

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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INTRODUCTION



Elizabeth Jackson & Hannah Regis

This special issue of *Tout Moun* is dedicated to honouring the scholarly legacy of our dear friend and colleague Professor Paula Morgan, whose distinguished academic career at the University of the West Indies has spanned over four decades, encompassing teaching, curriculum development, programme coordination, public service, research, and university administration. Having conducted ground-breaking research in many areas, including gender issues, violence and trauma, crime and criminality in the Anglophone Caribbean, representations of disability in Caribbean discourse, and pedagogical approaches to Caribbean literature and culture, Professor Morgan has received awards for teaching, publication, and graduate supervision. Her best-known works include *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence through Caribbean Discourse* (co-authored with Valerie Youssef, UWI Press, 2006) and *The Terror and the Time: Banal Violence and Trauma in Caribbean Discourse* (UWI Press, 2014).

In *Writing Rage*, Morgan and Youssef employ strategies of linguistic and literary analysis to a range of real-life and fictional discussions about violence. Their research delves into the insidious destructiveness that operates within the larger and smaller scales of Caribbean communities. We especially note that this publication served as a major resource for the inaugural interdisciplinary course on the subject at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine and subsequently became an essential reading for students and educators of Caribbean cultural studies in the region. Similarly, in her single-authored book, *The Terror and the Time: Banal Violence and Trauma in Caribbean Discourse*, Morgan examines the relationship between violence, trauma and contemporary Caribbean society. Drawing from a range of resources – literature, personal narratives, print media and popular culture, Morgan contends that

pain and trauma induced by the outworking of historical and structural inequalities accrue in contemporary life. The book examines the works of influential Caribbean writers such as Jean Rhys, George Lamming, Derek Walcott, Erna Brodber, V.S. Naipaul, Harold Sonny Ladoo and others. It delves into the impulse of those creative workers who revisit sites of originary violations to generate therapeutic interventions through their creativity.

Morgan also published numerous other essays and single-authored or co-authored journal collections, instructional texts and scholarly books. As it is impractical to list them all here, or indeed to do justice to her publication output, we will only summarize some of the highlights. In *Reassembling the Fragments: Voice and Identity in Caribbean Discourse* (co-edited with Valerie Youssef, 2013) Morgan and Youssef (along with other esteemed contributors), share a commitment to interrogating beyond the politically saturated constraints imposed on the study of creolization by the dominant discourses of European and North American scholarship, in order to re-centre Caribbean peoples of all backgrounds as active agents and producers of Creole languages and identities. The volume stands as a potent repository and reminder of an ongoing imperative to unearth and reassemble the fragments of voice and identity. In *Caribbean Literature in a Global Context*, which Morgan co-authored with Funso Aiyejina, the task to map new and emerging positions in literary and cultural criticism are anchored to the global designs inherent in the region. The essays in this collection examine the Caribbean as a logical consequence of the attempts by Europe to impose its moral, political, social and capitalist ethos on the world. In response to new forms of cultural and social totalitarianism, the text celebrates the concrete ways in which artists of the region ensure that globalisation takes on board the indigenous constructs of self and community that are germane to the region. Apart from the labour that such critical endeavours involve, Morgan has also edited two scholarly journal collections, co-edited five others, and produced two instructional texts: *Writing about Literature* (co-authored with Barbara Lalla, 2005) and *Language Proficiency for Tertiary Level* (1998). In addition, she has contributed 22 refereed book chapters to edited collections and 25 refereed articles to academic journals. In terms of quantity, quality, originality, impact, and contemporary relevance, Paula Morgan's publications are dazzlingly impressive.

