

# Decolonizing Trauma Studies



Image: *Sayed Hasan & Karl Ohiri, My Granddad's Car (2012).*

**15 May 2015,  
MY120, Avenue Campus,  
The University of Northampton  
School of The Arts**



## Decolonizing Trauma Studies Programme

**9.30 - 9.50:** Coffee and Registration

**9.50 – 10.00: Welcome** - Sonya Andermahr & Larissa Allwork

**10.00 – 11.00: Keynote Lecture – Stef Craps** (Ghent University, Belgium), ‘The Holocaust and Comparative Genocide in the Poetry of Sherman Alexie.’

**11.00 – 12.30: Panel One - Decolonizing Trauma in Women’s Writing.**

**Sonya Andermahr** (The University of Northampton, UK), ‘Decolonizing narratives of 1940s Britain in Levy’s *Small Island*.’

**Beatriz Pérez-Zapata** (The University of Zaragoza, Spain), ‘Of events and insidiousness: an analysis of trauma theory in the work of Zadie Smith.’

**Sihem Arfaoui** (LDC-ISSHJ, Jendouba University, Tunisia), ‘Fatima Mernissi and Diana Abu-Jaber: a view of trauma from the margins.’

**12.30 – 12.50: Sayed Hasan and Karl Ohiri** – ‘Exhibition talk: *My Granddad’s Car*.’

**12.50 – 1.30: Lunch**

**1.30 – 3.00: Panel Two - Trauma, Colonialism and Collective Identities. Chair: Ebtisam Ali Sadiq** (King Saud University, Saudi Arabia).

**Ayala Maurer-Prager** (University College London, UK), ‘Impossible Nationalities in Yolande Mukagasana’s *La mort ne veut pas de moi*.’

**Willow Berridge** (The University of Northampton, UK), ‘Hasan al-Turabi and the post-colonial politics of moral injury in Sudan, 1956-present.’

**Larissa Allwork** (The University of Northampton, UK), ‘Identity Frictions: Being Attentive to the Soviet Colonial/Postcolonial in Tomas Venclova’s Literary and Political Essays.’

**3.00 – 3.15:** Tea and Coffee

**3.15 – 4.15: Panel Three - The Case of the ‘Stolen Generations’.**  
**Chair: Janet Wilson.**

**Maram Samman** (King Saud University, Saudi Arabia), ‘The Aboriginal Stolen Generations: A Study of (Dis)integration of Identity in Selected Canadian and Australian Plays.’

**Justine Seran** (The University of Edinburgh, UK), “‘I cannot retract what has been written, it’s no longer mine’”: Stolen Generations Trauma and Collective Memoirs.’

**4.15 – 5.15: Decolonizing Trauma Theory Roundtable.**

**Chairs: Sonya Andermahr and Larissa Allwork.**

**Speakers: Stef Craps** (Ghent University, Belgium), **Bryan Cheyette** (The University of Reading, UK) and **Alan Gibbs** (University College Cork, Ireland).

**5.15 - 5.30: Concluding Remarks – Sonya Andermahr and Janet Wilson** (University of Northampton, UK).

**6.30: Symposium dinner at Les Olives Spanish Restaurant**, 18 Sheep Street, Northampton, NN1 2LU (There will be an additional charge for dinner, please contact Larissa Allwork to book a place).

