

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE RESPONSE, REPAIR, TRANSFORMATION



*Ai Weiwei - Remains, 2015 (Courtesy Neugerriemschneider and the artist)*

## ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

DECEMBER 12-14, 2022

JADUNATH BHAVAN  
MUSEUM AND  
RESOURCE CENTRE

### Project Co-convenors

Dr. Bidisha Banerjee, *International Research Centre for Cultural Studies, The Education University of Hong Kong*

Dr. Thomas Lacroix, *Sciences Po-CERI/Maison Française d'Oxford*

Dr. Judith Misrahi-Barak, *EMMA, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3*

# Abstracts and bios

## Keynotes' section

**Alexandra Délano Alonso (The New School) and Benjamin Nienass (Montclair State University)**

### **Public grief and political transformation**

Expressions of public grief have been ever more present in the context of growing numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean, at the US-Mexico border, and other regions. However, the political and transformative potential of collective acts of mourning has been increasingly put into question. Instead of posing a tangible challenge to border policy, grief has often been co-opted or actively employed by state actors precisely to work against transformation of existing policies and systems of migration control, not least by placating and comforting those in whose name borders are erected, protected and militarized. Expressions of public grief have also become normalized to an extent, without shifting what some call a "globalization of indifference". In this talk we reflect on the relationship between public grief and political transformation based on our research on public memory and the politics of mourning in the US and Mexico. We suggest that conclusions about the potential effects of public grief rest in part on competing visions of political transformation. Drawing on distinctions between instrumental and prefigurative politics, we examine examples of different memorials, countermemorials and collective grief projects in Mexico and the US. Through the work of memory activists in migrant shelters, public embroidery projects, occupation of plazas, community centers, and artistic interventions, we show that memory activists who create communities of mourning do not exclusively judge their work by effecting changes in laws or by holding states accountable, but by acting as if the alternative is already here, embodied by the activists' practices themselves, their everyday actions and the relationships built within these spaces.

**Alexandra Délano Alonso** is Associate Professor of Global Studies at The New School, New York. She is the current holder of the *Eugene M. Lang Professorship for Excellence in Teaching and Mentoring*. She received her doctorate in International Relations from the University of Oxford. Her work is driven by a concern with the inequalities underlying forced migration, the structures that lead to the marginalization of undocumented migrants in the public sphere and the practices of resistance, memory and solidarity focused on migrants' access to rights from a transnational perspective. Délano Alonso's publications include the book *From Here and There: Diaspora Policies, Integration and Social Rights Beyond Borders* (Oxford University Press, 2018) and the book *Mexico and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies of Emigration since 1848* (Cambridge University Press, 2011; El Colegio de México, 2014), which was co-winner of the William LeoGrande Prize for the best book on U.S.-Latin America Relations. She is also co-editor of *Microfoundations of Diaspora Politics* (with Harris Mylonas, Routledge 2021) and the special issue on *Borders and the Politics of Mourning* (with Benjamin Nienass, Social Research, Summer 2016). Her recent projects include *Brotos*, a poetry collection, and

*Fragments*, a short film, which probe political and personal questions in the context of the pandemic. She is also co-editor of the book *Luchas por la memoria contra las violencias en México* (*The Struggles for Memory Against Violences in Mexico*, forthcoming, El Colegio de México) and of the book *New Narratives of the Peopling of America* (forthcoming, Johns Hopkins University Press). She is co-founder and former co-director of the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility with Miriam Ticktin, as well as a member of The New School's Sanctuary Working Group.

**Benjamin Nienass** is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University. His research on the politics of memory has appeared in *The Review of Politics*, *Politics and Society*, the *German Studies Review*, the *Latin American Research Review*, *Current History*, *Globalizations*, *Social Research*, and many other journals. He is also the co-editor of the books *Silence, Screen, and Spectacle: Rethinking Social Memory in the Age of Information* (Berghahn) and *Luchas por la memoria contra las violencias en México* (El Colegio de México, forthcoming), and of several special journal issues, most recently “Myths of Innocence in German Public Memory” in *German Politics and Society* (2021).

### **Udaya Kumar (Jawaharlal Nehru University)**

#### **Death, History and the Destitute Present: Reflections on Recent Fiction from Kerala**

I shall focus on some new idioms of historical imagination and literary narration that have become notable in recent years in writing from Kerala in South India, especially from Dalit and coastal communities. These social groups have remained at the margins both of social and economic development and of the dominant narratives of Kerala's history and its modernity. Distinct from the invocation in nationalist invocations of original or long-standing belonging that connect people with territory and language, we find in these writings a preoccupation with suppressed histories of forced migration, violence and death. The presence of ghosts and spirits, and the experience of haunting, appear as vital to the historical memory of communities. Novels centred on the life of coastal Latin Catholic communities in the islands of Kochi—by Ponjikkara Raphy, P. F. Mathews and Johny Miranda—frequently invoke the myth of Kappiri Muthappan, a representation of the spirits of enslaved Africans brought to Kochi by force by Portuguese colonists. It is believed that some of these enslaved people were offered as human sacrifice and placed as guards and buried along with treasures by the Portuguese when they fled Kochi in mid-seventeenth century on being defeated by the Dutch. Ambivalent feelings of fear, reverence and revulsion produced by the figure of Kappiri Muthappan mix in these writings with complex emotions towards the native community's own destitute past and present. The tropes of migration and religious conversion also appear as prominent in many recent Dalit novels, linked with the aspiration to escape caste oppression and create new settlements. The spirits of the dead—testifying to histories of violence and defiance in the community's past—appear as sites of painful recollections and as resources of strength (C. Ayyappan, Raju K. Vasu, Vinoy Thomas). Through these varied writings, a new genre of fictional narration

seems to be emerging, which departs from realist templates of historical continuity to explore the difficult and indelible links of subaltern presents with death and displacement.

