

**Arrivals and Departures In and “Out of Africa”: the Case for Teaching Colonial  
Voices in Postcolonial Literature Courses  
ACLA Conference Seminar 2008**

**Final Report on ACLA for CELTSS**

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1. I attended the American Comparative Literature Association Conference’s annual conference, April 25-April 27<sup>th</sup>, hosted by the University of California, Long Beach, in order to both chair a seminar and present a paper. Back in October of 2007, I designed a seminar focused on the unique challenges one encounters teaching colonial texts, or “colonial voices,” in contemporary postcolonial literature courses, which was accepted by the ACLA conference organizers in mid-December. Besides my own paper, titled “Arrivals and Departures In and Out of Africa: a Case for Teaching Isak Dinesen’s Memoir,” I accepted four other scholarly essays, from a pool of over a dozen submissions, which I felt best addressed the seminar’s pedagogical aim.
2. The experience met the goals and generated the expected outcomes described in my original proposal. I did have one panelist cancel, due to family emergency, at the last minute, however, that simply allowed the four of us remaining panelists to entertain more questions and to take the time to draw connections between our own arguments. In terms of research and networking possibilities, this ACLA did not disappoint either. I describe those developments below.
3. In terms of my own professional development, this marked the first time I had chaired a panel at a major national conference. I have presented papers at ACLA, twice before, once at the University of Michigan, and once at Princeton University, and both times the conference essays were later accepted for publication. I am happy to report that as a result of attending ACLA in 2008, I was able to attend a three day “stream” of seminars on “Human Rights in/and Global Literary Production: Pedagogical and Theoretical Perspectives,” which has produced a publication opportunity for me, once again. At the final session, the organizers of the seminar distributed a call for papers for a proposed collection of essays on Human Rights Pedagogy and Literature. After returning from the conference, I brought the idea of a collaborative project to my FSC colleague, Dr. Alberti, and the two of us authored a proposal, which has since been accepted as part of the book proposal being pitched to the MLA Teaching Series. Our project, “Reading Culture and Writing Rights,” will be completed in January 2009.

4. Because I am virtually alone in my department in my area of specialization, contemporary world literature, and because the field is highly specialized, often relying on the talents of bi-lingual (and tri-lingual) comparativists to keep the rest of us updated on developments in the field, I rely on the ACLA as a resource for both my teaching and my scholarship. Since the first time I attended the conference in the spring of 2004, I have added numerous titles to my syllabi. After this conference I came home with dozens of titles of texts I need to consider incorporating into my courses such as: pairing Nigerian authors, Chris Abani and Uzodinma Iweala's recent novels on child soldiers, *Song of Night* and *Beasts of No Nation*, respectively; or reading Carolyn Forché's "The Poetry of Witness" next to poems from the "With an Iron Pen" series, forthcoming from SUNY; pairing Nobel Prize winners, J.M. Coetzee and Doris Lessing, by applying his book of critical essays, *While Writing*, to Lessing's short story collection, *African Stories*; adding to my unit on Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, film clips from the documentary *Life and Debt*; or finally, adding *The Map of Love: a Novel*, by Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif to my unit on North African women writers. While the additions above are exploratory, in Fall 08, I will most certainly be teaching Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest*, which I learned about at ACLA this year, as part of the human rights unit I'm co-teaching with Dr. Alberti as part of our Foundations cluster. This is the unit that we will analyze in our essay for the volume on Human Rights Pedagogy.
  
5. The funding for this trip to ACLA allowed me to accomplish four tasks at one event: a) gain experience pitching an idea for a panel and shaping the results; b) bring my dissertation research on Isak Dinesen in line with my theoretical interests in postcolonial criticism in a single, exploratory essay which I will submit for publication; c) discover new interdisciplinary trends in my field, in this case, the study of human rights discourse in literature; and d) discover my next new project: "Reading Culture and Writing Rights," which has been accepted for publication in a new volume on Human Rights Pedagogy, pending a contract. I want to thank CELTSS for supporting my professional development in this important way.