# **Speakers and their Presentations**

## Keynote Speaker

### Stef Craps

#### **‘The Holocaust and Comparative Genocide in the Poetry of Sherman Alexie.’**

**Abstract:** My paper explores the ways in which the Native American poet Sherman Alexie negotiates various comparative perspectives on the Holocaust in “The Game between the Jews and the Indians Is Tied Going into the Bottom of the Ninth Inning” (1993), a sonnet-length poem that considers Jews and Native Americans as similarly oppressed ethnic minorities, and “Inside Dachau” (1996), a long, meditative poem that describes a Native American’s reflections on visiting the site of a former Nazi concentration camp. It analyses Alexie’s engagement with the Holocaust against the background of recent efforts to theorize the interrelatedness of the Nazi genocide of the European Jews and other histories of victimization by scholars seeking either to broaden the focus of the field of memory studies from the national to the transnational or global level, or to bridge a disciplinary divide between Jewish and postcolonial studies preventing the Holocaust and histories of slavery and colonial domination from being considered in a common frame. The paper shows how Alexie’s poems highlight the pitfalls as well as the possibilities of bringing different atrocities into contact, a challenging and often controversial endeavour that holds both perils and promises.

**Stef Craps** is a research professor in English and American literature and culture at Ghent University, Belgium, where he directs the Cultural Memory Studies Initiative. He is the author of *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and *Trauma and Ethics in the Novels of Graham Swift: No Short-Cuts to Salvation* (Sussex Academic Press, 2005), and has guest-edited special issues of *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* (2011; with Michael Rothberg) and *Studies in the Novel* (2008; with Gert Buelens) on the topics of, respectively, transcultural negotiations of Holocaust memory and postcolonial trauma novels. His next book projects are an

introductory guide to the concept of trauma for Routledge's New Critical Idiom series and an edited collection titled *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* (with Lucy Bond and Pieter Vermeulen). His main research interest at the moment is in the role of memory in literary responses to climate change.

### **Roundtable Speakers and Symposium Commentators**

**Bryan Cheyette** is Chair in Modern Literature at the University of Reading. He is the editor or author of nine books most recently *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish/Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (Yale University Press, 2013) and volume seven of the *Oxford History of the Novel in English* (on the British and Irish novel, 1940-present) which Oxford University Press will publish in 2016. He is currently working on a short biography of Israel Zangwill for Yale University Press.

**Alan Gibbs** is lecturer in American Literature at University College Cork. He has written on trauma theory and cultural representations of trauma, and last year published *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* (Edinburgh University Press), which was recently awarded the Peggy O'Brien Book Prize by the Irish Association for American Studies.

**Janet Wilson** is Professor of English and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Northampton and Director of Research in its School of the Arts. She has published widely on Australian and New Zealand writing and cinema as well as on the diaspora cultures of white settler societies. With Gerri Kimber she has co-edited three collections of essays on Mansfield, most recently *Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)colonial* (2013). She represents Northampton as a partner in the Marie Curie-funded Initial Training Network on Diaspora, 'Constructions of Home and Belonging' (CoHaB). She is Vice-Chair of the Katherine Mansfield Society and the New Zealand Studies Network (UK and Ireland), as well as co-editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.

## Speakers and Abstracts

Larissa Allwork (The University of Northampton, UK)

### **‘Identity Frictions: Being Attentive to the Soviet Colonial/Postcolonial in Tomas Venclova’s Literary and Political Essays.’**

**Abstract:** Lithuanian poet, literary critic and essayist, Tomas Venclova was a child during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania, an inhabitant of Vilnius in the period of high Stalinism and a Soviet dissident intellectual and member of the Lithuanian Helsinki group during the 1970s. Since his emigration from the Soviet Union to the West in 1979, Venclova has become a prominent diasporic thinker on the 'memory frictions' of Cold War and post-Soviet Europe and the Baltic States, particularly how the remembrance of past conflicts affects relations between Lithuanians and Jews, Lithuanians and Poles and Lithuanians and Russians. This paper will analyse four of Venclova’s literary and political essays, in particular his post-1989 works ‘Odo et Amo’ (1990) and ‘Poems Melted into Ice’ (1991) in order to explore Venclova’s response to Soviet colonialism and its aftermaths. Following Stef Craps, this analysis will suggest that through attentiveness to Venclova’s essays, particularly in relation to language and history, a different aesthetic of bearing witness to trauma can be interpreted. This representational strategy rejects, “the modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia” (Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, 2012, p. 2) traditionally associated with a post-Caruth trauma theory orientated towards the theoretical and literary traditions of Western Europe and America. Instead, Venclova presents strategies of representation which are much more attuned to the specific post-Soviet cultural, linguistic and political experiences of the Baltic States, a specific set of experiences, which while reflecting on much discussed topics such as the Holocaust and Soviet oppression, remain nonetheless geographically marginalized in contemporary Anglophone trauma studies.



