



POSTCOLONIAL MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH



POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIONS 2022

20-22 OCTOBER

BONN

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CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Time	Thursday 20.10.	Friday 21.10.	Saturday 22.10.
9			Workshop Dr. Jennifer Leetsch
		Panel 3 Caribbean Literatures	
10			
	Conference Opening		
11	Keynote Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee	Coffee / Tea Break	Coffee / Tea Break
		Panel 4 Kinship	Panel 7 Immigration & Borders
12			
13	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
14	Panel 1 Hauntology & Grotesque	Panel 5 Extractivism	Panel 8 Resistance & Survivance
		Coffee / Tea Break	
15			
	Coffee / Tea Break	Panel 6 Memories & Temporalities (via zoom)	General Meeting & Wrap up
16	Panel 2 Arab Anglophone Lit. & Muslim Rep.		
17		Coffee / Tea Break	
		Artist Talk Alecia McKenzie	
18			
19			
		Conference Dinner	

THURSDAY, 20.10.2022

Conference Opening | 10.30-11.00

Keynote Lecture | 11.00-12.30
"Thanatic Ethics and Refugee Lives:
Yusra Mardini's Autobiography *Butterfly*"
Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee (Mainz)

Panel 1 | 14.00-15.30
Hauntology and the Grotesque
Chair: Marie Berndt
Speakers: Rita Maricocchi (Münster),
Dorit Neumann (Münster),
David Walther (Greifswald)

Panel 2 | 16.00-17.00
Arab-Anglophone Literature
& Muslim Representation
Chair: Angela Benkhadda
Speakers: Dr. Diviani Chaudhuri (Delhi),
Dr. Eva Oppermann (independent scholar)

FRIDAY, 21.10.2022

Panel 3 | 9.30-11.00
Caribbean Literatures
Chair: Marie Berndt
Speakers: Johannes Pfundt (Chemnitz), Dr.
Asma Hussein (Göttingen),
Julia Wewior (Wuppertal)

Panel 4 | 11.30-12.30
Kinship
Chair: Lena Falk
Speakers: Kristina Weber (Rostock),
Alisa Preusser (Potsdam)

Panel 5 | 14.00-15.00
Extractivism
Chair: Peri Sipahi
Speakers: David Kern (Köln),
Anabell Fender (Potsdam)

Panel 6 | 15.30-17.00
Memories & Temporalities (via zoom)
Chair: Lena Falk
Speakers:
Manuel Sousa Oliviera (Porto),
Laila Riaz (UCLA Berkeley),
Rhitama Basak (Delhi)

Artist Talk | 17.30-19.00
"The Joy of Sadness:
Looking at Loss Up and Down"
Alecia McKenzie (Jamaica/France)

SATURDAY, 22.10.2022

Workshop | 9.00-11.00
"PhD Defence and Beyond: A
Workshop for Early Career Scholars"
Dr. Jennifer Leetsch

Panel 7 | 11.30-13.00
Immigration & Borders
Chair: Peri Sipahi
Speakers:
Mérile Mbang Mba Aki (Nantes),
Christina Slopek (Düsseldorf),
Loredana Filip (München)

Panel 8 | 14.30-16.00
Resistance & Survivance
Chair: Angela Benkhadda
Speakers:
Matthew Robertson (Métis Nation
Ontario), Dr. Alessandra Magrin Haas
(Strathclyde), Corina Wieser-Cox
(Bremen)

General Meeting | 16.00-17.00

KEYNOTE LECTURE

“Thanatic Ethics and Refugee Lives: Yusra Mardini’s Autobiography *Butterfly*”

Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee (Mainz)

Biographical Note

Professor and Chair of American studies from the 19th to the 21st century with an emphasis on contemporary American literature and culture as well as transnational American studies. She received her doctorate (1999) as well as her Habilitation (2003) from the University of Mainz. From 2000 to 2002, she was a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley (Emmy Noether Grant of the German Research Foundation). From 2004-January 2010, she had the position of a full professor of American studies at the University of Siegen. As part of the Johannes Gutenberg University’s program of excellence, she received a call for an American studies professorship and a five-year research fellowship from the Gutenberg Forschungskolleg (Gutenberg Research College) to pursue a number of interdisciplinary projects, including the founding of a Center for Comparative Indigenous Studies at Mainz. With her team of researchers she will substantially contribute to joint research projects in the humanities and social sciences (ZIS, Socum, Historical Cultural Sciences). At the end of the fellowship she will take over the chair for American studies.

