



## GLOBAL MORRISON

27 - 28 June 2017 University of Greenwich London

Department of Literature, Language and Theatre  
Faculty of Architecture, Computing and Humanities

King William Court (KW) and Queen Anne Court (QA)

KW003

9:00-9:45 Registration

9:45-10:00 Welcome

KW002

10:00-11:00 Guest Speaker: Professor Karla Holloway

**“The Place of the Idea, The Idea of the Place”; or, A Word is a Place**

A meditation of the critical ecology of Morrison, not just in site, but the worlds in her words.

Karla Francesca Holloway is James B. Duke Professor of English & Professor of Law at Duke University, and holds appointments in the Duke University School of Law as well as the university's Department of English, Department of African and African American Studies, and Program in Women's Studies.

KW003

11:00-11:30 Coffee break

KW002

11:30- 12:00 Mariam Popal (University of Bayreuth, Germany)

popal.mariam@gmail.com

**Planetary Futurity within Aporias in Toni Morrison's *Home***

In her epic style, Toni Morrison does not only draft fiction. She also discusses issues pertaining to an other world, to a planetary thinking. This planetary care for the world implicitly lays open a futurity of how another world as home might be envisioned. This paper deals with Toni Morrison's novel *Home*(2012). In doing so, it discusses how the concept-metaphor of home is elucidated as a place very much in connection with the 'rest of the world' (Stuart Hall). It is a place of desire, of homely-ness but also a place that is connected to atrocities. *Home*, the title in this regard is a paradox, an aporia. On the one hand it stands for what we 'normally' connote with home as a quiet, safe, place. On the other hand this home is depicted as a historically driven place of horror that not only creates this horror within itself but also in othered spaces outside itself. Home is here also

unfurled into politics that also take place on the surface of the body and its inner space. *Home* is on the one hand a devastating narrative of the uncanniness of an ambivalent space/time/matter. At the same time, in the process of the narrative, a coming-to-home, an enabling subjectivity within aporias, is ensued. It thereby also alludes to a globalized capitalist system of exchange of money but also to affects and experiences that are part of it and the degenerating deprivations that it causes. It draws threads between home and inside as well as outside worlds. *Home* thus also opens up an utopianism narrative within the negativity of temporality, politics and history, a nevertheless-ness, in Ernst Bloch's sense, of hope.

#### Biography:

Mariam Popal, PhD, is a research fellow at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies and a habilitation candidate in English & Postcolonial Studies - University of Bayreuth/Germany and is currently working on a monograph on the novels of Paul Auster and Zadie Smith. Her research foci are (Feminist) De-/Postcolonial Studies, Ethics, (Postcolonial) Shakespeare Studies, Literary Theory, Affect Theories, especially humor, Modern English/American Literatures, Modernism, Virginia Wolff, Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, The Harlem Renaissance, Toni Morrison, American Short Stories, Film Theory & Photography Studies, Critical Race Studies and Representation Theory, Critical Inter-arity Studies within different critical movements, Diaspora Studies, images of Afghanistan in English Literatures and Modern Afghan Literatures & Cultural Studies, anti-Muslim racism, Neo-Orientalisms, Postcolonial 'New Materialism(s)'.

12:00-12:30

Yasmin Begum (University of Greenwich, UK) Y.Begum@greenwich.ac.uk

#### **Global Morrison – Resonant Ideals in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009)**

In her lecture 'Home', Toni Morrison commented on the 'radical distinction between the metaphor of house and the metaphor of home' in relation to her thoughts on racial construction. Morrison's rhetoric on 'dreamscape possibilities' has arguably been global in its reach and identifiable in contemporary world literatures. Despite being specific to African-American experience, Morrison's ideas can be traced in literature emerging from those constituent parts of South Asia now independent nations after the end of British Imperialism in India and the traumatic birth of three countries by the Partitions of 1947 and 1971. The aesthetic form of the novel, for both Morrison and many South Asian writers, is a site of redemption – a mode of articulation that without denying national identity, can transcend imposed borders and resultant conflict.

This paper will examine Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) as a transnational anti-nationalist narrative of migratory experience. Shamsie's fiction is acutely aware and demonstrative of the field of postcolonial studies so that whilst her novels are marketed as popular, a critical analysis reveals the intersection of history, politics and theoretical insights. The paper will focus on Shamsie's novel and its regard for wider discourse from novelists such as Morrison as well as postcolonial scholarship in the work of theorists such as Gilroy and Spivak. *Burnt Shadows* tells the narrative of a Japanese woman, Hiroko Tanaka, who survives the Nagasaki bombing in 1945. Whilst trauma is not depicted as homogenous sameness, Shamsie engages in ideas of

universalism through the tribulations of her protagonist as she charts Hiroko's travels from Nagasaki to Delhi 1947, Pakistan 1982-3, New York and Afghanistan 2001-2.

