

## PALAVER: LECCE

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The title of our publication PALAVER Lecce, Journal of the literary culture studies on Africa and the diaspora, leads immediately to the aim of our research group: which is to set up our European-African dialogue.

I say "our" advisedly, as for many years now many centres, groups and publications have been doing just that - and very well indeed. The two-word title has also been chosen advisedly: as "palaver" exists in several languages and has a recorded history over several centuries in contacts between Africa and Europe, it needed to be limited to our provenance - hence *PALAVER: LECCE*.

Our use of "palaver" is in the spirit of the original use of the Portuguese "palabra" in an African context (i. e. "discussion") as well as that of a current use in West Africa ("business"). The predominantly current, debased meaning in standard English of palaver as idle gossip is an aberration for our purposes, even though literary antecedents can be traced to Smollett.

As for the first, historical meaning, the O.E.D. (1933) 1970 states (*inter alia*) in the language of its time:

"Palaver (Ad. Pg. *palavra*, word speech talk = Sp.

*Palavra* seems to have been used by Portuguese traders on the coast of Africa for a talk or colloquy with the natives (quot. 1735), to have been there picked up by English sailors (quot. 1771), and to have passed from nautical slang into colloquial use.

1) A talk, parley, conference, discussion; chiefly applied to conferences, with much talk, between African or other uncivilized natives, and traders or travellers. 1735 J. Atkins, *Voy. Guinea*, p. 103, "a Palaaver being called".

As for the second meaning chosen, *A Supplement to the O.E.D.* 1982, states, *inter alia*:

d) Business, concern, 1899. (Note: this use is also listed by Partridge).

1953 P. Christophersen in *English Studies* XXXIV p. 286:

Palaver is now part of Standard English in the sense of "talk" or "parley". But in W. Africa this meaning is obsolete. In Pidgin and very largely in Coast English the word has come to mean "business"....

From consulting various dictionaries for the meanings of palaver it became clear just how much the cultural expectations of the intended readership influence definitions, which are accepted, often as final authorities.

In this respect the most worrying one is from the 1989 edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 4th edition, 1989: It restricts itself to:

palaver: 1) inform. derog. Fuss or bother, often with a lot of talking: 2 (often joc.) discussion.

This is even more surprising when a) the 1972 edition of the same work finds space for an historical account in its first definition:

talk or conference, esp. between traders or explorers and the people of the country

and b) again in the 1970s, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 1978, albeit noting "becoming rare" gives as its fourth meaning:

long talks dealing with a matter of importance, esp. between people of different societies, levels of education, etc.

Cultural expectations of the readers are clearly in mind also in the following:

a) *Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary of the English Language* Unabridged, Springfield Mass. (1909) 1966:

An often prolonged parley usu. between different levels of culture and sophistication (as between a 19th century European trader and natives on the African West Coast).

*La Petit Robert* Dictionnaire par Paul Robert, Paris, 1978 *Palabre: n. f ou m. (1604)*;

1° Vx, Présent fait à un roi noir des cotes d'Afrique pour se concilier ses bonnes grâces.

Par. Ext. pourparlers a l'occasion de la remise de ces présents.

It is our palaver to make sure that Commonwealth cultural expectations are respected in dictionaries dealing with the English language.

*PALAVER: LECCE* aims to take its place as a journal with a "Commonwealth" bias issued from an Italian University. For many years now - since the early 1970s - scholars in Italy have actively fostered the study of the newer literatures written by writers in the former colonies of France, Spain, England and Portugal. The Italian contribution to these studies has been remarkable for its quality, quantity and its continuing presence. Here in Italy, Canada has been to the forefront in both its major languages because of much sterling work and patient organization by - to quote two representative figures only - Giovanni Dotoli (Bari) and Giovanni Bonanno (Messina). The continuing value of Italian studies of Australian culture is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Giovanna Capone (Bologna) is first Chair of the newly-formed European Association of Studies on Australia, EASA. For Africa, with its multiform challenges and interests, Claudio Gorlier (Torino) has been characteristically brilliant and indefatigable in his leadership in this field. In addition, he, along with Sergio Zoppi

(Torino) and Giuseppe Bellini (Milano), is part of the highly innovative committee - under the aegis of the C.N.R., the Italian University Grants Commission-which provides crucial support for the scholarly presentation of these literary cultures in any of the appropriate languages. Consequently, their: *Africa America Asia Australia* is issued as a multilingual publication.

As for a group of us in Lecce, Africa seemed the ideal focus for an ongoing interdisciplinary research group in our part of Italy, in which we could participate in the spirit which elsewhere has informed the past decades of cooperation, research, publishing and teaching on the various aspects of "Commonwealth". We plan two issues yearly, one in English, one in Italian.

We are indebted to Professor Barbara Wojciechowska, Director, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, and colleagues for authorization to publish *PALAVER: LECCE* from the Department, which was agreed to in a characteristically generous way.

With this initial number of *PALAVER: LECCE* the research group on Africa at the University of Lecce welcomes members of the EACLALS Triennial Conference: "Commonwealth Literary Cultures: New Voices: New Approaches", Lecce, April 3-7, 1990.

We look forward to your contributions, either in Italian or English.

Bernard Hickey, Editor