

and interesting postcolonial studies group in Germany. By its very nature, postcolonial studies is a discipline that fosters building bridges, even more so than Eurovision, and Münster again proved the need for an international group such as GAPS outside of the US and UK “centres” of English and postcolonial literary studies.

I have now attended the last three GNEL/GAPS conferences and one post-graduate conference. Clearly the association is interested in exploring cutting-edge, current and important global debates, as evident in the conference themes; “Re-Inventing the Postcolonial” (Chemnitz 2013), “Postcolonial Justice” (Potsdam 2014), and this year’s critique of ideology. A non-conformist bent is also implied in the upside-down “A” of the new GAPS logo, an inversion that would, in my opinion, suit a little more subversion. While I left this conference feeling well supported and encouraged by my peers, I would have liked to see more vigorous debate, even contestation and argument. Within the safety and security of the association’s conviviality, the annual conference is exactly the right place to go out on a limb and experiment with more out-there ideas. This year’s theme offered an opportunity to tackle head-on some difficult contradictions and impasses that lie at the heart of postcolonial ideology, methodology, and practice. Perhaps next year we’ll throw away our scripts, roll up our sleeves, and get down to the business of arguing those gaps.

Melissa Kennedy (Vienna)



**“Ideology in Postcolonial Texts and Contexts”
26th Annual GAPS Conference
Münster, 14 - 16 May 2015**

On a sunny Thursday in the middle of May scholars from all over the world came together in Münster, a small town in the northwest of Germany especially known for the plenitude of bicycles roaming its streets, to enjoy a three day conference on the topic of “Ideology in Postcolonial Texts and Contexts.” When the participants arrived at the university castle that morning and walked into the foyer, they were met with familiar and soon to be familiar faces full of excitement. In her function as head of department of the English Seminar at the University of Münster and president of GAPS, Katja Sarkowsky opened the 26th GAPS conference with introductory words and a warm welcome. Interdisciplinarity and working together were the underlying conference themes – from the organization, in which all seven chairs of the English Seminar in Münster got involved, to the many discussions in panels as well as the following speeches and readings.

This disciplinary breadth was reflected in the invited keynote speakers from book studies, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), linguistics as well

as literary and cultural studies. The first keynote address came from book studies, a discipline that has only begun to engage with the postcolonial realm in more recent times. Beth le Roux from the University of Pretoria discussed the censorship of crime fiction in South Africa during apartheid and afterwards. As crime novels have political significance because of the way they depict (and thus define) crime, they are particularly interesting to look at in terms of censorship in the context of apartheid, when crimes were committed by the government. What was banned in South Africa, however, did not follow any coherent system for a long time but was rather based exclusively on covers and titles. Publishing firms often reacted by making use of this to generate more attention towards their books on an international scale. Le Roux argued that crime fiction should not be dismissed as trivial, especially because this popular genre of mass-market works helps to break down ideologies, social hierarchies and ambiguities, and she reminded her listeners that the ideologies of aesthetics are also always political.

In the opening TEFL keynote on Saturday morning, Mavis Reimer, Professor at the University of Winnipeg presented her current work on homelessness in recent Canadian Young Adult fiction. Contrary to the classic narrative structure that sees a protagonist leave home, have an adventurous journey and then return to a safe environment, the subjects of the recent YA texts that Reimer is analyzing often remain unsettled at the end of the narratives. Identifying certain recurring themes in these texts, Reimer reads these as allegories in the context of the nation state and globalization. Talking about her corpus of award-winning texts provided another link to ideology – as awards recognize texts that present patterns and projects particularly valued by a society – and an inspiring insight into her methodology and material selection.

Lionel Wee's linguistics keynote was to close the official part of the second conference day. Wee talked about insecurities surrounding Singlish (Singaporean English) and Singaporeans' desire for standard British (or sometimes American) English pronunciation – something he referred to as a "postcolonial hangover." Especially in situations involving public language performance a deep concern for correctness as well as worries about perceptions of Singlish as incorrect remain a widespread issue in Singapore. In order to overcome an evaluative discourse in which Singlish will always be juxtaposed with a standard variety regarded as being of higher prestige, Wee explained that it is important to generate self-confidence in an accent like Singlish. The high amount of discussion questions from the audience following Wee's talk is enough to "double confirm" the inspiring effect of his keynote.

Laura Chrisman from the University of Washington at Seattle took a reflection on co-editing the reader *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* with Patrick Williams as a starting point for her literary and cultural studies keynote. She then went on to consider the opening up of the field and particularly the uses of postcolonial theories within and outside of literary studies with a special focus on the theoretical work of Frantz Fanon. So what lies in store for the future? Chrisman criticized the trend towards transnationalism, especially when it is assumed to be in binary opposition to nationalism. As a term, she argues, it is no more useful

than third space, and scholarship needs to move beyond it. Another challenge facing academics is the complicity in structures of capitalism and commodification within universities and the literary market.

