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Report from the Chair

By Isabel Carrera Suárez

Before 2019 draws to an end, we would like to send all members our best wishes through this yearly newsletter, which reflects on the events of the past months. These unfortunately brought some severe losses, the most painful being the unexpected death of our colleague Geoffrey Davis, so inextricably linked to EACLALS and a contributor to our last Newsletter. Our website holds a number of tributes to his work and life, the first of which, by past Chair and friend Helga Ramsey-Kurz, is included below. The year did also bring fruitful and convivial gatherings, such as the ACLALS conference held in Auckland last July, as well as the preliminaries of our forthcoming triennial to be held at Cardiff on 18-22 May 2020, to which so many of you have generously contributed proposals. Our 2018 Newsletter anticipated an earlier Brexit and appealed to the networking and bridging power of EACLALS, but the UK has only reluctantly assumed the awkward vote that decided its split from the EU, currently still in process. Notwithstanding the limited power of academic associations such as our own to repair political gashes, our voices seem especially urgent in the current international mood of wall-building and disrespect for human rights.

The 2019 ACLALS conference at the University of Auckland foregrounded this worrying political moment on many fronts, while also demonstrating the value of bringing together differently positioned academics, writers and activists for sometimes difficult but ultimately constructive discussions. Selina Tusitala Marsh, Claudia Marquis, Paula Morris, Tom Bishop and Malcolm Campbell designed an appealing programme whose keynote speakers alone, located each day in the opening session at 9 a.m., sparked conversation for the subsequent hours. Witi Ihimaera, as the beloved 'native son' of the host country, deservedly gave the opening keynote for an association that can pride itself on having recognized his talent from the early years. His talk, with the ironical title on the empire writing forward, prompted thought on the long and complex journey that the author, Maori writing, the world and ACLALS have undergone in these past decades, and inaugurated a conference rich in discussions of indigeneity, activism and the difficulties of enacting cross-cultural and transnational solidarity. Kei Miller and Melissa Lucashenko's historically wide-ranging and stirring lectures, Elleke Boehmer's meditation on postcolonial studies syllabi and Arundhati Roy's outspoken description of the risk of writing and being a woman and an activist in Modi's India, all made evident that postcolonial and indigenous writing, and consequently ACLALS and its branches, tread well beyond the usual academic spaces. Current concerns such environmental issues (water, ecocriticism, ecofeminism), indigeneity, asylum seekers, cosmopolitanisms or (re)definitions of postcolonialism, de/coloniality and 'world literatures' were markedly foregrounded in conference panels and papers, a reflection of the shifting interests and anxieties held by contemporary thought and activism. Inevitable cancellations apart, the conference was well attended and had a good number of EACLALS presenters. Moving tributes were also paid to the two outstanding ACLALS figures and past Chairs, Geoff Davis and Michael Wessels, so unexpectedly lost and greatly missed at this first meeting in their absence.

The many panels and events held simultaneously encroached slightly on the AGM. Brief branch reports showed the wealth of regional activities, often in heroic funding circumstances. The main point in the agenda was the issue of a possible change of denomination of ACLALS and its chapters, already raised at the Stellenbosch conference and AGM in 2016, and here discussed mostly in relation to the unanimous vote by the Canadian branch, CACLALS (in their 2018 and



2019 AGMs) in favour of changing their own name, possibly to CAPS (Canadian Association of Postcolonial Studies); briefly put, the reasons related to the disengagement of the Commonwealth Foundation and the limitations (both political and descriptive) of the term 'Commonwealth'. Not all chapters favoured a change, and the AGM agreement was that individual branches may modify their denomination without loss of membership of ACLALS, but that (at least for the time being) the central branch will retain its historical name. In EACLALS, the subject was raised briefly in the Oviedo 2017 AGM and through a subsequent questionnaire, to only a handful of replies, although there is awareness that the younger European generation feels distinct disaffection for the term 'Commonwealth'. The matter thus remained unresolved.