**Udaya Kumar** teaches at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His publications include *Writing the First Person: Literature, History and Autobiography in Modern Kerala* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016), *The Joycean Labyrinth: Repetition, Time and Tradition in Ulysses* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), and papers on modern literature and culture, especially in Kerala. His recent research has focused on death and contemporary culture, forms of life writing, cultural histories of the body, and idioms of vernacular social thought.

### **Miriam Ticktin (CUNY Graduate Center)**

#### **Borders and Commons: The Struggle over Political Imagination**

This talk traces three different political imaginaries about borders, suggesting that the dominant imaginary – the one of border walls, which is driven by a fear of invasion and produces violence and the death of immigrants (or people-on-the move) – is only one way to live in the world. The second imaginary I trace involves the counterpolitics developed by artists and activists, which works to reimagine this regime of invasion. Third, I turn to examples of commoning by people-on-the-move, which I see as a form of alter-politics, or a parallel alternative to the current political order of borders. The goal is to amplify the way artists, activists and people-on-the-move are imagining and remaking the world in the face of regimes of incarceration and death.

**Miriam Ticktin** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the CUNY Graduate Center. She has held positions at the New School for Social Research, University of Michigan, and at Columbia University, and she has been a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City. She publishes widely on topics such as migration, borders, humanitarianism, and racial and gendered inequalities, and most recently, she has written about the idea of a decolonial feminist commons. She is the author of *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (University of California Press, 2012), and co-editor of *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care* (Duke University Press, 2010). Ticktin is currently at work on two related book projects 1) She is currently finishing a book on, and against, innocence, and 2) a book on "containment and the commons," which traces border walls and technologies of quarantine as one way to live in the world, and counterposes it with practices of commoning as an alternative politics.

## Deepak Unnikrishnan (NYU Abu Dhabi)

### There used to be old people

This talk will be about the lack of senior citizens among visa-dependent communities in Gulf cities like Abu Dhabi and how their absence arguably affects storytelling and memory making within their own families, as well as the Gulf states that employed them. I will also read some of my new work related to a dramatic adaptation of *Temporary People*.

About *Temporary People*: <https://www.amazon.com/Temporary-People-Deepak-Unnikrishnan/dp/1632061422>

**Deepak Unnikrishnan** is a writer from Abu Dhabi. His book *Temporary People*, a work of fiction about Gulf narratives steeped in Malayalee and South Asian lingo, won the inaugural Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing, the Hindu Prize and the Moore Prize. It was also shortlisted for the Believer Book Award, the Shakti Bhatt First Book Prize, the Crossword Book Award and appeared on the long list for the Center for Fiction's First Novel Prize, the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature and the International Dublin Literary Award. The book received critical acclaim by The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New Yorker, The Economist, The Los Angeles Review of Books, Times Literary Supplement, The Wire, Outlook India, Scroll.in, Open Magazine, Mathrubhumi, Di Repubblica, among others, and was named by Kirkus Reviews, San Francisco Chronicle, and The Hindu as one of the best books of 2017.

At the 57th Venice Biennale, Deepak's fiction was featured in the written publication of the National Pavilion of the UAE: *Rock, Paper, Scissors: Positions in Play*. His work can also be found in *Gross Ideas: Tales of Tomorrow's Architecture*, a book project commissioned by the 2019 Oslo Architecture Triennale. His voice and work can also be heard on musician Sarathy Korwar's album 'More Arriving'.

His essays and fiction have appeared in Foreign Affairs, The Guardian, The Common, Guernica, Drunken Boat, The State Vol IV: Dubai and Himal Southasian, *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature* (Penguin Classics, 2019) and *Building Sharjah* (De Gruyter, 2021), among others and he frequently collaborates with artists and scholars across disciplines. He has been a writer in residence at Sangam House, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and Brown University, and was a Margaret Bridgman Fellow in Fiction at Bread Loaf. He currently teaches at NYU Abu Dhabi.

## Speakers' section

**Al-Khoder Al-Khalifa (Jawaharlal Nehru University)**

### **Staging Activism, Writing the Precarious: Death, Migration/Refugeehood and the Dilemma of Literary Activist in Hassan Blasim's *Digital Hats Game***

This paper will foreground the importance of the Finland-based Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim by critically examining his first play, *Digital Hats Game* (2016) that responds to death, borders crossing and clandestine migration. The hope is to read the play to navigate the border between and argue with or against the spheres of literature and activism. Blasim, who is one of the most acclaimed contemporary Arabic short story writers, structures the themes of his play that are undeniably influenced by the recurrent themes of such short stories as "Truck to Berlin", "Ali's Bag", "Reality and the Record" and others. These themes, which oscillate between the claustrophobic and the Borgesian-like puzzle of "nightmare realism", critique the complex policies of border building in our modern days by narrating the tragedies of precarious migrants and their journeys of death. In Blasim's play, activists, who appear as hackers, strive to bring about an immediate and radical change regarding the miseries of these migrants till there are "no limits, no borders, no family problems." To this end, they attempt to challenge, transcend and dismantle the systems that control and harden border crossing among nations and humans by hacking the system itself. The paper will conduct a close reading of the play to locate these themes and to understand the extent of the writer's success of playing the role of an activist. Also, through Saadallah Wannous' idea of "theatre of politicization" this paper will show how Blasim's play can be seen as both a form of activism and an approach to involve the audience in that activism. As such, the paper will attempt to find (an) answer(s) to this question: Is performing and staging activism is a form of literary activism?

**Al-Khoder Al-Khalifa** is a Syrian researcher currently pursuing his Ph.D. at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. He completed MA from the University of Delhi in 2016. He also completed a Master's degree in Literary Studies from Aleppo University in 2012. Khalifa's research focuses majorly on contemporary Arab Mashriq writing on conflicts, death, poetics and aesthetics of modernity, and avant-gardism. He recently contributed a chapter entitled, "This City, 'Stinking Corpse': Adonis's Poetics of Modernity and Death" published in *Humanities, Provocateur: Towards a Contemporary Political Aesthetics* (2021). His current doctoral research entitled *Dystopian Macabre: Political Aesthetics, Death, and Bare Life in Contemporary Mashriq Literature*. The aim is to study the emergence of new imaginaries in response to contexts that suffer abnormal death, to grasp the representations of death, and, more importantly, to locate the political and aesthetical impact of death on the nature of such representations.