**Sonya Andermahr (The University of Northampton, UK)**

**‘Decolonizing Narratives of 1940s Britain: World War II and (Post)Colonialism in Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*.’**

**Abstract:** Recently, fiction writers have begun to address and revision under-represented aspects of wartime and post-war experience to focus on the lives of the unacknowledged ‘many’, such as women, the working classes, and Black migrants. This paper focuses on one of these ‘alternative narratives’, Andrea Levy’s prize-winning novel, *Small Island* (2004), which provides four interconnected accounts of the second world war and its aftermath from the perspective of its protagonists, Hortense, a Black Jamaican woman, Gilbert, a Black Jamaican Man, Queenie, a white British working class woman, and Bernard, a white British man. Utilising the insights of Stef Craps’s book *Postcolonial Witnessing*, in which he issues four challenges to Eurocentric trauma theory, this presentation will explore the ways in which Levy’s text seeks to redress the marginalization of non-Western and minority traumas, and address the underexplored relationship between First and Third World traumas. In addition, the novel may be seen to challenge the supposed universal validity of Western definitions of trauma, and provide alternatives to normative trauma aesthetics. As well as examining varieties of trauma in Levy’s text, I will suggest that storytelling and humour function as a means of narrative healing of traumatic rupture and historical silence. As a result, *Small Island* evinces a desire both to record untold or overlooked aspects of collective British history, and to intervene in History by giving symbolic and narrative shape to previously marginalised Black and working class experiences.

**Siham Arfaoui (LDC-ISSHJ, Jendouba University, Tunisia)**

**‘Fatima Mernissi and Diana Abu-Jaber: a view of trauma from the margins.’**

**Abstract:** As Stef Craps argues in *Postcolonial Witnessing*, breaking free of Eurocentrism requires an acknowledgement of “the traumas of

non-Western or minority populations for their own sake” (19). Although the literary is not the unique record of trauma, yet it remains an interesting mine to explore, especially when the question comes to writers of Arab origins such as Diana Abu-Jaber and Fatima Mernissi. In line with Craps’s suggestion goes the dedication of the present paper to addressing the different patterns of violence and oppression which are depicted in Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz* and Fatima Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass* (1994).

In both narratives, power emerges at the root of the consequent war sufferings experienced by the female characters. On the one hand, Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz* sets an adult woman’s continuous struggle with the memory of participation in female infanticide from the age of five years old and detention at the margins of the conflicts in the Middle East in the 50s. In turn, Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass* links the colonizer’s power, the female Berber guerrilla’s witness of a family massacre at the hands of the French in Morocco towards 1926 and the female child’s extreme anxiety of the Holocaust in the background of the Second World War. Despite these distinct contexts and examples of trauma, the considered narrative testimonies attest to the transnational double oppression of women due to colonization and patriarchy.

**Siham Arfaoui** received her PhD in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of Sousse, Tunisia. She is currently a professor-assistant at the High Institute of Human Sciences of Jendouba, and a language advisor in CLC at the University of Jendouba. Ms. Arfaoui is interested in ethnic female writings. She is the co-editor of the conference proceedings on *Indigenous Languages* (2014). Her recent publications have appeared in *Writing Difference: Nationalism, Literature and Identity* (Atlantic Books, 2013); *Dynamisme des Langues, Souveraineté des Cultures* (Tunis, 2012); and *Hyphen* (2011).

