We founded the “Postcolonial Narrations” postgraduate forum in order to provide PhD students and Postdocs who work in the field of Anglophone postcolonial literatures and cultures with a platform for exchanging ideas and discussing their current research projects with other young scholars in the field. Its first conference (of hopefully many to follow) focused on the topic “Challenging Boundaries: Postcolonial Narratives and Notions of the Global” and brought together 20 young scholars from Germany, Austria, South Africa and Australia.

The conference opened with a short welcome address by Prof. Dr. Barbara Schaff, who holds the chair of British Literature and Culture in Göttingen. Subsequently, Prof. Dr. Mark Stein presented a keynote lecture on “Open Cities, Porous Texts: Translocation, Urbanism and Postcolonial Remains”. Drawing on texts by Teju Cole and Mohsin Hamid, Professor Stein’s talk engaged with “translocal texts” and their formal specificities, which must be understood as a direct result of globalization processes. This keynote lecture and the following discussion started us off into two days of constructive work.

The conference sessions grouped a variety of research projects – from English and American literary studies to cultural studies engaging with food and identity or Australian theatre – under four major headings: Urban Spaces, Urban Identities; Scales and Global Power; Transculturality; Globalization and Environment. All conference participants could profit from the intense and detailed discussions of their contributions, which had been circulated amongst and read by all beforehand. The conference atmosphere was friendly, open and constructive.

Moreover, we invited a career coach, Dr. Jutta Wergen, who was giving us some valuable information on how to deal with problems that we encounter during our dissertation phase. Unfortunately, many people had to leave early due to their train/ flight schedules and could not participate in this afternoon workshop. However, those who did felt like they could benefit from the exercises in which Dr. Wergen engaged us.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity here to thank Katharina Nambula, who initially came up with the idea of a postgraduate forum, for taking me on board. It was a great pleasure to organize this first event with her and I am happy that we were able to put together such a successful inaugural conference and I am looking forward to the other events to come. Several participants already expressed their interest in hosting the next postgraduate conferences. Last but not least, I would also like to thank the whole organizational team in Göttingen, the volunteer student helpers, Prof. Mark Stein, the GNEL and our other sponsors. Most of all, I want to thank all the participants – including those who presented their work, those who did not present, but contributed to the lively discussions and those who kindly agreed to chair our sessions – for contributing to these three enjoyable and productive days!

Hanna Straß
Impressions of the first conference of the postgraduate forum “Postcolonial Narrations”
“Challenging Boundaries: Postcolonial Narratives and Notions of the Global”
Göttingen, October 10-12, 2013

This report adds a further perspective to Hanna Straß’s apt description of the first conference of the postgraduate forum “Postcolonial Narrations,” “Challenging Boundaries: Postcolonial Narratives and Notions of the Global.” Since I attended the conference as a guest and panel chair without presenting any of my own work, I had the opportunity of equally enjoying all the contributions and the additional programme.

The conference took place at two beautiful locations at the University of Göttingen, one of them in the university’s Historic Observatory and the other on the impressive main campus. The warm welcome by the organisers and Prof. Dr. Mark Stein’s enjoyable and informative keynote lecture, followed by a lively discussion, set the mood for the rest of the conference: the atmosphere was friendly, communicative and constructive throughout. It was quite evident that the organisation was done very professionally. There were hardly any delays, food and accommodation had been taken care of, and the timings of presentations, discussions and breaks in between were very well balanced.

The conference contributions covered a wide range of topics and research fields and demonstrated the scope of exploring ‘notions of the global.’ At the same time, they often revealed unexpected parallels in the use of theories or approaches. The friendly environment of scholars who were positioned at similar stages in their careers encouraged participants to present not only research that had already been completed but also, and especially, to discuss work in progress and to mention even those aspects that they felt insecure about. As far as I could estimate, every single contribution was followed by very constructive questions and criticism, thus providing valuable input to all participants. During the entire conference, Prof. Stein was kindly on hand with help and advice, while taking great care not to draw the attention away from participants and organisers.

Altogether, the newly founded postgraduate forum’s first conference nicely served the purpose of creating a friendly group environment among young scholars of Postcolonial Studies. PhD students and postdoctoral researchers from various universities had the chance to discuss problems and approaches of academic research and to get in contact with other young researchers working in the same field. The event offered the opportunity for conference beginners to collect experiences in giving presentations as well as for more experienced young researchers to put their work up for discussion. In focusing on the ongoing challenges faced during the dissertation process and on practical issues of academic work, the forum complements the annual ASNEL-conference. On the last day of the conference, we also discussed the future of the forum. The enthusiastic input from almost all of the participants was an indication of the success of the first conference: ideas included a stronger focus on workshops and tips about presentation strategies, possibilities of an online forum for members, and many more. I am looking forward to seeing these ideas put into practice and to meeting again for the next conference. Thanks a lot to the organisers for a great conference!

Verena Jain-Warden