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## REPORT

Report from the Chair

By Isabel Carrera Suárez

Dear EACLALS members,

As I expressed on the occasion of the Triennial General Meeting last year in Oviedo, where I was elected to succeed Helga Ramsey-Kurz as Chair, I am greatly honoured as well as deeply aware of the responsibility of chairing an association which has a long and distinguished history, and which marked my academic stance very early in life. I presented my first EACLALS paper as a young scholar in Nice 1988, where I found, to my concern, that Anna Rutherford would chair the panel I shared with two Canadian writers. In awe of Anna's achievements and authority, I did not anticipate her warm reception and the enthusiasm with which she welcomed me into the community of scholars that EACLALS constituted. Even less did I anticipate that I might find myself chairing this same association almost three decades later. EACLALS has offered me the privilege of co-organising two triennial conferences: its Silver Jubilee in 1996 and, last year, after the bid put forward by my young colleagues led by Liamar Durán, the 2017 EACLALS Performing the Urban, where we had the pleasure of welcoming so many of you for a week of discussion, creativity and —this being Northern Spain— convivial eating and drinking in between events and performances. I want to take this chance to thank all participants once again for making possible the wonderful gathering of knowledge and conversation that crystallised at the conference. Huge thanks are also due, for too many reasons to detail here, to the former Board, Helga Ramsey-Kurz, Petra Tournay-Theodotou, Veronika Schuchter, Laura Zander and Geoff Davis, who not only made our organising extremely easy and supported us throughout the process, but also ran EACLALS so dynamically and effectively for the three years of their term.

As organisers of EACLALS 2017 in Oviedo, we tried our best to continue its spirit of democratic and inclusive academic encounter, together with the foregrounding of authors that has always characterised EACLALS conferences. With fifteen creative writers and performers and six plenary speakers from all continents, some of them long-time members or friends of EACLALS, the conference encompassed a wide spread of geographical areas and theoretical approaches, and reflected the evolution of the concept of the postcolonial as experienced worldwide and particularly in our own field. It also opened new avenues by including artists and lectures dealing with areas such as China or Puerto Rico, recognising the transversality of the current postcolonial approach. For those who missed out, the programme can still be found on our website, <http://www.eaclals-oviedo17.com>, and we are pleased to report that the lectures from the conference are now available online at <http://mediateca.uniovi.es/web/mediateca/eclals2017>. We have also received a good number of proposals for publication, to which we will respond after receiving the full papers in September, followed by peer-review, a process that we hope to complete by November. In the meantime, we celebrate the publications that hold results from the 2014 Innsbruck conference, first and foremost *Uncommon Wealths in Postcolonial Fiction* (Brill 2017), edited by Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Melissa Kennedy, as well as publications supported by EACLALS grants, such as Libe Garcia Zarranz's *TransCanadian Feminist Fictions: New Cross-Border Ethics* (McGill-Queens UP 2017) and Janet Wilson and Melissa Kennedy's *Interventions Special Issue, All that Glitters is not Gold: Pacific Critiques of Globalization* (29.7: 2017). Such publications are proof of the energy drawn from EACLALS gatherings.

This has been a busy year, with administrative arrangements taking up a rather unexpected amount of space in the Board's work due to various details of European banking and data protection



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legislation which have required adjustments and much inquiring and reorganisation. We thank you all for your patience, and assure you that our aim is that any necessary changes will create as little inconvenience as possible for members. I must express my gratitude to our Treasurer, Liamar Durán Almarza, and Secretary, Melissa Kennedy, for their dedication and efficiency in terms of financial arrangements and information respectively, as well as to Michela Borzaga for linking with students and updating social media content.

Those who attended the Oviedo meeting may recall that Vera Alexander generously proposed to explore the possibilities of holding the next conference in Gröningen. As unfortunately the logistics finally proved too uncertain, new bids had to be considered. We are pleased to announce that the Board received two excellent proposals from Paris and Cardiff, which made the final choice of venue very difficult. However, we collectively agreed that Cardiff would hold the next conference, in 2020, and that Paris will be kept as a preliminary proposal for 2023, to be ratified at the general meeting in Cardiff. We would like to express our gratitude to Christine Lorre-Johnston for her offer from University Sorbonne Nouvelle–Paris 3, first for 2020 and then for 2023. We also thank Vera Alexander for her efforts, and, of course the organisers for 2020 at the University of Cardiff, longstanding EACLALS members Radhika Mohanram and Luisa Pèrcopo, for their enthusiastic and imaginative proposal, which links the EACLALS Conference and the Hay Festival. The details are described below and we very much look forward to convening for the event in May 2020.

