

# *Tout Moun*

*Caribbean Journal of Cultural Studies*

*Beyond the Crisis-Generation and the Dread  
Instilled: Special Issue in Honour of  
Professor Paula Eleanor Morgan*

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## “HERE COMES THE SUN”: TRIBUTE TO A BELOVED MENTOR



*Hannah Regis*

I'd been reading Professor Paula Morgan's work for my MA thesis which quickly turned into an MPhil and then a PhD. Caribbean spectrality inherently bears traces of pain and trauma. I wanted to find out how committed Caribbean writers were to applying spiritual healing interventions to the wounds of Caribbean people.

I first met Prof Morgan in 2011 while completing the final year of my undergraduate degree at the University of the West Indies in St Augustine. I remember thinking how regal she looked sitting on her glossy black leather chair, chatting fluently about that out-of-order Hip-Hop artist's performance at Club Zen and then moving into an intensive discussion about feminism, nationalism and race.

Our multi-way conversations in the years that followed were threaded through with deep topics about destinies, faith, family and the academy often including quotes from the literature we loved—Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott, V.S Naipaul, Arundhati Roy and more. “What is my service to humankind and to God?” was a particular favourite, rendered pensively and reflectively, depending on the mood. I can't imagine Professor Morgan retired; a persistent and penetrating conversationalist. I wondered what will she do with all of those small, blue pocket notebooks in which she would tirelessly make notes for every book she read, every meeting she attended, every seminar she listened to? In an intricate penmanship demarcated by its slender strokes with the spaces between the letters and the words often narrow, her hieroglyphic handwritten expressions would make a rare and rich archive to any Caribbean intellectual.

Prof Morgan's devotion to her students is unrivalled and we, without fail, love her unconditionally. During her tenure as Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Professor, she was equally at home in local and international universities such as The University of Leicester, The University of Graz, The University of Miami and the prestigious Ivy League—Dartmouth College (New Hampshire, USA) in which she held the post of Visiting Professor. At St Augustine, she pioneered new interdisciplinary approaches, using the raw material of Caribbean literature and culture for the creation of previously unexplored and unwritten social histories. Her commitment to making us see how and why Caribbean literature and culture matter; her unmatched energetic teaching style; her opera-like singing and sideway discourse peppered with rhythm, insight and perception; and a presence that felt almost God-like encapsulate, in part, her biography.

As a student, I grew to understand her scepticism of theoretical orthodoxy. Mentored by the inimitable Professor Gordon Rohlehr, Morgan, in her 1993 PhD thesis, *A Cross-Cultural Study of the Black Female-Authored Novel of Development*, interrogated the fictional portrayals of black female protagonists from Africa, North America, Central America and the Caribbean. The breadth of the study in and of itself is testament to the historical and socio-political complexities that occupied her imagination. In this study, Morgan probed the novels of development as a capacious space and questing ground for unaccustomed, radical ways of being and living, which are variously shaped by bonding with mother figures. She unrelentingly gave optimum focus to what mattered: women's writing and the stories they told.

Apart from grappling with de Beauvoir, Spivak, Cixous, Butler, Crenshaw and others, the complicated knots of the 1960s independence movements and their ensuing intellectual enquiries also occupied Morgan's philosophical mind. The enduring social issues which emanated at that time and within the Caribbean literary imagination as a whole, became prominent features of her discourse which culminated in her 2017 Inaugural Professorial Lecture, "Healing the Hurts of My People Slightly - Societal Violence and Trauma in Caribbean Discourse."

On the evening of Thursday November 16<sup>th</sup> 2017, the School of Education Auditorium brimmed with anticipation as esteemed academics, professionals, and community leaders gathered to hear the ground-breaking address. Morgan, renowned for her global expertise and a pioneer in the field of cultural and gender studies, commanded the stage with an aura of confidence and purpose. As the lecture unfolded, she skilfully deconstructed deeply ingrained paradigms that had perpetuated systemic inequalities and societal divisions. With intellectual acuity and a captivating delivery, she engaged the crucible of the labour riots and challenged rightward swings of governments, exploitative conditions, and discriminatory practices that plagued Trinidad's social fabric. The lecture became a turning point where the pursuit of knowledge converged with the pursuit of a better nation. Like the Prophet Jeremiah, she understood that the process of healing calls for an arresting—a confronting—of the destructiveness of unhealed pain, and cautioned against the erosion or denial of a sublime capacity to experience the potential for transformative change. Morgan provides a book-length argument for applying a model of historical causality to present traumas: "Spaciotemporal distance dulls pain," she argues, "but historical traumas do not simply disappear" (*The Terror and the Time*, 203). In a sensitive and most passionate determination to redress the region's numerous injustices, she calibrated a fierce anticolonial aesthetic through which the people could recognize their resilience and self-worth.

Over the years that followed our first encounter, Prof Morgan and I worked closely together, planning conferences and workshops, launching numerous issues of *Tout Moun*, devising course syllabi, building inter-collegiate networks and so on. Our relationship, which began as a simple supervisory arrangement, blossomed into a bond that transcended the boundaries of hierarchy and transformed into a collaboration of minds. She nurtured with wisdom and profound respect a young scholar with an intensive will. I salute her patience, generosity of spirit, positivity and support when I encountered my fair share of life's misadventures. In seasons, when all that I could see was a cloud—the size of a man's fist— she detected a firmament that trembled; a tapestry of divine design ready to unfurl.

As tirelessly as she served the University, Prof Morgan served her people and community with an unrivalled generosity of spirit and profound belief in the transformative power of discourse. There was no UWI engagement too insignificant to warrant her time and attention. No writing competition was deemed too small to be noticed and acknowledged. Whether it was a radio, early-morning television program, or library lecture with a modest audience, she embraced every opportunity to contribute and share her wisdom. With characteristic diligence, she served as Head of Department for both the Institute of Gender and Development Studies and the Department of Literary, Cultural and Communication Studies, and held numerous high-level administrative positions at the UWI. Despite resisting it for some time, Prof Morgan finally agreed to become the University Director for the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) in her preretirement season. When others would have been winding down, she saw a pressing need for meaningful change during a most difficult time – nationally and regionally.

I had no idea when I met her that first afternoon in Room 313 A that I was meeting a mentor of a lifetime. Always ready to courageously speak truth to power, unintimidated, just and unequivocally altruistic in all her ways, Professor Morgan is far more than a beloved mentor. She nurtured and sustained a culture at St Augustine that was shaped as much by caring as by sterling and careful scholarship.

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#### WORKS CITED

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