**Willow Berridge (The University of Northampton, UK)**

**‘Hasan al-Turabi and the post-colonial politics of moral injury in Sudan, 1956-present.’**

**Abstract:** This paper will explore the applicability of Basil Davidson’s concept of ‘moral injury’ to post-colonial politics in Sudan. The Sudanese Islamist academic Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim has already contended that the onset of colonial modernity in Sudan constituted a form of ‘moral injury’, traumatizing Muslim colonial subjects by assaulting them with secular epistemologies and marginalizing their religion by restricting it to the ‘traditional’ sphere of colonial world divided along Manichaean lines. This paper will further explore these arguments with reference to the speaker’s work on the leading Sudanese Islamist Hasan al-Turabi, contending that Homi Bhabha’s theory of colonial and post-colonial ambivalence is more relevant to understanding his efforts to resolve the traumatic impact of Western colonial modernity. Since colonial discourse was ambivalent, the post-colonial Islamist discourse of Hasan al-Turabi also reproduced the same ‘ruptures’ and ‘slippages’ in its efforts to counter it.

**Willow Berridge** is a lecturer in Global History at the University of Northampton. She recently published her first monograph, entitled *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan: the ‘Khartoum Springs’ of 1964 and 1985*. She is currently researching a British Academy funded project on the Sudanese Islamist Hasan al-Turabi.

**Ayala Maurer-Prager (University College London, UK)**

**‘Impossible Nationalities in Yolande Mukagasana’s *La mort ne veut pas de moi*.’**

**Abstract:** “Je hais l’Occident”, spits Yolande Mukagasana bitterly, surveying the destruction of her familial home and Rwandan landscape. “Belges, il nous ont appris à nous hais les uns les autres.” Despite directly implicating Western colonialism into the reality of Rwanda’s genocidal violence, Mukagasana’s national identity does not stand

entirely in opposition: “je suis à moitié blanche,” she writes, “formée par des professeurs blancs. Suis-je déjà trop occidentalisée pour pouvoir supporter encore le discours Noir?” Current conceptions of the traumatised individual – and, indeed, the field of contemporary trauma theory – have developed out of an engagement with Holocaust survivors and their testimonies. But, as Stef Craps notes, these ideas take trauma “as an individual phenomenon [...] distracting attention from [...] collectivist societies.” Thus, this paper asks: what happens when trauma induces a notion of selfhood tormented by a fractured nationality that is a crucial part of its constitutive elements?

Reading Mukagasana’s testimony, this paper will interrogate the trauma of negotiating postcolonial identity in the wake of Rwanda’s violence. Through examinations of Mukagasana’s allusions to language, spirituality, self-perception and the imperative to write, this paper will demonstrate the trauma of identificatory liminality and trace the complexities of broken national allegiances after postcolonialism - and a devastating civil war - that force a rethinking of traditional post-violence notions of home, belonging and community.

**Ayala Maurer-Prager** is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Genocide Literature at University College London (UCL). Provisionally entitled “On Their Own Terms”: The Challenge of Culture in Literary Depictions of Genocide and Mass Violence’, her thesis represents a disciplinary convergence between Holocaust and Postcolonial Studies. Conjunctively analysing texts in English, French and Hebrew depicting the Holocaust, South African apartheid and the Rwandan genocide, her research aims to challenge the orthodoxies of Eurocentric trauma theory to develop an innovative approach to trauma and its representation that functions in a global context.

**Maram Samman (King Saud University, Saudi Arabia)**

**‘The Aboriginal Stolen Generations: A Study of (Dis)Integration of Identity in Selected Canadian and Australian Plays.’**

**Abstract:** The study proposes to examine one of the damaging policies of Western colonialism implemented against the Indigenous peoples of Australia and Canada. The 'stolen generation' is a discriminatory program that aimed at the erosion of Indigenous cultures. It practiced removing by force Aboriginal children from their natal families to assimilate them into the Western civilization. The cross-cultural research focuses on two Australian and two Canadian dramatists. On the Australian side, there are Jane Harrison and Ned Manning and their plays *Stolen* and *Luck of the Draw* respectively. On the Canadian side, there are Marie Clements and Drew Taylor and their plays *Tombs of the Vanishing Indian* and *Someday* respectively. These plays make very strong statements to preserve minority history and culture against the colonial forced assimilation.

