

## **Postgraduate Un-Conference**

### ***Labour and Liberty: The Black Diasporic Experience***

**Thursday, 14 October 2021, 12:30pm–5pm**

12:30pm: Introductions

### **1pm: Decolonising Classics and Music**

*Dylan Bailey, University of Glasgow, “Decolonising Classical Studies”*

Classics has had an unfortunate history of excluding non-White perspectives from the discussion. My essay investigated some of the ways where Classics have been decolonised, specifically by performances of Greek Tragedy. I found the 2007 book *Crossroads in the Black Aegean* particularly revelatory to how ancient Greek theatre has been re-interpreted in both colonial and post-colonial contexts. The essay assessed the success in making the original messages of the play relevant to a postcolonial audience. I analysed a 1992 production of the *Oresteia*, which used the court scene to criticise the actions of the Supreme Court under the Bush 41 administration. I also examined a 1986 production of *Ajax*, which was an explicitly left-wing critique of the Reagan administration. I could find no performances of *Ion* that addressed a postcolonial audience. I attempted instead to decolonise the play with racially motivated re-castings, which immediately placed imperialist exploitation at the heart of the play. For this presentation, I plan to include some changes to my framing that I have considered since receiving feedback about the original essay from my tutors. In the original, I focused on whether the performances represented an accurate reflection of ancient Greek theatre. Although this point has relevance to postcolonial studies, I believe it is more important that art can be made accessible to a modern P.O.C. audience, regardless of whether it reflects the author’s original intentions. This is a point I wish to examine further in this presentation. By assessing past examples and my own attempt to make ancient Greek theatre accessible to a modern P.O.C. audience, I hope to encourage a rethink about the decolonisation of Classics in modern academia.

*Luka Mukhavele, University of Music Franz Liszt Weimar, “New Perspectives and Approaches in the Study of African Musics”*

Musicology is supposed to study music(s) without any ideological impositions. However, its “scientificity” remains corrupted. Since its introduction in non-Western societies, musicology has been an agent of colonialism, destroying indigenous musical cultures and superseding them with the Western. For Example, in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and other countries where I did my research, only Western music was taught in schools, forcing students to unlearn their indigenous musics, which were banned during colonial time.

1:45pm-2pm: Break

## **2pm–2:45pm: Brazilian Black Diasporas**

*Sara Mello Neiva, University of São Paulo, “Teatro Experimental do Negro: Political and Experimental Meanings in Brazilian Theatre in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”*

The proposal is to present the work of Teatro Experimental do Negro - TEN (Experimental Black Theatre - 1944-1968), a project idealised and developed by Abdias do Nascimento, an inescapable figure in the anti-racist struggle in Brazil. The emergence of TEN is part of a moment that Guilherme Carlos Mota called the “Rediscovery of Brazil”. After the Revolution of 1930, when, in addition to political upheavals, counterpoints to the “authoritative explanations” of nation formation emerged and, with it, new angles of debate on identity, national, Brazilian and popular culture. In parallel, in this beginning of the politics of the masses in Brazil, in which from the growth of the cities and of the proletariat, ample sectors are gradually launched into political life, the absorption of the popular layers in the elitist government projects becomes unavoidable. TEN was born with purposes that went beyond the purely artistic. They sought, in the words of Abdias himself, “to work for the social valorisation of the black community in Brazil, through education, culture and art.” Together with other activities, Teatro Experimental do Negro elaborated literacy programmes, an important action considering that more than half of the population in Brazil was illiterate. The study of Teatro Experimental do Negro reveals how political struggle engenders aesthetic advance. Social motives were conjugated with aesthetic experimentalism, a new scene that took into account black corporality, songs, a new dramaturgy. This was something completely new in those 1940s, in a country whose colonial slavery heritage is structural.

*Moussa Traoré, University of Cape Coast, “A Study of the Brazilian Returnees in West Africa: The Specific Case of the Tabom in Ghana”*

My research aims at scrutinizing a phenomenon that is represented by the return of Brazilian slaves on the West African coast (Nigeria, Togo, Benin and Ghana) in the 1830s, focusing on its facets that have not been examined enough. The rationale behind this study is the following. Not many Ghanaians and not many residents of Accra, where these returnees settled first, are aware of this important socio-historical fact, which continues to be of vital scope when one considers the lives and studies related to the Black diaspora across the world in general, and the Ghanaian society in particular. The other and most important concern of this study is the fact that those returnees, the Tabom, do not exhibit any trait that translates their Brazilian identity, unlike their counterparts who settled in Nigeria, Benin and Togo. My study aims to unearth how they succeeded in effacing the Brazilian component of their identity. The results of this investigation will add a new dimension to the field of Diasporan Studies, an area that has so far been anchored on the convergence and the open expression of the distinctive features, the hybridity of various cultures and people that have been in contact.

