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**Living Beyond Theory: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Postcolonial**

A two-day symposium hosted by Postcolonial Perspectives in association with the Centre for Modern Studies and the Humanities Research Centre

Thursday 10th - Friday11th February 2011

Berrick Saul Building

**Paper Abstracts and Speaker Biographies**

**Ben Poore (Queen Mary University of London), “Reading Joyce in Lahore: Masud Khan, Modernism and the seductions of Psychoanalysis”**

**Abstract:** The Anglo-Pakistani psychoanalyst Masud Khan was one of the most controversial figures in British psychotherapy, yet few accounts of his life move beyond Freudian psychobiography or the closed community of British and American psychoanalysts amongst whom he made his home. Khan offers a unique opportunity to explore the interrelation of psychoanalysis and the postcolonial through the particularities of his account rather than the unwieldy theoretical tropes that have dominated both discourses. This work will explore the seductions of a continental Modernism, and the literatures of exile that go with it, in the articulation of Khan’s personal history and postnational identity. His personal and professional diary, the *Work Books*, as well as his theoretical psychoanalytic writing, articulate a complex set of identifications with Western culture, and this paper will explore in particular the reading of Joyce in the political context of Lahore in 1945. By exploring the centrality of Joyce in Khan’s psychoanalytic writing throughout his career, this paper will explore the political scene embedded his choice of career and style of living as a psychoanalyst in the United Kingdom.

Khan’s responses to Freud and Joyce can be tied to the decline of his “feudal” life as an aristocrat in the Punjab, and as exploring alternatives to what he saw as the violent, self-defeating Nationalism of Indian Modernity. Above all, this paper seeks to detail the components of Imperialism, and the transmissions of European modernity, that shaped Khan’s interest as a psychoanalyst and writer.

**Bio:** Ben is a PhD student at Queen Mary, University of London, writing about the life of psychoanalyst Masud Khan. Prior to this, he studied English Literature at York as an undergraduate and as an MA student, specializing in Medieval literatures. His research interests include psychoanalysis and the postcolonial; British psychoanalysis and cubism; and medievalism in twentieth-century literature and theory.

**Email:** [b.w.o.poore@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:b.w.o.poore@qmul.ac.uk)

**Christin Hoene (University of Edinburgh), “Whose voice? Or: Can the Subaltern Sing? Agency, Identity, and the Raag in Postcolonial Fiction”**

**Abstract:** In this paper I discuss the role of music – and particularly the significance of voice – in relation to cultural agency and identity in postcolonial fiction of the South-Asian diaspora in the UK. I will focus on the Indian classical form of the raag in Amit Chaudhuri's novel *Afternoon Raag* (1993) and Suhayl Saadi's novel *Psychoraag* (2004). Much more than a mere eponym to the novels, the raag serves as structural analogy and content metaphor in both texts, and allows the protagonists to assess and express their cultural identity which is marked by hybridity, dislocation, and living in the heterogeneous and multicultural environment of the postcolonial diaspora in contemporary Britain. Voice in these novels is the agent for expressing identity; but the texts also raise questions as to where that agency lies: with the performer? In the music itself? With the listener as the ultimate instance to contextualise and interpret music? The question of agency is also very relevant within the framework of postcolonial literature and theory, as it pertains to issues of reasserting an independent identity that has been subjugated by the former colonial power. Postcolonial literature tries to reclaim that lost identity by “writing back” to the centre of the former empire (as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin phrase it), thus creating a space for previously silenced voices to be heard. However, as Spivak argues, postcolonial theory remains essentially a Western discourse, and therefore it always runs the danger of re-colonising and homogenising the postcolonial other by speaking on its behalf. Yet, in Chaudhuri's and Saadi's novels, the protagonists are given a voice to express their identity through music, which, by its virtue of being culturally rooted and transcending cultural boundaries at the same time, mirrors and accounts for the characters' multicultural heritage and thus enables them to voice who they are.