As we were finalising this Newsletter for distribution, Chris Prentice, Chair of ACLALS, sent notice that the baton of ACLALS coordination has been passed on to the Canadian branch, CACLALS, following the tentative discussion of this possibility in Auckland. Anna Guttman, at Lakehead University, is the new ACLALS Chair, and the triennial conference will take place at University of Toronto in 2022, organized by Karina Vernon and Neil Ten Kortenaar, with a team that includes John Ball, Laura Moss, Henghameh Saroukhani and Veronica Austen. We are grateful for the work carried out in past years by Chris Prentice and her team, as well as the Auckland conference organisers. We also look forward to working with our Canadian colleagues, all good friends of (E)ACLALS, and to attending the conference in 2022.

On the threshold of 2020, after the recent elections in the UK, it seems almost certain that our triennial will take place in a post-Brexit Britain. The nostalgic aura awarded by Brexiters to the concept of the Commonwealth, conflictive for a critical trans-European association, may well reinforce the younger generation's distaste for the name. Nonetheless, EACLALS's calling for European interaction paired with the critique of Eurocentrism and coloniality remains intact, and our Cardiff meeting, even if complicated by an incipient process of exiting the EU, should prove an occasion to develop stronger ties and to exchange knowledge and plans for the future. Radhika Mohanram and Luisa Pèrcopo, at the University of Cardiff, have been working steadily on the organization of an exciting triennial conference, which they skillfully situated next to the Hay Festival. It was great news that one of their confirmed speakers, Bernardine Evaristo, received the Booker Prize last October to great acclaim, becoming the first Black woman and the first Black British author to do so. Information on the convention is given below, with details to be made available on the conference website in January.

The EACLALS Executive is also pleased to announce that, in aid of doctoral students and unfinanced scholars, who most frequently face difficulties to attend conferences, our travel bursaries will now include a scholar category, added to the postgraduate awards created by the previous Board. Calls for both categories will be open in January and posted on the EACLALS website. Preliminary details appear below and we encourage applications from interested postgraduate students and scholars participating in the conference.

We very much look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in what will no doubt be a memorable triennial conference at the University of Cardiff.

With very best wishes and hoping for a fruitful 2020 for all,

Isabel Carrera Suárez, on behalf of the Board



UPDATE: CARDIFF CONFERENCE

EACLALS Triennial Conference 2020: Transcultural Mo(ve)mments: Memories, Writings, Embodiments.

Date: **May 18-22, 2020**

Venue: **Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales**

Thank you to everyone who sent in an abstract. They make for an exciting programme and we look forward to meeting you all there. We are currently working on developing our website and hope to have information for you online in early January.

Website: www.eaclals2020.wales

Email address: eaclals2020@cardiff.ac.uk

For more information please do not hesitate to contact the conference conveners:

Radhika Mohanram mohanramr1@cardiff.ac.uk and

Luisa Pèrcopo percopol@cardiff.ac.uk

EACLALS Triennial Conference Postgraduate Travel Grants

The board of EACLALS is pleased to announce the 2020 edition of its postgraduate grants, covering travel and accommodation up to 500 Euros, to attend the upcoming EACLALS triennial conference at Cardiff.

The recipients of the EACLALS Triennial Travel Grant will be chosen on the relevance of their research to the conference theme as discernible from the abstract of their proposed paper.

Applications must be made through the application form provided on the EACLALS website <https://eaclals.eu/2019/12/20/travel-bursaries-for-cardiff-2020/> and sent to the chair of EACLALS, Isabel Carrera Suarez at icarrera@uniovi.es no later than 25 January 2020.

EACLALS Triennial Conference Scholar Travel Bursaries

The board of EACLALS, understanding the difficulties faced by younger or non-financed scholars, particularly those from non-European countries, offers grants covering travel and accommodation up to 500 Euros for scholars (PhD holders) in unwaged, non-tenured positions or other specified precarious financial situations, to attend the EACLALS triennial conference at Cardiff in 2020.

The recipients of the EACLALS Triennial Scholar Travel Bursary will be chosen on the quality and relevance of their proposal to the conference theme, the continued membership and/or previous participation in EACLALS or ACLALS events and the discernable need for funding due to precarious academic positions.



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Applications must be made through the application form provided on the EACLALS website <https://eaclals.eu/2019/12/20/travel-bursaries-for-cardiff-2020/> and sent to the chair of EACLALS, Isabel Carrera Suarez at icarrera@uniovi.es no later than 25 January 2020.

(Board members of ACLALS chapters are not eligible for bursaries).