Biography:

Yasmin Begum is a PhD. student who also teaches at Greenwich University. Her research interests are in Postcolonial Literature and in particular identity politics as a result of colonisation and its legacy from a postcolonial perspective.

12:30-13:00

Liani Lochner (Université Laval, Canada) [liani.lochner@lit.ulaval.ca](mailto:liani.lochner@lit.ulaval.ca)

**Toni Morrison and Zoë Wicomb: Towards a Transnational Feminism**

Toni Morrison described *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), Zoë Wicomb's first book, as 'seductive, brilliant, and precocious' and called the South African author 'an extraordinary writer'. In turn, in various interviews, Wicomb has frequently expressed her admiration for, and acknowledged the influence of Morrison's oeuvre on her writing. Critics have noted, for example, the intertextual references to *Beloved* (1987) in Wicomb's *David's Story* (2002), underscored by the latter novel's cover-artwork by Penny Siopsis, originally conceived as an artistic response to Morrison's novel (Robolin). There are other overt resonances: Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), a novel about racial passing, nods to Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992), and one of the epigraphs of the South African writer's latest novel, *October* (2014), is taken from the American author's *Home* (2012).

The metatextual commentary on each other's writing, expressed in their capacity as public intellectuals who are also readers, should be read alongside these intertextual references as forging a recognition for women's writing that disrupts their respective nations' gendered and racial mythologies. Morrison's frequent staging of the relationship between writers and characters who interrogate the biases and limitations of the very language they wield, finds a parallel in the recurring figure of the female writer and concerns of authorial responsibility in Wicomb's work. Acutely aware of history's occlusions and erasures, theirs is a writing, this paper argues, that forges a space for the recognition of the female voice, not as silenced by but as questioning and shaping the narratives of the nation.

Biography:

Liani Lochner is Assistant Professor of Anglophone Postcolonial Literature at Université Laval, Canada. Educated in South Africa and England, her research interests are in critical theory and the ethical and political possibilities of literature, and she has published related essays on the works of Adiga, Coetzee, Rushdie, and Ishiguro. Her current project is on the life and writing of the South African author, Zoë Wicomb.

KW003

13:00-14:00 Lunch

KW002

14:00-14:30

Jee H. An (Seoul National University [SNU], South Korea) "안지현" [jan@snu.ac.kr](mailto:jan@snu.ac.kr)

**The Unbearable Homelessness of (Non)-Being in American Empire: Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Home***

*Sula* (1973) and *Home* (2012), though written almost 40 years apart, reveal Toni Morrison's intense scrutiny of the rise of the neo-colonial American Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the figure of the traumatized black war veterans Shadrack and Frank Money. Believing that fighting for one's country in an integrated army would inevitably lead to a fuller integration of the racialized US as WEB Du Bois had endorsed during WWI, both characters in their disillusionment return to a racialized homeland that stubbornly refuses to provide a 'home' for the black veterans. However, more importantly, Morrison's critique of the domestic racist policy of the US, portraying an unchanging racist society which refuses to impart (black) humanity to the war veterans, is interlaced with a deeper critique of an imperial US which positions the black soldiers as an impossibly contested site of simultaneously victims of domestic racism and perpetrators of violence representing the American Empire. Shadrack's shellshock in France jolts him to see that 'the white, the red and the brown would stay where they were' (8) and Frank Money's recurring memories of killing a Korean girl bring him to a repressed knowledge of the impossible subjectivity that he himself occupies as both a homeless non-being and a representative of the American Empire. Their invisibility as full US citizens and visibility as black war veterans operate to foreground the segregated spaces inhabited by blacks with the US as another Third World territory and the neo-colonial and imperial expansion of US internationally. Theorizing through the works of Edward Said, Donald Pease, Amy Kaplan, Laura Doyle and David Scott, my paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing critical work that recasts Toni Morrison's novels as a significant part of postcolonial and transnational contemporary literary oeuvres.

Biography:

Jee H. An is Associate Professor of English Language and Literature at Seoul National University (SNU) in South Korea. She has been teaching at SNU since 2004, and was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard-Yenching Institute in 2010. She grew up in Seoul, Korea, and received her BA and MA in English Literature at SNU and her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 2003. Her recent articles include 'The Form of Slavery in *A Mercy*' and "'Only then, if I listen carefully": The Sounding(s) of Countermodernity in Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River*'. She is currently working on a book manuscript on the relationship between modernity and segregated home spaces in black women's novels. She has also translated Caryl Phillips's *Crossing the River* into Korean.

