

## The Caribbean: Linguistic Sensibilities, Fluid Geographies, and Modern Slavery

To begin with, I would like to refer to the year 1987 and the publication of the book *El Caribe y América Latina / The Caribbean and Latin America* edited by Ulrich Fleischmann and Ineke Phaf in Frankfurt am Main as a starting point of the history of the study of Caribbean literatures and cultures in Germany. I do not mean to dismiss previous efforts at organizing colloquia or workshops that resulted in publications, such as *Missile and Capsule* (1983), edited by Jürgen Martini, and *Der karibische Raum zwischen Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung* (The Caribbean space between self- and foreign determination), edited by Reinhard Sander (1984); these efforts did, however, not relate to Latin America. In *El Caribe y América Latina*, in contrast, the contributions in Spanish, French, and English cover a much broader field and were the result of a conference with the authors Edouard Glissant (Martinique), Earl Lovelace (Trinidad), Astrid Roemer (Suriname), and the literary critic Jorge Emilio Rodríguez (Cuba) as the invited international guests of the Latin America Institute at the Free University in Berlin in November 1984. This publication was linked to a project on the social history of literature, *La literatura latinoamericana en el Caribe* (1983), directed by Alejandro Losada, who organized the yearly meetings of the AELSAL, of the Association for Studies of Literatures and Societies in Latin America, in Lausanne, Switzerland (Bremer/Losada 1985; Bremer/Peñate Rivero 1988 and 1989). These interdisciplinary approaches influenced Socare, the Society for Caribbean Research, founded in 1988, which – notwithstanding some ups and downs – has prospered ever since for almost thirty years. The papers of its first congress came out in the volume *Alternative Cultures in the Caribbean* (1993), edited by Thomas Bremer and Ulrich Fleischmann, who, with Manfred Kremser, are the ‘founding fathers’ of this society.

Many scholars held positions on the Socare board over the years: Ulrich Fleischmann (Berlin 1988–2003), Manfred Kremser (Vienna 1988–1999), Thomas Bremer (Halle 1988–2003), Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger (Berlin 1999–2003), Werner Zips (Vienna 2003–2009), Kathleen Gyssels (Antwerp 2003–2009), Michael Hoensch (Berlin 2003–2009), Anja Bandau (Hannover 2009–), Martha Zapata Galindo (Berlin 2009–2015), Jessica Gevers (Potsdam 2009–2011), Liliana

Gómez-Popescu (Halle 2009–2011), Martina Urioste-Buschmann (Hannover 2011–), Anne Brüske (Heidelberg 2013–), Annika McPherson (Augsburg 2013–2015), Natascha Ueckmann (Bremen 2015–) and Johannes Bohle (Bielefeld 2015–). They all worked or are still working very hard to make the Society for Caribbean Research a success and their achievements can be found on the website of Socare ([www.caribbeanresearch.net](http://www.caribbeanresearch.net)).<sup>1</sup> Socare's record of edited volumes, which reflect a continuous interdisciplinary approach in which different fields alternatively intervene, are listed there. However, going back to the foundational years of Socare, it seems that the critical dialogue with the social history of Latin American literatures more or less came to a standstill. This dialogue continued to be discussed at the international conferences of the AELSAL and, moreover, of LASA (Latin American Studies Association), with collaborations in the *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, which just celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2015.

## 1 Linguistic Sensibilities

Criticism of Latin American literature only sporadically refers to the Caribbean (Phaf-Rheinberger 2011), which does not mean, however, that Caribbean Studies have nothing to learn from it. Caribbean Studies have been deeply involved in the postcolonial debates since the 1990s, whereas it went almost unnoticed that criticism of Latin American literature has adopted the concept of postcolonialism only in a very restrictive way. One of its representatives, the Uruguayan professor Mabel Moraña, elaborated on Aníbal Quijano's concept of "coloniality of power/colonialidad del poder" (Quijano 2008) as a complementary alternative to postcolonialism. Quijano's concept invokes the continuity of social inequality since early modern times due to the division of labor along racial lines in the newly founded global system of capitalism. Moraña (2008) also demonstrates that this lack of equality lies at the root of the differences between the works of José María Arguedas and Mario Vargas Llosa, both authors born in Peru but with a completely different approach toward the/their local background. She scrutinizes their texts through the filter of their affiliation with oral traditions in a language other than Spanish, in Arguedas' case Quechua, and its oppressed presence in the public realm of Peru. Arguedas grew up with Quechua and learned Spanish only later in life. The dilemma for

