



the Global PLANTATION

PRINCETON
UNIVERSITY



OCTOBER 15 - 17, 2020

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM

The Global Plantation is sponsored by the University Center for Human Values and the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies.

Logo Credit: Shiraz Bayjoo, *The Wandering Rail*, 2019

Image Credit: Jasmine Togo-Brisby, *Inheritance*, 2019. Collodion on glass 258 x 305mm. Photo credit: Brian Scadden



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Plantations were and are sites for labor and production. As physical, economic and material interventions in a landscape, they also exist powerfully in people's imaginations. As our title suggests we are also interested in the plantation's iterations across temporal and spatial geographies, for we wonder if the transformations they wrought across the globe might also create possibilities to imagine the intimacies and particularities of time and space differently.

We want to ask: how and where have plantations been imagined and represented and why? If the plantation is a site of convergence, of interspecies interaction and of human and commodity flows, what has been lost or occluded in the enduring representation of plantations as the opposite of industrial and "modern" sites of labor and production? What are the implications of a term like plantationocene? And while historically a site of unfree labor and enslavement in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans, what alternative constructions of freedom, and other-worldly economies of knowledge, resilience and resistance might we find within its various constructions?

Finally, how might we construct or explain a visual vocabulary of plantations and their afterlives in ways that help us to understand the politics of race, representation and labor in our contemporary moment?

This symposium will bring together scholars and artists from around the world to interrogate representations of plantations across a range of geographic locales as well as disciplinary and aesthetic modes.

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The symposium organizers acknowledge we are on the
unceded lands of Indigenous people. We pay our respects to
elders past, present, and emerging.

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SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZERS

Anna Arabindan-Kesson

Princeton University

Assistant Professor of Black Diaspora Art, Departments of African American Studies and Art & Archaeology

Clare Corbould

Deakin University

Associate Professor of History

Jarvis C. McInnis

Duke University

Cordelia & William Laverack Family Assistant Professor of English

Jessica Womack

Princeton University

Ph.D. Candidate, Departments of Art & Archaeology and African American Studies

THE GLOBAL PLANTATION

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM

DAY 1, SESSION 1

Thursday, October 15, 2020

WHAT LIES BEYOND THE PLANTATION?

Keynote Lecture Conversation and Q&A

The recorded keynote lecture is available on the symposium website. The symposium's first live session will feature a moderated discussion and Q&A period.

Thursday, October 15 | 5:00–6:15PM EDT



DEBORAH A. THOMAS

R. Jean Brownlee Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for Experimental Ethnography, University of Pennsylvania

This talk interrogates the afterlives of imperialism and heralds the death of the West, its models of sovereignty, and its conventions of knowledge production. In thinking through the new geopolitical condition – one in which China is ascendant on the global stage, and where we are seeing a new spatial and temporal organization of policing and control – it endeavors to elaborate the new forms of accountability that must also emerge. If Western European empire inhabits the expression of sovereignty, not only within Europe but also throughout the post-colonial world, and if this expression is always potentially undone by that which fails to recognize it, by that which refuses it in intentional and unconscious ways, then our contemporary condition requires a formulation of accountability that resides outside the normative parameters of perfectible governance, and an elaboration of sovereignty that abandons the world of “projects” and eschews the expectation embedded within the future anterior, thus disrupting the disavowals and deferrals that undergird imperial Being.

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DAY 1, SESSION 2

Thursday, October 15, 2020

IMAGINED FUTURES

Thursday, October 15 | 6:30–8:00PM EDT

“We identify as Sugar Slaves”: Australian South Sea Islander Memorialization in the Global Afterlife of 19C Unfree Labor



HILARY EMMETT

Associate Professor, American Studies, University of East Anglia

CLARE CORBOULD

Associate Professor, History, Deakin University, Melbourne



In this work, we continue our project to examine why Australasia is so frequently disregarded in otherwise rich analyses of global intimacies and the Oceanic plantationocene. Observers of late nineteenth-century plantation labor in Australia had no trouble seeing it as on a continuum with Atlantic enslavement—an “afterlife.” Likewise, in recent years as a public reckoning about unfree labor in Australia’s history has unfolded, descendants of South Sea Islanders and many Indigenous people have had little hesitation in likening their ancestors’ lives to those of enslaved people caught in the Atlantic trade.