**Bio:** Christin is a PhD-student and Teaching Assistant in the Department of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses on the role of music in postcolonial Indian literature, and she is particularly interested in the significance of music for (re)shaping cultural identity in the context of postcolonial experiences of cultural hybridity, dislocation, and diasporan communities. Previous research projects include several conference papers on the role of music in postcolonial literature, and a postgraduate dissertation on new aestheticism and the postcolonial sublime in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight’s Children*. Christin received her postgraduate master’s degree (MSc) in *English Literature: Literature and Modernity, 1900 to the Present* from Edinburgh University in 2007.

**Email:** [c.hoene@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:c.hoene@sms.ed.ac.uk)

**Kirsty Breedon (University of York), “‘Contact Zones’: the Potential of Transcultural Theory for Art History”**

**Abstract:** In 1947, the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, proposed the term ‘transculturation’ to accurately describe the ‘complex transmutations of culture’ which took place during colonialism.[[1]](#footnote-1) Since then, the theory has developed and been utilised in many disciplines within the humanities. Most significantly, Mary Louise Pratt has developed Ortiz’s ideas in relation to nineteenth-century travel writing, demonstrating that the examination of ‘contact zones’, where cultures ‘meet, clash and grapple with each other’ enriches our understanding of the ‘complex and shifting relationships’ between coloniser and colonised.[[2]](#footnote-2) Yet, within art history, transcultural analysis has only recently been applied, notably in Julie Codell’s forthcoming publication, *The Art of Transculturation: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in British Art, 1770-1930.*

My paper examines the real and potential impact of transculturation for art history. I examine this in specific relation to the English imperial adventurer, travel writer and sculptor Herbert Ward (1863-1919). Inspired by his five-year exploration of the then-Belgian controlled Congo Free State during 1884-1889, Ward created nineteen bronze statues depicting Congolese tribespeople, which were subsequently displayed in Europe and America. By analysing Ward’s the *Charm Doctor* (1902) through a transcultural lens, I argue that this statue provided a sculptural ‘contact zone’ for predominantly European and American audiences to encounter Congolese peoples, and their visual and material culture. Analysing the ‘map of interactions’[[3]](#footnote-3) between the sculptor, his Congolese sitters, the bronze, and its audiences, I demonstrate how transcultural theory can generate a more nuanced understanding of Ward’s work than the traditional coloniser/colonised dichotomy. Consequently, I reveal a more subtle interplay between a complex colonial history and the creation and reception of his sculpture.

**Bio:** Kirsty Breedon is a third year doctoral student in the History of Art Department, and funded by the AHRC in 2008. Kirsty’s research interest is in nineteenth and twentieth century sculpture, specifically issues of display, utilisation and reception within a global context. Her PhD thesis examines the varying and often contradictory utilisations of Herbert Ward’s sculptures of Congolese tribespeople across the circum-Atlantic world, from 1910 to the present day. She is the first non-US scholar to win a Smithsonian Institution Graduate Research Fellowship, spending three months in Washington DC studying the Ward archives and sculpture.

**Email:** [kb161@york.ac.uk](mailto:kb161@york.ac.uk)

**Charlotte Arndt (Humboldt University, Berlin), “Spaces of Negotiation between Postcoloniality and Globalization: African Cultural Magazines in Paris”**

**Abstract:** The 1990s and the end of the cold war led to a fundamental reconfiguration of power relations at a global level. In France, this shift can be seen in a number of magazines that deal with the cultural productions of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. Tired of négritude, but without a major political project of their own, they engage with issues of representation, challenging ongoing schemes of othering. In this way, these magazines endeavour to contribute to knowledge about contemporary cultures in Africa, to affirm their presence,[[4]](#footnote-4) and to deconstruct occidental stereotypes, as manifested in both the colonial imaginary and present day racism.

As the fruit of collaborations between exiles, people from the African diaspora in France, and afrophil contributors, the magazines’ quest for a postracial position is marked by a key ambivalence: they are caught in between a transnational configuration that carries postcolonial traces, and the upcoming globalisation process that installs new hierarchies in which the postcolonial categorisations are fundamentally reconfigured.

