

## Editorial

*Karib: Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* has grown out of a series of invitations. The first took place in 2010, when Hans Jacob Ohldieck asked a fellow Caribbeanist at the University of Uppsala, Christina Kullberg, to come to the University of Bergen. The occasion was a seminar series for Caribbean Studies entitled “Karibia— Identitet og konflikt”, which a group of researchers in Bergen had been organizing for a couple of years. From that point we began talking about the need for a common Nordic forum for Caribbean studies. Meanwhile two small publishing houses in Sweden began working on the Swedish translations of Édouard Glissant’s epic poem *Les Indes* (Elisabeth Grate Förlag 2012) and his last poetic essay, *Philosophie de la Relation* (Glänta Produktion 2012). On this occasion, we invited Glissant to Stockholm. He accepted the invitation, but his health did not allow him to travel to Scandinavia. On February 3rd 2011 he passed away. As much as it is a cliché or a “lieu-commun”, to use Glissant’s words, we truly wanted to keep his thinking alive. In honor of his work and as a beginning for the creation of a forum for Caribbeanists in the Nordic countries, Charlotte Bydler and Cecilia Sjöholm at Södertörn University together with Christina Kullberg co-organized the symposium “Archipelagic Connections”. The symposium took place in Stockholm and the key-note speakers, Celia Britton and J. Michael Dash, helped bringing Caribbean studies and Glissant’s writing to the Swedish audience. We also had the honor of having with us his widow, Sylvie Glissant. The event ended with a reading of Glissant’s last and not yet published poem in French, English, and Swedish. The next Nordic gathering took place in Bergen in April 2013 in the same spirit as in Stockholm: “Archipelagic Connections (II)”. These symposiums led, in their turn, to the first issue of *Karib: Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies*.

In the spirit of Glissant's thinking – and in line with the thematic focus of the Nordic encounters – we have dedicated the first issue of *Karib* to the idea of the archipelagic. The decision is also the result of acute and concrete questions that we ask ourselves. How are we to connect peripheral places to one another, especially when their realities are sharply distinct, such as those of the northern peninsula of Europe and the Caribbean? Why deal with the Caribbean in the Nordic countries? In fact, the need for a platform for Caribbean studies in the Nordic countries is vital. The first, and perhaps most urgent reason, is our common history. Swedish iron was used for manufacturing chains and balls for the slave trade. Two hundred years later these balls and chains of Swedish iron would resurface in poetry from the region in terms of concrete traces, left on the bottom of the ocean, as testimony of the deeds committed against millions of people who died during the Middle Passage. Moreover, Denmark (which at the time also included Norway) and Sweden participated in the slave trade. One of the most famous slave narratives from the Caribbean is written by *Gustavius Vasa*, named after the Swedish king. By the end of the eighteenth century, both Sweden and Denmark also had colonies in the Caribbean. This history has yet to be extensively written and dealt with in our respective countries. The way this history has been silenced says a lot about our respective national identities. The Nordic countries would clearly like to promote the image of themselves as democratic welfare states with high ethical and moral values in regard to global politics, ideals that do not rhyme well with a colonialist past.

The second reason is institutional. There is clearly a growing interest in different dimensions of the Caribbean that can be traced in scholarly work, but also in the number of Caribbean authors that have been translated into Nordic languages in the recent decades. Problems, concepts and ideas raised by Caribbean scholars and thinkers have also gained terrain in this region of the world. Here, as in other countries, Caribbeanists are scattered among different languages and university departments and thus need their own space. There are many of these spaces elsewhere – social media platforms, seminar series, journals such as *Small Axe*, and conferences – but in Scandinavia, language departments are still very much directed toward European

countries (England, Spain and France) and linguistics. *Karib* is an attempt to introduce the idea of Caribbean Studies and work over institutional, disciplinary, linguistic, and genre barriers in the Nordic countries. This will hopefully make it easier for scholars not only to exchange research and ideas through publications of articles and book reviews; as the core of the network for Nordic Caribbean Studies *Karib* will, we hope, provide a platform from which scholars may enter into other international networks.

