

Arts and Decolonisation Symposium

March 19th 2021 – MS Teams

Organising committee:

Snezhina Gulubova (Music)

Aniarani Andita (Music)

Tina K. Ramnarine (Music)

Desiree Sanchez Meineck (Drama)

Adriana Páramo Pérez (Media Arts)

Chloe Lee (Humanities)

Theadora Jean (English)

Laura S. Ventura Nieto (Doctoral School)

Arts and Decolonisation Symposium

Code of Conduct

To ensure a safe environment for everybody, all participants of the Symposium must adhere to the following code of conduct.

General rules

This Symposium is dedicated to providing a safe space for all participants to discuss issues surrounding decolonisation in the arts, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, race, experience, or religion (or lack thereof). We do not tolerate harassment in any form. We expect all participants to be kind and respectful in expressing their opinions/comments/questions.

Participants who violate these rules may be expelled from the Symposium at the discretion of the organising committee.

MS Teams meeting room

- The Symposium will be held through MS Teams.
- Participants must mute their microphones when not speaking. Switching on the camera is encouraged.
- Comments and questions for the speakers:
 - o There will be a Q&A session in every panel after all speakers have completed their presentations. The host of the panel will notify participants when this session starts.
 - o Comments and questions, or an indication that you have comments/questions, should be put in the chat box. To avoid distraction from the notifications, please hold off putting on these in the chat box until the Q&A session.
 - o The host of the panel will moderate the session and communicate the comments/questions to the speakers.
- Participants are not permitted to record or screenshot any of the Symposium's session.

Arts and Decolonisation Symposium

Programme

14:00 – Welcome (Tina K. Ramnarine, Music)

14:10 – House-keeping (Chloe Lee, Humanities)

14:15 – Panel 1

Host: Snezhina Gulubova, Music

- Bridging the Gap? Obstacles to Higher Music Education in the UK – Stephen Tatlow, Music
- “Why discriminate against the footprints of our ancestors?”: Guarani in the voices of Pataguan female singers – Romy Martinez Garay, Music
- The Greek Philharmonic Society of Alexandria: Music as cultural mediator in late 19th century Egypt – Georgios Argiantopoulos, History

15:30 – Break

15:40 – Panel 2

Host: Desiree Sanchez Meineck (Drama)

- ‘Decidedly, I am beautiful!’, exploring the use of identity euphoria in literary criticism – Nemo Martin, Comparative Literature and Culture
- Decolonisation of the Landscape and the Mind: A New Reading of Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North Informed by Animist Realism – Ilham Essalih, Comparative Literature and Culture

16:30 – Break

16:40 – Panel 3

Host: Adriana Páramo Pérez, Media Arts

- How to impose/depose a solar system: poetry planets in performance – Edwin Evans-Thirlwell, English
- Cultural neo-colonialism in British/African film: the narrative, the development and the creation of an ‘elsewhere’: a practice based enquiry – Rex Obano, Media Arts

17:30 – Break

17:40 – Committee Round-up

Host: Laura S. Ventura Nieto, Doctoral School

17:50 – Closure (Tina K. Ramnarine, Music)

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Abstracts

Panel 1

Bridging the Gap? Obstacles to Higher Music Education in the UK Stephen Tatlow, Music

Whilst indications of progress are present in the fight to minimise discrimination in university admissions in the UK, a 2020 quantitative analysis of gender demographics for Higher Music Education (HME) courses in the UK between 2014 and 2020 revealed a significant gender divide in specific areas. General music degrees and degrees combining music and theatre (e.g., Musical Theatre) have predominantly female populations, whilst degrees combining music and technology and degrees focused around the study or performance of popular music have predominantly male populations. These are indications of a continued and substantial gender gap which must be bridged in future access and inclusivity initiatives.

To identify potential areas for impactful work, a qualitative survey of advertised entry requirements for undergraduate degrees matriculating in 2021 in music-related subjects at universities in the UK was conducted. This revealed five main types of entrance requirements for HME in the UK: academic qualifications; non-academic qualifications; artistic requirements demonstrated through creative portfolio, interview or audition; further study requirements foundation years or additional study years; evidence of musical engagement.

By examining existing data surrounding these pathways, three key questions can be answered: what obstacles to access can be observed in this study? What difficulties do those working in the UK face as they to challenge these obstacles? What further data is required to maximise the impact of diversity initiatives?