Her main areas of research are the American Renaissance, Naturalism, ethnic American literature, Life Writing, Critical Race Theory, Whiteness Studies, South Asian Diasporic Film and Bollywood Cinema.

She is co-editor of the “Reihe Siegen” (published by Universitätsverlag Winter), and a reader for journals, such as *Amerikastudien/American Studies*. Among her recent publications are “The Elephant in the Living Room: Centenarians’ Autobiographies, Co-Authorship and Narratives of Extreme Longevity” (*Journal of Aging Studies*, 2020) and *Biologische Geisteswissenschaften. Von den Medical Humanities zur Narrativen Medizin: eine Einführung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2020).

PANEL 1: HAUNTOLOGY AND THE GROTESQUE

“Haunting back”: Literary Histories of Survival and Resistance in Evelyn Araluen’s *Dropbear*

Rita Maricocchi (WWU Münster)

Abstract

In speaking about her 2021-published poetry collection *Dropbear* and pointing to the long literary history of invasion, settlement, and dispossession in Australia, Evelyn Araluen has described her poetry as an effort to “haunt the same thing back” (First Book Club). “Haunting back” seems to reference and yet also subvert the postcolonial notion of “writing back” (Ashcroft et al. 1989), as it takes into account the physical and material impact of settler colonialism on the lives and bodies of Aboriginal peoples. Notable in the collection is Araluen’s copious use of intertextual references that engage with and challenge canonical Australian texts and myths. Thus to consider Araluen’s employment of intertextuality as an act of haunting allows for an understanding of her poetry as creating a landscape in which Aboriginal peoples, stories, and voices have always been and still are present, recognizing a continuity of resistance which is often erased from the national narrative. This paper seeks to bring selections of Araluen’s poetry into conversation with the notion of hauntology. Katy Shaw writes that, “[t]he notion of the spectral haunt challenges history by disrupting established chronologies of past, present and future. It gives voice to the hard-to-hear, it represents the formerly unrepresentable, and makes visible that which was previously ignored” (Shaw 2018, 8). Repositioning Shaw’s notion of hauntology within a theoretical framework including Aboriginal voices, such as Araluen’s own writing on Aboriginal Australian poetics, as well as critical texts by Chelsea Watego and Alexis Wright, I hope to show how a hauntological approach to Araluen’s poems allows for a reading particularly attuned to notions of survival and resistance. “Haunting back” then functions as an anticolonial tool which disrupts chronologies of the Australian nation and makes visible relations and continuities across, between, and around colonial discourses in the Australian context. Taking a particular look at two longer prose poems in the collection, “The Last Endeavor” and “THE LAST BUSH BALLAD”, I intend to expand upon the conference theme of life and death by engaging with the spectral and the haunted as both method and content in the poems, troubling notions of life and death, voice and

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silence, presence and absence, in the post- and anticolonial context.

Biographical Note

Rita Maricocchi is a research assistant and PhD student at the Chair of English, Postcolonial and Media Studies at the University of Münster. She completed her MA thesis on manifestations of German identity in Birgit Weyhe's comic *Madgermanes* as part of the degree program National and Transnational Studies in Münster. Her PhD project focuses on intersections of the Anglophone and Germanophone in the (postcolonial) German literary and cultural sphere.

