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*Beyond the Crisis-Generation and the Dread
Instilled: Special Issue in Honour of
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PELICAN PRIDE: THE SCHOLARSHIP AND SERVICE OF PROFESSOR PAULA MORGAN



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Although biographical study of Caribbean women educators is not a busy field generally, it is even less so for local women scholars/intellectuals like Professor Paula Morgan to whom this paper pays tribute. As one of my mentors in the field of tertiary-level teaching during the first decade of the 2000s, Morgan exemplified teacher efficacy and introduced me to the teaching of Literatures in English as an existential adventure, wherein instruction shapes not only intellectual growth but also social / critical consciousness and cultural understanding. She also introduced me to the academic conference circuit, particularly the West Indian Literature Conference where one could participate in cutting-edge literary and critical discourses. This exposure was very beneficial because of the network of relationships one was able to form in the field and the depth of analyses one encountered through the scholarly presentations.

So what role should a scholar be playing in our society? Morgan responded to this query by illuminating the mentoring relationship she shared with Professor Gordon Rohlehr who “saw her through all her degrees” (Zoom interview August 25th 2022). In her opinion, Rohlehr was the embodiment of the scholarly role and “modelled the task” with his personal style – he was “grounded, practical, kind, gracious; a grassroots scholar who mastered Western thought

but maintained no obeisance to it” (Zoom interview August 25th 2022). As a scholar herself, Morgan functions from a strong core internal sense of self; in her words, she is “someone in pursuit of truth and adventurous in pursuing knowledge” (Zoom interview August 25th 2022). However, in the Professorial Inaugural Lecture she delivered publicly on November 16th 2017, Morgan described herself as “a child of the Independence movement” who “came to the study of Caribbean Literature in the mid-1970s when the nations and their bodies of literary work were still in their infancy” (np). Additionally, she synopsisized her academic career in the lecture with the declaration that she “has evolved into a literary and cultural scholar with a deep conviction in the power of the creative imagination to unearth and diagnose enduring social issues.” Those three disclosures enable the contextualization of Morgan’s scholarship and service within a confluence of interrelated events, namely, the nationalist movement of Trinidad and Tobago as led by Dr. Eric Williams, the flourishing of Caribbean Literature / Cultural Studies within the academy, and the establishment of UWI St. Augustine where her scholarly reputation is firmly grounded.

Accordingly, the term “Pelican Pride” is ascribed to Morgan’s scholarship and service in the title of this paper to acknowledge them as part of the distinguished cumulative legacy of academic and research excellence amassed by the UWI institution over the past 75 years. “Pelican Pride” also stands as a metaphor for the fulfilment and satisfaction Morgan experienced on achieving professor status at UWI St. Augustine in 2016, the inaugural lecture occasion being deemed by her “a privilege” because getting there was “a most arduous uphill climb with lots of obstacles, digressions, and bunny trails – every one a blessing” (Morgan). Above all, this paper uses the term “Pelican Pride” to invoke association with *The Pelican: A Magazine of The University of the West Indies* as captioned on the masthead of Issue 11: July – December 2012 and in

which readers are promised “an intriguing mix of articles about regional issues of the day, research and philanthropic developments at UWI as well as our outstanding UWI people including faculty, alumni and students” (Pelican 5).

Professor Paula Morgan stands as one such outstanding UWI ‘people’, her scholarship and service spanning the 45-year period 1978 to the current 2023. In 1978, at the age of 22 years, Morgan achieved her Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Literature and Psychology, Upper Second Class Honours, at the UWI St. Augustine, while her present role in 2023, at the time of writing, is that of University Director, Regional Coordinating Office, Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS). It should be noted, therefore, that the usage of the term UWI in this paper operates on two levels: it refers to a particular UWI campus, which is identified by the inclusion of its location, for example, UWI St. Augustine, but it also refers to UWI the regional institution that was formed by Royal Charter in April 1962 (Brereton 51). To quote the current Principal of UWI St. Augustine, Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, in her article entitled “Grading UWI’s contribution” for the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Independence in Trinidad and Tobago on August 31st 2022:

it is the collective whole of this university, not so much its singular parts, that has made the greatest impact and best represents us. It stands as a symbol of our identity, the strengths, capacities and possibilities that we have reclaimed as a country – rooted in our community, our culture and in our own ethos. It represents a good vision of ourselves, yet incomplete, but one that has made such important strides for our nation (19).