**Markus Arnold (University of Cape Town)**

**Uncertain spaces, floating temporalities: Deleuzian disjunction and ecopoetics  
in *Borders* by Jean- Michel André and Wilfried N'Sondé**

The worldwide intensification of migrant and refugee predicaments over the last decade has encouraged writers and artists to produce a remarkable variety of critical and sensitive responses to the increasing violence of the borders and restriction of people's circulation. Between testimony, empathy, and care, but also revolt and opposition, these artworks call for a transformation of the social and political imagination by unveiling and promoting narratives of shared humanity and new forms of cohabitation beyond national and racial frameworks, but also of the human's place within nature – thus resonating with recent ecopoetic endeavours.

To express the complexity of such issues, artists often use collage, juxtaposition, and hybridisation to relate forms and media and thus open our interpretation via double (or multiple) coding but also contrast and dissonance. This is the case of the book *Borders* (2021), a variation about frontiers and migrants, which places side by side the images of photographer Jean-Michel André and the texts by novelist Wilfried N'Sondé. Yet, contrary to a conventional graphic or photo novel, this text-image articulation does not provide any clear relations between the two media and escapes a linear, causal, and referential reading. Besides, the book's visuals locate cultural and artificial signifiers in a vast natural and organic environment.

This paper suggests a Deleuzian reading of *Borders* which is also informed by ecopoetic theory. I argue that the book's specific artistic response to frontier violence and empathy about migrant suffering lies notably in loosely associating and disconnecting formal, visual, and narrative elements. Far from any explicit, sensationalist or even documentary and activist rendering, the repairing and transformational gesture is here expressed in an aesthetics, which operates through the logics of the "Time-Image" (Deleuze 1985): the dissociation of time and movement, non-referential representation, mise-en-abyme, narrative disjunction and interchangeability. At the same time, while migrants are thus located in uncertain spaces and floating temporalities, they are also embedded in a larger environmental scene (ecosystems, animals, elements, the cosmos...) giving their condition a singularly universal aspect.

**Markus Arnold** is Associate Professor of French and Francophone studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where he is integrated in the "2030 Future Leaders Programme". His interests comprise comparative and Francophone literatures of the Global South (notably Indian Ocean), postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and text-image relations. His publications include the monograph *La littérature mauricienne contemporaine* (2017), the co-edited books *L'image et son dehors* (2017) and *Borders and Ecotones in the Indian Ocean* (2020), and a co-edited special issue on *African literary and artistic manifestos* (FSSA 51.2, 2021). He was visiting professor at the Sorbonne-Nouvelle (Paris) in 2021, is a project team leader of "Thanatic Ethics: The circulation of bodies in migratory space" and co-investigator of "Spaces of Precarity: Migration, Spatiality and the Refugee Graphic Narrative". He is editor of the journal

*French Studies in Southern Africa*, currently works on 'Afropolitanism' and 'Afrotopia', and will hold a research fellowship at the Maison Francaise of Oxford (MFO) in Autumn 2022.

## **Bidisha Banerjee (Education University of Hong Kong)**

### **Spectrality and Thanatic Ethics of Care**

Although the gendered response to moral problems articulated by Carol Gilligan in her 1982 book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* - which heralded the area of study that came to be known as care ethics - has become passé, the binary approach to moral problems where one response is based on emotion and connection, whereas the other on autonomy from others and justice and fairness, has remained. While some scholars have called for the integration of these approaches, others have come to question dominant liberal forms of political care such as humanitarianism and welfare. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brown and Woodly have called for a new politics of care for the 21st century. This kind of refashioning dismantles the care-justice binary and even troubles the meaning of justice by thinking care and justice together. My purpose in this paper is to see what this binary at the heart of care ethics and the new ways of looking at care ethics have to offer to migration studies. Through a reading of Alejandro González Iñárritu's 2011 film *Biutiful*, I posit that the spectral portrayal of the migrants in the film critique the liberal politics of care that the protagonist Uxbal represents. It also serves to offer an alternative politics of care based on dismantling care justice binaries and seeing the world in new ways through genuine relationality, trust and responsiveness to need, albeit somewhat problematically falling back on the discredited link between femininity and care in the film's denouement.

**Dr. Bidisha Banerjee** is Associate Head and Associate Professor of English in the Literature and Cultural Studies Department at the Education University of Hong Kong. Her research and teaching interests include postcolonial studies, globality and transnationalism, diaspora and refugee studies, postcolonial feminist fictions and theory, cultural studies, and graphic narratives. She has published in journals like *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, and *Postcolonial Text*. Dr. Banerjee is the Principal Investigator of two projects: the transdisciplinary, collaborative project, *Thanatic Ethics: The Circulation of Bodies in Migratory Spaces* as well as a RGC funded project called *Spaces of Precarity: Migration, Spatiality and the Refugee Graphic Narrative*. Her monograph, *Traces of the Real: The Absent Presence of Photography in South Asian Literature*, is forthcoming with Liverpool University Press in 2023.