By the time we meet in Cardiff, Brexit will unfortunately have materialised, and the ties between the UK and the Europe where most of our members live and work, will have been partly severed. While one the effects of Brexit, as Geoff Davis's report on the 2018 CHOGM explains below, may be an attempt to counter by reinforcing strategic and cultural links with 'the Commonwealth', the use of the Commonwealth as a political tool against European alliances is hardly a matter to be celebrated by our Association. Our 2020 meeting in Cardiff, a return to a UK venue after a long absence, and to a relatively peripheral part of the UK at that, should help us fortify intellectual and professional relationships which, we are aware, have been undermined against the will of many academics. The current Board is fully committed to consolidating links between countries across Europe and also with our parallel associations across the world. In May 2018, while at the Canadian Humanities Congress in Regina, Canada, I attended a number of CACLALS sessions and exchanged information and ideas with the current president, Mariam Pirbhai, on the possibilities of common actions to strengthen and renew our respective associations, and to boost the participation of young scholars. The coming academic year should allow us to initiate these, and needless to say, we are open to suggestions by members. One of the actions established by the former Board to encourage young scholars' participation were travel scholarships to attend EACLALS conferences, awarded to six young scholars for the Oviedo meeting (Sohini Banerjee, Kata Gyuris, Chelsea Haith, Samantha Reive Holland, Alice Michel and Astrid Schwegler Castañer), as well as the Anna Rutherford Memorial Grant (awarded to Libe García Zarranz), which allows a more extended visit to a relevant university for research on postcolonial projects. As the new Board, we would like to acknowledge the importance of these scholarships initiated by Helga Ramsey-Kurz, and announce that they will be continued in our term of office, with calls to be announced in due time through our Bulletin, webpage and social media.

Finally, a brief word on the 2018 Newsletter. While previous newsletters included features such as books published, calls for papers and similar information, we now feel that such news is more effectively covered through the immediacy of our webpage, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and are therefore limiting the information to official or general matters related to EACLALS and its conferences. We very much encourage you, however, to follow us and to participate at the addresses found in the footer of this newsletter.



With very best wishes to you all on behalf of the EACLALS Board, and wishing a good summer break to those in the Northern hemisphere,

Isabel Carrera Suárez



Oviedo, April 2017

## CONFERENCES

**EACLALS Triennial Conference**

**Transcultural Movement**

**Cardiff, 18-22 May, 2020**



We are pleased to announce that the next EACLALS triennial conference will take place in Cardiff, capital city of Wales, between 18-22 May, 2020. The conference will be hosted by the School of English, Communication and Philosophy in Cardiff University. This later date to hold the conference is to synchronise it with the Hay Festival in Hay-on-Wye, South Wales, which will take place between May 21st and June 7th in 2020.



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The general topic of the conference will be 'Transcultural Movement' as it includes issues of, and tracks shifts among, migration, borders, refugees, language, gender, genre, and interdisciplinarity. The CFP will be circulated in early October 2018.

The Hay Festival of literature and the arts is the most prominent British book festival which attracts international writers, thinkers and artists. In 2018, speakers included Margaret Atwood, Salman Rushdie, Germaine Greer, and Simon Schama. Hay Festival information: <http://www.hayfestival.com/home>

One of Europe's fastest growing capital, Cardiff is a vibrant transcultural and multilingual city, easy to navigate and with plenty of accommodation available. It has an international airport that is increasingly linked with more European cities and capitals. KLM and Qatar Airways have established a hub here and more and more low-cost airlines are flying directly into Cardiff. It is less than one-hour way from Bath and Stonehenge, Bristol, Shakespeare's country, and the Cotswolds and only two hours away by train from London. Bristol airport is linked to Cardiff by bus and train and can be reached within 55 minutes. Hay on Wye can be reached from Cardiff by car, train and bus easily.

Promotional video on Cardiff: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mybz0rQm770&feature=youtube>

We look forward to welcoming you in Cardiff in May 2020.

**Conference Committee:** Radhika Mohanram and Luisa Pèrcopo



## ACLALS Triennial Conference

The Uncommon Commonwealth

Auckland, 15 – 19 July 2019



*The job of holding the center . . . is often done by the men from the provinces, from the outskirts. Contrary to popular belief, the outskirts are not where the world ends—they are precisely where it begins to unfurl.*

Joseph Brodsky

*Is heaven also made in Taiwan? And does Jesus really know how to speak Samoan?*

Sia Figiel, *The Girl in the Moon Circle*



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In its modern history, the Commonwealth has provided an uncommonly flexible set of social, political, legal and economic forms of association. Founded in British colonialism, it conducts its business in a more or less common language, English and, arguably, shares core cultural values. But the Commonwealth is marked by the distinct topographies, histories, ethnicities and indigenous languages of its member states, variously confronting post-independence, the legacy of Britain's "masks of conquest".