Black Absence as Presence: Alternative Memory in Narratives of Postcolonial Hauntings and the Oceanic

Dorit Neumann (WWU Münster)

Abstract

In my presentation (based on my current MA thesis project), I want to argue for the epistemological advantages of reading contemporary African American fiction dealing with collective memory of the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath through a hauntological lens. The structural continuities of colonialism and transatlantic slavery still haunt imaginations and performances of blackness in the USA and postcolonial Africa, projecting notions of absence onto black bodies. This persistence of subjection thus prompts the question of how do we remember and mourn a disaster that is still ongoing and fundamental to racial gendered capitalism? Recent concepts of postcolonial, southern, or black hauntology provide a methodology for reading history against the grain by focusing on stories and voices of the past that have remained untold or marginalized in dominant history but which continue to be present. In contrast to gothic texts, hauntological narratives illustrate how the everyday life and language are haunted by present-absent ghosts of colonial slavery and racism. These hauntings have the potential to disrupt hegemonic perceptions of time, history, and humanity, and to re-actualize repressed memory, which can inform our present and initiate the imagination of alternative futures. Current publications in Black and oceanic studies provide meaningful additions to hauntological approaches, theorizing the role of water, particularly the Atlantic Ocean, in retaining a critical historical consciousness and ancestral connections. Yaa Gyasi's neo-slave narrative *Homegoing* (2016) and Brit Bennett's novel *The Vanishing Half* (2020) serve as two examples of hauntological literature about the

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transgenerational trauma of the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath in the US (South) and the Gold Coast/Ghana. A literary-linguistic analysis of the two texts shows that the mundane, scraps, and remnants, as well as the element of water act as forceful triggers of memory of transatlantic slavery - sometimes conjuring traumatic memory, other times enabling mourning, self-determined performances of blackness, and emancipatory transformation.

Biographical Note

Dorit Neumann holds a B.A. in Anglistik/Amerikanistik and sociology from Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster and is currently finishing her M.A. program “British, American, and Postcolonial Studies” at the English Department in Münster. Her M.A. thesis explores hauntological concepts and theories of the oceanic in relation to the remembrance of transatlantic slavery in contemporary African American women’s fiction. Additionally, she works as a student assistant at the Collaborative Research Center “Law and Literature” and the Chair of American Studies at WWU.

Spaces of Death: Horror and Reprieve in Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

David Walther (Universität Greifswald)

Abstract

“So all in all, with a People’s Pool, a People’s Zoo and a People’s School, things were going well in the old graveyard. The same, however, could not be said of the Duniya.”¹

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017) marks Arundhati Roy’s return to fiction, and once more she draws attention to the suffering of a marginalized people, this time challenging assumptions of Western cultural imperialism, issues of caste, gender, the environment, and the political struggle in Kashmir. These aspects of reality, which “Hijras called Duniya, the World” (Roy 24), beset the group of outcasts through which Roy, with discernable anger, employs what Menozzi has termed an “aesthetic of the inconsolable” (20). Roy thus combines a commitment towards “realism’s deeper ethical imperative” (ibid) with a simultaneous rejection of the notion that literature alone could ever bring closure, or in fact consolation, to

¹Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 400.

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those implicated by the forces at work in the Duniya.

The Duniya is thus configured as an antagonistic space inside of which resistance proves futile, leaving only flight as an option. But whereto is one to flee, if the hardship of reality is all-encompassing? Roy's answer is to create secondary spaces outside the Duniya, the most predominant of which is the graveyard in which Anjum builds her utopian community. This second spatiality establishes a sanctuary for those who occupy the fractures left behind by a society riven with strife and inequality. These spatial configurations are enmeshed in different forms of the grotesque, ranging from the horrific that draws attention to the inequities of the Duniya, to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque that operates as a form of dis-identification and resistance. This contribution seeks to show how the spaces Roy constructs can be mapped onto the grotesque spectrum, and how the juxtaposition thus achieved carries with it an implicit demand for activism in line with the demands of her non-fictional writing.

Works Cited

Menozzi, Filippo. "“Too Much Blood for Good Literature”: Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness and the Question of Realism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2019, pp. 20-33.

Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin Books, 2018.

Biographical Note

David Walther studied English and German at Greifswald University and the University of Manitoba. He is currently working on a dissertation on the grotesque as a discursive interface in the works of Salman Rushdie. Beside the grotesque, he is also doing research concerning the long eighteenth century, having contributed multiple entries to *DIGITENS*, a digital encyclopedia of British sociability; as well as in the field of eco-criticism, having recently held a talk about Solarpunk at the Anglistentag 2022 in Mainz.