By engaging critically with contemporary trauma studies, the research investigates how the four plays can help in demonstrating the colonial effects of child removal on the identity of Aboriginal individuals and community from a new historicist perspective. This study focuses on the stolen generations not as an individual problem but as a collective and cultural trauma. Such representations take the conception of trauma beyond the boundaries of personal and psychological experience to communal grounds. Literary representations of trauma aim at generating a general feeling of opposition to hegemonic colonial power structures and justify the call for their overthrow. The new historicist perspective reflects not only the culture in which they are produced, but actively contribute to the constitution of new forms of culture, and thus of history.

**Mrs. Maram Mohammed Samman** is a Lecturer at Taiba University in Madinah Al-Munawarah. She has been enrolled at King Saud University in Riyadh since 2010 for a PhD. Her thesis under process is

entitled "The Aboriginal Stolen Generations: A Study of (Dis)Integration of Identity in Selected Canadian and Australian Plays." Her PhD presents a new historicist reading of the Aboriginals' trauma resulting from the colonial child removal policies in the two countries. She intends to complete her doctorate in 2015.

**Justine Seran (The University of Edinburgh, UK)**

**“I cannot retract what has been written, it’s no longer mine”:  
Stolen Generations Trauma and Collective Memoirs.’**

**Abstract:** This paper argues for a re-reading of Aboriginal author Sally Morgan's Stolen Generations narrative *My Place* (1987) in post-Apology Australia (2007-present). The novel tells the story of Morgan's discovery of her maternal Aboriginal origins through the life-stories of her mother and grandmother. The family stories are the object of a quest for the past that is both relational and matrilineal, incorporating elements of autobiography and as-told-to memoirs to create a form of choral autoethnography. I argue that Morgan's text explores the intergenerational consequences of child removal in the Aboriginal context and is representative of Indigenous-authored narratives in its suggestion that the children and grand-children of victims of colonial policies and practices can work through the trauma of their ancestors.

I also examine the literary processes of decolonisation of the Indigenous writing/written self and community, as well as strategies for individual survival and cultural survivance in the Australian settler colonial context. Such notions are especially visible through the interactions between traumatic memories and literary memoirs, a genre often neglected due to trauma theory's concern with narrative fragmentation and literary Modernism, and the proliferation of 'themed' life-writing centred on a traumatic event. To this end, I also question Giorgio Agamben's definition of the witness and call for a revision of trauma theory's Eurocentric core through scholarly engagement with Indigenous experiences such as Morgan's and her family in order to

broaden definitions and take into account collective, historical, and inherited trauma.

**Justine Seran** is a third-year PhD candidate with the English Literature department at the University of Edinburgh and works on contemporary Indigenous women's writing from Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. She has published previously on Keri Hulme's short stories, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, and has a forthcoming article on photography in Maori literature.

### **Beatriz Pérez Zapata (The University of Zaragoza, Spain)**

**‘Of events and insidiousness: an analysis of trauma theory in the work of Zadie Smith.’**

**Abstract:** Zadie Smith has been very conscious of trauma theory throughout her work. In *White Teeth*, she elaborated on the idea of “original trauma”, which she employs for want of a better term that may describe the characters’ tendency towards repetition and the constant movement back and forth between countries and cultures. Her latest novel, *NW*, makes direct reference to several concepts related to trauma theory, such as the event, ellipsis, the impossibility to know, and the possibility to shape the bonding between Keisha Blake, one of the protagonists, and others. Yet, the narrator also asserts that “the significance of the event lay elsewhere” (201), which may point to a more insidious conception of trauma. Smith published in 2013 “The Embassy of Cambodia”, a short story that, mediated by the history of genocide in the twentieth century, narrates the life of a modern-day slave in London.