However, Professor Morgan the scholar is of course inseparable from Paula the human being. Her scholarship reflects not only her formidable intellect but also her warm-hearted human qualities, including her passionate commitment to social justice which she puts into action every day of her life. Her long-standing dedication to understanding and ameliorating the problem of gender violence, particularly in the Caribbean, has led not only to her position as Director of UWI's Institute of Gender and Development Studies, but also to her own personal projects such as her ministry to women in crisis. Paula's generosity is also reflected in the tireless service she has given to UWI throughout her career in the form of numerous administrative roles and leadership positions, to her students in the form of inspirational teaching and supervision, to her colleagues in the form of unstinting support and mentoring, and to her family who show the benefits of the love and care she has lavished on them over the years.

The idea of a special issue of *Tout Moun* in tribute to Paula Morgan was initially proposed by Jennifer Rahim, an award-winning creative writer, who was also our dear friend and colleague. We assemble this issue in that same spirit of friendship and collaboration. As an original co-editor of this issue, along with Hannah Regis, Jennifer Rahim worked generously in articulating the initial vision, in writing the call for papers, in laying the groundwork, and in doing many of the administrative tasks until her sudden and untimely passing in March 2023. Devastated by the loss of our cherished colleague, we are also dedicating this issue in memoriam to Jennifer Rahim, and we are honoured to include an extract from her forthcoming novel *Goodbye Bay* (Peepal Tree Press, 2023) which she intended as her published contribution to the issue.

In response to our call for papers, we have received a range of contributions, from which we have selected five scholarly essays, one work of creative non-fiction, two works of creative writing, and three personal tributes to Paula Morgan. In keeping with Professor Morgan's consistent commitment to flexible and interdisciplinary approaches, the topics suggested in the call for papers overlap and intersect with one another. However, in general terms, **Narrative as palliative: Trauma, violence and the Caribbean imaginary** is addressed by Barbara Lalla, Akhim Alexis, and Patricia

Mohammed; **State of the nation: 60 years of independence** is addressed by Akhim Alexis and Rose-Ann Walker; **Gender relations and family dynamics** is addressed by Elizabeth Jackson and Victoria Chang; **The scholar and society** is addressed by Rose-Ann Walker and Hannah Regis; and **Reading ourselves: Voice, performance and media texts** is addressed by Allison Ramsay and Alana Smith.

Barbara Lalla's essay "Balancing Acts: Wrighting, Writing, Righting Trauma in Caribbean Fiction" reflects on the role of creative writing in responding to trauma wrought by violence – historical, political, domestic, racialized, and gendered. According to Lalla, processes of breaking down and building up are a driving force in Paula Morgan's work which reflects a conviction that intellectual (critical) enquiry must feed into practical application to the circumstances of real people, to formation of policies and interventions. Lalla performs a similarly transformative role and demonstrates the extent to which literary discourse can entrench or palliate (in the Caribbean imaginary) a culture of violence that has embedded trauma through intellectual memory. She considers the social function of literature in coming to terms with the historical legacy of trauma and suffering, along with its ongoing effects, asking searching questions about authorial decisions and their implications.

The next three essays focus on gender issues in the Caribbean context. Responding to critical assessments of Lakshmi Persaud as a writer with a limited feminist vision, Elizabeth Jackson's essay "Lakshmi Persaud and the Ambivalent Indo-Caribbean Feminist Bildungsroman" analyses the ambivalence at the heart of Persaud's three coming-of-age novels *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990), *Sastra* (1993), and *Daughters of Empire* (2012). At its most basic level, this ambivalence is generated by the conflicting claims of self and community. However, far from presenting binary choices between conformity and rebellion, these novels portray more subtle and – Jackson contends – more interesting situations for the protagonists to negotiate.

As its title indicates, Allison Ramsay's essay "Women's Voices: Feminism and Calypso in Barbados" examines women's voices in calypso through their participation in the Crop Over Festival of Barbados by documenting their involvement in the calypso tents and the country's calypso competition called the Pic-O-De Crop. The discussion starts

primarily from the 1980s when Barbados gained its first female calypso monarch. It highlights some outstanding Barbadian female calypsonians and analyses a selection of calypsos on women's issues relating to oral feminism in popular culture.

