

NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL: THE SPIRIT OF EACLALS

By Janet Wilson and Daria Tunca

They say that time flies when you're having fun. Hard as we may try to lend this opening statement the touch of irony that it deserves, we have to admit that there have been few dull moments since we took over from the previous executive board at the EACLALS triennial conference in Venice. In March 2008, almost three years ago, we were entrusted with the daunting task of coordinating the activities of an association that had been founded by one of the pioneers of Commonwealth studies, Anna Rutherford. Furthermore, the organisation had for the previous six years been headed by a committee whose values and attitudes, while resolutely modern, had reinforced the enduring spirit of EACLALS as established by its founder: comradeship balanced with dedication in attending to the association's more demanding missions.

What initially appeared to be an intimidating inheritance has turned out to be one of our greatest assets.

Indeed, both Geoffrey Davis (the association's past chair) and Bénédicte Ledent (its former treasurer) have continued to lend us their expertise on numerous occasions since the Venice conference. Their generosity deserves to be acknowledged once more, for it has greatly facilitated our own modest attempts, on the one hand, to run the organisation with a sense of continuity and, on the other, to lead the association into new directions whenever possible. As the end of our term draws near, the time has come for us to look back, but also to look ahead, before handing over the reins to the next team.

As we approached our task in 2008, we planned to extend some of EACLALS's existing activities and introduce several innovations, in the shared endeavour of promoting academic and collegial exchanges between scholars of all generations across Europe. Perpetuating a community spirit was not as straightforward as it may seem, for it requires common interests to unite large numbers of people (and more cynically incentives for members to pay their annual fees). In the contemporary climate of economic unease, we had to realistically respond to the need to provide EACLALS with a strong professional infrastructure. We saw this as an indispensable provision, hoping that scholars and students in the field would appreciate the value of subscribing to EACLALS, and eventually develop towards the association a feeling of attachment – similar to that which many longer term members had already discovered – or at least, for the less sentimentally-inclined, a recognition of the organisation's practical merits.

With this project in mind, of renewing and expanding EACLALS, we started by extending the board through creating a series of ad hoc committees, each in charge of a particular aspect of the association's activities. Among the work done by the new committees and sub-formations, the most immediately beneficial has probably been that of the communications team, Vincent van Bever Donker and Dobrota Pucherová. By sending out email bulletins and preparing the bi-annual newsletters, they have confirmed that EACLALS is an organisation in step with

the times in its ways of keeping its members informed.

If one of our aims was to reaffirm the association's relevance to the postcolonial community by disseminating targeted announcements, another was to encourage doctoral students and early-career researchers to join. A postgraduate committee was set up especially for this. Its dynamic members, Birte Heidemann and Ole Birk Laursen, volunteered to organise a conference primarily aimed at doctoral students at Chemnitz Technical University, Germany, in March 2011 with the innovative theme "Postcolonialism and Labour". However, due to lack of uptake (for a number of reasons, one being the proximity to the EACLALS triennial in April 2011) this has now been rescheduled for 27 and 28 August 2011 and will be held in London (watch out for the CFP, which will be re-advertised soon). In any case, the postgraduate committee's efforts have shown results: the association is now attracting many new doctoral students from European countries like Germany, Italy and the UK.

By coincidence (or perhaps not?), these three countries also host associations with which EACLALS has recently developed affiliations: GNEL/ASNEL (Germany), AISCLI (Italy), and PSA (UK). These newly established relationships are designed to increase the geographical visibility of all the organisations, but also to benefit members, who are now entitled to discounts when joining both EACLALS and any of the partner associations. From a more general perspective, these connections also further the committee's wish to attract researchers from all over Europe. In the western parts of the continent, as mentioned above, we established contacts with existing organisations; in Eastern Europe, we focused on directly encouraging individuals to join. This is why, developing an initiative informally undertaken by the previous board, we introduced an official "Eastern European and Turkish" membership fee. Still following the example of our EACLALS predecessors, we decided to offer three grants to help Eastern European scholars to attend the upcoming triennial conference.

This conference is arguably the highlight of the EACLALS calendar, and we could not conclude this editorial without saying a few words about the next triennial, which will be held at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey, from 26 to 30 April 2011. The organisation of such a large gathering is, as always, a team effort, and due credit must be given here to all those who have worked, and continue to work, towards its realisation: convenor Işıl Baş, her assistant Aylın Alkaç Kutlukan and their team, Cihan Yurdaın and Melis Günekan; their Turkish colleagues Rezzan Kocaöner Silkü and Atilla Silkü; and conference committee members Gerhard Stilz and Annalisa Oboe.

