Citizenship and Literature:  
Past Concerns, Present Issues, Future Trajectories 
Münster, 20-21 February 2017

Conference Program

**Monday, 20 February 2017**

14:00 – 14:30
Katja Sarkowsky (WWU Münster)  
Conference Opening and Opening Statement

14:30 – 15:30
Brook Thomas (UC Irvine)  
"The US's Civic Myth of the Citizen/Soldier"

15:30 – 16:00
Coffee Break

16:00 – 17:00
Beth Piatote (UC Berkeley)  
"Sound, Sonic Warfare, and Citizenship: Notes from Standing Rock and The Surrounded"

17:00 – 18:00
Peter Schneck (University of Osnabrück)  
"Savage Civility and Civil Savages: Early Modern Foundations of Post-Colonial Citizenship"

18:00
Reception in the English Seminar

**Tuesday, 21 February 2017**

10:00 – 11:00
Mita Banerjee (Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz)  
"Writing the Citizen: Citizenship, Life Writing and Disability in Jason Kingsley's and Mitchell Levitz's Count Us In"

11:00 – 12:00
Carol Fadda-Conrey (Syracuse University)  
"Narrative Cartographies of Citizenship and Rights in the Age of US Empire"

12:00 – 14:00
Lunch

14:00 – 15:00
Tamar Hess (Hebrew University, Jerusalem)  
"Dystopia and Citizenship in Contemporary Israeli Fantasy Literature"

15:00 – 16:00
Mark Stein (WWU Münster)  
"'Remember the Ship in Citizenship': Debunking the 'Windrush Myth'"

16:00 – 16:30
Coffee Break

16:30 – 17:30
David Chariandy (Simon Fraser University)  
"Black Writing and the Limits of Citizenship"

17:30 – 18:30
Closing Discussion: Future Inquiries
Abstracts

Mita Banerjee (Mainz University)
"Writing the Citizen: Citizenship, Life Writing and Disability in Jason Kingsley's and Mitchell Levitz's Count Us In"

In her book *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (2006), American philosopher Martha Nussbaum has raised a question which may also be pertinent to the connection between life-writing and citizenship. She argues that concepts of justice cannot be assessed in the abstract; instead, she notes, they must be measured against the lives they make possible, of which they exclude from ideas of citizenship and political participation. This paper uses Jason Kingsley and Mitchell Levitz's co-authored autobiography *Count Us In: Growing Up with Down Syndrome*, as a case study against which to measure Nussbaum's claim. I argue that this autobiography can be read as a form of citizenship test by two young men living with Down syndrome, proving their "civic fitness" (Molina) and hence their eligibility for full citizenship. Seeing this "literary citizenship test" both as progressive and in some ways also problematic, my aim in this paper is to explore the relevance of life writing as a genre for explaining both the concept of citizenship and various degrees of social and political participation.

Works Cited

David Chariandy (Simon Fraser University)
“Black Writing and the Limits of Citizenship”

Memory is a tough place. You were there.
-Claudia Rankine, Citizen

Drawing upon recent writings by Claudia Rankine and Dionne Brand, this paper will explore an emergent philosophical ‘mood’ in contemporary Black women’s writing — one distinguished by a renewed activation of ‘memory’ in the service of critiquing the historic terms, ideals, and accomplishments of citizenship movements. Rankine and Brand, the paper argues, offer allied visions of social justice and “wake work” (Christina Sharpe) against the corrosive rise of ethnic nationalism, yet also in distinction to the beleaguered ideals of “multicultural citizenship” (Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka).

Carole Fadda-Conrey (Syracuse University)
“Narrative Cartographies of Citizenships and Rights in the Age of US Empire”