## **2:45pm-3:30pm: Enslaved Experiences and Histories**

*Linsey McMillan, University of Edinburgh, "Working in the Weakly Gang: Health, Disability, and Labour in Trinidad and British Guiana, 1823-1834"*

Enslaved individuals toiled under many severely limiting physical, social, political, and cultural barriers to their health and healthcare, which often resulted in an inability to carry out their assigned labour and led to power struggles between them and their enslavers. In the complaints of sick, injured, and maltreated slaves, we see the complexity of the relationship between the everyday health experiences of enslaved individuals and the economic expectations of their enslavers. Disability—a term used within this work to encompass a wide range of physical and mental health experiences—loosened enslavers' control over slaves' bodies and work, despite their best efforts to manipulate and coerce them. In times of ill health, enslaved individuals often re-negotiated the terms of their working and living conditions and asserted bodily autonomy. This presentation examines the history of disabled and sick enslaved people captured within complaints made to the "protector of slaves" in Trinidad and British Guiana in the years 1823-1834. This period saw radical changes in British law and slaveholding practice to "ameliorate" the conditions of slavery in its Caribbean colonies, including the creation of the office of the protector of slaves in Trinidad, Berbice, Essequibo, and Demerara. The reports of these officials provide a rich and under-utilised historical source for examining the medical relations of enslaved labourers. Using theoretical frameworks from disability studies and Atlantic and social history, it argues that experiences of disability, ill health and healthcare were often at the heart of the unrelenting conflicts between enslaved people and their oppressors.

*Laura Paola Flores Pabello, University of Glasgow, "My Un-told History and the Forgotten Legacy of Blacks in Mexico"*

There is a growing body of academic research on slavery in Mexico, but the presence and legacy of slavery and Africans in Mexico are hard to spot for the untrained eye. This heritage is often overlooked and replaced with the broader term of mestizaje. This erasure is not only an inaccurate interpretation of the history and the diversity of the people of Mexico; it is also an obstacle to any attempt to reach social justice and equality. This often results in further discrimination, segregation and in the loss of cultural heritage. The denial of African heritage in Mexico does not only affect the collective memory, but the individual memory as well. In my case, the history of my family is well documented from most sides. I possess records of arrivals and letters from my relatives who migrated from Spain, and I have broad knowledge of my indigenous ancestors, as their traditions and history of often well documented through festivities, academia, and popular traditions. But from my notoriously black family, I know nothing. For my project, I am unearthing the history of my black roots by tracking down long lost family members from Coyolillo, Veracruz and documenting my search for documents in town halls, churches and notarial records of the sale of slaves in the state of Veracruz to try and find out how and from where did my family arrive to Mexico. My quest may be hard, but hopefully it can prompt others to do the same, add to the literature and research of the slave

trade to Mexico, and contribute to the effort of black collectives to embrace our black roots and make history (specifically black history), more personal.

3:30pm–3:45pm: Break

### **3:45pm–4:30pm: Afrofuturisms and Speculation**

*Oswaldo Jossias José Cavele, Eduardo Mondlane University, “The Neoculture as the Fundament to Build a New Africanity”*

My research emerges within the context of political philosophy and seeks to present the cogitation of a neoculture in the African context as a means to construct a new Africanity. One of the greatest challenges that Africa came across, after the independences, was the impossibility of rethink its identity due to the general crisis of historical conscience, because of the long colonization. The colonization of the black continent, mother of humanity, had as consequence the denial of the capacity of the Africans to think a utopia outside of the dominating and annulment mentality implanted by what M’veng called anthropological poverty. Moreover, the readings of the current writing of the Italian based Mozambican philosopher and Professor Celestino Mussomar, entitled Exodus from the great sin, as pointed out the urgent necessity of Africa to revisit its historiography previously put aside by the canons of the western universalistic and totalitarian historiography, in order to rethink and reconstruct its history. Thus, according to Mussomar, it is urgent to revisit the dreams of the fathers of the African independences from a critical revisionism and rereading of the African cultures structurally wounded by the colonial imperium (domination), and propose an anthropology of hope capable of restitution of the old vision of the African humanity – the Ubuntu, as a condition of the existential dimension conscious of its key place and historicity in a world marked by the tendency of the dilution of the African.

*Shivali Moda, University of Glasgow, “Spider-Man and Afrofuturism”*

Miles Morales, the first Afro-Latino Spider-Man helms the narrative of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, a 2019 animated superhero film. I propose an analysis of this film through the lens of Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism may be understood as a genre that combines the conventions of fantasy, history and science fiction with themes and concerns relevant to the African diaspora, thereby taking control of African narratives that, from a historical point-of-view, have constantly undergone revisions or erasures at the hands of cultural outsiders. Ytasha Womack, leading scholar of Afrofuturism states that the genre is simultaneously about representation and about underlining the fact that “stories of African origin were not necessarily considered in futuristic contexts” (Womack, 2017). Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, I argue, satisfies both these tenets: it tells the story of a teenager of (partly) African origin, and bases his narrative in an alternate universe, the “Spider Verse,” where Miles is empowered and entirely responsible for preserving the space-time continuum of the universe. The film also makes the realization of institutional injustices tangible through its utilization of grotesque realism (Toliver, 2016) whereby the profits-over-people mind-set and hegemony of White

corporate superpowers is embodied by the disproportionately sized Kingpin – Miles’ ultimate adversary. Miles’ superpowers and his African-American father’s presence in the conclusive sequence enable Miles to defeat Kingpin. I argue that an Afrofuturistic rendition of Spider-Man as Miles Morales facilitates the broadening of a national (American) myth of heroism, allowing individuals of African origin to not only claim a future but also their history and, therefore, their present.

4:30pm: Concluding remarks and thanks