1 For a better understanding, it has to be added that German universities do not offer positions for Caribbean Cultural Studies, and it should therefore be emphasized that Socare could always count on a group of enthusiastic volunteers supporting its promotion without directly expecting academic acknowledgment for their effort.

him (and for Vargas Llosa) consisted in giving or not giving this oppressed voice a poetic dimension by translating its inner force of resistance against absorption into discursive strategies in Spanish. In her analysis, Moraña lays out in detail Arguedas' famous speech "No soy un aculturado" (1968) delivered upon receiving the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega Prize, and his carefully prepared suicide in Lima in 1969. She contrasts Arguedas' case with Vargas Llosa's win of the 2010 Nobel Prize for Literature, for which – in his case – the local linguistic affiliation plays a minor role and even becomes associated with victimization but nevertheless hailed his entry onto the international stage.

In order to clarify her notion of the 'short circuit' between local and internationally influential languages, Moraña explains how the 'burden of English' (Spivak) creates a double bind in the education system in India: It affects the construction of subjectivity and the processes of representations. The English language clashes with life styles perceived in other languages and histories and, often, is not able to express them. Paraphrasing the title of Spivak's book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), Moraña makes a plea for paying attention to linguistic sensibility in the aesthetic education in Latin America and, at the same time, making a connection with its longstanding political and social debate on democratization. In this sense, it seems that her argument regarding educational policies that take the problems of an oppressed linguistic expression in the public realm into account is also very important for the interpretation of literary texts by Caribbean (and, I would argue, also by African) authors in different time periods. This was discussed in detail in the introduction of the book *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures. Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean* (2003) by Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann. Fleischmann, a former president of Socare, addresses the sociocultural and linguistic profile of the Caribbean creole cultures, whereas Collier gives a number of specific examples in their respective introductions. This linguistic sensibility is certainly relevant when reading the seminal book *Le discours antillais* (1981) by Edouard Glissant, translated into English by Michael Dash. Theo D'haen (1996, 1997) has convincingly shown, for instance, that Dash downplayed the central role of local interventions in his translation *Caribbean Discourse. Selected Essays* (1989) alongside the references to Deleuze and Guattari. Nevertheless, D'haen does not address the Creole discourse in Glissant's original French text, which was also practically obliterated. The significant chapter on "pa roule tro pre," (Glissant 1981: 349–351) in which Glissant paraphrases this sentence in different ways to show the grades of creolisation of the French "pas roulez trop près," is not included in Dash's translation.

The criteria for this selection process certainly had to do with positioning this cultural essay on the English-speaking book market, and I would like to make a plea to pay much more attention in Caribbean Studies to such 'control-

ling’, ‘censuring’, ‘reducing’, even ‘streamlining’ of knowledge for the sake of global circulation. Such an attention makes it possible to understand Kamau Brathwaite’s insistence on “nation language” (1984) in his academic work and poetry as an ongoing and explicit resistance against this form of knowledge circulation. This question also applies to the analysis of the narratives of Frank Martinus Arion, one of the foremost writers of the Dutch Caribbean, who recently passed away (at the age of seventy-nine on 28 September 2015). Reviews mostly limit themselves to the celebration of his first novel, *Dubbelspel* (1973) (Double Play. The Amazing Story of a World Record); however, Arion wrote four more voluminous novels on the question how the “short circuit” concept influences his narrative strategies in Dutch and in the Creole language of Curaçao, called Papiamentu, a language that is originally of African-Portuguese origin. Even when Caribbean authors do not live in their home country and enjoy the ‘pleasures of exile’, they might perceive this dilemma as a question of life or death, of ‘to be or not to be’, as it was the case for José María Arguedas in Peru and Frank Martinus Arion in Curaçao.

## 2 Fluid Geographies

The second point I want to address is the question of mapping a region that always seems to be in flux. The Caribbean is divided and has never had a specific Caribbean frontier. By virtue of its waters, the Caribbean connects with and hence seems to extend to all places on the globe. Again, the island of Curaçao is an example. Its population of 141,000 is officially composed of at least fifty different nationalities. This means that its poetic substance can be considered a compound of migrations. Consequently, visual artists are looking for a method to express these flexible belongings by using metaphors of fluidity, for instance, in Nelson Carrilho’s little bronze statue *Agua Viva* (Phaf-Rheinberger 2016). Another example is Cuba, a country known for its problematic policies toward migration, remnants of Cold War politics. Notwithstanding, an internationally well-known visual artist from this country, Kcho (Alexis Leiva Machado), makes his work a paradigm of such fluid constellations, of which Vittorio Sgarbi, one of his curators of the 54th Biennale in Venice in 2011, writes:

The world is made of migrations. People travel in the hope of improving their conditions. Whatever may be the reasons behind the decision to move, you’ll always come across somebody who is involved in such situations. Alexis Leyva Machado, universally known as Kcho, justifies in this way an artistic approach that has always been a characteristic of his. Since his earliest artistic outings when he was just seventeen, Kcho has always been committed to

providing pictorial visibility and conceptual substance to a phenomenon that must be respected and brought to the critical understanding of the world. To this end, he has conceived piles of wrecked and abandoned boats with a view to highlighting the fact that the discarded materials conserve and release the energy of what has been experienced. (Sgarbi 2011: 14)

At this Biennale, Kcho presented his *Monumento final* (Last monument), consisting of fifteen paintings (oil and pastel on canvas) and two installations based on migrants on their way from the North-African coast across the Mediterranean to Europe. He had visited the islands of Lampedusa and Pantelleria, personally interviewed the people there, and observed their situation.

Kcho has his studio in the neighborhood El Romerillo, next to the Instituto Superior de Artes (ISA) in Cubanacán, Havana, one of Cuba's most famous buildings (Loomis 2011). Because of his international successes, Kcho provokes polemical comments in the Cuban art scene (see essays in Santana 2007), but these do not touch upon the main theme in his visual work, migration overseas. He experiments with objects related to navigation such as docks, paddles, oars, boats, rafts, sails, inner tubes, and debris washed up from the ocean or rivers or found in harbors. In his studio in El Romerillo, Kcho built an installation in the style of Auguste Rodin's bronze sculpture *Le penseur* (1882), also reminiscent of the wooden statue *O Pensador*, a seemingly very old piece originating from the Chokwe tradition in eastern Angola. Kcho's *El Pensador* is composed of twenty-four boats, being the sum of all their respective routes coming together in one and the same object. His *El Pensador*, made of polyethylene, nylon, paddles, metal, fish blood, and fishermen's sweat comprises legal and illegal transportation. Cuban critics do not compare Kcho's sculpture with the French or Angolan interpretations of "thinking within"; they do not focus on the concentration on one's inner thoughts. They interpret his work in relation to Cuban authors, and Abel Prieto writes:

The piece that gives the title to this magnificent exhibition by Kcho, immediately reminded me of the selection of poems *Fragmentos a su imán* by Lezama and especially one of his essential texts: *Los fragmentos de la noche*. There the poet narrates how he has started "an unending combat" against chaos and disintegration in his search for links, coherence and sense. Lezama aspires "corners or fragments" to be tied up and thus managing to form: "the unbreakable web of night, subtle and whole". And he adds: "I wanted to rescue the fragments of the night" and form "a universal substance." (Prieto 2012: 11)

### 3 Migrations

Following Kcho's conceiving the Caribbean as a compound of overseas migrations, I will take this metaphor as the point of departure for the analysis of Fabienne Kanor's novel, *Faire l'aventure* (2014). The people from Mbour, a coastal city in Senegal a three hour drive from Dakar, call migrating to Europe 'do the adventure' or the 'adventure'. Kanor's book is divided into four sections, reflecting the different geographical backgrounds of the plot: Mbour, Tenerife, Rome, and Lampedusa. The opening sentence sets the tone for the flexibility of frontier society as a whole: "Rien ne disait la frontière, sauf le gosse." (Kanor 2014: 11) This "kid" is Biram Seye Diop, whose *éducation sentimentale* consisted of stories about migration to France – El Dorado – in the past and in the present. At age seventeen, Biram meets Marème Doriane Fall in Mbour. Although their physical contact – one kiss – is very limited, the memory of Marème constitutes a crucial reference in the following years, until he meets her again in Palermo, seventeen years later. Both have migrated to Europe. Biram left Mbour for Dakar and, after some years, headed to Tenerife in a pirogue, a traumatic and dangerous journey. He is a notorious traveller, taking temporary jobs without being qualified for anything in particular. And Marème, who is from Dakar, leaves for France in an airplane. She joins her fiancé in Paris, a journalist. However, after being bitterly disappointed by Parisian life with him, she gets married for the second time: to an older Italian man, who offers her fundamental stability.