In "Matrimony as Sacrifice in Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter* and Lakshmi Persaud's *Raise the Lanterns High*", Victoria Chang considers notions of sacrificial womanhood in relation to gender norms such as the implied inevitability of marriage within the familial context of Indo-Caribbean culture. She explores two texts authored by Indo-Trinidadian women writers Shani Mootoo and Lakshmi Persaud, *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008) and *Raise the Lanterns High* (2004), respectively.

In keeping with Paula Morgan's consistent focus on the plight of vulnerable groups within the Caribbean, Alana Smith's essay "HIV Reporting: A Quantitative Study of the Gleaner Company (Media Limited)" argues that the media plays a crucial role in constructing public perception of HIV through coverage of related topics. In Jamaica, the government has formally included the media in its national response to HIV-related issues. Smith's study highlights how the media represents HIV-related issues by analysing specific terms used in HIV reporting by the *Gleaner* and *Sunday Gleaner* journalists.

Echoing Alana Smith's emphasis on the role of the media in influencing public perceptions, Akhim Alexis draws on Paula Morgan's scholarship in "Notes on Violence and Becoming: A Reflection on 60 Years of Independence and Violence Against Women and Children". Describing pervasive violence against women and children as a "darkening stain on the fabric of the nation" of Trinidad and Tobago sixty years after its independence, he sees the work of Paula Morgan, particularly in *Writing Rage* and *The Terror and the Time*, as "a long overdue bridge between theoretical discussion and anti-violence as praxis".

Preceded by a thoughtful introduction which links Paula Morgan's scholarship with creative writing on violence and trauma, Patricia Mohammed's original story "Mi Dawta, Mi Dawta" effectively demonstrates the power of fiction in illuminating a range of issues in the Caribbean context. These include class inequalities, family relationships, gender ideologies, the ongoing effects of historical injustice, poverty and

deprivation, crime and gender-based violence – all of which are key concerns of Morgan’s activist scholarship.

We are honoured to include another work of creative fiction in the form of an extract from Jennifer Rahim’s new novel, *Goodbye Bay* (Peepal Tree Press, 2023). In contextualizing the extract, the author explains that: “It is 1963, one year post independence. Macaima is a fictional, Trinidadian village in a declining cocoa producing district that is haunted by a story of violation suffered by the island’s indigenous peoples. Annabelle Bridgemohan leaves Port of Spain to begin a temporary job there as post mistress in the hope of finding new direction for her life. The extract is taken from a meeting organized by the Women’s Coalition of the ruling party. Brenda Moses upstages the meeting and opens the way for Anna’s own questioning and growing self awareness.” Arguably, it is the character Brenda Moses’s resolute refusal of social injustice which also lies at the heart of Morgan’s scholarship and activism.

We conclude this issue with tributes by Geraldine Skeete, Hannah Regis and Rose-Ann Walker. Geraldine Skeete shares a heartfelt commentary on her 29-year relationship with Paula Morgan, who has strongly and positively impacted her professional and personal development. “‘Here Comes the Sun’: Tribute to a Beloved Mentor” by Hannah Regis, chronicles a warm and heartfelt tribute to an outstanding scholar and an exceptional human being who inspires the rest of us not only with her productivity and achievements, but also with her compassion, generosity, and commitment to making the world a better place for everyone in the Caribbean and beyond. Last but not least, Rose-Ann Walker’s tribute “Pelican Pride: The Scholarship and Service of Professor Paula Morgan” offers a comprehensive and well-contextualized overview of her career. Drawing on Morgan’s professorial inaugural lecture of 2017, along with a Zoom interview, Walker also considers the role of the scholar in society, paying tribute to Morgan as a distinguished scholar activist whose hard work and outstanding achievements in terms of service, publications, teaching, and mentoring have been – and continue to be – hugely impactful.

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