Nevertheless, the epistemological categories within which the magazines move are not always in line with these reconfigurations. By propagating an image of the migrating African artist as an enigmatic figures of a transcultural world to come, they risk losing sight of the hardship of exclusion and the precarious way of life experienced in exile. As a result, the magazines’ discourses oscillate between a call for an abstract universalism and the affirmation of an essentialized universality. Crucially, moreover, this takes place at a critical point in France’s relationship with its founding republican principles, in which one of the major issues focuses on the need to acknowledge the cultural heterogeneity of its citizen. Alongside this is the continuing problem of the extraversion of the cultural sphere to include a considerable number of African countries. Neither position, I argue, manages to deal in a critical manner with the daily negotiations that artists undertake by the means of their aesthetic strategies to position themselves in the context of globalized capitalism.

Based on the insights of the difficult reception of postcolonial theory in France, as well as on interviews with the magazine editors, this paper proposes an analytical reading of two magazines--*Africultures* and *Lettre des musiques et des arts africains—*from the 1990s, claiming that they need to be seen as political aesthetics in the making.

**Bio:** Charlotte is currently working on a doctorate dissertation entitled “Discursive Strategies in Cultural Magazines of the African Diaspora in Paris” at the Humboldt University in Berlin, funded by a studentship from the Heinrich-Böll foundation. She has previously lectured at several universities in Germany, and has published her research in both French and German language academic journals.

**Email:** [lotte.arndt@gmx.de](mailto:lotte.arndt@gmx.de)

**Gao Gao (University of Edinburgh), “Confucian Between Genders: Female Same Sex Desire in Modern China”**

**Abstract:** The performance of female same sex desire in Modern China is a strategic

site from which to re-energise the critically interrogative capacities of interdisciplinary discourse. If conceptualised as a subversive expression of desire, the binary assumptions underlying a postcolonial reading normalise dichotomies of oppression, patriarchy, and gender. If articulated within the field of 'Queer' studies, the act of transgression against heterosexual norms fixes the function of 'Queerness' at the margins. Non-dominant sexualities are co-opted to legitimise politics of queer visibility, and are framed around narratives of equal citizenship and emergence.

Whilst these disciplines provide a critical vocabulary to locate alternative subjectivities as experienced in Chinese same sex or *'lala'* desire, an emphasis must be placed on troubling the conditions under which discourses on power are given ontological stability. Non-essentialist, perhaps even temporary connections should be made between disciplines to generate new interstitial sites of meaning that decentralise existing forms of linguistic, cultural and geographic colonisation. Multiple and specific sexualities must be proliferated without being subsumed under reductive or totalising systems of thought.

Using a combination of Li Yu's underground film *Fish and Elephant* (2001), interviews and field research, I will illustrate how *'lala'* subjectivity complicates prevailing conceptions of 'postcolonial' and 'queer' desire. Specifically, I will show how the subversive blending of *lalas*' lived experience with stylised narratives of governmental power, family and patriarchy create spaces of representation between frameworks of resistance and conformity. These spaces are demarcated within boundaries of ‘knowing’ - articulated through internet chat rooms, classifieds or support groups - whereby expressing same sex desire is dependent on the simultaneous misreading of *lala* performances of Confucian piety and femininity (such as sorority) with the refusal to identify within a Communist binary of desire (heterosexual or dangerously homosexual).

**Bio:** Gao Gao is a Masters candidate at the University of Edinburgh in Modern Art.

Her interests lie in exploring how cultural subversions such as deviant

sexuality, political anger, the feminist voice and the gendered conceptions

of the body collective have been expressed artistically in the past thirty

years within and despite meta-narratives of Chinese tradition.

**Email:** [godolewagaogao@gmail.com](mailto:godolewagaogao@gmail.com)

**Denise Wilson (University of Ulster), “Constructing the North: Interpretations of Irish Tourist Images”**

**Abstract:** Ireland is unique in that it may be seen as both colonial and post-colonial. While Ireland has undoubtedly been affected by colonialism and influenced by external hegemonic ideologies, these influences have given rise to the complex development of discrete identities and cultures. These identities have been expressed through Irish literature and the arts, including photography, which, because of its documentary claim to depict reality, was perceived to carry more authority than traditional art forms. This paper is concerned with the construction of a particular set of identities through photographs that were published and distributed in tourist literature.