14:30-15:00

Josiane Ranguin (University of Paris XIII-Sorbonne, Paris Cité)

[josiane.ranguin@gmail.com](mailto:josiane.ranguin@gmail.com)

**Embossing stories, Revealing History, Seamlessly: Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (1993)**

*Song of Solomon* opens and closes on extraordinary flights involving members of the Seven Days, a terrorist organisation whose aim is to systematically avenge racially

motivated killings of African-Americans, one day at a time. From echoes of slavery to harbingers of full-fledged citizenship, African-American history is then seamlessly blended into a narrative made of myths, tales, dreams, bags of fears, gossip and old wives' tales. Which is not to say that these stories should be understood as folklore, that is, otherworldly, as Toni Morrison underlines : 'But I don't study folklore — they are family stories and neighbourhood stories and community stories' (1985). These narratives are part and parcel of the African-American experience of a reality which is also informed by world history. We can trace in Caryl Phillips's work the same interest in retrieving a silenced past to help make more sense of the present — 'I felt I had to do some historical repair work' (2006) — in a novel where authentic threads of historical texts are woven into the fictional fabric. The Anglo-Caribbean author also shares with Toni Morrison the belief in the remedial function of writing, and when Toni Morrison sings the African-American gift of naming, Caryl Phillips echoes the list with a role call of members of the African diaspora, 'flung out into history' (1983), famous or infamous but 'Survivors all' (1993).

#### Biography:

Josiane Ranguin has received her Ph.D. from the University of Paris XIII-Sorbonne Paris Cité completed under the supervision of Professor Chantal Zabus. Her dissertation examined the Anglo-Caribbean gaze as evinced in a selection of Caryl Phillips's works on which she has also published articles. Her areas of interest include French and English language Caribbean literature, postcolonial writing and film studies.

15:00-15:30

Amber Lascelles (University of Leeds, UK) [enall@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:enall@leeds.ac.uk)

#### **Problematising Cosmopolitanism: Toni Morrison's 'Recitatif', Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go***

Toni Morrison's experimental short story 'Recitatif' (1983) narrates Twyla and Roberta's fraught friendship, from their childhood in an orphanage through to protests during the Civil Rights movement. Morrison reveals that one of the girls is white and the other black, but does not reveal which is which, obscuring recognisable racial codes. Twyla works menial jobs and marries a firefighter, whilst Roberta marries an IBM executive and enjoys a middle class lifestyle. This short story remains one of Morrison's most innovative works, radically disrupting racial codes to reflect upon the complex ways that race and class interact. 'Recitatif' interrogates how our racial preconceptions have been constructed, prompting us to consider who can achieve class mobility, and on what grounds.

Comparing 'Recitatif' to two recent novels, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) allows us to reconsider the ways that privilege is registered through the mode of race. In a world where global capital flows across metropolises, from Lagos to New York, *Americanah*'s protagonist Ifemelu and *Ghana Must Go*'s Taiwo reveal how privilege can seemingly remove racial boundaries, but racism remains, manifested in other ways. All three of these works allow us to explore the complex ways that cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism play out. Importantly, scholars have recently asserted that advancing capitalism, under the guise of

'diversity', renders systematic racism more difficult to discern and thus, dangerously insidious (Duggan, Melamed). With this in mind, how can Morrison's 'Recitatif' problematise the cosmopolitan, middle class protagonists in Adichie's and Selasi's novels? What can revisiting Morrison's fiction comparatively tell us about how race relations are currently configured in literature? Most pertinently, in what ways can Morrison's texts potentially restore radical feminist fiction?

#### Biography:

Amber Lascelles is a Year 1 PhD candidate at the University of Leeds (School of English) researching transnational feminism(s) and neoliberalism in the works of Edwidge Danticat, Dionne Brand, Chimamanda Adichie and Taiye Selasi, supervised by Professor John McLeod. Her research proposes that material analysis of literary texts reveals the potentialities of transnational black feminist criticism through diasporic, cross-border interconnections both enabled and disrupted by advancing capitalism. Amber's broader research interests include localities and globalities in sub-Saharan African and Anglophone Caribbean writing, feminist critiques of African-American literature, feminist theory and activism and Marxist analysis.

KW003

15:30-15:45 Coffee break

KW002

15:45-16:15

Aretha Phiri (Rhodes University, South Africa) [A.Phiri@ru.ac.za](mailto:A.Phiri@ru.ac.za)

#### **The Machineries of Blackness in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah***

Renowned African-American author, Toni Morrison, has persistently called in her criticism for a participatory engagement with her position on and concerns around blackness. Within contemporary Afrodiasporic writing Morrison's ideas are being critiqued and expanded to reflect 'African' attitudes and perspectives. In particular, the critically acclaimed emergent author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has, in conversation and in her most recent fiction, suggested that Africans (in the diaspora) articulate themselves differently from African Americans. Politicised thus as contested rather than putative terrain, blackness more significantly points to the diversity and dynamism of black culture and testifies to the enduring complexity of black subjectivity.