**Paolo Boccagni (University of Trento)**

**Where should it be, and what should it look like?  
Mapping migrant imaginaries, moralities and aesthetics about their “final homes”**

This paper reads across the scholarship in migration and refugee studies, as well as the relevant production in humanities and arts, to explore the repertoires of expectations, moralities and aesthetics about the location and characteristics of migrant final homes – the places where they are to be buried and, for them as much for anybody else, the only permanent home. Drawing on the emerging literature on what has long been seen as either an irrelevant or a taboo topic, I explore, on one hand, the prevalent aspirations regarding the location (i.e. country and local context) and characteristics of migrants’ final home, and their variation across time, cultural background and life course position; on the other hand, the ways in which migrant tombs – as the literature suggests – articulate continuity (literally, embeddedness) with the community of origin, distinction (wherever located), assimilation (i.e. hardly distinguishable from the mainstream), or even absence and loss, whenever they are replaced by some form of collective memorialization, e.g. for those who died on border crossing and were never found out or recognized. Drawing on the social study of home, and looking at tombs themselves as the ultimate and irreversible location of home, my contribution explores if, and how, burial places embody memories that are consonant or dissonant with migrant own identities, aspirations, and achievements. This means combining research on migrant imaginaries and concerns about their own burial, and case studies of burial places, across a very rich, disperse and fragmented field of scholarship.

**Paolo Boccagni** is Professor in Sociology (University of Trento) and principal investigator of ERC-StG HOMInG. He has published in the sociology of migration, home, diversity and social welfare. He is currently doing comparative research on the lived experience of home with a particular focus on asylum seekers in reception facilities. Recent books include *Migration and the search for home* (2017) and *Thinking home on the move* (coauthored, 2020).

**Cédric Courtois (University of Lille)**

**Forms of Care and Solidarity in Olumide Popoola and Annie Holmes’s *Breach* (2016)**

In Olumide Popoola and Annie Holmes’s collection of nine short stories, Calais and its “jungle” are at the heart of the migrant stories that are told, inspired — as the dedication at the beginning of the collection indicates — by true accounts. These stories enable to move the figure of the migrant from the margins to the centre and they are part of a sociocritical approach to literature. They insist on what “literature can do”, on the “sociality” of the text, on the power that literature can have “in its work on social discourse [...] as a supplement to social discourse [...]”. Popoola and Holmes’s

thematic, aesthetic – and eminently political – choices, seem to be motivated by a willingness to spread another discourse regarding the figure of the migrant (a literary one different from the one conveyed in the media at the time) so as to make the reader “meet” these characters that are representative of a social reality. At the same time, they denounce the fact that migrants are kept in a liminal position (“stuck-in-transitiveness”). The fact that migrants are stranded in limbo can be seen as a kind of social death. In the collection, death is also physical and some of the characters mourn they lost friends/relatives.

In the context of “Response, Repair, Transformation”, I will, among other things, raise the issue of the generic choice of the short story for the themes addressed in the collection. Could the short story be the most suitable genre for these moving stories? According to Frank O’Connor, the short story is the most suitable literary genre when it comes to “submerged population groups”. I will also raise another point: it seems that Popoola and Holmes’s collection is linked to an ethic of literature. It educates the readers — who might be considered as “implicated subjects” whose hospitality is questioned— and allows them to develop a form of attention / care, a form of solidarity towards ordinary, vulnerable, and precarious human lives. Forms of care are solidarity are also present within the diegeses themselves. However, the two concepts can be perceived as problematic in some instances.

**Cédric Courtois** is Senior Lecturer at the University of Lille, France. He specialises in Nigerian literature, which was the focus of his PhD dissertation on the contemporary Nigerian rewritings of the Bildungsroman. He has published various articles and book chapters on mobility studies, refugee literature, LGBTQIA+ studies, etc. Among his recent publications are « ‘She was a remarkable woman’ : l’héritage afro-féministe d’Efuru de Flora Nwapa dans *Purple Hibiscus* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie et *Sky-High Flames* d’Unoma Azuah » (2021) for *Études littéraires africaines*, « ‘Into the Mutation’: Osahon Ize-Iyamu’s ‘More Sea than Tar’ as Climate Fiction » (2021) for *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, or « Bernardine Evaristo’s ‘Black’ British Amazons : Aesthetics and Politics in *Girl, Woman, Other* » (2021) for *Études britanniques contemporaines*.

**Nandini Dhar (OP Jindal Global University)**

### **Beyond Sentimentality: Jamlo Makdam, Covid-19 Lockdown and the Crisis of Representation of Migrant Workers’ Deaths in Indian Media**

The Covid-19 induced global pandemic, needless to say, has given birth to crises, both material and representational. As we have witnessed, in the last three years, representations of Covid-19, in both popular media and literary-artistic narratives, have directed our attention to the fact that the crises brought about by the pandemic cannot be reduced to a biological-medical crises alone. Instead, the pandemic-induced crises, in their most complex representations, must also take into account the ways class, caste, the state and the pharma capital intersect to produce a materiality, which, ultimately, are related to questions of life and death. More specifically, the pandemic

has pushed both theorists and artists alike in front of an ethical dilemma – what are the stakes of grieving and representing the demise of an individual when dying itself becomes a collective affair.

Focusing specifically on the representation of the death of a twelve year old Adivasi girl from Chattisgarh, India – Jamlo Makdam –who also happened to be a migrant worker in the chilli plantations in Telengana, the paper demonstrates, how both sentimentality and “objective” numerical analyses – often used in the discussions of the migrant worker crisis in India during and after the nationwide lockdown in March, 2020 – are inadequate to open up discussions of the ways in which the spectre of death that always looms large during a pandemic, yet becomes connected to ethico-political questions. For example, one is prompted to ask, how does one mourn and memorialize the death of those whose lives were considered to be expendable by the state and conjoined institutions of labor and finance?

As such, Jamlo Makdam’s death, and the ensuing outbreak of social media outrage, direct us to the fact that complex representations of women workers in informal sectors in India are rare. Even rarer are representations of girl children who work in informal sector spaces -- in spite of the legal prohibitions on child labour -- unless they appear as objects of developmental aid. Yet, as this paper will show, these are precisely the questions that the Anglophone media representations of Jamlo Makdam critically avoids, couched as they are in a rhetoric of sentimentality and on the event of her death itself. Samina Mishra’s children’s book *Jamlo Walks*, on the other hand, dramatizes Jamlo’s attempt to walk 150 km from Telengana to Chattisgarh – her home state – along with other men and women, juxtaposing her life following the lockdown, with those of the middle-class children, thus creating a critical aesthetics of middle-class complicity and culpability, without which, she seems to conclude, lives such as Jamlo’s, cannot be memorialized. In doing so, she also de-stabilizes the ethos of sentimentality that have guided the media representations following Jamlo’s death, seems to conclude that there are indeed very few hopes of repair, and the route to transformation almost always lies in imagination, that can grant upon lives such as Jamlo’s a critical and creative subjectivity, in countering the engulfing invisibility that surrounds them both in life and death.

