

The Institute for World Literature Summer 2022
Postcolonialism and World Literature Colloquium



Colloquium leader: Dr. Zayer Baazaoui

Participants: Ajisebutu Omoyemi Sayo, Araki Kae, Baazaoui Zayer, Bernard Cecily, Kwok Cherrie, Medeleanu Maria Luiza, Mehandru Ishan, Miller Grace, Onyima Nnenna, Randall Renée, Thompson Jackie Ruth Krogmeier.

The “Postcolonialism and World Literature” Colloquium had a total of 11 participants of different interests and backgrounds. The presentations enriched our discussions and our understanding of World Literature and Cultures through diverse topics of studies.

In our first session, we started with a brief presentation of each participant’s main research interests, academic backgrounds, and their interest in the theme of our colloquium.

These presentations were followed by our first panel entitled “**Rethinking Gender and Sexuality in the Global South.**”

Zayer Baazaoui (St. Paul’s School) opened the panel with a paper on queer resistance and activism in *Upon the Shadow* (2017), a documentary of Nada Mezni Hfaeidh about a group of Tunisian young queer people in the broadest sense of the word who found themselves in the home of Amina, the famous Tunisian activist, and a former member of the radical feminist group FEMEN. These queer persons have been rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation and are taking refuge in Amina’s house. This presentation examined the negotiation of the family home and the public space, and the navigation of patriarchal society, the sense of community and the resulting solidarity and activism. Zayer’s presentation was followed by **Ishan Mehandru’s (Northwestern University)** paper which studies the habitations of Auntyhood: Bhabhi, Phupi, and Woman in Ismat Apa’s Literature. Ishan focused on explaining the concept of ‘auntyhood’ as a performance of femininity in the works of Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai. By closely reading two of her short stories, “Aunty Scorpion” and “The Rock”, Ishan examined how the deployment of speech and description of bodies become important critical and pedagogical tools for the aunty-figures in these narratives. His essay engages with Chughtai’s narratorial “I” as a co-conspirator in complicating the category of ‘third-world aunty’. We ended our first panel with **Nnenna Onyima’s (University of Virginia)** presentation entitled “The Wo/man, Her Body, His Spirit: Reading Agency in Léonora Miano’s *La saison de l’ombre* (2013).” Nnenna explored the concept of spirit-body relations in sub-Saharan African cultures through the literary work of Miano. Characters in Miano’s narrative typify the interplay between the African world’s physical, visible constituency, and the spiritual, invisible constituency. Nnenna’s paper sustains that although Miano’s characters evince an essentialism that prioritizes spirituality over corporeality,

bodies exercise agency in the physical world that curates the un/successful functioning of spirits within the African world-sense. It also argues that understanding the intersection between the spirit world and the physical world and the transcendences between these worlds is essential for comprehending sex, gender, sexuality, and its related components in African literature.

Cherrie Kwok (University of Virginia) started our second panel of July 15 entitled **“Postcolonialism and Global South Contemporary Literature: Diasporic Subjecthood, Agency, Trauma, and Race.”** Kwok’s presentation on Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Maryse Condé’s *Windward Heights*, and the Undisciplined Future of Victorian Studies examined the reception of Maryse Condé’s postcolonial reinvention of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in *La migration de cœurs* (1995)—which was later translated into English as *Windward Heights* (1997). Transporting readers from Thrushcross Grange to the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Guadeloupe, Marie-Galante, and Dominica, Condé’s novel draws out the imperial and racial tensions implicit in *Wuthering Heights* by transforming Catherine Earnshaw into Cathy Gagneur, a brown-skinned Creole, Heathcliff into Razyé, a Black Creole, and Edgar Linton into Aymeric de Linsseuil, a white-passing Creole. Scholars in Caribbean studies have highlighted how Condé’s novel exposes the incontrovertible ties between the British Empire and the West Indies, but Victorianists have largely overlooked, outright rejected, or insufficiently understood the critical stakes, of *Windward Heights*. Kwok focused her analysis on a case study of their concerns and argued that these concerns are instead emblematic of a larger set of challenges that Victorian studies must address if it is serious about “undisciplining” its predominantly white and Eurocentric intellectual orientation. This presentation was followed by **Yemi Ajisebutu’s (Northwestern University)** paper entitled “Oríkì as Phenomenology of the Nigerian Diasporic Consciousness.” in which she explored how oríkì is a part of the consciousness of a diasporic subject. Her analysis

takes a phenomenological approach in exploring the Being of the African/Nigerian/Yorùbá diasporic subject, intersecting the Yorùbá philosophy of Oríkì and Heideggerian notion of Being. She argued that Oríkì reveals an ontological or, in some instances, the pre-ontological being of a diasporic subject prior to its presentation to the individual's consciousness of being-in-the-world.