In a comparative reading of Morrison's celebrated novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977) and Adichie's popular text, *Americanah* (2013), this paper offers a fresh, specifically transatlantic and transnational, analysis of Morrison's African-American views on blackness through the contemporary Afrodiasporic lens of Adichie. Examining in their fiction Morrison's traditional dialogic call-and-response mode and Adichie's (gendered) engagement with technological innovations, the essay explores the ways in which *Americanah* speaks (back) to, in order to critique and expand, *Song of Solomon*'s representation of black cultural ontologies. In this regard, this paper seeks not just to problematise blackness in Morrison's work; it hopes to broaden understandings of, and

extend discussions around, the global character and influence of her (canonical) oeuvre within a broader, contemporary project of (black) cosmopolitanism.

**Biography:**

Aretha Phiri holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and is a lecturer in the English Department at Rhodes University as well as a fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Studies (STIAS) in South Africa. Her research interrogates the intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, gender and sexualities in comparative, transnational and transatlantic, considerations of identity and subjectivity. She has published in various journals including the *Cultural Studies* journal, *English Studies in Africa*, *Safundi*, *Agenda* and *Journal of American Studies*.

16:15-16:45

Justine Baillie (University of Greenwich, London) [j.j.baillie@gre.ac.uk](mailto:j.j.baillie@gre.ac.uk)

**Morrison and the Transnation**

**Biography:**

Dr. Justine Baillie is the author of *Toni Morrison and Literary Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and has published on African-American life writing, women's writing and the international novel. Dr. Baillie is currently working on a monograph, *Transnational Paris*.

**Greenwich Theatre**

17:15-18:30

**Phillis in London:** Spora Stories presents a script-in-hand reading of a new play, written and directed by Ade Solanke (University of Greenwich, UK)

Phillis Wheatley was the first African heritage person in the Americas to publish a book, the first African female to do so, and the third published female poet. As such, she occupies a unique position in the history of Women's writing, African-American writing, American writing and African writing in English.

Her 1773 volume, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, published in London when she was still a teenager, marks a watershed moment in literary history. She'd been kidnapped aged seven, transported to America and sold to a prominent Boston family, where she received a western education unique for a woman and an African. Her writing gained her transatlantic fame, making her a sensation both here and there – 'the Oprah Winfrey of her day', as Henry Louis Gates puts it. On her trip to London in 1773, she visited Greenwich, with its myriad connections to the Navy, sea-faring, the Slave Trade and British-African history.

Prodigy, poet and enslaved woman writer. 'Phillis In London' is an original piece of new writing, re-imagining and dramatising her experience as an African-American/British-American woman writer abroad, in an imperial European capital city, at the height of the slave trade, on the cusp of the American Revolution. She set sail three times in her life. How did her 'out-of-Africa' and 'out-of-America' experiences transform her?

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### Biography:

Ade Solanke is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. Her acclaimed, award-winning debut play, *Pandora's Box*, was nominated for Best New Play in the OffWestEnd Awards and shortlisted for the \$100,000 Nigeria Prize for Literature 2014, Africa's biggest literary award. It toured the UK in 2014. Her most recent play, *East End Boys, West End Girls*, won a BEFFTA Award for Best Play 2015. She is the recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award 2016 from the University of Sheffield. Ade wrote the screenplay for award-winning film, *Dazzling Mirage*. She is a judge for the Nollywood Movies Awards (NMA), and has judged the RAS Boabab Prize and the Nigerian ZAAFA Awards. Her screenplays have been quarter and semi-finalists in the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences annual Nicholls Screenwriting contest in LA, where she worked as a story analyst for several Hollywood Studios, including Sundance, New Line and Disney. She was the British Film Institute's first Writer-in-Residence, with the support of the Royal Literary Fund, of which she is a fellow. She's also a member of the BFI's African Odysseys Committee, which programmes African films at London's National Film Theatre. Earlier in her career, she was voted 'London's Top Youth Entrepreneur' for her writing business.

Ade has an MFA in Film and Television (Screenwriting) from the University of Southern California (USC) School of Cinematic Arts where she was a Fulbright Scholar, Phi Beta Kappa International Scholar and Association of American University women (AAUW) International Scholar. She has an Honours Degree in English Literature from the University of Sheffield, and a PG Diploma in Creative Writing from Goldsmiths, University of London, where she was recently AHRC-funded Pinter Centre Writer-in-Residence. She is working on scripts about African artists in Georgian and Sixties London.