Morgan’s scholarship and service are incorporated in such important strides, her expertise as a Humanities scholar being in demand by such organizations as the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) which engaged her with the Chief Examiner responsibility for English A in the 1998-1999 period. During that time frame, 1998-2000, Morgan was also Consultant, Curriculum

Development Specialist, Caribbean University Level Programme (CULP) under the LOME IV/CARIFORUM agreement with specific responsibility for programme planning and course development for the Masters in Agricultural Diversification and the Masters in Natural Resource Management, agriculture being the foundational area of study from which UWI has emerged, a fact no longer widely known. For, in the publicized opinion of the current Principal of UWI St. Augustine, “[m]any are unaware that in 1923, the place we now know as the UWI was established in Trinidad as the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA)” (Antoine 16). Nevertheless, the fact is that by 1960, the ICTA had changed “from an extra-regionally inspired centre of excellence for agricultural education and research... to a regional tertiary educational institute, the University College of the West Indies (UCWI), a regionally controlled institute, linked to the University of London” (Bartolo et al., 15). Morgan was four years of age at the time and certainly unaware of the far-reaching implications such change portended for her future, given the sociopolitical context of its occurrence. Suffice it to say that in 1960, the hurricane winds of nationalism were already quickly spinning colonial Trinidad and Tobago into self-government and independence with Dr. Eric Williams and the People’s National Movement (PNM) as the eye of the storm.

In our Zoom interview of August 25th 2022, Morgan linked her self-description as “a child of the independence movement” with the fact that her parents were “avid PNM-ites” who wanted to name her with initials that spelt PNM but eventually heeded the counsel of a great aunt and named her Paula Eleanor Mitchell. Ironically, the initials of that name spell PEM which were the initials of the People’s Education Movementⁱ a group of intellectuals with whom Dr. Williams was mutually involved between 1950 and 1956 when he was preparing himself to lead the country and through which he was “sponsored into public glare” (Deosaran 64). In a further irony, Morgan’s PEM name

initials remain to date, the “M” now standing for “Morgan”, her surname from marriage to Michael Morgan 43 years ago and which has yielded three children, two boys and one girl, all independent professionals now, and three grandchildren. Born in the colony of Trinidad on October 23rd 1956 during the burgeoning of the legendary “Williams era” - 1956 to 1981 - the date of Paula Morgan’s arrival was preceded by both the launching of the PNM on January 15th 1956 and the party’s immediate ascent to political dominance later that year when it won 13 of 24 seats in the September 24th general elections. This victory proved cataclysmic for the colony’s future, ushering in a new perspective on education in the colony because with the PNM assuming government in 1956, Chief Minister Eric Williams “immediately started to work towards the intellectual decolonisation of the country” (Hall, Green, Joseph 259). In that regard, Williams envisioned the university as having an active role. According to Ramesh Deosaran in *Eric Williams, The Man, His Ideas and His Politics* (1981), Williams “saw the Caribbean university’s role as one of taking an active part in the process of decolonisation through furthering cultural integration in the region, through the revision of the university curriculum to match the new social and economic pressures placed on Caribbean people, and through maintaining the autonomy of the institute” (68). Overall, Williams “wanted to create a more equitable society based on a reformed education system” (Rohlehr 15).

Morgan’s birth in 1956 therefore made her and successive generations immediate beneficiaries of Williams’ education reform ideas because by 1961, the year she entered the Trinidad and Tobago (TT) primary school system, such education had become compulsory and free up to age 12 (Quamina-Aiyejina et al 2) while secondary education had become free in 1960. At that time, Morgan was being raised by her maternal aunts because of her mother’s passing in 1957. Morgan recalls her strong female-oriented communal

upbringing during those years and the emphasis on education being a means of empowerment and nation-building after TT attained Independence on August 31st 1962. She shared her recollection of that time with this writer during our Zoom interview of August 25th 2022:

My parents were avid PNM-ites so I was a child of that independence movement and the hope of that movement and the hope also in education as a means of creating out of the progeny of slaves and indentees a people empowered to craft a viable social order; that was the thrust of the movement. That is why Eric Williams said there was hope for this free education. My mother died when I was very young and I had one or two little brain cells rattling around here and there. Without free education, where would I have been? ... Where would we be?

