

CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

1) Comparative Indigenous Studies

This research project departs from the idea that while political organizations have stressed the need for concerted effort to improve the situation of indigenous communities in many different parts of the world (US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia), such a transnational view of indigenous groups has so far not been addressed in the humanities. Fields such as Native American Studies, First Nations Studies, Maori Studies, Aboriginal Studies still seem to be nation-bound in their outlook. This project seeks to envision the possibility – and methodological feasibility – of a comparative indigenous studies. At the same time, it is also aware of the dangers such a comparative perspective may have, such as the lack of historical and cultural specificity. Arguing that there are similarities and differences to be explored in the field of indigenous studies, the project stresses the vibrancy and multi-facetedness of contemporary indigenous cultural production by bringing together artists, scholars, and writers from the Europe, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

As part of this research interest, the Center of Comparative Native and Indigenous Studies (CCNIS) was founded at the University of Mainz. Among the activities related to the idea of comparative indigenous studies, an interdisciplinary lecture course was held in the summer semester of 2011, funded by SOCUM ("Vanishing Indians and Disappearing Inuits? Envisioning Comparative Indigenous Studies." – to see the syllabus, please go to: http://www.amerikanistik.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/Flyer_CCNIS_Ringvorlesung_SoSe_2011.pdf).

A publication documenting the approaches introduced in the lecture course is being prepared for publication.

A SOCUM research group (AG3) is also dedicated to the field of comparative indigenous studies. (In collaboration with Prof. Anton Escher, Geography; Prof. Oliver Scheiding, American Studies; Dr. Gerd Becker, Geography, Cultural Anthropology; and Jun.-Prof. Michael Bachmann, Theatre Studies).

2) Naturalism/Naturalization

This project explores the intersection between the literature of naturalism and the history of naturalization. Linking literature and the law, the study departs explores the ways in which immigrants sought to be naturalized as American citizens, arguing before courts of law that they were indeed compatible with American culture and mores. This project sets out to argue that such a staging of naturalization cases can be traced not only to the courts, but also to the "courtroom" of literature at this historical period at the turn of the twentieth century.

Publications:

Banerjee, Mita. "A Whiteness of a Different Color?' Racial Profiling in John Updike's *Terrorist*." "Postcolonial Studies et études francophones." Ed. Janos Riesz and Véronique Porra. *Neohelicon* XXXV.2 (2008).

"Color Me Beautiful: Naturalism/Naturalization in Frank Norris' *The Octopus*." Representation and Decoration in a Postmodern Age. Ed. Alfred Hornung and Rüdiger Kunow. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009.

3) Interreligious Studies in the New Millennium

This project explores the resurgence of religious conflict as it is portrayed in contemporary literature and film. It argues that most depictions portray secularism as the only antidote to religious fundamentalism, thus neglecting the idea of a dialogue taking place *within* religious traditions. Taking Edward Said's collaboration with Daniel Barenboim as a point of departure, the project explores spaces outside of language which may provide a middle ground in-between religious differences.

Publications:

"Between the Burqa and the Beauty Parlor: Re-Orientalism in Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran*." *Living American Studies*. Ed. M. Banerjee, C. Birkle, B. Höttges, M. Siebald, N. Waller. Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2010. 301-325.

"In the Name of God': Pakistani Film and the Global Discourse of Postcoloniality." Joachim Frenk and Lena Steveker (eds): *Anglistentag 2010 Saarbrücken*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2011. 171-182.

4) Literature and Medicine: Comparative Medical Histories (1850-2000)

This project explores the clash of medical cultures as it takes place in the pages of American literature, from the literature of naturalism and the American Renaissance to the literature of postmodernism. While nineteenth-century American literature dismisses native and immigrant medical knowledge (such as traditional Chinese medicine), twentieth-century developments in the field of medicine seem to reverse this direction: Using insights from Chinese traditional medicine to manufacture pharmaceutical drugs, contemporary medicine seems to envision hybrid medical practices to an extent that nineteenth-century literature could not. Thus, the project also explores the question whether the canonization of ethnic American literature in the second half of the twentieth century also involves an increasing acceptance of the alternative medical practices portrayed in this literature. The "mainstreaming" of alternative, ethnic narratives may thus be traced in both literature and medicine.

Publications:

"Skunk's Gall Bladders in Gin: Normalizing Chinatown in Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*." *Transcultural Localisms: Responding to Ethnicity in a Globalized World*. Ed. Yiorgos Kalogeras, Eleftheria Arapoglou, and Linda Manney. Heidelberg: Winter, 2006. 109-28.

"Medical Redface in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*." *Ethnic Ventriloquism: Literary Minstrelsy and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2008.