QA Courtyard

19:00 **CONFERENCE BARBECUE**

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WEDNESDAY 28 JUNE

KW003

9:30-10:30

Guest Speaker: Emeritus Professor, Justine Tally [jtally@ull.es](mailto:jtally@ull.es) (University of La Laguna, Spain)

### **The Gnosis of Toni Morrison: A Conversation with Herman Melville**

With the reception of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, Toni Morrison seemingly burst upon the international scene and her renown and relevance have only increased in importance and recognition. Not only are her novels translated into languages around the world and taught in numerous international settings, but her attraction as a subject for MA theses and PhD Dissertations among young scholars has soared. Critics from around



the world continue to propose readings informed by their own 'chronotope' (in the words of Bakhtin) to broaden our understanding of Morrison's vision for and of our times. Yet it is the proposition of this paper that this internationalization of the author has been (and continues to be) a two-way street: not only have scholars and critics from outside the U.S. dedicated a good deal of time and analysis to her oeuvre from which the rest of us benefit, but the author herself has found much to contemplate and integrate into her own work, aspects of major innovative criticism from scholars abroad. Obviously her incorporation of the work of theorists like Foucault, Bakhtin, Derridá, and the French Feminists, for example, of even the philosopher John Locke, all examined in various of her novels, has been a staple of her work. Yet long before Morrison was extensively recognized as a serious contender in the 'Global Market of Intellectuals' she was obviously reading and absorbing challenging critical work that was considered 'provocative and controversial' by the keepers of the US academic community at the time. While no one disputes the influence of Elaine Pagels' work on Gnosticism at the University of Princeton, and the epigraph for *Jazz* from *The Nag Hammadi* certainly calls for close attention, the literary critique of major texts from the American Renaissance by a French critic certainly expands this notion of influence. Morrison's relationship with the global world of letters is at once inspirational and awe-inspiring.

Justine Tally is Emiritus Professor of American Literature, University of La Laguna, Spain. She is an eminent Morrison scholar, having written and edited a number of studies of Morrison's work.

10:30-11:00

Portia Owusu (University of Warwick, UK) [P.Owusu@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:P.Owusu@warwick.ac.uk)

**The (M)otherland: Images of Africa in the novels of Toni Morrison**

The literary and cultural influences on the genius of Toni Morrison is contested mainly because she has rejected comparison between herself and other writers. Concerning similarities between her work and that of William Faulkner, Morrison stated in a 1995 interview 'Faulkner...spends [an] entire book tracing race, and you can't find it' (Schappell & Lacour, 1993). Likewise, in 2010, at the first international conference of the Toni Morrison Society in Paris, France, when a conference participant asked Morrison about the influences of West African writers on her work, she evaded the question. She remarked that although she is aware of West African writers such as Achebe, her work is not influenced by them. To what extent is this true when we consider the focus on cultural and historical consciousness in the early works of Morrison (namely *Beloved* [1987] and *Song of Solomon* [1977])? In view of this conference's focus on the globality of Morrison's work, this paper looks at images of Africa or Africanness in these novels. It seeks to address the question of what Africa means, beyond historical and cultural connections, to Morrison and her characters. Particularly, it pays attention to Morrison's ideas as articulated in her 1984 essay, 'The Ancestor as Foundation'. It asks: to what extent is Africa to Morrison and characters the ancestral past or the ancestral present?

**Biography:**

Portia Owusu is a Teaching Fellow in American Literature at Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, University of Warwick. She completed in her PhD at

SOAS, the University of London and was previously at the Universities of Kent and York. In 2015, she won the prestigious Fulbright Award to the University of Kansas, where she completed her dissertation under the supervision of the distinguished professor of African-American literature, Maryemma Graham.

11:00-11:30

Razia Parveen (Independent Scholar) [U9950381@alumni.hud.ac.uk](mailto:U9950381@alumni.hud.ac.uk)

**The Significance of Morrison's Work for Contemporary Postcolonial/Transnational Theory**

I will examine how divisions illustrated in Morrison's novels lend themselves not only to traditional post-colonial theories but also to diasporic writings of identity. The representation of black consciousness in Morrison's early work, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), has become emblematic of the futility of reaching for 'ideal beauty'. Importantly, Morrison problematises essentialisations of racial identity in ways which have formed a cornerstone of much diasporic writing. British Black and Asian writers may not acknowledge the influence of Morrison's early work and yet Pecola's ghost haunts every page of contemporary Black and Asian writing. This paper will move on to focus on female representations in *Beloved* (1987), Spivak's notion of epistemic violence, and what palimpsestic writing means. Overall, the paper aims to alter the historical and social native consciousness; to delete all traces of the original and overwrite it with something considered more appropriate. Non-Western epistemology is dismissed as inadequate, 'insufficiently elaborated' and naïve. I will consider how female genealogy can only exist in a 'separate' time zone and how Irigaryan silence pervades *Beloved*.