Morgan's self-reflexive rhetorical questioning opened the way for her to passionately express further views about education, such passion undoubtedly fuelled by her knowledge that prior to the emergence of the PNM in 1956, "secondary education was reserved to those who could afford the high fees charged in the few schools available" until in 1960 when it became free (Williams 276). This was all part of the societal reconstruction that Eric Williams had envisaged for Trinidad and Tobago to redress "the distorted, unjust, irrational structures inherited from our historical past" (275). Morgan's parents numbered among the thousands who thronged Woodford Square in June 1955 to hear and see Williams present himself as representing "the principle of intellectual freedom" and "the cause of West Indian people" (Williams 112). To quote CLR James, "I have never seen or heard of any political forum (in non-revolutionary periods) where addresses of the level of Dr. Williams's speeches have been consistently listened to by popular audiences. The credit has to be equally divided between the courage and confidence of the speaker and the receptivity of the audience" (James 348). It is not surprising, therefore, that having been socialized from birth with the anti-colonial philosophies and thoughts of Eric Williams, the wounding inflicted on the Caribbean psyche by

the ravages of colonialism would become the centrepiece of Morgan's scholarly interest as evidenced by the title of her inaugural Professorial Lecture - "Healing the hurts of my people slightly - Societal Violence and Trauma in Caribbean Discourse." Moreover, given that the idea of a new future for Trinidad and Tobago and indeed the British West Indies is what Eric Williams brought to the twin islands in 1955 - "I am going to let down my bucket where I am now, right here with you in the British West Indies" (Williams 165) - it is also not surprising that 'education' in the broadest and deepest sense of the word defines and shapes the character and person of Professor Paula Morgan.

In that regard, Morgan's views on education as elucidated in our Zoom interview seem to incorporate and explicate the watchwords that guided the reform of education by the PNM in its early years of governance, namely, "To educate is to redeem" (Erica Williams 373):

My notion of education is that you are educated to serve the people; you are not educated to say well I have education and therefore I am better than you. It was education for service and the service was a nation-building service; and I am afraid that when we went to school there wasn't that cynicism ... that concept that because we were recipients of that education it conferred personal privilege and that's it ... good for me! We were clearly taught that alongside privilege, we had a social responsibility. I am convinced that any true education is for the empowerment of the people and not to blow up an individual mind. Rather, it is to empower the mass of the people and therefore we have to engage not only in academic type education but in public education, something that helps people who may not have the benefit of our training ... help us to collectively find our way. (Morgan Zoom interview)

The breadth and scope of Morgan's scholarship and service to society demonstrate that her convictions about education for empowerment are as highly personal as they are social. This is evidenced by the breadth and scope of her many presentations, speaking invitations, and Visiting Professor opportunities as reflected on her curriculum vitae. For example, in July 2018,

Morgan was an Invited Speaker at the University of Graz, Saggau School of Thought Meditating and Mediating Change: State - Society - Religion, Austria. The title of her feature address was “When Ancestral Faiths Meet Global Modernity in Caribbean Culture”. Prior to that, in April 2018, Morgan was an invited presenter by the British Academy Research Network Meeting on *Crime and its Representation in the Anglo Caribbean 1984-2018* at UWI, St. Augustine. Her presentation title was “Violation, Incest and Trauma in Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber*”. Furthermore, Morgan has conducted a teaching semester at Dartmouth College (2011), completed a Fulbright Fellowship in Post Modernity for the American Studies Summer Institute at Louisville, Kentucky (2001), fulfilled a Cable and Wireless Fellowship in Distance Education at the University of Surrey, UK (2000) and also a Netherlands Government Staff Development Fellowship in Women and Development at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague (1995).

“It began with *Writing Rage*”ⁱⁱ recalls Morgan in our Zoom interview when she was asked to comment on trauma seeming to be a recurring motif in her presentations, her professorial inaugural lecture being centered on it. “It started with an engagement with violence,” she continued, “we could not separate societal collective trauma from the individual violence; we could not get to the bottom of it. How do you overcome fundamental violations? There is a rhizome effect because we are all impacted by the violence; all party to a single traumatic event...” This sustained strand of enquiry matured and drove the production of her compelling monograph, *The Terror and the Time: Banal Violence and Trauma in Caribbean Discourse* (UWI Press, 2014).