We invite proposals for papers and creative submissions that tackle how new cultural and literary formations have emerged in the modern Commonwealth, or ways in which writing and culture address this pluri-form modern order. We are keen to receive proposals for linked or associated papers from panels of speakers.

For the conference website and full **Call for Papers** please go to: <http://aclals2019.org.nz/>

Closing date for Submissions: 30 October 2018

**Keynotes:** Arundhati Roy, Witi Ihimaera, Sarah Nuttall, Melissa Lucashenko and Kei Miller

**Conference Committee:** Selina Tusitala Marsh, Tom Bishop, Malcolm Campbell, Paula Morris, Claudia Marquis

## OBITUARY – MICHAEL WESSELS



Michael Anthony Wessels was born in South Africa on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1958. He was always a questing, unconventional spirit. He found inspiration in books, nature, people, history, experimental living and social justice. Extensive travels included a hazardous crossing of the Himalayas on foot. Walking and steeping himself in different cultures and religions were lifelong pursuits of his. His academic and career trajectories were unusual, with his successes bearing testament to his gifts and deeply held convictions.

In the 1980s Michael spent some time teaching English to black schoolchildren, then he registered for an Honours degree in English at the University of Natal. This was followed by a Master's dissertation titled "Disseminating the Myth: The Propagation of South African Ruling-class Ideology through the Literature Prescribed for Black Schools." Working on this project, which focused on exposing apartheid-era social engineering through literature, deepened his expertise in theory and his interest in the power of myth. Thereafter Michael taught in a newly independent Namibia and lectured at a teachers' training college in South Africa, before embarking on an extended period of travel.

Once returned to South Africa, Michael founded an alternative community of friends living on a hillside of the Byrne Valley in the KwaZulu-Natal mistbelt. His life partner, Linzi Rabinowitz, came to live here, and their son Akira was born in 2005, with their second son Tao following in 2007.

In 2002 Michael started work on a PhD at the University of Natal under supervision of Liz Gunner, completing the work in 2006. The thesis, "Interpretation and the /Xam Narratives," closely examined the nineteenth century archive of materials collected by Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek in Cape Town from /Xam informants. Michael engaged with prior critical material on this corpus and cast a fresh



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scrutiny on the narratives themselves as literary texts. This highly original and theoretically adroit reading questioned received wisdom about the /Xam oral narratives and instead viewed them as sophisticated material for in-depth interpretation. One of his examiners paid the work the accolade of being the best thesis he had ever read.

The revised thesis was published in 2010 as *Bushman Letters: Interpreting /Xam Narratives*. This book was the major piece of research published during Michael's period of postdoctoral work, but he proved himself to be an enthusiastic and prolific researcher of original articles on /Xam oral stories during this time. He also worked on the Encyclopaedia of South African Arts Culture and Heritage (ESAACH) project, led by Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, who referred fondly to Michael as "the tallest Bushman." Michael organised a highly successful conference on Khoi and San representation in Pietermaritzburg in 2013. He and Keyan Tomaselli co-edited a special issue of *Critical Arts* including some contributions to the conference, and this was subsequently republished by Routledge as *San Representation: Politics, Practice and Possibilities*.

In 2011 Michael started lecturing at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (formerly the University of Natal). Always interested in Romantic poetry and Indian literature, he developed new courses supplemented by websites packed with useful information and extensive illustrations.

Michael attended numerous conferences where he habitually asked searching questions, provoking interesting discussion. At the 16<sup>th</sup> triennial ACLALS conference held in St Lucia in 2013 he was appointed the chair of the association, which, as is well known, has been at the forefront of investigating postcolonial literature for over five decades and which has included many famous literary scholars in its ranks. This position of chair lasted until the next ACLALS conference held in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in 2016. The conference theme, "'Stories that float from afar': The Idea of Postcolonial Culture: Inclusions and Exclusions" was inspired by the words of a /Xam storyteller contemplating thoughts of home, narrative and the effects of colonialism. The conference sub-themes encompassed varied approaches to interpreting literature and culture, including from feminist, queer, postcolonial, ecocritical and transnational perspectives. A special issue of *Matatu: A Journal for African Culture and Society* including some articles based on papers delivered at this conference will appear shortly.