**Nandini Dhar** is an Associate Professor of Literature at OP Jindal Global University, India. Her academic essays have been published or forthcoming in *Ariel: A Review of International*, *The Comparatist*, *Journal of Transdisciplinary Peace Practice*, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, and in book collections such as *The Routledge Companion to World Literature and World History* (Routledge 2018), *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia* (Routledge 2021) and *Kala Pani Crossings : Revisiting 19th Century Migrations from India’s Perspective* (Routledge 2022), *Rethinking Place Through Literary Form* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2022). Currently, she is working on two monographs -- one on operations of neoliberal ideologies in contemporary South Asian food memoirs, and another on contemporary literatures of Indian indenture.

**Gargi Dutta (University of North Bengal)**

**Reading Death, Transformation and Ethics in Select Kala Pani Narratives**

In the corpus of indentured literature, death—pre-migration, en route and/or post-migration—acquires significance. In most cases, the finality associated with death initiates momentous transformations in the lives of other living characters. In Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Hukum Singh's death sets-in-motion the successive chain of events in Deeti's life leading to her subsequent migration. Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) traces similar transformations in Mona's life after the death of her beloved brother Kello. Shani Mootoo's *Moving Forward Sideways Like a Crab* (2014) narrativizes similar changes in Jonathan's life after the death of his parent of Indo-Trinidadian descent. Besides revealing transformative dimensions in the lives of individual characters, these revelatory narratives underscore the death of an old way of life and the birth of new living-conventions. These lives are lived on the verge on anxiety, pain, trauma and in the shadows of death.

These narratives also raise important ethical questions that directly derive from representations of death and intersect with important issues such as the politics of colonial exploitation, excavation of historically silenced voices, and dilemmas of identity formation and confirmation of individual histories. This article will read the transformations engendered by death in the novels mentioned earlier and examine the various intersections of ethics with colonialism, historiography and identity formation, in context of the history of migration and settlement of Indian indentured communities. It will also try to interpret stories of entangled lives of floating individuals and communities trying to grow roots in new spaces, in the light of the Freudian 'drives' of *Eros and Thanatos*.

**Gargi Dutta** has taught in two colleges in Bangalore—Mount Carmel College (Autonomous) and St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) as Assistant Professor in English. She is currently pursuing her PhD from North Bengal University. Her doctoral work is on the representation of bioregions and bioregional cultures in Indian English novels and Indian novels in English translation. She has published research articles and review articles in national and international journals. Her latest publication is the review of Himadri Lahiri's *Asia Travels: Pan-Asian Cultural Discourses and Diasporic Asian Literature/s in English* published in the journal *Indialogs: Spanish Journal of India Studies*, published in March 2022. She also writes poetry, some of her poems were recently published in *Café Dissensus*.

**Justine Feyereisen (Ghent University)**

**Migrant Deaths, Rights, Repair in Transatlantic Literature**

How and why do writers mark a purposeful commitment towards the deaths in migration and the duty to hospitality? Are novels more than testimonies of lives lost at sea? Is poetry only an aesthetic grave to find solace? Can literary manifestos act

beyond statements? Moved by repeated tragedies among immigrants attempting to enter Europe, writers from the transatlantic space turn today a critical gaze towards the Mediterranean, where the refugee crisis exhibits in broad daylight the “postcolonial melancholia” (Gilroy) and “necropolitics” (Mbembe). As pleas, the selected texts actively seek “real utopias” (Wright), alternatives to a politics of hospitality that would claim international freedom of movement in the name of renewed human rights. I argue that the notion of utopia can facilitate the formulation and negotiation of new perspectives on “exile rights” (Nouss). At an external level, I will interpret textual traces of the authors’ intentions (e.g. Etonnants voyageurs festival), which produce on the reader’s both cognitive and emotional effects. Account will be taken of the medium used as literary genders are often transgressed or mixed for the cause’s sake. At an internal level, I will shed light on their rhetorical dimension, also through the gender prism. Then the ethical aim of the texts is interpreted as critical, empathic, and mobilizing, as regards human rights to focus specifically on the interplay of literary representations and juridicalpolitical rights work. This paper will ultimately contribute, from the transatlantic perspective, to define a literature of “repair” towards migrants’ deaths, that is a literature which explores a twofold desire for symbolic reparation: as a deterritorialized set of connections “mises en relation” (Glissant), a transnational entity of writers come together to denounce the historical wounds that can be read in the present of the postcolony and a strategy of reconciliation through a shared “principle of responsibility” (Delmas-Marty).

**Justine Feyereisen** is currently a FWO Senior Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Ghent University, where she is conducting a project entitled “Reimagining Migration Narratives with Ecopoetical Postcolonial Perspectives in Transatlantic Francophone Literature”. She is associated with Wolfson College (Oxford) and Maison Française d’Oxford. In 2016-2019, she was Teaching Assistant of French and Francophone Studies at the Université libre de Bruxelles, after a FNRS PhD Fellowship at the Université libre de Bruxelles and the Université Grenoble Alpes, and a Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research also led her to the University of Oxford (Wolfson College) as a Wiener-Anspach Junior Research Fellow (2019-2021). She is President of the Association des lecteurs de J.-M.G. Le Clezio and Secretary of the Association des Amis de la Maison Française d’Oxford. She is the author of *Sens: J.M.G. Le Clezio. Essai de sensopoétique* (Classiques Garnier, forthcoming), editor of *Movere. Litterature, corporeite et mouvement. Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* (98.3, 2020), and co-editor of *Corps. Cahiers J.- M.G. Le Clezio* (12, 2019).

