

Conference Report on “Participation in Postcolonial Wor(l)ds”

Postgraduate Conference at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf,
September 29–October 1, 2022, Germany

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The three-day postgraduate conference “Participation in Postcolonial Wor(I)ds” organized by MIRIAM HINZ and CHRISTINA SLOPEK (Heinrich Heine University) focused on contributions touching on various issues related to postcolonial participation in and through literature, digital spaces and politics. The conference offered a platform for interdisciplinary perspectives on topics such as postcolonial epistemologies and genesis of knowledge, forms of participation by marginalized groups, and digital cultures as possibilities for non-hierarchical participation. The conference participants were invited to each give a 20-mins presentation that would be followed by an open discussion.

On September 29, the conference was opened with a keynote speech by MALAKA SHWAIKH (University of St Andrews). Shwaikh’s keynote address titled “Framing Participation: Word Choice and Language(s) of Care” focused on different understandings as well as the definitional pluralisms of the three terms resilience, empowerment and voicelessness. After Shwaikh’s talk, participants were thankful to engage in a lively discussion on the presented perspectives with the scholar.

The first conference panel “Indigenous Literatures and Criticism” chaired by LUCAS MATTILA (Heinrich Heine University) was opened by BRITTA COLLIGS (University of Trier). Her presentation with the title “land does not belong to people” dealt with Maori narratives and environmental activism. Britta Colligs started her talk by reporting on general understandings of the climate crisis and mainstream media coverage of it. She explained that the age we currently live in was understood as a time in which humanity came to have an impact on the environment: the Anthropocene. Colligs stated that in mainstream media the general claim is

that humans are responsible for the climate crisis. For Colligs, and many other scholars, this is a rather simplified depiction of the development of the climate crisis as there are multiple layers to human responsibility in the climate crisis and mainly countries of the Global North are to be held responsible. Britta Colligs then continued with a presentation of the Maori context (Maori knowledge, Maori world view, Te Ao Maori) and tools to study indigenous narratives. She then discussed Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki* and Cathie Dunsford's *Ao Toa — Earth Warriors*. In the same panel, BETTINA BURGER (Heinrich Heine University) spoke about aboriginal speculative fiction. Burger explained that aboriginal knowledge is not often imagined at the forefront of science-fiction. This framing assumes that aboriginal knowledge and sci-fi are incompatible. Burger's talk then gave an overview of Brian Attebery's typology "Aboriginality in Science Fiction." Burger further discussed Archie Weller's *Land of the Golden Clouds*, books one and two of Ambelin Kwaymulina's trilogy *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and *The Disappearance of Ember Crow*, and Claire G. Coleman's *The Old Lie*. All works imagine continuous existence of indigenous peoples. In conclusion, the discussed authors participate in the creation of fictional creation of future worlds — possible futures that embrace and are based in indigenous knowledge.

The second panel, chaired by BETTINA BURGER (Heinrich Heine University), was titled "Shaping Participatory Futures." The panel was opened by a presentation on "Layered Literacies: A Pedagogical Approach to Teaching African Literature" by FATIMA SECK (University of Maryland). In her presentation, Seck underlined that in the study of literature monoliteracies that "silence the already silenced" should become layered literacies. Seck explained that there is socio-economic literacy, cultural literacy, linguistic literacy and religious literacy that co-exists at the same time. Seck suggested those various contexts should be considered when dealing with literature in general, and in particular with African literature. In order to support her argument, she relied on the example of *Une si longue lettre* by Mariam Bâ. In the same panel, ELIZABETH ABENA OSEI (University of Ghana) spoke on "New Urbanities and Utopian Desire in Akwaeke Emezi's Afrofuturist novel, *Pet*." She explained that black speculative fiction was a product of alienation, marginalization, othering and Afrofuturism. She also revealed how utopian world building invented spaces, inverted realities and worked with mechanisms of fantasy. Following this introduction, Osei analyzed the Afrofuturist tropes in the novel *Pet*. Also in the same panel, in his presentation "The Afronauts of the future," BURAK SEZER (University

of Cologne) proposed that Black sci-fi is a tool for counter-hegemonic participation. Through relying on different concepts such as hegemony (Gramsci), cultural hegemony (Hall), imposed worldviews (Fanon) and identification (Mouse), he argued that Afrofuturism challenges cultural dominance.

The second conference day started with a digital panel on “Strategies for Postcolonial Empowerment.” AMANDA MARSH (University of Texas at Arlington) read a paper on “Science Fiction, Chicano Literature, and Critiquing Postcolonial Attitudes.” In the same panel, TANIA CHISSANO (University of Huddersfield) spoke on “Decreasing Domestic Violence against Women through Women’s Entrepreneurship Training in Mozambique: A Postcolonial and Feminist Critique.” Chissano presented her research design and her central research goal of understanding how women’s entrepreneurship functions as a decreasing factor for domestic violence and influences experiences of domestic violence.