**PANEL 2: ARAB-ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE
AND MUSLIM REPRESENTATION**

An Antigone for our Times:
Thanatopolitics and the Muslim Body in *Home Fire*

Dr. Diviani Chaudhuri (Shiv Nadar University, Delhi)

Abstract

Since the inauguration of the Global War on Terror, itself a pharmakotic war--a war which is both remedy and poison in that it escalates humanitarian crises that reproduce the conditions of its perpetuation on an unprecedented scale while allowing the reconstitution of its perpetrators as morally righteous inflictors of violence--the Muslim body has emerged as a site of contagion and suspicion either to be assimilated or expelled from a just, liberal democratic polity. Critics such as Giroux, Zizek and Butler have commented extensively on the suspected Muslim terrorist as homo sacer--a sovereign-less denuded "object of violence that exceeds the sphere both of law and of sacrifice," and who can be killed with impunity. Mohsin Hamid disrupted this early post-9/11 formulation in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* when he cast his protagonist as a suave 'janissary of empire' and a host capable of extending hospitality toward a foreign spy. Shamsie further addresses the thanatopolitics not only of the Islamic State, which was repeatedly described as a death cult in popular media, but also of western liberal democracy, where rampant Islamophobia casts all Muslim citizens as potential threats to national security. Shamsie's Creon, Karamat Lone, epitomises the older assimilated model immigrant 'Good Muslim', and is pitted against Parvaiz, a Polyneices who, as the alienated youth disenchanted with his prospects as the son of a jihadist embodying the trauma of previous wars from Chechnya to Afghanistan, becomes the ultimate 'Bad Muslim': one who allows himself to be recruited by the Islamic State. Parvaiz's capitulation to the charismatic recruiter Farooq is a study of propaganda victory in an age of post-truth politics. The novel then questions whether citizenship ought to be a given instead of conditional; an inalienable human right that mediates all other social and political relationships, or subject to revocation for such an act of transgression. Karamat, as Home Secretary, strips nineteen year old Parvaiz of his British citizenship posthumously, after he has been killed outside a British embassy in Istanbul while trying to escape the Islamic State. This precipitates the spectacular resistance enacted by Shamsie's Antigone, Parvaiz's twin Aneeka, which turns toward a supranational global

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audience for justice, mirroring and critiquing recent hypermediatised cases of distant mourning, such as that of Alan Kurdi in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, which through rapid digital dissemination call on an unspecified 'international community' to take humanitarian action.

George Steiner famously identified Sophocles' *Antigone* as one of the principal texts that occupied nineteenth century European intellectuals ranging from Hegel to Holderlin. For Steiner, the conflict between *Antigone* and *Creon* encapsulated fundamental oppositions between justice and law, death and life, and young and old. While Bertolt Brecht and Jean Anouilh modernized these relationships in the context of the rise of fascism, probing the will of the dissenting individual in the face of the state, and the implications of dissent, Kamila Shamsie's 2017 novel *Home Fire* inscribes post-9/11 anxieties about citizenship and the rights it affords in a seminal text of the Western canon, making the Muslim body a site of postcolonial thanatopolitics.

Biographical Note

Diviani Chaudhuri received a PhD in comparative literature from SUNY Binghamton and currently teaches greek tragedy, feminist theory and world literature at Shiv Nadar University, India.

The Coffee Shop as a Heterotopia for those reduced to Bare Life: Marsha Mehern's *Pomegranate Soup* (2006), and Deborah Rodriguez' *The Little Coffee Shop of Kabul* (2016)

Dr. Eva Oppermann (Independent Scholar)

Abstract:

With radical Islamic forces coming into power in Iran and Afghanistan respectively, it becomes necessity for several young women to escape persecution and even death. Whereas, after their escape from a violently sadistic follower of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, the Aminpour sisters Maryam, Bahar and Layla settle in the little Irish town of Ballinacraich and establish their own café against the resistance of the Catholic establishment led by the local publican, in 2007/8 pregnant Yazmina finds a safe haven from the persecution by Taliban and warlords, who regard her as "interest" for her father's debts, in Sunny's and Halajan's coffee shop. Thus, both coffee houses fulfil the necessary condition Foucault (1984) gives for a heterotopian place. At the same time, they work as catalysts for the emplacement of the young women in their new

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surroundings, thereby withstanding the danger of being overpowered by life-threatening forces old and new. In addition, both coffee houses become meeting points for what can be described as cells of a fledgling opposition; many Westerners in Kabul or the rebels against the establishment in Ballinacraich. Thus the women eventually find themselves in the centre of a friendly circle of neighbours, in short, they have become emplaced once more.