In 2015 Michael was appointed associate professor at the University of the Western Cape, where he continued to inspire students and engage in debate with colleagues. Over the course of his academic career he published over 30 chapters in books and accredited articles in scholarly journals. Most of this work was in the field of San Studies, but he also performed research on contemporary South African literature.

Sadly, Michael's academic career was cut short when he died in a swimming pool at the University of the Western Cape on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2018.

I recall an anecdote about a newly appointed young don being given advice by an old professor: "All of us here are clever; be kind, dear boy, be kind." This was advice that Michael Wessels never needed, as he was amply supplied with both cleverness and kindness. Across many walks of life, many mourn his passing, but remember with fondness his intelligence, vitality and warmth.

Cheryl Stobie  
English Studies  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Pietermaritzburg



### Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 16-20 April, 2018

<https://www.chogm2018.org.uk/>

“We are the difference makers”



The Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF) took place at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London from 16-18 April this year. Janet Wilson and I attended as delegates. The People’s Forum, which ran in parallel with a Youth Forum, a Women’s Forum and a Business Forum, preceded the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), a biennial event which brings together most of the heads of state of Commonwealth countries. This year it took place in the UK because Vanuatu, which was originally expected to host the meeting, was unable to do so largely because of the impact of climate change on the country’s infrastructure.

Given the opportunity to host the event and no doubt wishing in the run-up to Brexit to revitalise its economic links with the Commonwealth, the British government invested a great deal in what proved a fairly lavish event, even co-opting various members of the royal family to speak at some sessions. It also, one policeman told us, mobilised some 90% of the Metropolitan Police force in order to mount the enormous security operation required.

The overall theme of the People’s Forum was “Inclusive Governance: The Challenge for a Contemporary Commonwealth”. Each of the three days of the event was focused on a different aspect: “Exploring Exclusion in the Commonwealth”, “Injustice in the Commonwealth”, and “Accountable Governance”. A major concern of the organisers and a subtext running through many of the sessions was the question of how best to renew the Commonwealth.

The individual sessions convened around a broad range of timely and often contentious issues of particular concern to Commonwealth countries from “Reimagining Migration”, “Inclusive Education”, “Indigenous Rights”, “Women negotiating peace” and “Institutional Racism” to “Climate Justice”, “Dissent”, “Resistance” and “Universal Health Coverage”. Whatever else it may have shown, the event certainly confirmed that with people from 50-odd countries participating the Commonwealth continues to offer a very lively forum for debate and an excellent opportunity for networking.

The Commonwealth Foundation, which organized the People’s Forum, has on occasion been criticized for not paying enough attention to the role of culture in Commonwealth societies. Not this time however, for here they grasped the opportunity to foreground literature. The inspired choice as master of ceremonies was Mr Gee, a popular black British poet and radio presenter; the first keynote was given by the Nigerian writer Ben Okri; and there were performances by poets from St Lucia, Malaysia and Tonga.

Ben Okri’s inspiring opening keynote “Ending Exclusion: A Path to Renewal” was one of the undoubted highlights of the meeting, abounding as it did in memorable and eminently quotable formulations such as “The truth of the world is a hard truth” and “We have to accept the countenance of our times”. In a world increasingly bedeviled by nationalism, he argued, we need to “reconfigure ourselves into something new”. “We need truth-tellers,” he said, “not politicians who



sell us moral laziness.” The very notion of Commonwealth, he thought, needs redefinition. Its rich tapestry of difference is unique, plurality with unity is at its heart, and the diversity it embodies “is the true ideal of humanity”. Many of our societies are riven with poverty and injustice, he argued, and justice doesn’t happen by itself. We need a new language that speaks to power, “the power of those who never thought themselves powerful”, since “we are the difference makers”, and “only free people can make a free world”. (Okri’s speech is available on Youtube).

A striking aspect of the CPF is the high-profile speakers it can field. For example, I attended a session addressed by Theresa May, Bill Gates, and Andrew Holness, the young Prime Minister of Jamaica, which demonstrated just how stimulating such CPF sessions can be. For all her rhetoric about the “free and fair trade” Theresa May expects post-Brexit Britain will be able to fall back on with Commonwealth countries, she did have some encouraging things to say about Britain’s support for small states, its investment in the campaign to free the world of malaria, its concern to achieve 12 years of education across the Commonwealth, and its support for the blue charter. Most notable was her forthright condemnation of the legacy of discriminatory laws British colonial rule had imposed, and particularly those laws which criminalized same-sex relationships. “They were wrong then and they are wrong now”, she said. It takes some courage to tackle themes like LGBT rights in a forum like the Commonwealth where many member countries actively oppose them.