The second panel of the day “Digital Cultures and Politics” chaired by EVA ULRIKE PIRKER (Heinrich Heine University), was comprised of presentations by PIERRE MOURIER (University of Lyon), ISABELLA KALTE and FIONA QUAST (Justus Liebig University Giessen). In his presentation, Pierre Mourier revealed that race was one of the most influential factors enabling or disabling participation through voting in the United States of America. He presented theoretical devices and examples of the deterrent strategy used against African Americans in Trump’s campaign and the first 100 days of his presidency. Isabella Kalte presented “Forms of Unruly Participation: Dissenting to Legacies of Colonialism in Caribbean Feminist Social Media Movements.” Kalte did so by presenting two feminist social media activist groups based in the Anglophone Caribbean (Life In Leggings and the Tambourine Army). Kalte discussed the strategies employed by the two groups of participating in feminist activism and compared the reception of their actions to the way the U.S. based #MeToo movement was met by the general public in order to show that legacies of colonialism still influence contemporary constructions and representations of female subjectivity as well as determine which women are seen as valid participants of feminism and which women are denied participation and considered as agitators. Afterwards, in her presentation “Digital Maroonage: The Case of Colectivo Ilé from Puerto Rico. Afro-Diasporic Self-Representation, Participation and Education through Digital Media,” Fiona Quast showed how the anti-racist collective Colectivo Ilé appropriates digital spaces through their podcast *Negras* (2019) and the co-authored e-magazine *Revista étnica*

(2018) to effectively reach a broader public. Quast showed what strategies and forms of mediatic representation Afro-diasporic subjects employ to represent themselves, educate others and to participate in society.

The conference's fifth panel "Writing and the Publishing Industry" chaired by KRISTINA AHRENS (Heinrich Heine University) was comprised of three presentations from the field of literary studies. GABRIELA ALEXANDRA BANITA'S (University of Bologna & Sorbonne Paris North University) presentation "Literature from the Margins: Between Commercialization and Spaces of Freedom" focused on the question of what happens to the narrative when the author feels pressure from the literary market? She aimed to make sense of this question considering works such as Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*, Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.* and Helon Habila's *Travellers*. She pointed out that the majority of the most well-known African authors around the world are published by Western publishing houses. African authors live in the Global North and are what Simon Gikandi defines as "the metropolitan culture of the modern west" (*Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, Princeton 2009, p. 22). Following Banita's talk, in his presentation "Postcolonial Arabic Fiction and the Publishing Industry: A Re-Assessment," MOHAMMED MUHARRAM (University of Bremen) critiqued how some Western publishers and canonical postcolonial textbooks marginalized postcolonial Arabic fictions. He calls to English departments worldwide to include postcolonial Arabic fiction in their Anglophone postcolonial curriculum. In his talk with the title "Postcolonial Participation and Bangladeshi Writing in English," TOUHID AHMED CHOWDHURY (Otto Friedrich University Bamberg) spoke about the rich literary history and huge potential of Bangladeshi writing in English and how Bangladeshi writers are actively participating in the Anglophone discourse.

On the evening of the second conference day, there was a reading by ELIZABETH CHAKRABARTY (London) of her 2021 novel *Lessons in Love and Other Crimes*. The reading was followed by a Q&A session.

The third conference day consisted of the last panel and a workshop. The panel "Critical Outlooks" was chaired by CHRISTINA SLOPEK (Heinrich Heine University). RITA MARICOCCHI (University of Münster) was the panel's first speaker. In her presentation "Participation and Performance in the Graphic Novel: Birgit Weyhe's Narrative Strategies," Rita Maricocchi reflected on narrative strategies of the comic as a means to suggest how to write about

marginalized people. NII NAI ADJEI-MENSAH (Heinrich Heine University) presented on “Profit or Loss? The Cost of Postcolonial Participation in Jennifer Makumbi’s ‘Let Us Tell this Story Properly.’” Adjei-Mensah started by situating contemporary Anglophone African writing and pointing out African writers’ dependence on the publishing market in the West that was also treated in Gabriela Banita’s presentation. Adjei-Mensah also spoke on publication journeys and actants and the ways in which Makumbi resisted to change her work to make it more ‘suitable’ for Western audiences. Finally, Adjei-Mensah concluded that the commercialization of literature is highly problematic for African writers. He pointed out that major Anglophone publishers are aware of their crucial role in how they shape the literary market. In his presentation titled “Serial Killing, Smiling Back and Why Participation Is Not Enough: Oyinkan Braithwaite’s *My Sister the Serial Killer*,” LUCAS MATTILA (Heinrich Heine University) asked what it means to participate in various neoliberal discourses and how to move beyond postcolonial forms of participation?