Kanor – very much in contrast with current feminist views – seems to identify primarily with the male character, with Biram, in his search for freedom. He resists being domesticated by Europeans; finding Marème again at the end of the book, they spend a night on the beach together. Being with her, Biram considers going back to Senegal but instead of constructing a future with him, a 'free' – man who is willing to return with her to his country and marry her, Marème decides to stay in Italy, which is now the center of her life. She depends for her lifestyle – symbolized by Chanel No. 5, Pierre Cardin blouses, a Samsonite suitcase, one house in Rome and another at the beach near Palermo – on her financially stable husband.

It is evident that Kanor's book stands in the tradition of many works on migration from Senegal to Europe, among them Ousmane Sembène's *Le Docker noir* (1956), *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) by Fatou Diome, and *Mbèkè mi. À l'assaut des vagues de l'Atlantique* (2008) by Abasse Ndiome, some of which have been adapted to the screen. We might add examples from the Spanish-speaking literature of Africa, such as Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's short story "El sueño" (1973) and his novel *El metro* (2007), not to mention many other authors. Senegal, however, is a country with a long-standing tradition of migration to

France (Dodgen 2011) and many families live from migrants' remittances home. Senegal's cultural history, obviously, is equally connected to the tradition of *négritude*, personified by its former president Léopold Sédar Senghor and his friends from Martinique and Guyane, Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas. Kanor emphasizes the role of *négritude* and of Césaire in particular in the character of Diabang, "le professeur à vie de Littératures Comparées et Francophones, spécialiste de Sony Labou Tansi," (Kanor 2014: 14)<sup>2</sup> an impressive figure who aims to disseminate his knowledge among the young people in Mbour. To do so, Diabang organizes a public lecture once a month on a Sunday on the central square Neem, talking about difficult texts and expressing his aversion to any form of modernization, such as the opening of a casino or the plan to have the Dakar Rallye pass through his city. Modernization, for him, only serves the 'whites,' and Kanor makes the connection with Césaire's *négritude* by quoting some of – as she writes – Césaire's poetic lines: "Car la vie n'est pas un spectacle / Car une mer de douleur n'est pas un proscenium / Car un homme qui crie n'est pas un ours qui danse!" (Kanor 2014: 93–94)

In no way can Diabang be a role model for young citizens. An accident has put him in a wheelchair and he is very poor. Notwithstanding, his belief in dignity, honor, and incorruptibility of men in society is undaunted. The past does not offer positive examples, as we know already from the first pages of *Faire l'aventure*. Biram stands on the balcony of *La Signare*, a building located next to the beach and close to the mosque on the central square. He observes the ocean through his binoculars and is aware of the fact that this building used to be the depot for slaves awaiting transport to the Americas. The phantoms of their shadows still return at night, making loud noises, so the people of the city consider the building to be haunted and avoid it.

Standing on the balcony, Biram remembers the Mami Wata legend, about the sirene, half-fish, half-woman, a common reference on this part of the Atlantic coast. In his vision, this sirene has long hair and is dressed in brand-name clothes acquired during her shopping tours in European capitals. Everyone in Mbour is familiar with her, in this city full of fishermen, who go out on the sea with their pirogues, the boat they perceive as a complementary part of themselves: "La pirogue, c'est traditionnel. C'est nous, c'est dans notre sang." (Kanor 2014: 37) People used to tell each other about their experiences migrating via Mauretania and other places, heading for Europe, and they used to exaggerate the 'pleasures' considerably. The dangers of this journey, therefore, are viewed

2 Sony Labou Tansi (1947–1997) was an important author, playwright and theater director, born in the Democratic Republic of Congo but living mostly in the Republic of Congo. He continuously satirized political processes and was involved in oppositional movements.

ambivalently in Kanor's novel. When young people disappear with their boat, they are said to have traveled to Brazil or to Cape Verde, until their family is notified otherwise. Biram observes the ritual referring to their tragic destiny, the "Pleureuses de la Petite Côte," (Kanor 2014: 53) the women who wander around crying on the beach, mourning their drowned sons. The sea is thus crucial for memories of migration and social mobility and implies future prospects as well as tragedy.

