

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