

Report on the Joint Annual Conference of GAPS and IACPL, *Postcolonial Oceans: Contradictions and Heterogeneities in the Epistemes of Salt Water*, University of Bremen 30 May-2 June 2019.

The Joint Annual Conference of the German Association for Postcolonial Studies (GAPS) and the International Association of Colonial and Postcolonial Linguistics (IACPL), titled *Postcolonial Oceans: Contradictions and Heterogeneities in the Epistemes of Salt Water*, was held at the University of Bremen from 30 May to 2 June 2019. It was collaboratively organised by scholars not only from GAPS and IACPL, but also from the Institute for Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies, the 'Worlds of Contradiction' research network, the Creative Unit: 'Language in Colonial Contexts', the Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research, the 'Fiction Meets Science' research network, and the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research.

In the opening welcome delegates were reminded of the appropriateness of Bremen, with its local memorial to the victims of German colonialism, as the location for a gathering that combined postcolonial and oceanic studies. **Kerstin Knopf** reiterated the main aim of the Conference: because of the need for more multidisciplinary scholarship on oceans and salt water, the purpose of the conference was to extend the theoretical study of oceans and salt water and 'research saltwater knowledge systems, knowledge production and narratives from various epistemological, geographical, cultural and disciplinary perspectives'. **Anna-Katharina Hornidge** explained how the centres of expertise in marine science and technology in Bremen and Bremerhaven also connect with other areas of study, ranging from coastal changes to the humanities and social studies, transformation research, political geography, oceanic future studies, discourse analysis and economic studies. **Michi Knecht** and **Ingo Warnke** explained how the research network, 'Worlds of Contradiction', engaged with contradiction as a study area *per se*, and crossed the disciplines of law, the sciences, humanities and pedagogy – and how, tragically, salt water now meets contradiction in the Mediterranean, which has become the world's deadliest sea crossing for refugees and migrants. **Tonjes Veenstra** spoke of the project to decolonise creole language studies. **Annette Lang** described the policy of internationalism and multilingualism as both guiding principle and experienced reality at the University of Bremen.

The keynote lectures approached the Conference focus on contradictions and heterogeneities in the postcolonial study of oceans and salt water in strikingly different ways. In 'Oceans: The Space of Future Thinking', **Bill Ashcroft** traced the literary and philosophical history of the idea of utopia as fundamental to human life. In developing his postcolonial thesis that any kind of activity that resists must be driven by the spirit of utopianism, which is based on hope that the future will be better, he also proposed the notions of Oceania as constituting the largest continent in the world with the smallest land mass, and of archipelagos, such as the Caribbean, as challenging the polarity of Old World and New World, sea and land, islands and continent, and binary thinking itself. Archipelagic thinking, he argued, enabled one to view the sea as the site of a reimagined future. Ashcroft's lecture was complemented by **Nicholas Faraclas's** hugely informative presentation, 'Subaltern Currents and Transgressive Waves: Trans-Oceanic Agents and "Creole" Languages', in which he maintained that Creoles should not be domesticated as dialects of standardised European languages. Showing how Creoles originated in communities and sites of 'hospitable connectedness', from plantation to habitation and co-habitation, he argued that oceans invite us to dissolve artificial oppositions, acknowledge complexity, embrace contradiction and heterogeneity, and

recognise all languages as being ‘out of control’ and ‘contact languages’ – in effect creoles. **Anne Storch’s** presentation, ‘Terrible Magical Ways of Healing – Sea, Spa and Skin’, enacted contradiction. Her critique of the history of beach culture, the discourses of the beach as a magical site of commodified transformation, and the present-day, neo-colonial beach tourist industry in Zanzibar and Kenya in particular, was accompanied by a simultaneous and deliberately distracting counter-narrative on video in which she was seen extolling a range of coconut and palm oil products. The principle of contradiction was also signalled by the title of **Robbie Shilliam’s** lecture, ‘Grounding through Oceans’, in which he explained, against the background of Black Atlantic thinking about colonial enslavement and separation of people from their land, ancestors, religion and spirits, a Rastafari view of restorative grounding – or rooting – over vast oceanic distances through Blackness. In tracing some of the anti-colonial connections between Blacknesses in Oceania and the Caribbean, he argued that the ocean provides a metaphor that encourages a sensibility towards flux, ambivalence and plurality, and that, when it comes to Blackness, oceans can ground, ‘creatively, fractally, and redemptively’. In a video presentation, ‘Seascape Epistemology: An Embodied Knowledge of and Movement through the Sea’, **Karin Amimoto Ingersoll** described how she interacts physically with the ocean, how it creates a spiritual awareness and empowers her, and shapes her identity. She explained a seascape epistemology (as opposed to land-based geographies and epistemologies) as a way of knowledge based on the sea, its tides, waves and birds – which is also an indigenous Hawaiian way of knowing founded on sensorial, intellectual, and embodied literacy of the ocean. This kinaesthetic interaction with and connection to the ocean is ontological and informs the indigenous Hawaiian language, imagination and philosophy. In the final keynote lecture, ‘Building on the Strata of the Dead: A (Very) Brief History of Coral Reef Ecologies’, **Anne Collett** discussed the complex biological and cultural ecologies of coral reefs with reference to the poetry of the postcolonial Australian poet Judith Wright and the Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite. In an absorbing exploration of the generative ambiguity of the metaphor of coral in their work – of reefs built by living organisms on the skeletons of the dead – Collett considered the destruction of these fragile coral systems and the natural and cultural ecologies that they represent by climate change resulting from human greed in the Anthropocene.