In this co-authored paper, we consider the place of Queensland sugar plantations in recent works by Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) and Indigenous artists, including filmmaker Amie Batalibasi, visual artists Jasmine Togo Brisby and Tracey Moffatt, and spoken word poet Joella Warkill. ASSI and Indigenous artists depict the plantation and its associated signifiers—sugar, the plantation house, the slave ship—in acts of artistic resistance designed to combat the erasure of this chapter from Australian and regional history. In engaging, in particular, with the most famed 21st century African American and Black British artists’ representations of slavery in the American South and Caribbean, they assert the continuum between enslavement and indenture and insist that it be recognised and memorialised as such.

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DAY 1, SESSION 2

Thursday, October 15, 2020

IMAGINED FUTURES

Thursday, October 15 | 6:30–8:00PM EDT

Plantationocene – Plantationobscene – Plantationoscenes



MONIQUE ALLEWAERT

Associate Professor, English, University of Wisconsin–Madison

SOPHIE MOORE

Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison



The term ‘Plantationocene’ focuses attention on the plantation as the origin point for the relations of land, labor, and capital specific to the form of extractive racial capitalism that has been a geomorphic and historical force from the sixteenth century to the present. In this presentation, we consider the affordances and the limits of the term Plantationocene by putting it in dialectical relation with the terms Plantationobscene and Plantationoscenes. These latter two terms are inspired by critical Black studies. They unsettle the universalizing scientific impulse as well as the erasure of Black and Indigenous epistemologies at work in “cene” discourses. Though this triadic dialectic we follow out Sylvia Wynter’s suggestion that the plantation – the origin point of the conjoined racial, environmental, and economic injustices that shape our moment – might also be the site through which Black and Indigenous struggle have produced a series of alternatives to it.

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DAY 1, SESSION 2

Thursday, October 15, 2020

IMAGINED FUTURES

Thursday, October 15 | 6:30–8:00PM EDT

Australian South Sea Islander VOICES – Creating spaces for acknowledgement, remembrance, and healing



IMELDA MILLER

*Curator, Torres Strait Islander and Pacific Indigenous Studies,
Queensland Museum Network, Brisbane, Australia*

As recently as June 2020, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison said, "We had no slavery in Australia"; this, despite the country's historical enslavement of Indigenous Peoples and its foundations in convict labour. Morrison was quickly corrected, however, his ignorance is indicative of the wider Australian community. For example, what is even less well known or acknowledged is Australia's forced enslavement of Pacific Islanders as plantation labourers from 1863 to 1904. Today, their descendants—known as Australian South Sea Islanders—are articulating this history using our own words to change the narrative about South Sea Island history in major collecting institutions in Queensland, from a story about a past historical event, to a living narrative that is, intrinsically connected to the descendants, the Australian South Sea Islander community. This paper will discuss the Australian South Sea Islander identity and the creation of spaces where plantation material culture, archival documentation and contemporary collections are interwoven with personal narratives and memories to acknowledge a hidden history and value authentic Australian South Sea Islander voices past, present and future.

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DAY 2, SESSION 3

Friday, October 16, 2020

ENGAGING THE SITE OF THE PLANTATION

Friday, October 16 | 9:00–11:00AM EDT

Imagining freedom, constructing a politics of relationality on Natal's "plantation": the aesthetics of Afrapix photographers' resistance photography



M. NEELIKA JAYAWARDANE

Associate Professor, English, State University of New York-Oswego

My project for *The Global Plantation* symposium focuses on a group of photographers based in Durban, South Africa, who came together to form the Afrapix photographers' collective and agency. I am interested in exploring the precarious alliances and collaborative politics of the 1980s that helped foster this small group of "resistance photographers" from Indian, Coloured, and Black communities from Natal Province (today, Kwa-Zulu Natal). Several photographers in the group were from formerly indentured and so-called "passenger" Indian communities – their families had experienced the upheavals of being forced from their homes and businesses, and removed to townships specifically designated for "Indians" under the apartheid's Group Areas Acts. Others, like Cedric Nunn – who was from a rural farming community that traced its roots to both Zulu and British ancestors – were from communities designated as "Coloured", or "African" under apartheid's racial categorisations. My project aims to trace the interlinked threads of narratives in each photographer's work, as they documented the complicated, and necessary alliances that different racialised groups constructed, and the actions each group took – whether they were members of factory workers' unions, student groups, or community activists. By so doing, I hope to identify the ways in which they countered the divisive, racialised logic of the "plantation" as they attempted to reach for shared goals – exposing the violence of the apartheid regime, empowering workers through creating photographic records, and, ultimately, liberation from apartheid.