**Biography:**

I gained my doctorate in 2014 and research areas such as identity, diaspora, community and women. I also work in the area of oral history and have conducted interviews and analysed my results. I have just completed a book on identity in diaspora called *Recipes and Songs: An analysis of cultural practices from South Asia*.

11:30-12:00 Coffee break

12:00-12:30

Ree Hyun Kim (Ewha Womans University, South Korea) [bubblebath91@gmail.com](mailto:bubblebath91@gmail.com)

**Between 'Skin Privileges' and Child Abuse: Qualification of Love in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child***

In her latest novel *God Help the Child* (2015), Toni Morrison provides a critical perspective on what is often referred to as a post-racial world, wherein race is purported to be 'just a colour'. However, such a benighted statement is proven to be erroneous, for race has permeated the fabric of quotidian life and relations, only to be rephrased as 'skin privileges'. Opening with a deeply troubling severance of a mother-and-daughter relationship that is entrenched in 'skin privileges', the novel is entangled in a number of disturbing and even fantastical narratives that encircle a chain of child abuse. That Sweetness refuses to touch Lula Ann attests to the fact that her feelings of repulsion for the child, powerful enough to dispel ties that are deemed most natural, are anchored solely at the level of skin. Likewise, issues of child abuse and 'skin privileges' are

inextricably intertwined; yet the irony permeating the novel lies with the sanctification of children as ‘Angels’ and with the ubiquity of child abuse. In response to such an irony, this paper argues that Morrison presents child abuse as the epitome of instrumental love—love devoid of a sincere interest in the other, or in other words love that is only concerned with the self—not so disparate from motives that underlie practices of ‘skin privileges’. Culminating in the rhetorical question ‘[w]hat kind of love is it that requires an Angel and only an Angel for its commitment’, *God Help the Child* ultimately serves to testify to the fact that glorifying others as desirable ideals, by turning the gaze *away* from their potentially disturbing otherness, is no less abominable than the logic of racism which had focused *on* such otherness. Narcissistic self-love is destined to trigger dire consequences tantamount to figurative or even literal abuse, for it inflicts a subtler yet potentially deadlier harm, disguised by the pretence of beneficence.

#### Biography:

Ree Hyun Kim is currently studying for her Ph.D. degree after she received her B.A. and M.A. in English Literature at Ewha Womans University, South Korea. Her academic interest revolves around the study of the long Eighteenth century, ranging from domestic novels to political economy. Her paper ‘Female Property and Independence in *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*’ has been published in the journal of *British and American Fiction* (August 2016).

12:30-13:00

Dasol Choi (Ewha Womans University, South Korea) [dasolchoi27@gmail.com](mailto:dasolchoi27@gmail.com)

#### **Race, Space and Identity in Toni Morrison’s Home**

This paper aims to explore how, in her *Home* (2012), Toni Morrison illustrates the racial problems African Americans have faced in American society. This is facilitated by her descriptions of restricted space for African Americans and by considerations of the tensions involved in establishing African-American identity through the construction of a specifically African-American space. Morrison shows how, in their journeys through spaces in both the United States and South Korea, black people face racial oppression. The spaces, and black experience of them, reveal the silent history of the suffering of African Americans in the 1950s. The journey back to home, and the rebuilding of home, reclaims its meaning for African Americans.

Firstly, this paper examines the social problems African Americans confronted in the middle of the 20th century by providing a reading of Frank Money’s experience both inside and outside his Southern hometown of Lotus. Frank, a young African American veteran, is a central figure in *Home* and his experience of the South, urban centres of the U.S., and combat zones of South Korea reveal the agonies that African Americans have suffered. Simultaneously those spaces are related to the protagonists’ social status and gender identity.

Secondly, I consider how African-American space and the South is reclaimed in the novel. In re-establishing her protagonists’ home, Morrison delineates the ways in which African Americans can recreate relationships and identities and how space can change from traumatized space to space for healing. Although African Americans’ living space

has been considered a segregated site, the novel shows that the space, in particular the South, can offer the possibility of hope for African-Americans.

In conclusion, this paper argues that Morrison reveals racial problems through the depiction of movement across spaces inside and outside America and she emphasizes the importance of building a home and thereby establishing identity.