**Félicien de Heusch (University of Liège)**

**Building dialogues between ethnography and graphic novel around African migrants’ death in Europe**

Building on a multi-disciplinary dialogue between research and art around the thanatic ethics of migration, this proposal raises the following questions: how to translate through graphic novel the multiple responses towards death in migration context? how

to build a common ground between the artist and researcher works and experiences of death? The proposal is therefore twofold. It will first explore the ethnographer and artist experiences of death. It will then focus on the modalities of balancing a shared sensitivity of an experience of a multi-sited ethnography around Senegalese migrants' death through the lens of graphic novel.

This is the story of migrants evolving in the shadow and on the margin of European cities. These different life trajectories are linked to each other by the disruption of tragedy, which invites and imposes itself like a “macabre ritual”. Their names are Abdou, Mamadou, Mariama, Honoré, Koulibaly, Franco; they are Senegalese or Cameroonian, and they move between the cities of Belgium, France, Spain and Italy. Facing precariousness and irregularity, death, as an unpredictable but omnipresent event, brings them together as a community. Death requires them to organise and mobilise to guarantee a dignified death for those who have not been able to live a dignified life. While they experience irregularity throughout their life, their cold, lifeless bodies are eventually able to fly home legally.

**Félicien de Heusch** is PhD candidate at the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies (CEDEM), University of Liège. He is member of the European Research Council (ERC)-funded project “Migration, Transnationalism and Social Protection in (post-) crisis Europe (MiTSoPro)”, under the supervision of Dr. Jean-Michel Lafleur. His PhD thesis focuses on Senegalese migrants' transnational engagement around death in Europe. He published in 2021 at *AmeriQuests* the paper “Empowerment through the arts: rap music and clothing design by street vendor activists in Barcelona”. URL: <https://ameriquests.org/index.php/ameriquests/article/view/4876>

### **Florence Laldinpuii (IIT Delhi)**

#### **‘Salvage his bones’: Insurgent Deaths and the Ontological Commitment to the Dead through the lens of Mizo *Rambuai* Narratives**

This paper focuses on nonfictional Mizo *rambuai* (troubled land) narratives to examine the materiality and cultural significance of the corporeal body after death. By focusing on ‘war deaths’ that here refers to the deaths of Mizo insurgents during the insurgency period (1966-86), and the social obligation or commitment on the part of the living (survivors) to recover and repatriate the bodies of the deceased even if in the form of bones, we will analyze the cultural ‘obsession’ to be buried in one’s homeland that was prominent among the ‘displaced’ insurgents. The ‘continued bonds’ between the living and the dead are enacted especially by the Mizo survivors who take it upon themselves to retrieve the bodies of their fellow dead comrades from the ground, putrefy the flesh, wash the bones, etc. so as to be brought home. Insurgent deaths invoke in people the hope of seeing the bodies returned home. The argument is that such ‘evidence’ (of death) or ‘remains’ (of the dead) plays a crucial role in opening a site of bereavement, grief, and repair for bereaved families, offering reconciliation with their deaths through the performance of a traditional, ‘secondary burial’ in the village. The post-death status of the ‘war heroes’ would be contextualized against the transformation of their deaths

into glorious deaths and their commemoration via war memorials such as Martyrs Cemetery in Aizawl. The aim is to redefine 'insurgent deaths' (alongside migrant deaths), provide resistance against their historical subversion, and argue for a 'secondary burial' for deaths conditioned by war and politics.

**Florence Laldinpuii** is a Ph.D. scholar and Teaching Assistant in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi. Her research focuses on the socio-cultural construct, literary representation, and politics of death and dying. She is a recipient of the Zubaan-Sasakawa Peace Foundation Grants for Young Researchers from the Northeast (2021-22). She has facilitated the first Asia-Pacific Youth Exchange India 2020. She has presented a paper on "Online Funerals and Virtual Bereavements: The Pandemic's Impact on Mizo Cultural Practices" at an international conference on Cultural Trajectories through Language, Literature and Media (2022). Her work has appeared in *Agony and Ecstasy of Covid-19: An Anthology of Pandemic Poems* (2021).

### **Praveen Mirdha (Government Girls' College, Ajmer)**

#### **'Whispers of Immortality' from *Kalapani* Crossing: Recovering Female Bodies from 'Zones of Indistinction'**

Stories emerging from geo-cultural displacement of millions of Indians as indentured workers from Northern Gangetic plains across the *Kalapani* between 1894-1920 became identified with a large body of diaspora literature concerning the traumatic recall of thanatic ethics. Crossing the forbidden sea was, paradoxically, the most precarious choice for them to escape death in their motherland that was witnessing severe drought conditions. Among these migrants a large segment of female population also left their homeland to disappear in distant shores and were submerged into the black waters: some succumbed to disease/death in the alien surroundings on/across the *Kalapani*; others were killed or pushed to commit suicide struggling against sexual and economic exploitation. *Kalapani* poetics bears evidence to the effect that migration and misplacement had undone so many female bodies that whisper back to their descendants across the globe to be recovered from 'zones of indistinction' (Prמוד Nayar). Human Rights scholars Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith observe that storytelling functions as a crucial element in establishing new identities of longing and belonging of those bodies who have been denied their basic human rights. The paper addresses the individual as well as collective invisibility and absence of those female bodies who were dismembered during/after *Kalapani*-crossing from their homeland imaginaries. To enable the reversal of the disruptive effects of migration on those 'bones' calls for the formulation of a culture of repair, restoration and memorialization of the indentureship stories of trauma, dislocation and exile. The paper would investigate the writings of Gaiutra Bahadur and Sonny Ladoo and focus on the construction of empathy-citizenship in India to claim new identity for indentured female subjectivities.

