

## Invitation | “Wide-eyed, innocent, and pure: Postcolonial trafficking in images of children”

**BIO:** Heather Snell is an Associate Professor of English at The University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and a Research Associate at the University of the Free State. Her research straddles two fields, postcolonial cultural studies and young people’s texts and cultures. She has published articles in *Postcolonial Text*, *The Journal of African Cultural Studies*, and *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, among others; and she is the co-editor of the recently published *Children and Cultural Memory in Texts of Childhood* (Routledge, 2014). Her current research explores uses of the figure of the child in global visual culture and efforts to re-claim this figure on the part of postcolonial cultural producers from Africa, South Asia, and South America.

**Date:** 8 May 2014, Thursday

**Time:** 13:00-14:00

**Place:** Johannes Brill Building, Room 19  
(Post Graduate School)

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**ABSTRACT:** Why does the child always seem to be at the centre of narratives set in informal or otherwise impoverished urban settlements? From the nineteenth century to the present, the child has been practically ubiquitous in depictions of the so-called “slum,” a term that manages to collect highly diverse and often disparate socio-economic arrangements and community conglomerations under one pejorative umbrella. From Charles Dickens’ highly sentimentalized child of London’s poorest areas to today’s international blockbusters, there seems to be a fascination with the child and the peculiarly urban forms of poverty in which it is shown to be steeped. We might ask, then, how this connection between poverty and the figure of the child impacts both how we view poverty and how we view the poor child. Is the poor child merely an object of pity, made all the more so by dint of what it is made to represent, or has it, following critic Mavis Reimer, become the “normative subject of global capitalism”? This talk discusses the implications of the postcolonial trafficking of images of children in globalized visual culture, re-marking the ways in which the forms of exoticism witnessed by our current era often rely precisely on the figure of “the child”: its proffered innocence, inviolate even when the child in question is a soldier or gangster; its perpetual orphanhood and thus availability to privileged consumers of poverty and suffering; and finally, its symbol as failure of modernity, especially in its postcolonial manifestations.

**Department of English Speaker Series: Prof. Heather Snell**