Kanor won the important 2014 Carbet Prize for Caribbean Literatures with *Faire l'aventure*. Her French language is full of contemporary speech, often playing with expressions from other languages, like Wolof, English, Italian, or Spanish, which constantly coincide in the global world scenario that she depicts. Marème Doriane Fall, a character with a somewhat flat profile, seems to be a contemporary version of La Signare, an expression derived from the Portuguese 'Senhora,' the name for a local woman living in concubinage with a white man in accordance with the "traditions of the country" in times of the slave trade. The Signare had a high status in local society. This is true also for Marème. From the perspective of her family in Dakar, she is a successful woman, because she has made it in Europe by marrying a white man and coming back with costly presents for the family. Marème learns early in life that to be 'black' always influences personal relationships with 'white' men, although these are not generally depicted in a negative way. On the other hand, Biram Seye Diop is a typical representative of the *vague*, addressed by Abasse Ndione in the title of his novel *Mbeke mi. À l'assaut des vagues de l'Atlantique*. Biram is a *vague* in the double sense: 'vague' in French means 'wave' in English but can also be derived from 'vagos': in the language of slave society, the character who is 'free' but does not wish to work for the whites and is therefore considered a lazybone and good-for-nothing.

We find many of Kanor's stereotypical themes (e.g. the female's preference of choosing to live with a 'white' man, the extreme importance of female beauty, and the trope of the drowned Africans) in *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), the classic Cuban novel on slave society by Cirilo Villaverde. The contemporary Signare – Marème – also aspires to have a high status by living with a 'white' and financially established husband. She is the complete opposite of Mami Wata, who decides herself whether she will go on a shopping tour to Europe for an elegant outfit, without owing anything to anyone or bothering about social status. This more or less burlesque interpretation of the traditional Mami Wata (a water spirit that in local belief was banned since European colonization) is in concordance with a general trend of retrieving the associations with them in postcolonial narratives. When the Europeans arrived, local traditions for addressing water places or the sea disappeared. To display protest against such oblivion, contemporary writers tend to emphasize the existence of these tradi-



tions by bringing their oppressed presence – Mami Wata, Yemayá, Kianda (Krishnan 2012; Sobral 2014; Phaf-Rheinberger 2014) – back to the surface. This reaction against local hiding also extends to linguistic strategies. When meeting Marème after so many years, Biram asks her the crucial question in Wolof: “Li lan la?” (Kanor 2014: 332: ‘What is the matter?’) Only then does she decide to recognize his presence. The reference to the social situation appears in the musical part of the book, which action obviously takes place in the time of the presidency of Abdoulye Wade (2000–2012). Biram and Marème both know the music of Youssou N’Dour, the star singer from Senegal. When Biram hears the song *Bitim rew*, whose lyrics idolize the migrant figure, he feels that, being a migrant himself, he is able to contribute to the well-being of his country: “We thank you and we pray for you / Yes, Senegal is our country and when back we will sing about you.” (Dodgen 2011: 42) Dodgen writes that “migrants are popular symbols in the songs of Senegalese musicians, who sing about migrants as the representatives of continental Senegalese society.” (Dodgen 2011: 41)

In contrast, Marème perceives the memories of her two years in Paris, including her experience with the “frères adoptives blancs” (Kanor 2014: 231) of Youssou N’Dour, as a constant confrontation with complex situations and humiliation: “l’Europe l’avait transformée” (Kanor 2014: 232) and her image of France is forever “changé” (Kanor 2014: 232) as well. This is also the case for Biram. After his reencounter with Marème, he dreams that he is back in Mbour, climbing the stairs at *La Signare* again. But now, after his stay in Europe, he finds the former slave depot deserted: no rasping sounds or phantoms are found there any more, and Kanor comments on this in the last sentence of the book: “La foi l’avait plaqué, la mer l’avait batu, mais ça va, ce n’était pas la fin du monde.” (Kanor 2014: 363)

#### 4 Modern-Day Slave Narratives

Kanor’s irony when referring to *négritude* also points to a different direction than merely talking about the ‘color’ line. Her constant reflections on how to make a living recall the findings in the field of *Global Labor History* (Linden 2008). The question came up whether the category ‘slave work’ is something restricted to the past or whether it is also valid in the present. Since the beginning of this century, scholars of *Global Labor History* claim that ‘labor’ has always been studied in accordance with categories based on nation states and industrialization. In reality, however, when projected on a global level, the categories of ‘labor’ and ‘work’ are much more complex and have to be studied within a wider environmental context, and this holds true for Africa in particular (Eckert 2015). The connotations of work, for instance, are different in many

situations and societies, as was made visible in an exhibition in the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin, *Arbeit als Einstellung. Labour in a single shot* (Farocki/Ehmann 2015). The curators had made thousands of short single-shot videos about labor situations in fifteen cities on different continents, revealing the myriad of gradations between wage labor and work as such. In a similar way, as the result of many interviews conducted worldwide, the concept of ‘modern slavery’ came into use, as discussed in Laura Murphy’s volume *Survivors of Slavery* (2014):