**Dr. Praveen Mirdha**, Associate Professor, Department of English, Government Girls' College, Ajmer, completed her Post-graduation and M. Phil. (ELT) from Banasthali

Vidyapith, Banasthali and Ph.D. from University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. She specializes in Women's Writings, Human Rights Stories, Travel Writing, Partition Literature, Cross-cultural Writings and Comparative Literatures, Diasporic Imaginaries in literature, Translation Studies and Bhasha Literatures. She has authored a book *Madness: Perspectives and Representations in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* and published numerous articles and book chapters. Her latest publication "Exilic trajectories of crossing the Kala pani: Locating female subjectivity in the writings of Ramabai Espinet and Gaiutra Bahadur" is part of an edited volume titled *Kala Pani Crossings: Revisiting 19th Century Migrations from India's Perspective* co-published by Routledge (London) and IAS (Shimla). She has presented papers in several International Conferences/Seminars organized by institutions acclaimed for academics and research including IAS, Shimla, Central Universities of Rajasthan and Pondicherry, Emma and University Paul-Valery, Montpellier, France.

### **Sanjukta Naskar (Janki Devi Memorial College)**

#### **Marichjhapi: The Massacre Within**

The year 1979 marked a terrifying history of human tragedy of migratory deaths in a small island in the southern tip of West Bengal. Known as Marichjhaapi, later renamed as Netaji Nagar, the island is haunted by one of the darkest moments in Bengal's already chequered history of partition and prolonged migration in phases.

The division of Bengal at the time of India's independence in 1947 created an influx of a huge Bengali Hindu population into West Bengal. This generated migration along communal lines caused by Bengalis (*Hindus of both upper and lower castes*) to flee Bangladesh and look for resettlement in West Bengal. The first flow of refugees consisting mostly of upper caste Hindus were easily resettled in West Bengal, the problem however, of the lower castes, mostly Namasudras did not find an easy solution and they were initially resettled at Dandakaranya.

From Dandakaranya began an internal migration to the promised land of Marichjhaapi, and what resulted was a horror of human tragedy, aggravated by the fact that the already voiceless Scheduled Castes were once again at the brunt of the whims of the policy-makers, thereby reinforcing the valueless condition of the displaced. During the mid-1978 to mid-1979 was unleashed a relentless horror of police tyranny ending in the death of thousands (*though the official figure being an abysmally low single digit one*). Those who had left Dandakaranya and flocked to the Marichjhaapi island with the hope of a better and more familiar life became consumed by the woe of circumstance and betrayal.

Migration of any kind carries within itself an untold tale of hostility and uncertainty, but the large-scale massacre at Marichjhapi opens up a new chapter on death due to migration and the pointless juggling of fates.



In my paper, I wish to engage with the tragedy of forced migration and coerced remigration, which not only resulted in unaccounted for deaths and the indignity in mass murder but is also a grim reminder that migration holds a different set of realities determined by one's class and caste.

**Sanjukta Naskar** is a faculty in the Department of English at Janki Devi Memorial College. Her area of interest lies in Folklore and Caste in Bengal. She has presented papers in various national and international conferences. She has also received the Charles Wallace Trust Scholarship in 2010 during the course of her PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University.

### **Suparna Sengupta (University of Cambridge)**

#### **Eros and Thanatos: Bodies in Incarceration in Andaman Penal Colony**

Convict transportation was constituted as a punitive measure in colonial India as a secondary punishment in lieu of death. The penal colony of Andamans received several criminals in the course of late nineteenth and twentieth century as potential colonists apart from those whose offences were deemed as 'political'. The commemoration of the Cellular Jail in post-Independence India as well as cinematic representations of the *Kala pani* confined Andamans to the popular memory of only the nationalist struggles of the twentieth century despite historiographical revisions. This paper emphasises upon the much-neglected dimension of the debated status of 'civiliter martuus' of the convicted criminals within the colonial administration. Envisaged within the imperial schemata as colonists, several incentives for settling in Andamans had to be provided by the colonial officials to counter the Thanatic will with that of the Eros. Such measures included commutation of sentences for early release, policies of marriage among convicts, schemes for 'Self-Support' tied to fertilizing land: all of which cannot be completely encompassed within the discourse of 'Reform' of the delinquents. The colonial administration was besieged with the problem of 'rates of mortality' during the period of conveyance as well as in the colony which was sought to be tackled by prohibitory orders against the 'old, sick and infirm.' Besides, the condition of 'natal alienation' of slaves had to be differentiated from the transported convicts by adjudicating upon the estates of deceased convicts with the ever-present danger of the sovereign prerogative of issuing death sentences upon those who transgressed the surveillance measures imposed by the colonial administration.

**Suparna Sengupta** is a Charles Wallace India Trust Visiting Fellow (2021-22), hosted by Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge. She worked as a postdoctoral Junior Fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, on the project 'Occupying Islands and Controlling Sea: Andamans and Bay of Bengal' from a historical perspective to understand the relation of maritime jurisdiction and the process of Empire-building. Her doctoral dissertation in University of Delhi was titled 'Convict Colonization of Andamans, c.1850–c.1920', wherein she had explored the aspect of colonial 'rule of law' in relation to the penal policy of convict transportation. Her interests include imperial sovereignty, the legal notion of subjecthood in Empire,

criminal law, and international law. Her most recent publication is 'The Terror of Kala pani: A Colonial Myth?' in (ed.) Judith Misrahi-Barak and Ashutosh Bharadwaj, *Kala pani Crossings, Revisiting 19th Century Migrations from India's Perspective*.