“Why discriminate against the footprints of our ancestors?”: Guarani in the voices of Paraguayan female singers Romy Martinez Garay – Music

This paper focuses on the use of the indigenous language Guarani in Paraguayan popular song and on some key interpreters born between the 1930s and 1980s. It analyses two representative musical genres of Paraguay, the *Polka Paraguaya* and *Guaraniá*. The lyrics of these genres follow one of four poetic-linguistic forms: to be entirely in Guarani, entirely in Spanish, bilingual (alternating verses in Guarani and Spanish), or in *Jopará*; the last being a form where words of both languages may be mixed in a single verse. Through these forms, the lyrics alternate and combine the Indigenous voice with the one introduced with colonisation, in turn reflecting how Guarani seems to constantly transit, to and from, between a position of disdain and of value within Paraguayan society. Through analysing recordings of *polkas paraguayas* and *guaraniás*, I also identify three of styles of singing adopted by female singers who include these genres in their repertoires, namely classical folk, folk and pop folk. This analysis is informed by a pilot study which consisted of online interviews with several Paraguayan artists, revealing significant aspects of their backgrounds and musical influences. In addition, I draw on autoethnographic approaches, building on my experience as a singer and music researcher. From a decolonising perspective, the paper brings together the distinctive voices and sounds, expressed in popular songs, from a marginalised country, language and gender.

**The Greek Philharmonic Society of Alexandria: Music as cultural mediator in late 19th century
Egypt
Georgios Argiantopoulos – History**

The geopolitical changes of the 19th century and the Eastern Question brought a completely new situation in Egypt especially after the occupation of the country from the British, in their attempt to secure their access to the Empire's diamond, India. The British rule intensified the colonial pressure on the foreign diasporic communities including the Greeks and Greek Cypriots, who had to conform with new ways of administration and a series of social and cultural influences. In this paper, I argue that the introduction of western forms of cultural production in colonial or semi colonial settings like in the case of Egypt, was not necessarily done directly, but through 'local intermediaries' like the Greeks. This local dynamic comes in contrast to the focus on western cultural imperialism.

The role of music in the lives of Greeks and Greek- Cypriots in the late 19th early 20th centuries Alexandria, has become apparent in the existing historiography. Historians make general references of people involved in musical education and their successful activities. Such works are I. M Hatzifotis's *Alexandria the two centuries of modern Hellenism (19th-20th)*, *Old and New Alexandria*. Others, like Krisztina Lajosi's and Andreas Stynes's *Choral Societies and Nationalism in Europe*, link choral singing to the development of nationalistic notions in Europe.

However, these works have not adequately addressed how identity and boundary-building around music could have been a diplomatic way for the Greeks to align themselves with the English rulers. This paper highlights the use of artistic institutions as community builders and philanthropic intermediaries of cross-cultural social interaction. The Greek Philharmonic society of Alexandria was established in 1893, first as a male choir. Maestro Napoleon Labelet attracted the attention of Georgios Averof, president of the Greek community in Alexandria and Konstantinos Synadinos, a member of a notable family.

In my project I will be looking at institutional, public and ego historical documents of these figures. By closely examining the Greek Philharmonic society and its people, this paper will highlight the role of music making in spreading artistic ideas, determining community boundaries and shaping intercommunal interactions in the colonial multi-ethnic environment of 19th century Alexandria.

Panel 2

'Decidedly, I am beautiful!', exploring the use of identity euphoria in literary criticism Nemo Martin – Comparative Literature and Culture

Theories of critical race and queer theory agree that criminality and self-hatred have often been understood to denote a character's deviation from whiteness and from cis/heteronormativity. According to the Gender Recognition Act 2004, a diagnosis of self-hatred (dysphoria: 'unease or dissatisfaction' with their body) is necessary to obtain a certificate of transgender identity. Critical readings often approach texts with the same assumption that non-normative identities are linked with feelings of self-hatred and shame. For example, in the first English translation of *Les Misérables* in 1862, Wilbour mistranslated Hugo's adjective 'bohème' as a reference to Javert's being Romani rather than as an evocation of his parents' bohemian lifestyle. This translation was in use until 1987 because of the common association between criminality, self-hatred and being a person of colour. To this day, Javert is disproportionately cast as a person of colour against a white Valjean. Whilst these arguments appear to form a solid base for the study of race, they marginalise non-white, non-heteronormative characters by propagating biased preconceptions. In recent years the transgender community has pioneered another way to consider the transgender umbrella, in which the antithetical term 'gender euphoria' is defined as 'a psychological condition which consists of comfort or even joy when thinking about one's true Gender identity'. I offer an alternate to the transphobic and racist assumption of traditional readings by encouraging a new critical line of thought in which deviation from whiteness and cis/heterosexuality can be read through self-love and pride over shame, or identity euphoria.