Rhetorically Bill Gates may not be a particularly gifted speaker, but he certainly projected abundant optimism. Convinced that, in spite of all, the world is improving he highlighted progress in polio eradication, malaria control, child survival and literacy. Progress, he stressed, is not inevitable, however. There must be investment in young people who constitute the majority of Commonwealth citizens. He was fulsome too in his praise of successes Commonwealth countries like Bangladesh, and Singapore had achieved in education and health. Commonwealth best practices, he asserted, could change the world.

Starting from a common history and the shared values of law, language, and democratic governance Jamaica shared with Britain, Andrew Holness took the opportunity, politely but firmly, to criticize British discrimination against members of the Windrush generation, a scandal much in the news that week, and to protest which he had led a delegation of Caribbean heads of state to 10 Downing Street. Holness devoted most of his contribution to climate change. From a Jamaican perspective, he said, “it is not a philosophical issue ... we don’t have time to indulge in discussion of whether it’s real or not ... it’s an existential threat”. Emphasizing that it is the countries which have contributed least to the situation which are suffering most from it, he reminded his listeners that some middle-income Caribbean countries had had their entire GDR wiped out. Developed countries, he argued, should take responsibility and come up with fresh systems of development assistance.

The CPF spawned a number of side events, one of which, hosted by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, was devoted to “Re-engaging with the Commonwealth? Gambia and Zimbabwe”. The particular interest of this meeting lay in the fact that Gambia had just rejoined the Commonwealth after enduring two decades of dictatorship, while Zimbabwe seemed to be on the point of rejoining. The Gambian section of the meeting gave us accounts of the difficulties of transition, while the Zimbabwean section offered a remarkably upbeat assessment of the country’s development post-Mugabe. (The new Zimbabwean foreign minister had been invited to CHOGM, and the country has now applied to rejoin, an application whose success will depend not least on whether the elections later this month are recognized as credible).

The Commonwealth People’s Forum first brought Civil Society Organisations together in 1991. Its aim was to add a civil society voice to the debates of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings. Its focus this time on integrating issues of exclusion, gender equality, disability, LGBT



rights, the plight of refugees, and the rights of indigenous people sometimes proved contentious, but it demonstrated once again the role that Civil Society Organisations, of which ACLALS is of course one, can play in the renewal of the Commonwealth and that civic voices do matter.

The London Declaration on Inclusive Governance for a Renewed Commonwealth, which summarises the findings of all the CFP sessions, is available online at: <https://www.blast.org.bd/content/Resources/CPF-2018-London-Declaration&Call-to-Action.pdf>

Geoff Davis

## ACLALS QUESTIONNAIRE

The response to the Questionnaire from ACLALS members across all branches has so far been disappointing. Since we had hoped in this project to reflect the views and experience of ACLALS members we are therefore asking you to consider filling the questionnaire out this time. It would be much appreciated.

**Please follow this link to the questionnaire on the ACLALS website:** <http://www.aclals.ulg.ac.be/news.html>

The questionnaire is part of our preparation to write a history of ACLALS (including all of its branch organisations). It is our belief that ACLALS has, for more than fifty years, played an important role in the evolution of Commonwealth / Postcolonial / World Literatures; and that many of its members have also made substantial contributions to the development of Literary Studies, especially but not only in English. However, the visible history of the organisation is somewhat obscured by the multiplicity of its branches, the lack of a central archive and the fact that many of its founding members have passed away. We are already working on possibilities for centralising the archive. From what we have discovered, some of the relevant materials have already been deposited in libraries and/or archives. But some also remain in private hands. In any case, the questionnaire aims to supplement the documentary record with a range of more personal accounts of participation in ACLALS and its branch organisations.

The success of our endeavour depends entirely on its being a collaborative effort and we hope we can rely upon your support. We will use the information we receive to help us write as lively and accurate account as possible.

Please pass this questionnaire on to past members of the association who may not otherwise receive it, as it is important that it circulate as widely as possible through ACLALS networks of both past and present members.

**To simplify matters, please return to Geoffrey Davis at <[geoffrey.davis@web.de](mailto:geoffrey.davis@web.de)>**

Geoff Davis (former Chair of ACLALS) & Russell McDougall (Current Chair of SPACLALS)



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