This book is a collection of modern-day slave narratives. It marks the reemergence of a narrative genre that many of us thought had died with the last of the survivors of legal slavery in the Americas. Slavery unfortunately did not end with its abolition in any country in the world. Instead, it went underground. It often operates under different and more obscure names, such as *conscriptio*, *trafficking*, *peonage*. But the basic elements of slavery – the forced labor, the lack of pay, the inability to escape – remain the same. And the drive to tell the story of slavery remains as strong among survivors today as it did during the antebellum period. (Murphy 2014: 1)

Merely imagining the existence of such “modern-day slave narratives” would have been unthinkable in the early days of the Society of Caribbean Research. Much more important and innovative at that time was the effort to decipher to which degree the heritage of the past slave society still influences and survives in the present cultures of the Caribbean, in and outside the region. With her novel, Kanor documents the survival some of its stereotypes, also in Africa. *La Signare* and the *vague* are recognizable characters in Caribbean literature and the presence of Diabang, the representative of *négritude*, has been a symbol of Afro-modernity since the 1930s. It is possible to argue that Kanor’s display of this migration reenforces these stereotypes rather than replacing them with other personalities. On Lampedusa, Biram cries out: “Y’en a marre. L’esclavage, c’était hier.” (Kanor 2014: 304). The author also extends her ironic approach to the character of Diabang, who says: “Si tout le Sénégal part du Sénégal, je serai le seul à rester.” (Kanor 2014: 109) This is a very strong statement, considering that, when interviewed by Bruno Riccio, an Italian anthropologist on migration, a Senegalese migrant commented: “If someone does not emigrate, it is because he has no legs to do so.” (Dodgen 2011: 41)

Other things have changed as well since the early days of Socare. Under the presidency of Anja Bandau, the organizational structure has been modernized: Regular workshops and seminars are offered for PhD students and more information is circulating among members. In addition, the connection between African and Caribbean studies is now reaching out to Latin America. Literary criticism of African literature is flourishing, showing an increasing

interest in concepts from Latin America formulated in the twentieth century, such as “New History” (Nascimento 2015: 48–67) and “Magical Realism.” (Quayson 2009, Warnes 2009) African critics are beginning to address authors and scholars not only from the Caribbean but increasingly from Latin America because of their record of protest against dictatorship, corruption, and bad government. Until now, literary criticism of African literature does not focus on the “coloniality of power,” as do scholars working on Latin America. On the other hand, it is also relevant that the discussion of African descent is quickly gaining ground in Latin America (Valero 2015a, 2015b), making it really appealing to promote comparative studies with African literatures.

To sum up, Socare has always been a representative of interdisciplinary studies and has focused on a variety of academic fields alternatively. There is much more to say, but I wanted to stop here, yet not without emphasizing the importance of visual art for Caribbean studies. Yolanda Wood has demonstrated its explosive character and enormous communicative capacity regarding natural phenomena in her study *Islas del Caribe: Naturaleza-arte-sociedad* (2012), and I would emphatically like to see this issue discussed further in future Socare events and publications. A Caribbean author who also displays its different dimensions and tries to break through stereotypes on the level of language is Astrid Roemer (1987), born in Suriname and already present in the aforementioned volume *El Caribe y América Latina / The Caribbean and Latin America*. She was the first Caribbean author to receive the P. C. Hooft prize in The Hague, the most important literary prize in the Netherlands, on 19 May 2016,<sup>3</sup> and an English translation of her “A Word of Thanks” is published in the *Afro-Hispanic Review* fall issue of 2015.

Socare has a solid reputation for breaking through frontiers and language barriers, reflecting the common effort of the society to situate the Caribbean within the broadest parameters of Cultural Studies and beyond. This, sometimes, is only recognized after a longer time and, therefore, I always have the feeling that the work of Socare is just beginning. Consequently, on this occasion, I wanted to lay out some of its aspects showing how times have changed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft was the most important Renaissance poet of The Netherlands. The Prize has been awarded since 1947 and, today, the winner receives 60,000 Euros.

<sup>4</sup> I am very grateful to Anja Bandau, Anne Brüske, and Natascha Ueckmann for their careful readings of my text and their comments.

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