

## **Biennial Conference of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies**

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The 12<sup>th</sup> conference of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies (AACS) was hosted by the Australian National University in Canberra, from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2017. The conference does not focus on education, but I am reporting on it in this journal because of the postcolonial ethos that characterises the meeting. It is an example of a gathering that investigates, discusses and celebrates the culture and society of the Caribbean as a postcolonial region.

The conferences attract scholars, researchers and artists from Australia, the Caribbean and other countries around the world. They afford an opportunity for both established scholars and early-career researchers to present their findings in a friendly and informal atmosphere. AACS conferences have been supported by several Australian universities which recognize their value in contributing to cross-cultural research, scholarship and cultural exchange.

The Australian Association for Caribbean Studies was founded in 1995 as an interdisciplinary group of academics, postgraduate students and others concerned with the Caribbean region. The first conference took place in Brisbane in 1995 and since then it has been held biennially at universities around Australia. The AACS conference is also noteworthy for its themes, which are richly productive in stimulating unusual ideas and approaches to thinking about Caribbean culture. The conferences follow a tradition of being excitingly interdisciplinary, reflected in papers on the natural sciences, the social sciences, literature, history, education, politics, geography, law, poetry, art, music and film. The 2017 theme

of the AACS conference was 'Interiors' (see website: <<https://aacs2017.wordpress.com/theme/>>).

### **2017 AACS conference theme: 'Interiors'**

Presenters at AACS conferences are encouraged to think about how perspectives suggested by the theme might be expressed in their own research and writing. They may offer papers related to the theme, or go outside of the theme. In 2015, the Wollongong conference took as its theme "Land and Water", particularly apt in the venue of a coastal city. The Canberra conference, with its theme of 'Interiors', took place at the only inland site at which the AACS has held conferences, one in 2001 and another in 2017.

As the conference organisers observed about the 'Interiors' theme, every Caribbean country has its inner life. They started ideas rolling by inviting presenters to consider 'interiors' such as these:

- the geographical: the Caribbean's inland cities and regions
- the spatial: haciendas, homes, the urban, the countryside, theatre, plazas, old city centres, institutions
- the personal: biographies, literary representations of the self or the nation

Thus, presenters could consider material ranging from the geophysical character of the Caribbean, the perception of 'inland', the interior decoration and architecture of buildings, to the interior life of institutions including jails and mental hospitals. The theme could also relate to these ideas: "Literature scholars have a direct line to the study of interiors and interiority in fictional, dramatic, theatrical, poetic and autobiographical characterization. The writing of biography always involves a balance or struggle between the exterior and interior lives of the subject. This runs us quickly to the psychological interior of the individual Caribbean person, related to ideas of personhood, identity, 'inscape' (an idea counterbalancing that of 'landscape') and livity and I-nity. The interior life of the soul, religion and possession; the headspaces in which crimes are conceived; secrets and lies. These are just a few ideas..., all of them open to study using social science, historical, literary and natural science methods" (see <<https://aacs2017.wordpress.com/theme/>>).

The conference keynote speakers discussed the ‘interiors’ theme in a variety of ways, with the following papers on ethnobotany, politics, and poetry:

- *Perspectives on the Baobab’s Guinea Tamarind Name in Tobago*: John Rashford, Professor of Anthropology at the College of Charleston, USA.
- *Captivity and Freedom in Guantánamo Bay, a Caribbean Site of Conscience*: Don E. Walicek Associate Professor of English and Linguistics, University of Puerto Rico.
- *Saltwater Trouble*: Dr. Angelique Nixon, lecturer at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.

Embodying the stimulating diversity of the conference were papers addressing the following categories:

#### **Education and Identity:**

Anne Hickling-Hudson, “Interiority and the Grenada Revolution, 1979-1983: A retrospective on educational change.”

Kathleen Phillips-Lewis, “Global versus local in the construction of Caribbean identity.”

Anabel Fernandez Santana, “Children of the new man: Collective identities and cultural consumption in Havana youth.”

#### **History and Biography**

Diane Austin-Broos, “Willis Ogilvy Isaacs: A life.”

Kit Candlin, “Deep Inside the Fedon Rebellion: Grenada 1795.”

Justine K. Collins, “The transplantation of Common Law in the British West Indies and the reverberations thereof, 1700-1900.”

Kathleen E. A. Monteith, “The coffee planters: Their residency, status and demographic profile in early nineteenth century plantation Jamaica.”

#### **Literature and Language**

Caryn Rae Adams, “Uncomfortable truths: Fictional autobiography as narrative resistance in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.”

Anne Collett, "Claude McKay's Desolate City."  
Ben Etherington, " 'The liquid Negro language of the South': Claude McKay's Exemplary Doggerel."  
Russell McDougall, "Imperial and postcolonial fictions of Pauline Bonaparte."  
Ruth Mahalia McHugh-Dillon, "Junot Díaz and Dany Laferrière: Race and masculinity inside the bedroom."  
Sophie Pappenheim, " 'Nègres pieds-à-terre, nègres va-nu-pieds': Reading the interiors of allegory in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*."  
Sue Thomas, "The haunting of Julia Martin in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*."

### **Visual Art, Film and Music in societal context**

Bernice J. deGannes Scott, "Pan on the move: From Port-of-Spain to the rest of the world."  
Consuelo Martinez-Reyes, "Economies on and off screen in Juan de los Muertos and Dólares de arena."  
Susan Wilczak, "Reflection and identity: Contemporary women artists of Curacao search the natural and cultural environment of the island for inspiration and the inner motivation to create their art."

### **Geography and Demography**

Laurence Brown, "A migration revolution: Island frontiers and demographic transitions, 1750-1790."  
Brian J. Hudson, "A geographer explores Caribbean literature and discovers some interesting interior features."

### **Social & Economic Analysis**

Dinah Hippolyte, "Tobacco control in Trinidad and Tobago: A framework theory for conceptual approach."  
Carlos Eduardo Morreo, "A debt is a powerful device: PetroCaribe and the unmaking of 'socialist oil' in Jamaica."  
Kim-Marie Spence, "Beyond the stereotype: Reggae, class and policy in Jamaica."

### **Vitality**

The success of the Canberra conference, the 12<sup>th</sup> since the foundation of the AACS in 1995, illustrates the continuing vitality of the association. Moreover, the election of a relatively

youthful committee at the AGM gives reason to be optimistic about the future of the organisation. The next conference is scheduled to be held in 2019 at the University of Western Sydney. The newly elected leaders of the AACS are Dr. Laurence Brown and Dr. Consuelo Martinez-Reyes, academics at the Australian National University. Their email addresses are as follows:

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