Morgan underscores this idea of collective wounding in her inaugural professorial lecture and suggests by the lecture’s lead title - “Healing the Hurts of my People Slightly” - that placing the issue of trauma in the public domain is

at least a start to alleviating its psychic impact. With its subtitle indicating a literary approach - "Societal Violence and Trauma in Caribbean Discourse" - Morgan gives a subtle reminder that her discipline is Literature/Literary Criticism and that her practice is literary scholarship. Thus, in her lecture, Morgan projects Derek Walcott's "Laventille" as a symbolic repository of our nation's communal histories to contend that "if Laventille's cultural inventions are national symbols of accomplishment, pride, resistance and cultural assertiveness, then Laventille's lacerations, violence and eruptions in crime are symptomatic of the contemporary state of the nation" (*UWI Today* 11) Her recommendation for healing, therefore, is "therapeutic intervention" requiring the kind of creative imaginings that she holds certain will heal our nation. This is her proposal:

Knowledge and cultural workers nationwide need to reshape collective memory and formulate empowering group memories with which emerging individual memories can intersect. And because the body remembers, this memory work should also be undertaken in visual modes and embodied modes of dance and performance. The UWI has been instrumental here through its recognition of the people's philosophers through the award of honorary doctorates. Professor Patricia Mohammed's recent film *The City on the Hill* is also exemplary of positive refashioning. Most significantly, there is need to formulate a new foundational narrative, to reconstitute the torn social fabric, and to realize the potentialities of a new future" (11).

In his book *Potentialities* (1987), Wilfred Cartey posits that potentialities are "inherent to all life," (98), and that "the reality ordained by potentiality is limitless" (96). Such intuitive assurances imbue Morgan's prescription for the nation's healing through the arts with enormous hope. They also underscore that creative imaginings are indeed potentialities made manifest. It is not surprising then that when the first Council meeting of the independent UWI occurred in 1962, the year Trinidad and Tobago attained Independence, "the decision was taken to establish a College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) right here

in Trinidad” (59) as revealed by historian Bridget Brereton in *From Imperial College to University of the West Indies: A History of the St. Augustine Campus*.

CAS was introduced in 1963 according to the current Principal of UWI St. Augustine, Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, and it ushered in the modern-day Faculty of Humanities and Education (FHE), whose “seminal contribution” to the expansion and enhancement of secondary education in the 1960s and 1970s and development of our country cannot be over-emphasized” (19). Moreover, in Antoine’s view, the FHE “has provided a unique transformative Caribbean space for creative intellectual inquiry” and the FHE’s “voice on national issues resounds and it will continue to play a critical role in analyzing regional and global issues from culture to climate change” (19).

One such representative voice from the FHE is that of Morgan, whose academic / administrative leadership of the Department of Liberal Arts (DLA) between 2008 and 2011, resulted in the DLA receiving the Faculty of Humanities and Education award in 2012 for Most Productive Research Department (STAN October 2012 March 2013 46). Prior to the DLA receiving that award, Morgan’s teacher efficacy received acclaim in 2002 when she won a Guardian Life Premium Award for Teaching Excellence, followed in 2003 by the 10th anniversary award for Outstanding Contribution to the Center for Gender and Development Studies, UWI St. Augustine. In 2016, Morgan received the UWI Graduate Mentor Award for supervision of Dr. Kwynn Johnson’s dissertation: “How the Light Enters: Visualizing Absence and Continuity in the Jacmelian Ruinscape”. The dissertation was the first UWI Cultural Studies doctorate by practice, and it was awarded with high commendation. Morgan also became Professor, West Indian Literature and Culture in 2016, an appropriate milestone achievement, given that those like her, born in the decade of the 50s, constitute

“the first generation of Caribbean children to grow up taking the existence of Caribbean Literature as a given” (Cobham-Sander 51).

As one who belongs in that 50s generation with Morgan, Cobham-Sander further contends that unlike their parents, they “took it for granted that West Indians *could* give birth to books, although, since practically none of these writers still lived in the islands, we were not quite sure where or how this literary conception happened” (51, emphasis in the original). Unwittingly making the case for why Morgan’s professorial achievement must be considered notable besides its academic distinction, Cobham-Sanders recalls how at the time,

the silence in our school curriculum on the subject of Caribbean writers raised additional doubts about the literary merits of such works as well as the moral standing of their authors, so we tended to talk about them, like the uncle who had fled to Venezuela to escape a little problem with the police, in the past tense or the subjunctive. To make matters worse, the snippets of Caribbean poems and stories we heard recited at special events at the Public Library downtown or at the USIS children’s library children’s hour, we considered embarrassingly folksy, not to say vulgar (51).

Despite such initial reaction to hearing/ reading the language of Caribbean English rather than standard English being voiced through some of the characters in those early Caribbean novels, characters who resembled real people existing in the Caribbean landscape, in one’s community, Cobham-Sander admits to the seminal legacy of the West Indian literature writing that began to emerge in the 1960s parallel with the independence movement in former colonies like Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. To quote her, the works introduced “a vast new library of words and images ... with which to begin to name *all* our worlds; a language through which to express *all* our desires ... They allowed us to see our world clearly for the first time through the prism of art ... (53, emphases in the original).