Speaking of the production and creativity side of literature, special guests who were eagerly awaited at the conference were celebrated authors Larissa Lai (University of Calgary, Canada) and Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o. Showing how creative writing and scholarship can be combined, they both shared their thoughts, ideas and personal experiences in the form of readings, as well as in a lecture or as part of a panel. In her talk, Lai outlined some of the issues that arise by identifying as Asian and indigenous, and the problems of citizenship. Wa Thiong'o's discussion of his texts also dealt with the connection between stories and identity. They thus provided a perspective on the power of literature to challenge ideologies of language, identity and perception, and they raised important questions about the role of writing and literature in changing societies.

Besides the keynotes and readings, conference participants were free to choose from a wide array of talks within five simultaneous panel discussions, grouped under a unifying umbrella topic and dealing with ideology, from narration to politics and even photography and board games. The first day of the conference also showcased two panels in which PhD projects were presented to give young scholars a chance to get feedback from their peers and more established scholars. Overall, the discussions in all of the panels were as fruitful as the after-speech discussions between the speakers and the audience. While the majority of the questions were aimed at the topic being presented, some questions were more general and dealt with postcolonial studies in a bigger scheme of things and even questioned the relationships between academics in the field, addressing a kind of animosity that would sometimes be expressed towards what the other was doing. All was done in a friendly manner, with lighthearted laughs here and there. The exchange of thoughts and ideas continued outside the lecture hall into the conference's coffee breaks and throughout the social program. Particularly noteworthy was the conference dinner in the castle garden and the ensuing conference party which brought together participants in a more relaxed setting until late into the night. Those new to Münster also had a chance to discover the city and its famous sculpture projects, either on foot or in true Münster style by bike.

One of the highlights of this year's GAPS conference was the Teachers' Workshop. Amos Paran, Senior Lecturer at the University of London, and Thorsten Merse, TEFL research assistant at Münster University, led a successful workshop with a lot of hands-on material and interesting activities for the roughly 20 participants. Paran's and Merse's aim was to open up opportunities and ways of ideology in postcolonial texts and contexts in the classroom. The idea is challenging: How should teachers go about teaching such a complex topic to young students? Paran and Merse focused on Indians in England, which is also part of the *Abitur* curriculum in Germany. The goal was to find new ways of teaching this topic that would lessen the dominance of the expert, the teacher, and not diminish the learner. The participants were asked to take part in a "gallery walk," which entailed walking around the room and looking at the texts that were taped onto the

walls. In the end, everyone should stand next to the text that they related to the most and discuss it with others who made the same choice. Paran and Merse also drew attention to interesting alternative media by introducing graphic novels, web quests and the method of silent viewing. Overall, the methods presented were manifold and enlightening, and both presenters did an excellent job in showcasing them. The success of the workshop can only be emphasized by the fact that all participants were unanimously in favor of skipping the coffee break for the workshop – and we all know how much teachers love coffee!

The roundtable discussion on Saturday afternoon provided a final opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange. Here, Susanne Reichl, Abhijit Gupta, Michael Freedden as well as keynote speakers Chrisman and Wee gave a brief statement on the topic of ideology in their respective discipline before engaging in a highly interesting discussion with the audience. Chrisman elaborated on the idea of literature as bearer and critic of ideology as well as the importance of a discussion about ideology in literature. Then, Wee highlighted ideologies behind language policies, which may even go beyond nation politics. Reichl connected the idea of ideology with teaching practices, emphasizing that there is an ideology behind standardized tests and school curricula, but that often teachers are unaware of it or feel it does not apply to them. Subsequently, Gupta gave an insight into ideology in book studies, which tends to center on the history of the book in the West while neglecting the rest of the world. Finally, Michael Freedden opted to lay out seven popular misconceptions about ideology. For example, he claimed that many think ideology is dispensable while it is, on the contrary, ubiquitous, or that ideology is always a deliberate and conscious manipulation. In the subsequent discussion, many ideas and issues were raised. Notably, one member of the audience drew attention to a critique of the term ‘postcolonial,’ sparking a multitude of responses from the panelists and the audience. This led to probably the most memorable statement by Freedden, criticizing the affix ‘post-’ (especially in context of ‘post-ideology’) as “one of the laziest words,” concluding that “people need to find proper names for the disciplines they are engaging in.”

Overall, the three-day conference provided a great opportunity for scholars, young and more established alike, to come together and exchange their ideas, raise questions for discussions to come, and pay homage to the study field of postcolonialism, whether one was working within the field of literature, linguistics, TEFL or book studies. Interdisciplinarity was certainly the key to unlocking various aspects of postcolonialism at this conference and participants were able to cross boundaries of academic interests and not only peek into current research projects scholars are still working on but also get a glimpse of different approaches applied to similar topics.

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