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DAY 2, SESSION 3

Friday, October 16, 2020

ENGAGING THE SITE OF THE PLANTATION

Friday, October 16 | 9:00–11:00AM EDT

Circling around the plantation: Simryn Gill's *Becoming Palm* (2018)



EMILIA TERRACCIANO

*Writer, Translator, and Lecturer, Art History and Cultural Practices
Department, University of Manchester*

Since 1993, artist Simryn Gill (born Singapore 1959) has been documenting the plants, landscapes, and outmoded structures in and around Malaysian plantations, using different media from installations to tracings of various forms. This paper considers Gill's book *Becoming Palm* (2018, with Michael Taussig) which focuses on the histories of the plantation in Malaysia. *Becoming Palm* juxtaposes text with archival photographs, evoking the format of the pocket-size guide, one that also revived the idea of the pastoral, pre-industrial landscape as key to a nation's identity and character. Gill's project does not offer a tour or guide to the plantation landscape; there are no routes, vantage points, vistas, or reclamation sites. *Becoming Palm* reflects on the ongoing and mundane violence that the plantation as 'camp' has long wrought on peoples and environments: iterative constructions of legality and institutional bondage, as well as the accelerated contingencies of cause and effect. Making sense of the plantation as industrial landscape, once of rubber, today of palm oil, this paper analyses Gill's contribution by concentrating on the intimacies – between humans, animals and their surroundings – that emerge in this technologically-altered world, and which are bound up in the cycle of consumer capitalism. Circling around the plantation might also mean tracing how the violence and displacement generated by this machine has come full circle. The human body turns into a site for planting and sowing other kinds of intimacies: palm oil flows into our bodies transforming us one synthetic, chemical, and cellular component at a time.

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DAY 2, SESSION 3

Friday, October 16, 2020

ENGAGING THE SITE OF THE PLANTATION

Friday, October 16 | 9:00–11:00AM EDT

Cocos Keeling: The Unplanned Family Plantation



MICHAEL LAFFAN

Professor, History, Princeton University

In this presentation I wish to give a brief overview of one of the most anomalous of histories in the Indian Ocean, that of Cocos-Keeling, “ruled” by the Clunies-Ross family from the 1820s to the 1980s. As I shall show, its main source of wealth was never planted, but rather collected, and by people supposedly freed from slavery in the 1820s and yet bound by word and familial ties for generation after generation that resulted in the most Malay of Scottish dynasties in Asia.

Tuskegee and the Plantationocene: Toward a Theory of Eco-Ontology in Black Studies



JARVIS MCINNIS

*Cordelia & William Laverack Family Assistant Professor, English,
Duke University*

THE GLOBAL PLANTATION

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DAY 2, SESSION 4

Friday, October 16, 2020

RECYCLING THE PLANTATION

Friday, October 16 | 5:00–7:00PM EDT

Returning to the Cane



ANDIL GOSINE

Professor of Environmental Arts & Justice, York University, Toronto

On May 7, 2013, I staged the first performance of *Cane Portraiture*. This iteration was dubbed *Wardrobes: (Made In Love)* and held at the Jamaica Performing Arts Centre in Queens, New York, part of the inaugural annual gala of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance. I had set up a photo studio in the basement of the former church and throughout the evening, guests could come sit for a portrait against a backdrop of sugarcane. *Cane* set two sites of interrogation in its conception: first, the heritage of colonial portraiture that began with the “capture” and circulation of images of colonized peoples by European photographers in the nineteenth century, a practice that was in many ways reproduced in the studio practices in former colonies; and second, the nostalgia of the would-be participants, mostly first- and second-generation Caribbean emigrants from Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. When the project was restaged at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2016, for a mostly white Canadian audience, another, subconscious drive for the project was revealed: my own sense of exile from “home,” represented by the image of the sugarcane. This yearning was also literal: I grew up in a home that for the first many years of my childhood was surrounded by sugarcane. In this paper, I report on the process of enacting *Cane Portraiture*, through the framework of its three intended and unintended points of interrogation. I ask: what does it mean to return to the cane? Weaving personal narrative with social and historical research, I consider the deep complexity of this figurative return, which produces the plantation as both a site of terror-and, because of the perhaps inherent longing for home-potential pleasure.