In my presentation, I will use Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life and Foucault's heterotopia in order to precisely describe the women's potentially lethal situations in order to define the heterotopian character of the coffee houses. In addition, I will highlight how the way to safety and eventual emplacement is made possible through a stay (causal and spatial) at a heterotopian place, thereby highlighting its importance in the process.

Biographical Note:

Dr Eva Oppermann studied English and Theology for teaching at grammar schools at the University of Kassel (Germany) and the University of Central Lancashire, Preston (England) from 1992 till 1998. She has worked as a doctoral researcher and junior university teacher at the University of Kassel between 2004 and 2006, and as a research assistant (postdoc) and junior lecturer at the University of Rostock between 2008 and 2009. She has written her doctoral dissertation on the first Golden Age of English children's literature, and her Second Book is about the Fall of Satan Motif in English Literature from the *Caedmon-Genesis* to the Present, in the context of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (2018). Furthermore, she has published on Aldous Huxley, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and contemporary Fantasy, spatial concepts in literature with emphasis on heterotopian places and spaces, and travel literature.

Dr. Oppermann is an Independent Scholar.

PANEL 3: CARIBBEAN LITERATURES

“Rebellion Is a Thing that’s Natural to Us”: Negotiating Resistance and Survival through Practices of Caribbeanness in the Short Stories of Brandon O’Brien

Johannes Pfundt (TU Chemnitz)

Abstract

Brandon O’Brien’s texts feature the re-surfacing and re-contextualization of traditional Caribbean mythical figures and spiritual practices that lend the stories’ characters agency and means of fighting back against the hardships they are facing. Throughout O’Brien’s writings discussed in my talk, these are matters of life and death. The short stories “Best Foot Forward” (2015) and “The Howling Detective” (2018) re-introduce traditional Trinidadian mythical figures such as *La Diabliesse* and the *Lagahoo* to form a framework for the characters to take matters in their own hands in the absence of state or legal help. As quoted in Flanagan, these acts of resistance, mostly exerted in violent and dangerous ways, are deemed to be forms of “righteous vengeance” (2020) by O’Brien. Moreover, the supernatural acts and entities forge a way back to humanity for the characters who are subjected to inhumane conditions of the postcolonial Caribbean. However, they only achieve this by decidedly transcending the characters’ realm of humanity by turning them into supernatural characters. The appropriation of violence is portrayed as a supernatural act that mirrors the extreme and even potentially self-destructive nature of the struggle versus the oppressors, thereby negotiating matters of life and death, of protest and resilience.

Subsequently, my talk discusses the above-mentioned selection of texts of Caribbean speculative fiction via a close reading against the backdrop of Caribbean (Benítez-Rojo, Glissant) and postcolonial theory (Césaire, Fanon). In this context I open up the space to address and discuss the dialectic of violence and humanness in face of the seemingly antagonistic juxtaposition of moral and ethical judgement and socio-political justification. I argue that practices of Caribbeanness constitute a meaningful and powerful source of resistance and survival vis-à-vis matters of life and death in the narratives of Brandon O’Brien.

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Works Cited

Flanagan, Frank (2020). "Caribbean History is Afro-Punk: Brandon O'Brien Talks Fantasy, Folklore and Science Fiction." In: *Mako - Caribbean Arts and Letters*. 30 May 2021 <mokomagazine.org/wordpress/Caribbeanhistory-is-afro-punk-brandon-o-brien-talks-fantasy-folklore-and-science-fiction/>

Biographical Note

Johannes Pfundt is a lecturer and research associate for the English Practical Language Programme of the English and American Studies department at Chemnitz University of Technology. His teaching and research interests include translation studies, discourse analysis and critical reading as well as postcolonial studies, Caribbeaness, speculative fiction and the spatial turn. He is currently working on his PhD in English literatures entitled *Caribbean Space(s) in the Anglophone Speculative Fiction Novel*.