OBITUARY – Geoff Davis (25.11.1943–22.11.2018)



In one of our many conversations leading up to the 2014 EACLALS Triennial Conference in Innsbruck Geoff and I found ourselves musing melancholically about how difficult it would be in the not too distant future to find someone suited to give the Anna Rutherford Memorial Lecture by dint of having known Anna personally. I suggested that we should have something like a Geoff Davis Address, not instead, but as well. “Don’t you dare!” he exclaimed in absolute horror when he realised that I was serious. I guess he would be just as horrified to learn of anyone even thinking about having a Geoff Davis Memorial Lecture at one of our future conferences. Such was his modesty

- memorable in itself and perhaps most appropriately remembered in silent affection along with his warmth and enthusiasm, his energy and unbending optimism. Here I want to make a point of these endearing qualities of his though, because they shaped the spirit of EACLALS and made the association a home for so many scholars like myself seeking more in the academy than fulfilment of professional ambitions. Many found what they were missing in the generosity with which Geoff would share his vast knowledge of literature, his passion for learning, his commitment to the Commonwealth Foundation and the countries it stands for. “It changed my life,” he used to say about his role as chair of EACLALS and ACLALS and he would go on, his blue eyes sparkling, to tell the stories he had gathered on his many travels of encounters with crooks and academics, rattlesnakes and writers. Brilliant raconteur that he was there was no way one could not be affected by his positive outlook on life and his generous way of seeing others. “Marvellous!” he would say and sigh with pleasure at a colleague’s achievements. “Marvellous,” he would judge a conference that had gone well. “Marvellous,” he would remark, always in genuine wonder and admiration, after a good talk or reading or performance. Marvellous one might duly call the massive enjoyment he himself managed to derive from his work and the incredibly diverse research he accomplished. In due course others will honour it in their obituaries that, naturally, will take time to write. At this point it is Geoff Davis, the friend, colleague, mentor, supporter, teacher, and companion, I would like us to recall with the fondness he used to give so generously to our association.

Helga Ramsey-Kurz
University of Innsbruck

More tributes to Geoff can be found on our website: <https://eaclals.eu/>



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Aachen Tribute to Professor Geoffrey Davis (25.11.1943–22.11.2018)

A commemorative tribute to Geoff Davis took place in his 'home' base Aachen, Germany on November 2nd 2019. The timing of the event, shortly before the first anniversary of Geoff's untimely departure from this planet, was chosen by his widow Ingrid, who had organised the tribute jointly with the Department of English Studies at Aachen University of Technology, of which Geoff had been a member for over fifty years, represented by Sven Strasen, Peter Wenzel and Pete Marsden.

Geoff's extraordinary life and exceptional achievements were celebrated by a clutch of invited speakers, covering the multifarious facets of the man and his opus: Manfred Romich (Sociology/Aachen); Ian Wallace (German Studies/Bath); Bénédicte Ledent (CEREP: Postcolonial [Anglophone] Studies/Liège), co-convenor with Geoff of the 2000 cross-border ASNEL conference; Thomas Brückner translator, freelance musician and cultural manager/Leipzig); Dennis Haskell (English and Cultural Studies: UWA, Perth), co-organiser of the academic exchange (one of many initiated by Geoff) between their respective home institutions; and Pete Marsden, Geoff's immediate local colleague for the best part of half a century. For the high point of the gathering, special guest Dennis Haskell donned his non-academic hat and treated the gathering to a reading of his own poetry. The verbal contributions were interspersed by musical interludes in which Katja Boxwell (voc), a graduate of the Aachen Department, was accompanied by Pete Marsden [kb]). The atmosphere throughout the meeting was calm and constructive. Despite the sadness of the occasion, the response from the audience (of about 50-60 - quite a few people had been unable to attend) was overwhelmingly positive.

The event was generously funded by the Aachen Department of English Studies, the Friends of Aachen University of Technology (proRWTH Aachen), Brill Rodopi, publishers of the astoundingly successful Cross / Culture Series comprising more than two hundred volumes that Geoff had co-founded with Hena Maes-Jelinek back in 1990, and GAPS (the German Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies). It was particularly gratifying that Fred van der Zee of Editions Rodopi, who had fostered that project from the very start, was present at the tribute together with his assistant Christa Stevens.

Peter H. Marsden
(Aachen), 19 December 2019