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DAY 2, SESSION 4

Friday, October 16, 2020

RECYCLING THE PLANTATION

Friday, October 16 | 5:00–7:00PM EDT

The Speculative Plantation



AMY CLUKEY

Literary realism has often been seen as a primary mode of historical recovery, insofar as it reveals the violent material conditions of enslavement and the production of raw materials for commodity production. However, I argue that, as both material site and an unreal fantastical imaginary, the plantation both *does* and *does not* exist, and that the speculative plantation has always been a battleground for racist and anti-racist futures—even in supposedly realist formulations. In particular, my presentation examines how romanticized depictions of enslavement and the plantation popularized internationally by the American “Plantation School of fiction” led by Thomas Nelson Page in the 1880s became integral to the formation and consolidation of science fiction as a genre in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, the U.S. plantation is foundational to the work of white male SF writers like HP Lovecraft and Edgar Rice Burroughs. The long shadow of these white supremacist writers continues to shape the sexist and racist political terrain of SF publishing, reading, and fan communities in the twenty-first century, even as Black speculative writers from North America, the Caribbean, and Africa have increasingly turned to speculative and science fictional modes to recover and foretell histories of enslavement, extractivist capitalism, neo-imperialism, and climate change throughout the global plantation complex.

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DAY 2, SESSION 4

Friday, October 16, 2020

RECYCLING THE PLANTATION

Friday, October 16 | 5:00–7:00PM EDT

A Conversation between Lacey Wilson and Olivia Williams



LACEY WILSON

Site Manager, Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historic Site



OLIVIA WILLIAMS

Cultural History Interpreter, McLeod Plantation Historic Site

Intentional historic interpretation brings forward the uncomfortable history in historic homes and plantations. These stories are crucial to understanding the history of these spaces and the weight on black interpreters who do this work. Together, Olivia Williams and Lacey Wilson discuss their experiences interpreting at the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters and McLeod Plantation. This discussion will be a conversation between professional peers and public historians on changes in language, how perspectives on historic homes and plantations have changed due to intentional interpretation, how black and white visitors have reacted differently, and show some sites are sought out for telling the truth and connections to the present.

Being South Sea: between presence and absence



JASMINE TOGO-BRISBY

Between 1847 and 1903, more than sixty-two thousand Pacific Islanders were abducted/coerced and taken to Australia to toil in sugarcane plantations and serve in wealthy homes. Today, the descendants of the Pacific Slave Trade make up Australia's South Sea Islander community. As a fourth generation Australian South Sea Islander (Vanuatu), my research and arts practice is concerned with the contemporary legacy that this practice has imparted on those who trace their roots through the slave-diaspora. I will discuss the complexities of my South Sea Island identity and how I claim space and place through my artistic practice. I re-claim sugar products as South Sea material and discuss photographic interventions and alternate archives.

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DAY 3, SESSION 5

Saturday, October 17, 2020

PLANTATION EFFECTS

Saturday, October 17 | 8:00-10:00AM EDT

Bolt to Fabric: Cotton, Black Matter, White Form



TIFFANY LETHABO KING

*Associate Professor, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies,
Georgia State University*

In Episode Six "Cradle," of season one of the television series *Underground* (2016), director Misha Green and cinematographers depict the lives of enslaved and fugitive children. In several scenes depicting a cotton plantation, the camera work focuses on a young child who is sent to the cotton fields as a form of punishment. While removing the bolt of cotton from the stem, the small child cuts his hands and 'bloodies' the cotton. This paper traces the bloody cotton bolt to scenes of Frederic Engel's family textile factory in Raoul Peck's film *The Young Marx* (2017). By tracing the bloody cotton bolt through its transformation into fabric, this paper attempts to connect the plantation to " 'modern sites' of labor and production." While juxtaposing the scenes in *Underground* and *The Young Marx* brings the cotton plantation and the shop floor into the same production cycle, the scenes simultaneously depict Black enslaved bodies as Black matter and White working bodies in factories as expression of form and by extension liberal subjects. Tracing cotton's movement from bolt (plantation) to fabric (factory) exposes what Denise Ferreira da Silva names as western reason's violent organizing principles of "determinacy, separability, and sequentiality."

