Emmanuel Levinas thought is inspired by the Hebrew bible and Greek philosophy. His work attempts to repair the violence at the heart of European philosophy and politics by defining an ethical space which is prior to both political and historical categories. Drawing on Hebraic texts and rabbinic interpretation, Levinas interrupts this violence by pitting Jewish wisdom against Greek philosophy; however, his work has been criticised for its ties to monotheism, Zionism and a Eurocentric vision of identity and ethics. For postcolonial critics, Levinas’ endorsement of the European project informs his lack of interest in the material other who comes from a non-European history, a non-European project or a different race. Critics claim that Levinas’ philosophy is ultimately bonded to Western metaphysics, which obscures an ethical engagement with postcolonial theory or the postcolonial other. Defenders claim that there is a universality to Levinas’ description of the other, which operates at a depth exceeding the political and historical forces that form the postcolonial subject.

This workshop will seek a more productive encounter by rethinking alterity in engagement with history, identity, embodiment, diaspora, time, and meaning drawn from both the European experience of disaster and black Atlantic theories of the New World. This mode of engagement will underscore limits to Levinas' thinking, while also showing how his thought opens up myriad possibilities for thinking about ethics and politics in the postcolonial context. Édouard Glissant's poetics and creative work will serve as an opening to postcolonial claims and experience, beginning with the right to opacity, which moves so many of the key concepts in Africana theory.

Glissant’s work discloses the trauma and loss at the centre of the African experience in the Americas, where the Middle Passage and much of plantation life are structured to expunge African identity, language, and custom. “What to make of Africa?” therefore becomes the ante-chamber question for African-American and Afro-Caribbean theory, asking if Africa names retrievable memory (Aimé Césaire), colonial abjection (Frantz Fanon), or productive, creolizing fragments (Glissant).
What does a critical conversation between European Jewish and black Atlantic accounts of alterity and diasporic identity tell us about colonialism, decolonization, and questions of postcoloniality? The workshop aims to open conversations on difference, community, and language and how loss and recovery contain *specificities* not only in terms of historical experience but also in terms of memory, space, temporality and justice.

The central figures in our conversation, Emmanuel Levinas and Édouard Glissant, prove key pivots for conversation, but also point toward a wider engagement between European thought, Jewish philosophy and postcolonial theory.

In six sessions over two days, the workshop will address questions of *(1)* totality and how totality structures ethical and political relations to the other; *(2)* what is meant by ‘difference’ in ethical and political thought; *(3)* how experience relates to embodiment, difference in general, and racial difference in particular; *(4)* how diasporas alter a sense of collective identity; *(5)* how we make sense of loss and how understanding and experience of loss change conventional notions of remembering, sense-making, and personal or collective identity; *(6)* how alterities affect our conception of the future.

Participants will not be asked to submit or present formal papers but rather to submit a four page memorandum or short paper prior to the workshop, responding to the themes of their session and to discuss their contribution in a roundtable format. Sessions will be developed and organised according to participant contributions.

**Organiser:**
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**Keynote Speaker:**
Professor John E. Drabinski
John E. Drabinski is Professor of Black Studies at Amherst College, Amherst, MA and is the author of three books, including *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh, 2011) and has published numerous articles on European philosophy and Africana cultural theory
Invited Participants

Prof. Celia Britton, Department of French, University of Central London
Assoc. Prof. Carrol Clarkson, Department of English, Language and Literature, UCT
Dr. Michael Fagenblat, Department of Jewish Civilization, Monash University
Prof. Grant Farred, Africana Studies Research Centre, University of Cornell
Assoc. Prof. Harry Garuba, Centre for African Studies, UCT
Prof. Jonathan Judaken, Spence L. Wilson Chair of Humanities, Rhodes College, Memphis
Prof. Abraham Olivier, Department of Philosophy, University of Fort Hare
Assoc. Prof. Marisa Parham, Department of English, Amherst College
Assoc. Professor Bruce Rosenstock, Department of Religion, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Assoc. Prof. Meg Samuelson, Department of English, Language and Literature, UCT
Dr. Rico Settler, Sociology of Religion, University of KwaZulu Natal
Dr Rafael Winkler, Department of Philosophy, University of Johannesburg