Biography:

I am Ph.D student in the department of English at Ewha Womans University in Korea. I graduated at Ewha in 2016 with a M.A, in English and went on to Ph. D program of English department at Ewha. My master's thesis is on Toni Morrison's *Home*. My academic interests are African American literature, Caribbean literature, Toni Morrison, space and diaspora.

13:00-14:00 Lunch

14:00-14:30

Luana de Souza Sutter (University of Erfurt, Brazil) [luanacqueiroz@gmail.com](mailto:luanacqueiroz@gmail.com)

**Poetics of (Re)Memory in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Conceicao Evaristo's *Poncia Vicencio***

This paper proposes a comparison between Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and the recent novel *Poncia Vicencio* (2003)[Evaristo, Conceicao. *Poncia Vicencio*. Belo Horizonte: Mazza Edicoes, 2003. Print.] by the Afro-Brazilian author Conceição Evaristo. Sixteen years set these novels apart, which illustrate the effects of the memory of slavery for former slaves and their descendants with a very similar poetics of entanglement of memory and nature. Reading Evaristo's *Poncia Vicencio* as an elaboration of Morrison's poetics of rememory in *Beloved*, I will inquire the connections these novels draw between nature, the mediation of memory, and the characters' articulation of collective identity. In *Beloved*, I will focus on the element water, which plays an important connecting role between the people of the Bluestone community, the past of slavery, and their ancestors – illustrating the fluid and cyclic character of rememory. In *Poncia Vicencio*, I will address how Evaristo envisions the junction of the water with earth to form clay – a malleable and moldable material that allows the protagonist Poncia to communicate and disassociate from the traumatic memories passed on from her enslaved grandfather. To embed this comparison of the novels' illustration of the memory of slavery in relation to the symbology of water and clay, I will lean on discourses of Black cultural criticism, Gaston Bachelard's essays on the imagination of matter and Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemorial art [Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.]. Hence, this paper seeks to evince the influence of Morrison's poetics of rememory in recent Afro-Brazilian fiction drawing an ecocritical reading of the workings of traumatic memory in *Beloved* and *Poncia Vicencio*.

Biography:

Luana de Souza Sutter graduated with a BA in Literary Studies at the Universidade Federal Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She has recently achieved her MA degree

in Literary Studies at the University of Erfurt, Germany with a thesis on the poetics of memory in the novels *Poncia Vicencio* and *Beloved*. During her master studies, Luana was also a fellow student at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. At the moment, she offers at the University of Erfurt a course on ethnic American fiction and the notion of “cultural haunting” and her current research project is concerned with memory and materiality in African American and Afro-Brazilian contemporary neo-slave narratives.

14:30-15:00

Alaa Al-Halbosy (Bangor University, UK) [a.m.k.al-halbosy@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:a.m.k.al-halbosy@bangor.ac.uk)

**Transnational Impact through Stories and Trauma in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved***

This paper seeks to investigate folktales and trauma in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987). A consideration of *Beloved* helps to answer the question of how an African culture, beyond the borders of the continent affects African-American consciousness and shapes identity. My paper also examines how a link between notions of nationalism and fiction could create a transnational perspective.

In *Beloved*, rituals and folklore work as a ‘time machine’ for travelling across generations, working as a means to preserve some aspects of African culture for new communities. I discuss the effect of trauma and memory on the shaping of African-American identity and show how they have a significant impact on contemporary African- American literature in general and African-American women’s writing in particular.

Folktales and trauma, as aspects of transnationalism, are represented through the character of Denver, Sethe’s daughter, and the stages that she goes through in her childhood and memories. Denver listens to stories told by Sethe and Baby Suggs and these stories bring aspects of African culture and custom to life in the new continent of America, specifically in the African-American community of Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Biography:**

I am a PhD student from Iraq, in the writing up period of my PhD which is about the African American Identity in the Fiction of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. I have a BA in English from Baghdad University/ Iraq 2016. Then I did my MA at Pune University/ India and now, as I have mentioned earlier, doing my PhD at Bangor University/ Wales. I taught English Lit. at the University of Anbar from 2009 to 2013 when I started my PhD.