The third reason is poetic. There is a *Relation* that cuts across historical and institutional maps. For the Nordic countries are also archipelagic. (Islands are omnipresent in Scandinavia.) Perhaps geographic connection has provoked a certain insular sensibility. Glissant considers the geographical reality of the archipelago both as a model for a radical rethinking of identity and regionality, and as the basis for aesthetics, linking writing to the earth and the sea. It is also by means of archipelagic thinking and the idea of relation that he has connected his imaginary to the fjords of Norway. Likewise, another Martinican, Patrick Chamoiseau, finds inspiration in the Icelandic sagas in terms of a kind of insular epic. And maybe this shared experience is what led Wilson Harris to publish his *Explorations* with Dangaroo Press, a small publishing house in Aarhus, Denmark. In any case, these submarine connections are indeed appealing. But we do not naïvely want to wipe out differences. We do not think that the hybrid societies of the Caribbean hold a utopian answer to our increasingly interconnected world; we do not think that creolization can save us; we would not like to fetishize or essentialize the Caribbean or the Nordic countries and their various expressions. We do think, however, that many lessons can be learned from Caribbean history, society, literature, music, film, and arts, especially in regard to challenging the insular, dark tendencies that are operating in Europe today.



The first issue of *Karib* contains three articles, a survey about the notion of Caribbean discourse, one *rapport de lecture* and two book reviews. These texts explore how the idea of the archipelagic may be used in various contexts.

Can it help to consider other forms of regionality across the world? Can its profound geographical dimensions be relevant for considering literature in relation to land or to think about space? What would an archipelagic poetics look like? Can language be considered in terms of archipelagic thinking?

Alessandro Corio offers a reading of Glissant's earlier poetic work in light of Heidegger's theories on the links between poetry, place and *habitation*. Focusing mainly on *Soleil de la conscience*, a key text in Glissant's oeuvre that has surprisingly been over-looked by critics, Corio shows how the geopoetical dimension is fundamental also for understanding his more abstract philosophical notions of *tout-monde* and *mondialité*. There is a deep conflict within the relationship between language and earth. These conflicts undermine the critical tendency to interpret Glissant's vision of the world in terms of a harmonious singularity. Kjersti Aarstein's article moves in Glissantian water without making explicit references to his work: it deals with ocean crossings in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. Whereas these novels have often been compared by scholars, the specific motif of sea voyages remains unexplored. The sea is an ambiguous *topos* in both novels as it is depicted both by Brontë and Rhys through the evocation of ghosts, storms, and shipwrecks. The idea of fundamental and often violent conflicts that cuts across Corio's text, thus resurfaces here, as – in Aarstein's words – "the ocean crossings emerge as striking allegories for an uneven communication between England and its former West Indian colonies". In the third article, Heidi Bojsen explores the possibility of connecting Glissantian theories of multilingualism to the practical context of language learning. The article takes up a path in Glissantian studies that has been neglected for some years, namely language, language politics, and didactics. Language is always present in his thinking, but lately, the linguistic aspect of Glissantian creolization has been overshadowed by that of cultural encounters, and the notion of language diversity has mainly been addressed in regard to the problem of translation. The truly archipelagic strategy of Bojsen is that she takes Glissant's ideas on language, transforms them gently and makes them highly relevant in a different context: namely language didactics. Her example is that of the co-relation of French and Creole in class-rooms in the French Caribbean, but the study

is also pertinent in other contexts, particularly at a time when language teaching faces new challenges. Like translation, language teaching does not imply only two languages, but a network of languages and media. Bojsen also shows that while Glissant does not believe that there is a solution to global problems and inequalities, partly caused by colonization and slavery, he continues to combine his “poetic intention” with political engagement. The article is thus an important reminder that language is not only about communication, it is also about violence, resistance and refusal to speak. Finally, we present a survey in which we ask several Caribbeanists whether or not there exists a Caribbean discourse today, 32 years after the release of *Le Discours antillais*. From their different perspectives, the answers cover a wide range of opinions: “Absolutely!”, says Adriana Méndez Rodenas, while Richard Price reveals that “I do not believe that there is (or ever was) ‘a Caribbean discourse’”.

Glissant writes in *Traité du Tout-monde* that, “[all] archipelagic thinking is a trembling thought (*une pensée du tremblement*), a non-presumptuous thought, but also a thinking which opens out, a sharing thought” (231, our translation). On the one hand, archipelagic thinking corresponds to a particular mode of thought: it is tentative and intuitive, privileging the process of knowing over static knowledge. On the other, it is a means for connecting to the smallest geographical and natural detail while having the entire planet as one’s horizon. Archipelagic thinking entails both an ethics – connecting to others – and an aesthetics as a means for a sensuous exploration of the world. Corio’s, Bojsen’s, and Aarstein’s articles offer such explorations. Without being presumptuous, this is also the ambition of *Karib*: to create a forum for Caribbean Studies in the Nordic countries as a means of reaching out.

*Christina Kullberg and Hans Jacob Ohldieck*