While US borders are increasingly patrolled and used to exclude populations, and political debates in the US still overwhelmingly focus on domestic, national boundaries, it is impossible to disassociate the US nation-state from its imperial reach. The War on Terror and the long-standing U.S. economic, political, and military interventions have transformed the lives of citizens and non-citizens, at “home” in the U.S. and outside of it. As discussed by various scholars in the field of American Studies, US national and imperial formations are premised on multiple and intersecting discursive logics that emphasize exceptionalism, benevolence, and human rights. These logics operate differently at the national and international levels: although claims of exceptionalism augment feelings of fear and vulnerability locally, they are simultaneously mobilized to expand territory, resources, and power through military violence. My paper aims to disrupt US hegemonic discourses and their deployment in national and
transnational contexts through the lens of testimonials and other life writing texts, focusing on how these texts undercut and complicate dominant understandings of homes, rights, citizenships, and belongings, and at the same time help reshape literary genres. To do so, this paper interrogates the discursive spaces facilitated/created (through literary narratives and testimonials) by some detainees of the "War on Terror" to show how these published texts unsettle the exceptionalism defining the US nation-state as a vulnerable homeland in need of protection. These texts include the Mauritanian detainee Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantanamo Diary*, the Yemeni prisoner Mohamad Farag Ahmad Bashmilah's testimonials, as well as Arab American poet Philip Metres’ integration of the testimonials of Bashmilah and those given by prisoners and US soldiers at Abu Ghraib in his book of poetry *Sand Opera*. My analysis here then delineates alternative narrative mappings of the "War on Terror," as enacted through testimonials and other life writing texts, as well as the carceral logics underpinning the US nation-state and its imperial power. The narratives I examine, while documenting the materialities of US carceral sites, complicate assumptions of detainees’ humanity based solely on their ability to speak/write. In doing so, I explore potent questions about detainees’ complex approaches to their own unmoorings, unhomings, and unbelongings, during their imprisonment and even after their release. More than merely documenting the materialities of what Laleh Khalili calls “detentions in shadows,” however, Bashmilah’s, Slahi’s, and Metres’ texts raise compelling questions about detainees’ perspectives and positionalities: How do these perspectives disrupt hegemonic national narratives of homeland security and rights? In what ways do the detainees’ portrayals of their subject positions through testimonials and literary narratives revise binaristic understandings of homes, communities, and belongings? How do these portrayals ultimately help us re-conceptualize the role of literary and narrative expression in constructions of nations and citizenships? And what rhetorical, artistic, and political vistas are made available by the psychic and physical landscapes offered by such narratives?

**Tamar Hess (Hebrew University Jerusalem)**

"Citizenship and Dystopia in Contemporary Israeli Fantasy Literature"

Dystopia is markedly present in contemporary Israeli fiction. Often these dystopias are structured within a Biblical theological context. The novels this paper discusses, Dror Burstein’s *Teet* (Mud, 2016) and Shimon Adaf’s *Kfor* (Nuntia, 2010), both depict heroes based on Biblical prophets (Jeremiah and Ezekiel respectively) but are distinct from one another in poetics, affect, and approach. Both novels may be read as part of current Israeli cultural and social concerns facing the continuous deterioration and disintegration of citizenship and democracy, the eradication of civil rights within Israel and the ongoing military rule in occupied Palestine. These processes correspond with the state of emergency declared when the State of Israel was founded in 1948, which has never been legally suspended.

In "Nuntia,” in a futurist Jewish ultra-orthodox Tel-Aviv, the bodies of male prodigies are plagued by a manifestation of Ezekiel’s visions of Cherubim and grow wings and talons. Poetry and non-Jews are equally forbidden free access to the city. The novel which is heavily engaged intertextually with ancient and medieval classical Hebrew literature, as well as Latin poetry, reaches a violent tragic closure of destruction, as does “Mud”. “Mud” however is written in a satirical mode, placing its main intertext of the book of Jeremiah in present day Jerusalem. Borstein’s initially hilarious and seemingly satirical novel turns into a furious lament over Jerusalem’s corruption and ruin. While Adaf’s novel highlights threats to authorship, art and free speech, and is concerned with gender based oppression, Borstein depicts the abuse of power and moral decay. Both do so while they seemingly isolate Jewish existence from its immediate urgent surroundings. In both novels questions of Palestinian citizenship, presence, and civil rights are invisible. This absence can be interpreted as blind indifference, but this paper suggests it is a mark of deep despair.
Beth Piatote (UC Berkeley)
“Sound, Sonic Warfare, and Citizenship: Notes from Standing Rock and The Surrounded”