The art of West Indian / Caribbean writing remains central to Morgan's engagement with Literatures in English, beginning with her 1983 MPhil thesis entitled "The Love Relationship: A Study of Male-Female Interaction in Selected West Indian Authors" and her 1994 doctoral dissertation entitled "A Cross-cultural Study of the Novels of Black Female Development: A Comparative Reading of Women Writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and North America." In fact, her extensive curriculum vitae provides evidence *inter alia*, not only of how her skills as a literary / cultural scholar became honed, but also how her beacon remains education for empowerment. For example, she has created several impactful instructional texts such as *Language Proficiency for Tertiary Level: A Self-Instructional Course for Caribbean Students* (1998); *Writing About Literature: A Self-Instructional Course* (2010) with Barbara Lalla; "Sex and Gender in Caribbean Literature" in *Cultural Representations and the Construction of Masculinity and Femininity*, an instructional text for the Certificate Programme in Gender and Development at UWI, Mona; and "Introduction to Sybil Seaforth's *Voyage to Sandy Bay*" - an activity based instructional resource designed for secondary school students. Further evidence that education for empowerment is her beacon is amassed in her several edited book collections, scholarly edited journal collections, scholarly refereed book chapters, scholarly refereed journal articles, articles in non-refereed conference proceedings, commissioned research reports, and public video materials.

Morgan's wide range of scholarly publications reflects the wide range of her personal activities and responsibilities - wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, manager of a family business, and Secretary for the Network for Outreach and Disabilities Sensitization and Education (NODES), 2014 to present. As Morgan has admitted to this writer, she has "always done a wide range of things, is driven by a strong impulse towards serving others, however it manifests itself, and organizes life around a core of spiritual and ethical

values” (WhatsApp interview March 9 2023). It is not surprising, therefore, that Aglow Internationalⁱⁱⁱ is prominent in Morgan’s community affiliations. Since joining the organization some three decades ago, Morgan has held positions such as President, St. Augustine Chapter, 1992-1995; National Assistant for the Southern Caribbean, 1998-2003; and Member of Trinidad and Tobago Area Board, 2011-2020. Morgan is also a member of the Professional Christian Educators Group.

Piaget’s cognitive theory indicates the stages of intellectual development all human beings must experience between childhood and adulthood. This developmental process enables the interpretation of Morgan’s “child of the independence movement” self-descriptor on two levels: one, as a well-considered judgment which she would have processed over the years given her increasing knowledge and awareness of TT’s history and her place in it; and two, as an assertive declaration of identity given her published view that the “colonial enterprise, the largest such endeavour in human history, sought to erase the subjectivities of the colonised and to re-inscribe alien and alienating identities” (Morgan 35). In that regard, it is noteworthy that the “child of the independence movement” notion only became crystallized for Morgan during her 2007-2010 foray into politics as a founding National Executive Committee member / Secretary Communications of the Congress of the People (WhatsApp interview March 2023). The Congress of the People (COP) was formed to challenge the dominance of the PNM in local politics. Paula Eleanor Morgan, the daughter of “avid PNM-ites” and progeny of the “Williams era”, had come into her own.

This work has presented its discourse on Professor Paula Morgan’s scholarship and service using a blend of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprise two interviews given to this writer by Morgan, the first via

Zoom on August 25th 2022 and the second via WhatsApp on March 9th 2023; her curriculum vitae and her available published and unpublished work. The secondary sources comprise various local newspaper articles, the UWI Pelican and STAN magazines, and textbooks. As one of the post-graduate students mentored successfully by Professor Morgan during the first decade of the 2000s, and with whom the relationship continues albeit in terms of life, I offer this tribute in respectful gratitude. Many or most university mentors will not achieve big-time celebrity status, but acknowledgement of the mentoring experience should serve to honour their presence and champion their silent successes in the academy. "There must be a saint for women like us" (Rahim 33).

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Notes

i The education arm of TECA - Teacher's Economic and Cultural Association - which created the PEM in 1950.

ii A scholarly publication by Morgan and Valerie Youssef. The full title is *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence in Caribbean Discourse*. Mona, UWI Press 2006. ISBN 978-976-640-410-9.

iii Aglow is a dynamic, global kingdom movement made up of women and men with a single purpose: to see God's will done on earth as it is in Heaven. It began in Seattle, Washington, USA, in 1967 with four women who expressed a desire to meet together as Christians without denominational boundaries. Aglow International now impacts lives in over 170 nations. www.aglow.org.