Robert Welch (1859-1936) was a new breed of commercial photographer based in Belfast who eschewed the more usual choices of portraiture in favour of many and varied commissions from local industries. Among Welch’s most prominent clients were the Irish railway companies, who attracted the powerful enterprise of several English railways after a period of rapid growth and expansion. Thus his photographs played a significant role in the promotion of tourism to Ireland through the mass distribution of tourist brochures at the turn of the century, and in Ireland’s struggle to construct a distinctive identity or place-image for the British market. Ideas of Irishness that originate in colonialism tend to dominate how we read Welch’s photographs: tourist brochure images represent Ireland as a de-populated, pre-modern, rural idyll. However, there is complex interplay at work here which can be revealed by offering several different interpretations of Welch’s photographs, which began to appear in English railway guides to Ireland in the early twentieth century. While photography and tourism in Britain and Ireland co-existed in a mutually beneficial relationship, photography in Ireland was also bound up with the expression of colonial and post-colonial identities.

**Bio:** In 2002 Denise undertook a dissertation by practice on Landscape Photography & Rathlin Island as part of her BA Hons Media Studies at the University of Ulster, Coleraine. She returned to the university in 2009 to study for an MRes in the photography of Belfast-based commercial photographer Robert Welch, resulting in a dissertation entitled ‘Constructing the North: Tourism and Photography in early Twentieth Century Ireland’. Denise is currently in the first year of a PhD, also at the University of Ulster, entitled ‘Female Photographers in Nineteenth Century Ireland’

**Email:** [Wilson-D18@email.ulster.ac.uk](mailto:Wilson-D18@email.ulster.ac.uk)

**Rebecca Jones (University of Birmingham), “Nigerian Travel Writing, the 'Local' and the Postcolonial”**

**Abstract:** Throughout the twentieth century, Nigerians travelled across Nigeria and wrote about their journeys, individual and collective, across a variety of genres – from newspaper columns and memoirs to town chronicles – in both English and local languages. Travelling from town to town, between Lagos and the Yoruba hinterland, the north, the east, and beyond, they wrote about the nascent nation, the people and unfamiliar languages they encountered, the spectacular new trains, steamers, and roads. They developed fascinating local, translocal and regional networks, and portrayed the towns and regions they travelled through as heterogeneous and diverse. And yet study of travel writing – a field dominated by postcolonial theory – is silent on this exciting body of work. It has failed to recognise that people do not always travel between the colonial or postcolonial ‘margins’ and the ‘centre’.

This paper thinks about what postcolonial theory can learn from this writing, looking in particular at accounts of travel in Yoruba and English in the Lagos-based newspapers of the early twentieth century. Niyi Osundare (2002) has challenged postcolonial theory’s representation of African ‘lived experience,’ asking sardonically ‘Is there anything worth talking about outside coloniality?’, while Karin Barber (1995) has criticised the field’s preoccupation with texts which ‘write back’ and those in European languages, resulting in ignorance of vital African-language literary cultures. Though the interests of Nigerian travel writers– difference, nationhood, colonial ideologies of ‘civilisation’ – often chime with postcolonial theory, they are not preoccupied with “writing back” to the centre or with colonialism itself (though they are embedded in that context and often highly critical of it); they are more interested in heterogeneous and dynamic local and regional networks. Postcolonial studies must move beyond its myopic preoccupation with hybridity, migrancy and identity by adopting a multi-lingual, multi-generic approach and thinking about ‘local’ networks and forms of travel writing.

**Bio:** Rebecca Jones is a PhD student at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, where she is researching ‘local’ Nigerian travel writing in Yoruba and English. She previously studied for a BA in English Literature and an MA in African Studies at the University of Cambridge and SOAS respectively, as well as studying Yoruba at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, Nigeria.