The deployment of sonic weapons in warfare is nothing new, but its use against citizens in non-violent protest, such as the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies in their current resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline, is of great concern. Drawing on my recent work on law and the senses, this paper opens with a discussion of the use of sonic weapons in the escalation of a situation from “protest” (the right and valor of the citizen) to “war” (the construction of the citizen as enemy). While sonic cannons and incessant drones have created a soundscape of war in North Dakota, the Standing Rock protesters have also deployed sonic tools of resistance, particularly singing and drumming. The representation of singing and drumming as resistant acts is beautifully represented in D’Arcy McNickle’s 1936 novel, The Surrounded. The paper turns to this novel to consider a range of sonic representations and how sound can operate when other expressions of citizenship, such as public speech or legal testimony, refuse to be heard.

Peter Schneck (University of Osnabrück)
“Savage Civility and Civil Savages: Early Modern Foundations of Post-Colonial Citizenship”

The prevalent conceptual horizon of our notions of citizenship was historically established – and still remainsto be determined – by the state and the law. The understanding of citizenship as a status defined by law and guaranteed by the state thus still dominates the common sense of citizenship in Western democracies. Taking both the state and the law for granted, however, not only sustains a rather abstract and thoroughly legalistic notion of citizenship, it also fails to acknowledge the particular historical constellation which had to be negotiated between emergent and contested notions of the state, between expanding (and competing) legal orders and between national and colonial forms of citizenship during the early modern period. In order to discuss this particular constellation, I will focus on a rather notorious example of early modern ‘propagandistic’ poetry, taken from the general historical context of early English settler colonialism in North America, marking one decisive moment within that history, the ‘Jamestown massacre’ of 1622: Christopher Brooke’s Poem on the Late Massacre in Virginia. The focus of my discussion will be on the particular way in which Brooke’s poem projects and proposes a notion of ‘savage civility’ in reaction to the dreadful treachery committed by ‘civil savages’: projecting, in effect, a notion of modern citizenship as a ‘corpo-reality’ constantly threatened by, and thus inevitably struggling with violence from outside.

Mark Stein (WWU Münster)
“‘Remember the Ship in Citizenship’: Debunking the ‘Windrush Myth’”

Borders around nation states have become increasingly permeable, with respect to population flow, and also given multi-layered material, visceral, cultural, political, and economic relations to spaces elsewhere (to sub- and supranational entities; to diasporas; to ancestral homelands; to linguistic hubs and cultural centres). Urban spaces in particular demand that we read them as translocations, their subjects inhabiting several locations at once. The expansion of the term citizenship has been impacted by this development too – it has been pluralized and become multivalent. The Guyanese poet John Agard partakes of this tropification: emphasizing ‘the ship’ in citizenship, he identifies it as a cultural practice that imagines and effects membership in overlapping sovereignties. As Poet in Residence at the BBC in London, UK, his poem “Remember the Ship” was written in the context of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the SS Empire Windrush. Their function was the creation of visibility and a sense of history, memorializing the onset of large-scale postwar Caribbean migration to Britain. Agard’s work not only reflects the careering of the concept ‘citizenship’ from a legal and political term to a much broader concept marked by porosity. I want to demonstrate the ways in which it not only contributes to the Windrush celebrations but also critically engages the ‘Windrush myth’, which,
arguably, risks reinscribing Britain's Caribbean denizens as arrivants and newcomers, as unbelonging.

Brook Thomas (UC Irvine)
“The US’s Civic Myth of the Citizen/Soldier”

All nations have civic myths: myths about a nation’s founding, its ideals, and its membership. An important civic myth in the United States is that of the citizen/soldier, which hearkens to the myth of the Roman Cincinnatus. This myth links citizenship to a particular ideal of military service. I will examine how various works of literature set in the era of Reconstruction evoke the myth as the nation underwent a new founding moment. One section will be devoted to works portraying how African Americans earned citizenship through military service; a second to works using the myth to counter the legitimacy of African American citizenship; and a third to implications of the myth for arguments about the right to expatriation, which was crucial for a land of immigrants and was negotiated internationally through so-called “Bancroft Treaties,” after the famous historian/diplomat and Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft. I will end by updating the status of the myth in the age of an all “volunteer” Army, proposals for women to register for the draft, and the election of Donald Trump, a businessman with none of the agrarian roots associated with Cincinnatus.