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Saturday, October 17, 2020

PLANTATION EFFECTS

Saturday, October 17 | 8:00-10:00AM EDT

Fi Dem II



ZINZI MINOTT

Dancer and Filmmaker

Saturday 22nd June 2019 saw the release of *Fi Dem II*, the second work in the durational work *Fi Dem* began in 2018, as a commitment to the Windrush generation, and a continued investigation of Blackness, diaspora and the heritage of her family. June 22, 2019 was the first National Windrush Day, a public holiday created by the government after many years of campaigning by the Black Caribbean migrant community and an extension of the wider reparations movement in the UK. A potential pacifier in the face of The Windrush Scandal no doubt. Minott reflects on this national holiday which sits in the middle of PRIDE month and seems to get lost amongst its longer established contemporary. What does this mean for those like her? Black British first and second generation children and grandchildren of Windrush migrants who are LGBTQI+? This work also looks at labour, whose labour is it to remember this day? More specifically, the work of her maternal Grandmother Doreen Haynes, a Nurse of 52 years.

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Saturday, October 17, 2020

PLANTATION EFFECTS

Saturday, October 17 | 8:00-10:00AM EDT

"It is the Sea that Connects Us"



SHIRAZ BAYJOO

Visual Artist

ANNA ARABINDAN-KESSON

Assistant Professor, African American Studies and Art and Archaeology, Princeton University



Shiraz Bayjoo's practice is animated by the legacies of the plantation and unfree labor in Mauritius. He explores the entangled movement of people and commodities that shaped the island's landscape and located it within an imperial geography. Working between photography, painting and film, he assembles alternate archives of remembrance that imagine futures beyond the ruins, and the limits, of these colonial histories. Dr. Anna Arabindan-Kesson and Shiraz Bayjoo will present a live walk and conversation of the exhibition curated at 12 Gates gallery in Philadelphia.

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DAY 3, SESSION 6

Saturday, October 17, 2020

PLANTATION INHERITANCES

Saturday, October 17 | 5:00–7:00PM EDT

Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture



GAIUTRA BAHADUR

Essayist, Critic, Journalist, and Assistant Professor, Arts, Culture and Media, Rutgers University-Newark

The author of *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, a narrative history about indentured women, discusses researching and narrating the lives of subjects missing, at least in their own words, from the archives. She reflects on the possibilities of the personal and the present, along with alternative oral and visual sources, as strategies for navigating elisions and biases in the written records of the past. She also argues for the present as justification for working with incomplete and biased archives. Her paper draws parallels between African storytelling in the Americas and Indo-Caribbean storytelling and claims the twin tropes of the violence of archive and the fictions of the archive, already elaborated in the historiography of slavery, for the context of indenture.

BLACKBIRD



AMIE BATALIBASI

Writer, Director, and Producer

Batalibasi will screen and discuss the film *BLACKBIRD* (13mins, PG), which tells the story of Solomon Islander siblings, Rosa & Kiko, who were kidnapped from their island home to work on a sugar cane plantation in Queensland, Australia in the late 1800s. Rosa struggles to keep an eye on her young spirited brother who comes into conflict with their Overseer. And as Kiko journeys into adulthood, amidst oppression and severe loss of culture and identity, he must find his will to survive.

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Saturday, October 17, 2020

PLANTATION INHERITANCES

Saturday, October 17 | 5:00–7:00PM EDT

Wild Cotton



IMANI UZURI

Vocalist, Composer, and Cultural Worker

Composer and vocalist Imani Uzuri's improvisational conceptual project *Wild Cotton* explores the imagined, undocumented soundscapes of enslaved Black American ancestors that still haunt us today. Uzuri will share photos and excerpts from various performances — including a special excerpt filmed at Park Avenue Armory as part of 2019 Black Artists Retreat (BAR)— and discuss her research, methodology and inspirations that inform *Wild Cotton*.