Narrative and Narration in Jamaica Kincaid's *At the Bottom of the River*

Dr. Asma Hussein (University of Göttingen)

Abstract

1949 Antigua-born, US-resident Elaine Potter Richardson is better known under her nom de plume of Jamaica Kincaid. Studying photography at Franconia College (Vorda 7) awakens the giant writer inside via the assignments of describing her photographs (Ferguson163). In 1973, the giant was renamed Jamaica Kincaid; its expressive talent redirected to the medium of short stories and the channel of *The New Yorker*. A decade later, the *New Yorker* pieces (i.e., "Girl," "In the Night," "At Last," "Wingless," "Holidays," "The Latter from Home," "At the Bottom of the River") were compiled along with others under *At the Bottom of the River*. These Cézannean pieces read as installments of an interconnected story whose internal chronology pivots on a girl's Oedipal anxiety to grow out of her mother's authority. The lead story "Girl," for example, is dominated by the deuteragonist's i.e., mother's voice, and its tensions are extended in the following pieces until eventually culminating in the penultimate "My Mother." This operative structure and recursive storyline resonate even in subsequent novels: Annie John (1985) and Lucy (1990). Over and above, the mother-daughter relationship is rendered as a continuation of the juggernaut of colonization whereby eliminating the watershed in 'mother-

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daughter' mirrors deconstructing its colonizer-colonized counterpart. Considering the autobiographical tinge of Kincaid's writing, this paper probes the narratological "magic of At the Bottom of the River [that] comes from its language. ... often read like a coded message" (Dutton 406) through which the personal and the national vignettes are homogenized.

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- Dutton, Wendy. "Merge and Separate: Jamaica Kincaid's Fiction." *World Literature Today*, vol. 63, no. 3, Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, 1989, pp. 406-407.

Biographical Note

In 2017, I passed the Ph.D. state exam and dissertation defense at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. During my postgraduate studies (2012-2017), I worked as a teaching assistant at the department of English and American studies of my alma mater and taught introductory courses on literature and thesis writing. From 2018 to 2020, I taught English language and conversation courses (A1-C2), and the single English literature course offered at Ada und Theodor Lessing Vhs Hannover. Early in 2021, I started and am still teaching at the English Philology Department, Georg August University, Göttingen. Primarily, I offer literature courses for the MA program. My courses include amongst others: Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, Postcolonial Rewritings of Shakespeare, Derek Walcott: The Poet, Gothic Fiction, American Transcendentalism, and The Romantic Novel.

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Phantom Presences: Bare Bodies of Exception in Danticat's Short Stories

Julia Wewior (University of Wuppertal)

Abstract

The gang members were also called chimé, chimeras or ghosts, and were, for the most part, street children [...], boys whose parents had been murdered or had fallen to some deadly disease, leaving them alone in the world. [...] We can't move forward as a neighborhood, as a town, or as a country [...] unless we know what makes these men cry. They cannot remain chimé, chimeras, phantoms or ghosts to us forever. ("Ghosts", 66-69)

In my research, I have previously argued that Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat in her milestone novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) anticipates and goes beyond Judith Butler's theorizations on (un)grievability (as pondered in Butler's *Precarious Life* (2004) and *Frames of War* (2009)) and highlights the notion of the migrant body as space of exception. Building on this, my current paper seeks to analyze the representation of bare bodies of exception in three of Danticat's short stories: "Ghosts"(2013) sheds light on the often ungrieved lives of members of criminal organizations. In "Without Inspection"(2019) the last thoughts of a (migrant) construction worker as he falls to his certain death are narrated. These short stories foreground the discursive practices involved in creating 'ungrievability' as the characters, facing death and/or in death, are falsely accused of criminal action, misidentified as gang members and included in the public record by a false name. In "Di Mwen, Tell Me" (2013) the radio's potential as discursive corrective and space of establishing grievability is pondered. While Isabell Lorey's notion that in the neoliberal moment of normalized precarization, "the entire person, with their knowledge and their affects, becomes part of the capitalist production process, as do their relationships"(83) is illustrated on various levels, the stories showcase the continued unequal distribution of precarity. Furthermore, they highlight that overexploited Black and Brown people's 'ungrievability' and their status as 'exceptional' in the Agambian sense, i.e. as outside of the protections of the legal-juridical system, yet through their exclusion also importantly the reason the system can function, is not a byproduct of, but a prerequisite for, the neoliberal moment.