**Email:** [rebecca.senoj@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.senoj@gmail.com)

**Jose Miguel Diaz Rodriguez (University of Leeds), “Living the Postcolonial, Thinking it Neo-colonial, Calling it Cultural Exchange: Spain and the Philippines”**

**Abstract:** For two years I worked in the Spanish Embassy in the Philippines, promoting Spanish culture. Sometimes it felt as if I were caught in some kind of postcolonial trap. I realised that the complexity of the situations I encountered was partly because the Philippines and Spain had had a colonial relationship. Some saw my job as cultural exchange; I questioned this.

From the promotion of Spanish language in the archipelago to Philippine events with a Spanish flavour, Spain has steadily increased the amount of funding dedicated to boost cultural relationships with the Philippines over the last decade. Examples of this are the major exhibitions that Spain has organised in the last few years such as the *Filipiniana exhibit*, which presents an ambivalent view of the former colony and utilises practices such as the creation of ‘knowledge’ as to control that representation.

If Filipino academics define the term postcolonial as ‘…a position produced by being constructed or represented as Europe or America’s “ontological Other”’ (Patajo-Legasto 2004: 8)[[5]](#footnote-5), then we can envision the Spanish events as part of a postcolonial reality. However, postcolonial theories are not sufficient to explain the complexity of that reality.

The clear links between the cultural activities and specific political objectives call for the use of an interdisciplinary analytical approach. Spanish cultural activity in the Philippines, which some diplomats have referred to as the exertion of cultural pressure (Colome 2000)[[6]](#footnote-6), can be seen as part of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1998)[[7]](#footnote-7) which is at work in the field of cultural exchange. This cultural pressure has led to a Spanish discourse that links a historical past of grandeur of the Spanish Empire with the current intentions of Spain to position itself as a major political player in Asia. Could cultural promotion be a euphemism for a neo-colonial encounter?

**Bio:** Jose Miguel Diaz is currently a second-year PhD student and AHRC awardee at the University of Leeds, where he was also awarded an MA by Research for his thesis: *Spain and the Philippines, a Cultural Reconquest?* He also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Management from the University of Auckland (New Zealand) and a five-year undergraduate degree in Media Studies from the *Universidad Complutense* of Madrid (Spain). As a tutor and lecturer he has taught in educational institutions such as Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand), Yuexiu College (China), De la Salle Lipa (Philippines) and the Spanish *Instituto Cervantes*.

**Email:** [mljmdr@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:mljmdr@leeds.ac.uk)

**Emily Baughan (University of Bristol), “‘Empire’s Duty to Europe’s Children:’ Representations of Empire, Internationalism and Humanitarian Responsibility in the Appeals of the Save the Children Fund, 1918-1930”**

**Abstract:** In the years following the First World War the geographies of British benevolence shifted. Throughout the nineteenth century, British humanitarian efforts had primarily been directed towards subjects of the British Empire. After 1918, however, Britons were increasingly urged to consider new, international humanitarian responsibilities. This paper explores the interplay of internationalist and imperial discourses within the fundraising appeals made by Britain’s first ‘international charity’, the Save the Children Fund. In doing so, it questions the utility of postcolonial methodologies for illuminating the continuing imperial attitudes and assumptions of the interwar internationalist movement. Firstly, the paper explores how fundraising campaigns appealed to British imperial identities. Concern for Europe’s children was presented as an expression of the same ‘British benevolence’ which was held to inform colonial rule. The public were told that feeding European children not only demonstrated the nation’s fundamental generosity, but also promoted the ‘good name of Britannia’ abroad. Secondly, the paper discusses the relationship between international duty and imperial strength constructed by the Fund. Appeals stated that responsibility towards European children was due to the Empire’s ‘moral and material victory’ in the First World War. The Fund also capitalised upon anxieties about the increasing dominance of America, urging that the contribution of British Empire must be ‘second to none’. Finally, the paper explores how Fund’s appeals echoed the ‘civilising mission’ of Empire. It was claimed that donations would not only feed hungry children, but ensure the ‘moral uplift’ of their parents and communities. The paper concludes that, whilst the Fund promoted international responsibility for hungry children in Europe, Empire remained integral to the way in which this responsibility was imagined and described. It thereby sheds light upon the colonial legacies inherent within twentieth century international humanitarian discourses, a subject which at present remains vastly under-researched.