Renée Ragin Randall (University of Michigan) concluded our second panel with her presentation on "Supernatural Traumas." She explored the supernatural and the surreal in a Syrian writer's (Ghada al-Samman) novelistic trilogy about the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil wars, released decades before 9/11 and the globalization of trauma theory. Renée's paper reframes today's popular texts by establishing them as part of a longer tradition of non-realist storytelling, and not just a response to a contemporary moment. The contextualization she offers for the long history of non-realist storytelling from the Arab world seeks to create a more nuanced close reading of what the supernatural, in particular, adds to an understanding of conflict in this region.

Our third session "**World Literature and Cultural Identities**" started with **Medeleanu Maria Luiza's (University of Bucharest)** presentation on "Cultural Identity and the Ethics of Fictionality: Roma Image in the TV Series *Gypsy Heart*, *Peaky Blinders* and *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings*." Luiza analyzed images of Roma in contemporary European Cinema and media art, exploring how and whether representations in films and mainstream series influence the building of a Roma cultural identity and the ways in which the Roma are perceived in society. She considers recent productions, such as the Romanian series *Inimă de țigan* (*Gypsy Heart*), *State de România*, *Regina* (*The Queen*) or international series like *Peaky Blinders* (still running) or *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings*. Drawing on the theories of Stuart Hall and bell hooks, she examined the notion of intermediate identity, as the identity of the Roma, although culturally assimilated by the dominant culture is still considered Roma. This presentation was followed by **Grace Miller's (Binghamton**

University) paper on “Intergenerational Trauma due to Cultural Genocide in Indian Residential Schools.” Grace studies boarding schools as one of the colonial abuses most forgotten by the colonizer’s descendants and fallen into historical amnesia within non-Native populations. In order to acknowledge the systematic loss of voice suffered by the Indigenous Peoples of colonized America, in both history and legality, all resources used for this paper are created by those of Indigenous background. Through the study of literature by Indigenous authors (both fictional and nonfictional), historical context from the side of the subjected, and publicly available interviews, the repercussions of the colonial atrocity in the Indian Residential Schools are highlighted in terms of the suffering of identity and cultural genocide. Grace argued that the continued trauma caused by the colonization of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas has divided not only tribes, families, and societies but individuals as well. **Jackie K. Thompson (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)** concluded our third panel with her presentation entitled “Catholicism’s Entanglement in Irish Mythology: Brigid’s Decolonial Power as both Saint and Goddess.” Jackie’s project takes two forms. First, a short historical exploration of Brigid’s history as both Catholic saint and Irish goddess and the ways in which this dual narrative served Irish peoples throughout Britain’s colonial reign. Second, a short work of fiction that Jackie is writing in the magical realism genre, exploring the entanglement of Catholicism and Irish mythology during the Home Rule movement. Jackie has done research in gender ideology in Irish literature of the Home Rule movement before, so she is interested in a meta-analysis that could arise from writing her own fiction related to gender and ideology.

The last session of our colloquium revolved around the theme of “**Latin American & Caribbean Literature: Indigeneity, Decoloniality, and Translation.**” It began with **Kae Araki’s (Tsuru University)** presentation entitled “Loss of Identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea.*” Kae

analyzed the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (*WSS*, 1966) and followed a close reading approach. The novel is set in Jamaica after the abolition of slavery, and this work is based on *Jane Eyre* from a different perspective. *WSS* is Jean Rhys' most famous masterpiece. In *WSS* Rhys projects her life into Antoinette (Bertha in *Jane Eyre*), who broke her mind and set fire to the Thornfield Hall. Antoinette, who is portrayed as a mad woman in *Jane Eyre*, lost her identity and was seen as a mad Creole woman. Kae studies this loss of identity and aims to find out the cause of the collapse of Antoinette's identity by focusing on her childhood and her marriage, two important periods in her life. **Cecily Bernard (University of Tennessee, Knoxville)** concluded this panel and our colloquium by presenting her dissertation prospectus. Tentatively titled "Latin American global literary production: Extending geographical and conceptual borders in world literature and globalization," this project purports to go beyond the definitions of the key terms of World Literature, Globalization, and Latin American cultural production offered and employed by Héctor Hoyos in his seminal work *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (2015) to explore the terms in other ideological contexts, thereby distilling possible working definitions for an intended future study that envisions a more radical version of the Hoyos project, considering primarily the literary cultures of authors who not only are marginalized within international circulation, but who face local limitations to begin with. The paper therefore examines recent scholarship reflecting the status of the ongoing debates in the areas of World Literature, Globalization and Latin American cultural production, enabling an informed discussion of potential possible frameworks within which to conduct the referred-to future research.

In sum, being a colloquium leader was such a wonderful experience for me:rewarding and productive at the same time. I really want to express my deepest thanks to the organizers of IWL 2022 and the colloquium participants for trusting me with the organization of the "Postcolonialism

and World Literature” Colloquium. All the presenters and respondents participated enthusiastically in our discussions and shared their knowledge, expertise, and perspectives with their peers in an inclusive and respectful setting. A lot of ideas, suggestions, references, connections, and thoughts were well received by our participants. I wish them great success in all their future academic adventures and endeavors.

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