The conference’s closing workshop on “How to Publish your Dissertation” by LENA MATTHEIS (University of Surrey) gave an overview of the different steps to take when publishing doctoral dissertations.

The conference presented a fertile ground for interesting conversations on current scholarship regarding different topics relevant to forms of postcolonial participation and in general to the study of culture. The dialogue between researchers from different fields, but at the same academic level, granted a space of horizontal exchange. Even though the allotted time for discussions in the panels did not allow for enough room to discuss details, overall, the conference was very thought-provoking for all participants.



Participation in Postcolonial Wor(l)ds Postgraduate Conference

September 29 - October 01, 2022

Confirmed Keynote by
Dr. Malaka Shwaikh, St. Andrews University

Reading with Elizabeth Chakrabarty
Lessons in Love and Other Crimes

Organized by Christina Slopek, M.A., & Miriam Hinz, M.A.

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Christina Slopek, M.A.
Miriam Hinz, M.A.



Program

Thursday, September 29

Conference Opening by Christina Slopek, Miriam Hinz and Birgit Neumann (Heinrich Heine University)

Keynote Speech by Malaka Shwaikh (University of St Andrews): “Framing Participation: Word Choice and Language(s) of Care.”

Panel I: Indigenous Literatures and Criticism — Chair: Lucas Mattila

Britta Colligs (University of Trier): “‘land does not belong to people’: Maori Narratives and Environmental Activism.”

Bettina Burger (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf): “Participation in Possible Futures: Technology in Aboriginal Australian Speculative Fiction.”

Panel II: Shaping Participatory Futures — Chair: Bettina Burger

Fatima Seck (University of Maryland): “A Pedagogical Approach to Teaching African Literature: Layered Literacies.”

Elizabeth Abena Osei (University of Ghana): “New Urbanities and Utopian Desire in Akwaeke Emezi’s Afrofuturist Novel, *Pet*.”

Burak Sezer (University of Cologne): “The Afronauts of the Future: Black Speculative Fiction as More than Postcolonial Participation?”

Friday, September 30

Panel III: Strategies for Postcolonial Empowerment — Chair: Miriam Hinz (online)

Amanda Marsh (University of Texas at Arlington): “Science Fiction, Chicano Literature, and Critiquing Postcolonial Attitudes.”

Tania Chissano (University of Huddersfield): “Decreasing Domestic Violence against Women through Women’s Entrepreneurship Training in Mozambique: A Postcolonial and Feminist Critique.”

Panel IV: Digital Cultures and Politics — Chair: Eva Ulrike Pirker

Isabella Kalte (Justus Liebig University Giessen): “Forms of Unruly Participation: Dissenting to Legacies of Colonialism in Caribbean Feminist Social Media Movements.”

Fiona Quast (Justus Liebig University Giessen): “Digital Maroonage: The Case of Colectivo Ilé from Puerto Rico: Afro-Diasporic Self-Representation, Participation and Education through Digital Media.”

Pierre Mourier (University of Lyon): “Race Impact in the 2016 American Presidential Election.”

Panel V: Writing and the Publishing Industry — Chair: Kristina Ahrens

Gabriela Alexandra Banita (University of Bologna & Sorbonne Paris North University): “Literature from the Margins: Between Commercialization and Spaces of Freedom.”

Mohammed Muharram (University of Bremen): “Postcolonial Arabic Fiction and the Publishing Industry: A Re-Assessment.”

Touhid Ahmed Chowdhury (Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg): “Postcolonial Participation and Bangladeshi Writing in English.”

Reading and Q&A with Elizabeth Chakrabarty (London): “*Lessons in Love and Other Crimes* (2021)”

Saturday, October 1

Panel VI: Critical Outlooks — Chair: Christina Slopek

Rita Maricocchi (University of Münster): “Participation and Performance in the Graphic Novel: Birgit Weyhe’s Narrative Strategies.”

Nii Nai Adjei-Mensah (Heinrich-Heine-University): “Profit or Loss? The Cost of Postcolonial Participation in Jennifer Makumbi’s *Let Us Tell this Story Properly*.”

Lucas Mattila (Heinrich-Heine-University): “Serial Killing, Smiling Back and Why Participation Is Not Enough: Oyinkan Braithwaite’s *My Sister the Serial Killer*.”

Workshop with Lena Mattheis (University of Surrey): “How to Publish Your Dissertation.”