**Bio:** I am a first year AHRC funded PhD student at the University of Bristol. My thesis explores the ‘internationalisation’ of humanitarian ideals and practices in interwar Britain. Taking Save the Children Fund (SCF) as a case study, it discusses the ways in which the Fund was able to create feelings of closeness, connection and responsibility for those who fell outside traditional British spheres of concern. It questions how far, in advocating responsibility along international, rather than imperial, lines the work of the SCF presented a clear break with humanitarian campaigns of the nineteenth century. In doing so, it evaluates the extent to which the shift from imperial to international humanitarianism was the product of the changing ‘imagined geographies’ of the interwar period and the increasing popularity of liberal internationalism. My thesis also argues that, whilst the work of SCF had shifted beyond the traditional boundaries of empire, the way in which was enacted and imagined and might still be described as ‘imperial’.

**Email:** [Emily.Baughan@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Emily.Baughan@bristol.ac.uk)

**Charlotta Salmi (University of Oxford), “Re-writing the Postcolonial Territory: Rifts in Time and Genre”**

**Abstract:** The conflict over Palestine/Israel has occupied a troubled space in Postcolonial theory and criticism. The dispute between two dispossessed peoples has left critics uneasy in categorizing the region as colonial, let alone *post*colonial. In light of this, it is necessary to consider Palestinian literary and political texts aimed at a global market place as engaging with a critical debate which is unclear about Israel/Palestine’s political status.

One of the most recently acclaimed political writers in the Western media is Orwell-prize-winning Palestinian Human rights activist and lawyer Raja Shehadeh. Shehadeh’s latest work, *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle* (2010), explores the Palestinian political and geographical landscape through a combination of memoir, nature and political writing. I would like to read Shehadeh’s text alongside his earlier memoirs of partition – *Strangers in the House* (2002) and his pre-Oslo diaries – to demonstrate how Shehadeh’s narrative troubles (post)colonial genres such as the colonial travelogue and the national/autobiographical *bildungsroman* in interesting ways, shedding light on some of the tensions between writing of and living in a (post)colonial territory.

The territory in Shehadeh’s narrative has shifted between being a closely bordered and blood-soaked ‘vampirical land’ of violence to a lost Eden facing environmental and political extinction. Shehadeh both constructs and crosses boundaries and histories to repossess a ‘vanishing’ landscape and salvage it from a ‘cartographic cleansing’; however, his narrative demonstrates a constant slippage between the narratable ideal and the physical reality of living in a conflict zone. Thus, although Shehadeh’s writing has been reviewed as challenging political and eco-critical paradigms it should also be considered as intervening in traditional narratives of (post)colonial nationhood, attempting to give form to a troubled nation which problematic political status elides its textual representation.

**Bio:** Charlotta Salmiis a second year DPhil at Linacre College, Oxford. Her thesis on partition and ethnic nationhood in narratives from Palestine, Israel, India and Pakistan, is funded by the AHRC and a Scatcherd European Scholarship.

**Email:** [charlotta.salmi@linacre.ox.ac.uk](mailto:charlotta.salmi@linacre.ox.ac.uk)

1. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* Trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham: Duke University, 1947), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In doing so, they take up the project initiated by the magazine *Présence* *Africaine*, founded in 1947. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Patajo-Legasto, Priscelina (2004) ‘Discourses of “Worlding” and Philippine Postcolonial Studies’ in Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo and Priscelina Patajo-Legasto (eds.) *Philippine Postcolonial Studies*, Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, pp. 3-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Colomé, Delfín (2000) ‘Presentation’ in *Filipinas, a Century Ago* (Exhibition Catalogue), Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, Secretaría de Estado de Cultura, pp. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bourdieu, Pierre (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)