All contributed to the development of the call for papers, which was first circulated in September 2009 and attracted well over three hundred proposals from all five continents. The programme committee was particularly pleased with the creativity with which some of the prospective participants approached the theme, "Under Construction: Gateways and Walls"; they will no doubt contribute to making the conference a stimulating event, as will the plenary speakers and creative writers who have agreed to attend. At this stage, confirmed academic guests include Jean Comaroff, Margaret Daymond, Maureen Freely, Declan Kiberd and Patrick Williams. They will be joined by many writers and performers: Diana Evans, Mohsin Hamid, Michael Harlow, Kevin Ireland, Gail Jones, Stavros Karayanni, Jan Kemp, Stephanos Stephanides, Robert Sullivan and Chika Unigwe. We hope to add one or two names to this list in the next few weeks.

As we approach the Istanbul conference with a mixture of excitement and trepidation, we pause to consider what conclusions should be drawn from our time on the board. What has become clear to us is that the success of an organisation such as EACLALS cannot be gauged from behind computer screens; it cannot be quantified in terms of the number of emails we exchanged in the past three years, nor can it solely be judged, for that matter, by looking at the size of the current membership. Rather, the ultimate success of the association of which we are all

part lies in the increase of a sharing and collegiality in our common pursuits: our eagerness to learn from experienced scholars if we are junior researchers, and exchange ideas with younger colleagues if we are senior academics; the efforts towards rigour and originality that we make in our presentations at the triennial events; our willingness to reach out to others, and our enthusiasm about the coffee break as an opportunity to engage in lively debates – over the value of a novel, the limitations of a theory, or any other topic we are passionate about. It is in these various ways that the Istanbul conference will be significant, for it will determine whether our scholarly community has, in the increasingly individualistic world of academia, managed to preserve the spirit of EACLALS for another three years.

CONFERENCE REPORT

Chotro Three: "Local Knowledge – Global Translations: The Imagination & the Images of Indigenous Communities in the Twenty-First Century"

Bhasha Research and Publications Centre, in association with the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS)

11-16 September 2010 at Delhi & Chail

by Pavan Kumar Malreddy (Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany)

Having attended the previous two Chotro conferences, I was happy to see some familiar faces among the participants, organizers, volunteers, and the Chotro staff upon my arrival in Delhi. Chotro Three was organized in association with the Bhasha Research Centre, Baroda, the Developing Countries Research Centre, Delhi and the ACLALS. Apropos the annual theme of the conference of indigenous communities, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Chotro organization has emerged as a global platform for scholars, activists, writers, and artists representing various (local) indigenous groups and languages over the years. The conference featured well over eighty presentations on a diverse range of topics

concerning indigenous and tribal groups from around the world – from the Lambada tribes in Andhra Pradesh to the Oba of Benin, and the Inuit of Canada.

Although the attendance of the Indian participants outnumbered the overseas visitors, I found the diversity of the topics discussed, and the indigenous and tribal communities represented therein, quite comprehensive. A good number of papers dealt with the racialization of the tribal groups, the systemic destruction of the tribal languages and natural resources, and the near civil war conditions in the so-called Seven Sister States in Eastern India: Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. Espousing the indigenous significance of the Northern and North-eastern Indian states, the second part of the conference was held at the foothills of the lower Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh, which is home for tribal communities such as the Kinnaure, Lahule, Gaddi, and Pirals. Other presentations from the Indian participants covered a vast terrain of indigenous issues: the oral narratives of the Dungri Bills of Gujarat; the ethno-linguistics of the Shabar Karia's of West Bengal; the revival of birth and death rituals among the Malayalis of the Kalvaryan Hills; and the experiential histories of the Lambadas of Andhra, among others.

Much of the discussion in these presentations was centred around the role of the state policies on economic marginalisation, exploitation of the traditional agrarian resources, the destruction of tribal languages through modern educational systems, the efforts of the NGOs and other tribal-based organizations in mobilising tribal people to represent their claims at the national level. While these issues found parallels in other presentations on Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the case of the white settler colonial countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand proved to be somewhat different from the rest. Whereas in the postcolonial states most tribal groups are subject to marginalisation from the mainstream society, in the settler-colonial context they are the victims of an aggressive political campaign for assimilation and integration (into