15:00-15:30

Grace McGowan (Exeter College, University of Oxford, UK)

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**Toni Morrison, Robin Coste Lewis, and the Classical Tradition**

‘A central figure in transnational intellectual history’ Morrison’s oeuvre has helped to deconstruct the triangulated relationship between a European Graeco-Roman classical tradition, Africa, and America. It is becoming clear that Morrison’s deconstruction of the classical past and its aesthetics have been the foundation for the reconstructive work of a new generation of writers such as Robin Coste Lewis. Both writers engage in the difficult task of renegotiating and reclaiming a classical aesthetic by recovering its African roots

and situating it in an African-American context. Giving a detailed analysis of quotations from throughout Morrison's oeuvre and examining their influence and adaption in the poetry of Robin Coste Lewis this talk will investigate the ambivalent attitude of the writers towards the classical tradition. By extension it will also explore the difficulty with which that aesthetic tradition has been 're-appropriated', rejected, or confirmed. The second part of the talk will examine how classical aesthetic ideas have spilled into beauty discourse. This will focus particularly on how Robin Coste Lewis has attempted to revision a way of seeing the black female body in art and Morrison's influence on this. The final section of the talk will address what all of this means for canonicity, linking the ambivalence, optimism, and scepticism, of a reclaimed classical aesthetic for a woman of colour to Morrison's ambivalence towards a literary canon in *Unspeakable Things Unspoken*. How successful are these reclamations of the classical aesthetic? And how necessary? Is it better to attempt to re-appropriate a tradition from which black female bodies have been annexed or to reject it completely? Where is the fine line between re-appropriation and capitulation for characters like Jadine and Bride? Or for writers like Morrison and Lewis?

#### Biography:

My name is Grace McGowan and I'm currently doing my final year of a BA in English Language and Literature at University of Oxford. I recently completed my dissertation research on Toni Morrison, Robin Coste Lewis, and their interaction with the classical tradition. I have also recently been approved for an academic travel grant to go to Paris to research its significance for Morrison, particularly with regard to her time as curator at the Louvre.

15:30-16:00

Min-Jung Kim (Ewha Womans University, South Korea) [minjungkewha@gmail.com](mailto:minjungkewha@gmail.com)

#### **Racial (In)Determinacy and Abject Bodies in Toni Morrison's 'Recitatif'**

In this paper on Toni Morrison's 'Recitatif', I seek to explore how race overdetermines yet fails to capture identity in the U.S. by focusing on the characters Twyla and Roberta--their volatile and persistent relationship to each other and to their own mothers, and to Maggie. Much has been written on this intriguing story, with nuanced readings being produced on the intersection of race and class, disability as a metaphor for race, and the entwining of race and violence. In this paper, I hope to further some of the discussions on the work by drawing specifically upon Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject and abjection to consider how racial difference operates as a figure for abjection in the narrative, but to also examine some of its enabling possibilities, in so far as the very nature of the abject--the me that is not-me--introduces questions of instability and disturbs borders and identities, and confuses identifications. The opening scene of the story makes explicit that, on the one hand, Twyla seizes upon her racial difference from Roberta as her only source of departure from her socially deviant status as being abandoned at St. Bonny's. And yet, despite her attempts to distance herself from her mother as the source of her own social abjection, Twyla calls upon her racial connection to her own mother to define herself and establish her difference from Roberta. At other moments, as the narrative progresses, it is the abjection of one's mother and one's own race that enables the connection between the abandoned girls. Thus, in focusing on the continuities between

the two girls' relationship to each other and to their lingering connection to their own mothers, I hope to think about the ramifications of Morrison's representation of racial indeterminacy and ambivalence in this work, especially for readers outside the U.S.

Biography:

Min-Jung Kim is a professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Ewha Womans University, Seoul, Korea. Kim received her BA in English from Ewha, MA in English from the University of California, Berkeley (Fulbright graduate study grant), and Ph. D. in Literature from the University of California, San Diego. Her research interests include African American and Asian American Literature, Narrative Theory, Post-Colonial Literature and Theory, and critical issues in American Studies scholarship and study of American culture and literature in Korea. She is the co-editor of *Transnationality in US Immigrant Literature* (Ewha Womans Univ. Press), with her article publications covering a wide range of canonical and minority writers. Her interests in US Multi-Ethnic Literature, American Studies, US imperialism in Asia, and immigration and issues of memory are explored in essays such as "Moments of Danger in the (Dis)continuous Relation of Korean Nationalism and Korean American Nationalism" (*Positions* 1997) and "Language, the University and American Studies in Korea" (*American Quarterly* 2005), and "The Vexed Location of Teaching American Studies in Korea" (*American Quarterly*, Forum, 2016). In 2003, Kim received the American Studies Association's Yasuo Sakakibara Award for her essay on Ronyoung Kim's *Clay Walls*. She was also the recipient of the Fulbright Mid-career research grant, 2006-2007. Her current project examines issues of language, representation, and narrative style and form in the novels of Toni Morrison. Kim currently serves on the Editorial Board of *American Quarterly*, for which she has also served as an Associate Editor (July 2014 to July 2015.)

16:00-17:00

Closing plenary and coffee: Round table discussion