Although it is undeniable that Zadie Smith is well aware of trauma theory, I would argue that she also shows in her work, if not a total rejection of it, at least the inappropriateness of many of the ideas that such theory proposes when it comes to studying the lives of migrants in a postcolonial and metropolitan context. Thus, this paper will discuss this issue in relation to the ideas put forward by those critics who are now re-questioning trauma theory. Although I will make reference to

the idea of trauma as represented in Smith's previous work, I will mainly focus on *The Embassy of Cambodia* to further study the uses, abuses, and future of trauma studies.

**Beatriz Pérez Zapata** is a pre-doctoral researcher from the Department of English and German Philology at the University of Zaragoza (Spain), where she has also worked as an assistant lecturer. She is part of the research group "Trauma and Beyond: The Rhetoric and Politics of Suffering in Contemporary Narrative in English." Her thesis analyses the work of Zadie Smith from a transdisciplinary perspective under the supervision of Dr. Dolores Herrero. Her main research interests are postcolonial literature, memory, trauma, class, gender, race, and identity.

### **Accompanying symposium talk and exhibition in Maidwell Atrium**

#### **'My Granddad's Car' (Sayed Hasan and Karl Ohiri, 2012)**

**Curated by Suzanne Stenning (The University of Northampton)**

**Sayed Hasan** is a British artist from Northampton. At the core of his practice Hasan reflects upon the notion of hybridity and the importance of understanding the complexity of identity in the globalised world. Themes of current interest include: Family, religion, patriarchy, multiple – home space, ownership and belonging. These concerns are developed through autobiographical narratives, which are developed through the use of lens – based media, video, installation and sculpture. Since graduating in 2009 from Goldsmiths, Hasan has exhibited his work in the UK and internationally and been the recipient of Arts Council England, funding for self-initiated projects. In 2014 Hasan was artist in residence at The National College of Art, Lahore Pakistan and in 2015 held his first home town exhibition at NN Contemporary. Most recently Hasan participated in the East Midland Pavilion at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, contributing to the online project 'Sun Screen' by Candice Jacobs.

**Karl Ohiri** is a British/Nigerian artist based in Kent. The framework of his practice is situated between two overlapping points of interest:



Cultural Studies and The Human Condition. Recurring themes include: identity, relationships, public and private boundaries and discourses surrounding death. This is explored through the use of photography, recontextualisation and appropriation, creating two strands of work: personal works that are often autobiographical in nature and conceptual works primarily based on social commentary. Since graduating from Goldsmiths in 2008 he has given talks and exhibited works in venues such as: The New Art Exchange, Heathrow Terminal 5, Tate Britain, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is represented by the Agency Gallery in London.

## **Organisers**

**Sonya Andermahr** is Reader in English at the University of Northampton, UK She has written widely on contemporary British and American women's writing. Her publications include *Jeanette Winterson* (Palgrave 2009), *Jeanette Winterson: A Contemporary Critical Guide* (Continuum, 2007) and, with Terry Lovell and Carol Wolkowitz, *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (Edward Arnold, 2000). Her current research interest lies in trauma narratives with a particular focus on narratives of maternal loss in contemporary women's writing. She has recently co-edited (with Silvia Pellicer-Ortín) a volume entitled, *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and (with Lawrence Phillips), *Angela Carter: New Critical Readings* (Continuum, 2012). She is also currently editing a special issue of the *Humanities* journal on postcolonialism and trauma.

**Larissa Allwork** researches in the English division at the University of Northampton School of the Arts. Having trained at the University of Oxford, she completed her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London in 2011. Her monograph, *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational* will be published with Bloomsbury Academic in 2015. Larissa also participates in the Marie Curie Initial Training Network, 'Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging' and the University of Northampton Working Group for Interdisciplinary Research in Trauma, Narrative and Performance.







**This event has been sponsored by the  
University of Northampton School of The Arts.**