Focus of the debate at the conference was also enabled by the careful organisation of the various panel sessions, or workshops, into thematic clusters, such as Literature about the Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans as well as the Caribbean, Postcolonial Readings of European Sea Literature, African Waters, Historical Oceans, Oceanic Futuring, Port Cities, Littoral Sense-making, Epistemic Inequalities, Critiquing Origins in the Mode of the Archipelago, Fluid Ethnologies, Oceans and Migration, Transgressing Concepts of Sea and Humans, Media and Film, and Language and Discourse Studies. These – including the Student Panels – produced a wealth of multidisciplinary postcolonial and marine scholarship in productive dialogue. It is not feasible to single out individual papers from among the many outstanding ones that were heard; mention has, however, to be made of the plenary workshop presentations at the Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum. In ‘German Colonialism and Objects of Marine Knowledge’ **Tobias Goebel** explained the new interdisciplinary approach to German maritime history and objects with colonial contexts in museums. In their presentation on ‘Tupaia’s Map of Oceania’ **Lars Eckstein** and **Anya Schwartz** reimagined the actual situation in which Tupaia’s enigmatic map of Oceania was produced in collaboration with various members of Captain James Cook’s crew on *Endeavour* and, in a fascinatingly detailed analysis of the different cartographic principles operating in the map, they showed how Tupaia translated the epistemes of precolonial Polynesian navigation into the logic of Cook’s compass to provide a map informed by ‘two very different wayfinding systems and their respective representational models’. **Marleen von Barga** and **Ruth Schilling** looked at

individual artefacts from the collection of the German Maritime Museum/ Leibniz-Institute for Maritime History, which were brought back home during the Imperial Age by members of the German Navy as souvenirs, and which may be regarded as ‘boundary objects’ to understand the complex negotiation of cultural expression both in the places where they were produced and where they were received. In his response, ‘The Sea and Its Souvenirs: Circulating Memories and Connected Histories’, **John McAleer** offered for consideration images of a 19th century Newfoundland canoe, a guillotine and a 17th century Persian astrolabe, and then proceeded to tease out the surprising oceanic connections and stories around them. There could have been no more suitable choice of venue than the Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum in Bremerhaven for these sessions of the Conference, which made it possible for delegates to visit different parts of the Museum and reflect on the history of this Hanseatic hub. The Museum also provided an appropriate venue for the literary readings by Kenyan writer **Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor**, Singaporean **Alvin Pang** and Australian **Ellen van Neerven**.

On a note of self-reflection, the conference marked the 30th anniversary of GAPS. **Annika McPherson** ‘unpacked’ the Association’s discursive, cultural and critical shifts over three decades, not only through its publications but also its Summer Schools. The Conference further coincided with the 30th anniversary of the publication in 1989 of the landmark postcolonial studies text, *The Empire Writes Back*, which was recalled by **Bill Ashcroft** at the launch of *Postcolonial Literatures in English: An Introduction*, collaboratively written by Potsdam academics **Anke Bartels**, **Lars Eckstein**, **Nicole Waller** and **Dirk Wiemann**. In ‘Larger than Life: A Tribute to Geoff Davis (1943-2018)’, **Peter Marsden** offered a celebration of the life of **Geoff Davis**, and of his huge supply of positive energy and boundless enthusiasm, which continued into retirement, his incredible publication output, his travelling and organisation of conferences. Geoff Davis was an ‘ideas man’ – consultant, facilitator, enabler, collaborator, editor, networker supreme, visionary, and time manager – and truly ‘a giant in our field’. And on a last celebratory note: the winner of this year’s Graduate Award was **Marie Berndt** whose masters thesis on Jamaican homophobia as represented in the works of four Jamaican writers was supervised by **Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp**.

Johan Jacobs