work marks a progression and continuance of the so-called British Poetry Revival, read from his collection *Happiness* (2011), whereas Mooney shared poems from his *DCLP (District and Central Line Project)* with the audience.

On Friday afternoon, speakers like Brenda Yeoh (National University of Singapore) and Chielozona Eze (Northeastern Illinois University) talked about the changing roles and feminist movements of women in Singapore and Africa and a growth in the number of 21st century African women writers in the panel "Gender and Migration in the Postcolonial Metropolis", chaired by Karin Ikas (University of Tübingen). A second panel, chaired by Katja Sarkowsky, took a closer look at "Contested Spaces in the North American Metropolis". Here, Florian Freitag presented New Orleans as a (Post)colonial city in a contextualizing and close reading of Rosalyn Story's *Wading Home*. The second speaker, Kathy-Ann Tan, presented issues of gentrification and multiculturalism in fictions of the North American metropolis. Katharina Rennhak took the audience on an excursion to New York City as a postcolonial Irish metropolis.

Between the two panel sessions, a poster presentation was offered at the reception, where two young scholars informed all those interested about their ongoing research and dissertation topics. After a short break, the second panel sessions were held and also the Under Construction section was presented here. In this section, young scholars were able to present and discuss their ongoing research.

After all the panels ended, the GNEL/ ASNEL members joined for a meeting to discuss current topics that are important within the society, whereas the others had the option of going on a 3-hour city tour through Chemnitz. In the evening, all conference participants had the opportunity to come together at the conference dinner, which took place at Janssen Cafe, Bistro, Restaurant.

Saturday was the third and final day of the conference. It started with a keynote lecture on "The Artistic Possibility of Comparing World Cities: the 'Third World', the Old and the Modern" presented by Amit Chaudhuri, in which the author illuminated the experience of traversing the world today. Chaudhuri gave a rather free talk, explaining in how he has perceived the postcolonial during his life. He set out to compare the so-called third-world with the western world and pointed out that it is necessary to view the modern in the 'East' differently from that of the 'West'.

This lecture then was followed by the last three panels which provided a concluding view of the whole conference. Two very special guests, namely Bill Ashcroft and Diana Brydon, presented their current research on the postcolonial metropolis from two very different angles. First, Bill Ashcroft on "Utopian Sights: Reinventing the Metropolis in the Postcolony" focused on Singapore and Hong

Kong and examined ways in which the postcolonial city is re-invented and re-discovered, since it never has been automatically a site of postcolonial discourse. Second, Diana Brydon in her paper on “Thinking and Walking the Settler Colonial City” presented appealing views on notions of the *flâneur*. With this paper she set out to “engage postcolonial urban imaginaries as they are challenged and re-defined” in both Canada and Australia. According to Brydon, these countries are connected “with the myth of the wilderness and the bush”, although they are highly urbanized countries. Brydon focused on the “gendered and racialized spaces of the city within the contexts of Canada’s colonial inheritance”. Moreover, she compared her findings on Canada with Sydney, Australia, linking up with Bill Ashcroft’s argument.

The panels and the whole conference were closed by thanksgivings. Special thanks was given to Prof. Dr. Cecile Sandten and her team, who did a great job in ensuring a smooth course of the whole conference. The organizers were most happy that everything went well, and the participants enjoyed the great atmosphere during the conference.

Melanie Ulbricht und Isabel Groth (Chemnitz)