**Alexis Tadié (Sorbonne University)**

### **Writing as Repair: Hisham Matar and the Trauma of Disappearance**

Taking as a larger context works that have emerged from the Arab revolutions, this paper focuses on the writings of the Libyan writer, Hisham Matar, who writes in English. It analyses his two novels and his memoir: *In the Country of Men* (2006), *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011) and *The Return* (2016). All three books are concerned with the abduction and disappearance of the father: the father of Suleiman, the narrator of his first novel; the father of Nuri, the narrator of the second novel; the father of the author, in the memoir. Such compulsion to return to the theme of the disappearance of the father comes of course from Matar's own predicament, specifically the abduction in Egypt, imprisonment in Libya, and ultimate disappearance of his father, Jaballah Matar, a well-known anti-Qaddafi activist. This presentation is concerned with looking at the ways in which Matar's writings, both fictional and non-fictional, rest on an engagement with the dictatorship of Qaddafi, on an analysis of the Arab revolutions, and on the role of writing in such a process. Specifically, the paper addresses the ways in which writing can help the writer approach the trauma of disappearance and the severance from the home country. Matar writes of characters who were forced to emigrate because of these dictatorships and repressions, of all the people who, like him, had a relative imprisoned in Abu Salim, and who found that the civil records had been altered by the regime, unbeknownst to them, to account for 'deaths from natural causes', of the woman who cooked meals for five years for a son who was in fact dead. These 'precarious lives' are indeed at the heart of the dictatorships and at the heart of the Arab revolutions, and it is the function of literature, according to Matar, to listen to them and to restore them to the reader. Stories are a means to reconnect the world of the prison and the outside world, to repair some of the fractures that have affected the country, between past and present, between home and exile, between people and their past histories. All three books are attempts to address this tension, to provide, through an act of imagination, an exploration of a world reconfigured by the disappearance of the father figure.

**Alexis Tadié** is professor of Anglophone Literatures, Sorbonne University, Paris. He specializes in the eighteenth century and in colonial and postcolonial literatures (mainly about India). His latest monograph, *Le Tennis est un art*, was published in 2020 by Sorbonne Université Presses.

## **Raj Kumar Thakur (Assam University)**

### **Journey of the Coolie: Disease, Death and The Politics of 'Care'**

Dead do not speak, but the processes that lead to death, and the ways through which dead bodies get politicised surely provide historians with the required ammunition to explore the category of death. For the coolies travelling via steamers and crossing the Ganges and the Brahmaputra to work in the tea gardens of Assam, their journey is replete with instances of increasing disease and recurring deaths. It sent shivers across the diverse departments of the colonial state and questioned the ethics of the 'coolie trade'. The idea of a failed state began emerging from all fronts. Be it the social reformers, nationalists, missionaries and humanitarians, all of them participated in this debate and turned the dead bodies into a site of politics. To recover the lost ground, the colonial state made enquiries and reversed the blame on the body of the coolies, by calling them 'weak', 'unfit' and 'feeble'. The enquiries generated several published reports which introduce us to medical and racial stereotypes that were circulated about the body of the coolies. By making use of these archival evidence, this paper reveals how the body of the coolie became central in the debates on cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery and anaemia. While the nationalists and humanitarians took recourse to fiction (novels and plays) and newspapers which were utilised to question the benevolence of the colonial state, the colonial state refuted their claims by reproducing the idea that disease was embedded in the body of the coolie, and that it was committed to 'care'. The dead and diseased bodies were made to speak, it was a domain of politics where several players and observers competed for hegemony and legitimacy. This paper investigates the emergence of a quantitative episteme of the colonial state and captures the surveillance of the body of the coolie through quarantine, segregation and isolation amidst the rising fear of disease and death. The journey of the coolie is therefore an enquiry that sheds light on the rhetoric of 'care', on the limits of a paternal state, on fear of travel and the claims and counter claims of multiple observers and players involved in the 'coolie trade'.

**Dr Raj Kumar Thakur** works as a faculty in the Department of History, Assam University, Silchar. He has completed his PhD from the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU. His PhD explores the stories of conflict between the colonial state and the tea planters in Assam, and how the labour life was shaped amidst these conflicts. As a Fellow of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, he explored the relationship between the tea plantation labourers and the post-colonial state. He is primarily a labour historian who has been working on how migration shaped the transition from empire to nation, and the behaviour of both the colonial and the post-colonial state. He has also been publishing in academic journals and newspapers and shedding light on the relationship between the state and the subjects and citizens. One of his research monographs titled: 'Coolie to Mazdoor' was published by Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, captures the transition from empire to nation. He has also published an article on the border conflicts and the claims and counterclaims of nation in the 'Hills and Plains' of northeast India. He is presently working on two monographs that deal with the 'coolies' of Assam and their relationship with the colonial and post-colonial state.

**Songayam Zimik (University of Delhi)**

**The Naga Migrants' Response to Death: Nostalgia and its Role in Jim Kasom's  
*Homecoming and Short Stories***

The 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed an exponential increase in the number of migrants from Northeast India, with studies suggesting even further growth in migration over the coming years. The paper highlights the Naga migrants' response to death in their homeland, juxtaposing the subsequent homesickness for their physical homeland with that of nostalgia for the past. The paper particularly looks at the nostalgic sentiment evoked in Jim Kasom's text, *Homecoming and Other Stories*, where he documents how death of the elderly leads to the breakdown of the memory of home itself. These elderly and often amnesiac characters who struggle to keep in touch with the present world, mirror the plight of the migrants who inhabit dual worlds and lose their bond with their own land and nature, the apparent anchor of memory in these characters. The paper will look at how memories of home and the nostalgic sensation towards the past binds the migrant to the land that he departs from. Placed within the context of the Naga people's violent history, as well as the deeply interwoven nature of their Christian identity, nostalgia becomes a tool to repair and transform the Naga identity for these migrants. The paper will further look at how, at the center of these stories is the oral storyteller, whether as a visible presence or one bearing an inconspicuous influence on the form of the text. Finally, the paper delves into how death influences the perspective of the linearity of time as pitted against the Naga's traditional view of cyclical and seasonal time.

**Songayam Zimik** is an M.Phil. Scholar in the Department of English at the University of Delhi. His thesis is on "The role of Nostalgia in Tangkhul Naga Literature". He is a Junior Research Fellow under UGC. He has presented a paper on "Nostalgia and Visions of an Apocalyptic Future in Naga Literature" at IIT Gauhati's Research Meet 2021.