Decolonisation of the Landscape and the Mind: A New Reading of Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North Informed by Animist Realism Ilham Essalih – Comparative Literature and Culture

"They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago. Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history" (Season of Migration to the North, 95)

The famous words spoken by Mustafa Sa'eed at his trial for the murder of his English wife describe the European desire to colonise far away parts of the world, leaving millions dispossessed. He is plagued by the "wanderlust" disease, this European urge to conquer the world which transforms into an obsession with revenge, leaving him in the end desperate and suicidal. His wanderlust stems from mimicry which he learned to adopt at a young age while growing up in the colonial system. Mimicry becomes an integral part of his existence but it gradually erases his own identity, splitting his self into two. Tayeb Salih offers a glimpse into the self-shattering agony that the colonised subject endures when afflicted with the postcolonial condition and he does this in a way that is inherently anticolonial: moving away from the Western philosophical hegemony of the secular and the rational, he depicts an animated nature that plays a role in the healing of the condition. In this paper I attempt to read and reframe this condition using Harry Garuba's animist realist framework which is able to offer new avenues of agency.

Panel 3

Cultural neo-colonialism in British/African film: the narrative, the development and the creation of an 'elsewhere': a practice based enquiry Rex Obano – Media Arts

When neo-colonialism is applied to screenwriting it describes the idea that the apparent variety of stories conceals a deeper conformity to Western narrative paradigms which not only limit the range of narratives that can be told but also perpetuate the myth that the colonised are victims in need of colonisation.

In the last few years films which have received funding from the BFI and written by black British screenwriters have perpetuated colonial paradigms in the way they have portrayed their lead characters. In these films all the lead characters are in foster care, there is an absence of fathers, the main characters lack agency and control over their own destiny, and their protagonists' emotions are symbolized only through aggression. It can be argued that these paradigms 'fetishize' victimhood in order to assuage white guilt.

However, the scene is different in literature where post-colonial writers have managed to successfully decolonize their writing by using a variety of paradigms and literary techniques. In Wole Soyinka's dramas, for example, he managed to mould the English language to reflect his historical mythology and, in so doing, change the nature of the literary protagonist from one seeking personal elevation to a protagonist who embraces the fate of the entire community. Akala in his address at the Oxford Union in 2015 argues that Thiong'o, Soyinka and other post-colonial writers "may have been schooled in the colonial system but they were educated elsewhere".

My aim is to find this 'elsewhere' in my own writing.

How to impose/depose a solar system: poetry planets in performance Edwin Evans-Thirlwell – English

Planets are complex social metaphors and reference points in the extension of a colonising impulse. The noun denotes a provocative lack of fixity - it derives from "wanderer" in Ancient Greek - but solar system models often present the planets as an orderly series, more easily subsumed within imperial power structures. The Smithsonian's Voyage exhibit, for example, lines the planets up against the triumphal architecture of the National Mall. In the course of my thesis, I have created a series of poetry card decks in antagonistic response to Voyage and similar models. These collaborative procedural texts invoke astrophysical bodies and environments as ways of negotiating questions of privilege, prejudice, exclusion and objectification along borders, while exploring how those social dynamics may structure a poem itself.

In my Agena deck, inspired by accounts of spacecraft rendezvous, a "pilot" and "target" player select cards to create a series of instructions as to the creation of a world (e.g. "To watch the world/perfect the unfriendly parts of it"). Only the target player decides when the "rendezvous" is complete. In my Planets deck, performer and audience ask each other questions of their own devising that can only be answered with the numbers 1-9: these numbers correspond to cards

that form a quasi-lyric account of a journey across a border. I fear this latter deck is a failure inasmuch as it does not sufficiently account for my privilege as a white European man. I intend to compose and perform a new version for the conference which addresses this, perhaps involving listeners as co-writers.