

**“Blood on the Leaves / And Blood at the Roots”:
Reconsidering Forms of Enslavement and Subjection across Disciplines**

18th June 2020:

**Pre-conference panel on getting published & networking event for postgraduate students and early career researchers
and practitioners**

Supported by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS)

19th-20th June 2020

Conference at the University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Funded by the University of Warwick Centre for Philosophy, Literature and the Arts (CRPLA), The Humanities Research Centre (HRC), the Environmental Humanities Network (EHN), the Yesu Persaud Centre for Caribbean Studies (YPCCS), the Department of English and Comparative Studies, the Department of Philosophy, the British Comparative Literature Association (BCLA) and The Royal Historical Society (RHS).

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

Professor Kaiama L. Glover (Columbia University)

Professor Robert Bernasconi (Penn State University)

Dr. Monique Allewaert (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Dr. Meleisa Ono-George (University of Warwick)

Call for papers

Deadline: 20th April 2020

This event aims to open a multicultural space beyond institutional and geographical boundaries to foster discussions and to listen to a variety of voices, addressing the problems of enslavement and subjection. In this space, this conference seeks to explore the various figurations and conceptions of enslavement and subjection across disciplines—from philosophy to literature, from the arts to the social sciences, to mention only a few— and beyond territories. Enslavement and subjugation are not only concerns of our past but urgent problems of our *present* and *future*. The title of the conference directly refers to Billie Holiday’s 1939 performance of *Strange Fruit* so as to emphasise both the human and environmental impact of forms of enslavement and subjection which have—literally and metaphorically—left “Blood on the leaves / And blood at the Roots.”

This exploration, as we intend it, takes the form of a reconsideration because we believe that enslavement and subjection need to be continuously ‘considered again’ and ‘rethought’ to extend and problematise understandings and approaches to these key themes. Each time we return to these issues, we fix in our mind something that we ought not to forget and we learn something new that we ought not to neglect. In this conference, we would like to reconsider and return on the multiple facets of the problems of enslavement and its evolution in modern forms of subjections, taking with us and keeping in mind the following words:

“[E]ven as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not *simply* or *only* live *in* subjection and as the subjected.” (2016:4)

In this quote, describing her family’s struggle as Black Americans in the 1950s US, Christina Sharpe’s words and italics highlight an insidious pitfall in methodological approaches to the study of slavery and its legacies in a number of academic disciplines. These approaches are often conducive to a consideration of subjected individuals and communities “*simply* or *only*” as ‘enslaved’ people. These subjected agents become objects of study only *as* ‘slaves’ rather than subjects endowed with their own agency, thinking and feelings, and this tendency continues in post-slavery and race studies. Hence, the very attempt to study and understand (post-)slavery and subjection poses the risk of falling back into another type of objectification and dehumanisation of ‘subjected subjects.’ As for example, Saidiya Hartman notes in relation to archival studies that “[t]he archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios. To read the archive is to enter a mortuary; it permits one final viewing and allows for a last glimpse of persons about to disappear into the slave hold.” (2007:17)

In light of these words and cognizant of this danger, the conference would like to propose a reconsideration of enslavement and subjection that aims to de-objectify and do justice to the humanity of what we have called the 'subjected subjects,' of the subjects of uneven (hi)stories of a brutally imposed condition, that is not just part of our past, but also continues to have disastrous impacts on our society and environment. Thus, we also aim to further consider the ecological dimension of enslavement and subjugation as tightly knit with the human one, promoting a de-reification of 'nature' and the 'natural.' Thereby our purpose is to illuminate systematic and structural issues of our current climates. The best way to carry out this reconsideration, in our view, is to create a space to listen and to discuss, bringing together diverse contributions across disciplines and institutions, within and without academia. We are convinced that only an inter-and-trans-disciplinary enterprise, which encourages human and intellectual diversity, enables a reconsideration of the problems of enslavement and subjection, as well as of the ways in which we approach these topics. For this reason, we welcome papers both from different fields of study and that tackle the issue of enslavement and subjection at the intersection of different disciplines. This space is not only open to scholars from all over the world, but also to activists and artists who wish to discuss their political engagement with and artistic approaches to the themes. We welcome other presentation formats such as roundtables, discussion, jam sessions.

We invite abstracts on topics including, but not limited to:

- Forms of enslavement across time from Antiquity to today.
- Figuration and representation of enslaved people and/or slavery and more broadly subjugation in the arts (music, visual and performing arts, film, tv and media studies, theatre and drama, literature and graphic novels, etc.)
- (Hi)Stories of slavery and oppression as well as resistance, emancipation and liberation and memory studies.
- Philosophers' views on slavery as well as the philosophical significance of the concept of enslavement and subjugation in the history and practice of philosophy.
- Philosophical accounts of servitude as a condition.
- (Political) Ethics of enslavement and/or subjection.
- Traces of slavery and enslavement in our time, structural racism, #BlackLivesMatter, minority activism movements and social (in)justice.
- Gendered and reproductive enslavement and labour, housewifization and women's emancipation movements and activism, #NiUnaMenos & #Metoo.
- The role of colonisation and slavery in building Europe and the United States and its economy as well as debates surrounding restitution and reparation.
- Decolonising the University and the syllabus, and decolonial methodologies more broadly.
- The evolution of slavery, indentured labour and forced migration.
- Modern slavery and human and animal trafficking.
- Contemporary economies of tourism and/or neo-liberal practices of extractivism as forms of enslavement and subjugation.
- Commodification of bodies and lands and their intertwined relations.
- Traces of slavery on the environment, plantationocene, climate change, uneven developments and environmental justice.
- Human-Animal relations, animal ethics and their exploitation and rights.
- Extinction as a result of exploitation and subjugation.

We invite individual proposals for 20-minute papers, as well as proposals for panels (three 20-minute papers), for roundtables, jam sessions, or any other format to present artistic production or to address activism, etc. Please send an abstract (200-300 words) and a brief biography to bloodontheleaves2020@gmail.com by 20th April 2020.

For more details please see <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/conferences/bloodontheleaves>.

We strongly encourage submissions going beyond Western scholarship and from scholars at any stage of their careers.