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Biographical Note

Julia Wewior is a researcher in the field of American Studies at the University of Wuppertal and is currently working on her PhD project tentatively entitled "Establishing 'Ungrievable' Lives in their 'Grievability': Precarity in Danticat's and Adichie's Writing". She holds a Magister degree from Goethe-University Frankfurt and studied American, English and German Studies in Frankfurt, in Olomouc (Czech Republic) and, as a stipendiary of the State of Hesse, at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh (USA). She has recently co-edited a special issue of *Parallax* on *Migrant States of Exception*. Her research interests include Precarity, Women Writers, Gender Studies, Migration Studies, African American Studies, Caribbean Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Ethics and Aesthetics, More-than-Human Studies and Narratology.

PANEL 4: KINSHIP

Asexual Perspectives on Livability and Grievability

Kristina Weber (University of Rostock)

Content note

domestic abuse/intimate partner violence, murder, homophobia, incest, rape

Abstract

What kind of life is deemed ‘worth living’ is a question entangled with the (colonialist and capitalist) primacy of the romantic couple. The heteronormative, exclusive couple as a mechanism of social control and the central axis of society is a European phenomenon that was exported around the globe through colonialism and the spread of Christianity. Influenced by pressures of keeping a line of inheritance and upholding ‘racial’ and national dominance, other forms of kinship relationships were largely pushed to the margins. Today, this has developed further into heterotemporal (Halberstam, 2005) expectations of how a life narrative should play out. As a result, single, unmarried and/or ‘virgin’ life is highly stigmatised: literature and other media often support the message that being uncoupled is synonymous with ‘dying alone’ and lacking grievability, and romantic relationships are seen as the only way to live a healthy and satisfactory life, i.e. livability. Compounded by material concerns such as financial and bodily safety that make the couple formation desirable (e.g. for single women in patriarchal cultures), this structure is charged with political significance.

An asexual lens on these social relations as they are represented and challenged in literature, helps to uncover the workings of oppressive structures that govern the worth that is bestowed onto life. Compulsory sexuality (Gupta, 2015), the pressure to be sexual, makes such relationships central to livability. Further, amatonormativity (Brake, 2012), the expectation of universal romantic attraction, marginalises single life. Asexual readings offer an alternative perspective onto the sexand-romance-based life models that both heteronormativity and queerness often perpetuate. By uncovering asexual resonances (Przybylo and Cooper, 2014) in selected Anglophone Caribbean texts, I am going to show how the normative expectations around coupledness and sexuality are criticised, and how the texts construct ways of deprivileging the status afforded to the romantic (and sexual) couple.

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Biographical Note

Kristina Weber is a PhD candidate at the University of Rostock. She received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in British and American Studies (the M.A. with a Transcultural focus), and Communication and Media Studies in Rostock. Her research interests include the construction of gender, queerness and transculturality. She has been pursuing her PhD on the topic of asexuality in Anglophone postcolonial literatures since the beginning of 2020, funded by Rostock's scholarship for the university's best alumni.

Against the Necropolitics of Settler Colonialism: Literary Kin- and World-Making in the Ruins

Alisa Preusser (University of Potsdam)

Abstract

As Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte points out, "Indigenous peoples everywhere have been through repeated apocalypses" (238), including more than 500 years of settler colonialism on Turtle Island (also known by many as Canada and the US). If understood on a temporal continuum of such structural colonial violence, climate collapse and environmental destruction, which impact Indigenous peoples disproportionately (Tsosie 1625), thus emerge as based on a hierarchization of life and death that positions Indigenous peoples and their more-than-human kin as disposable. At the same time, Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (Métis) call for more careful attention to be paid to "Indigenous resistance in the face of

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apocalypse, and the renewal and resurgence of Indigenous communities in spite of worldending violence” (773; emphasis original). Heeding Davis and Todd’s call, my focus in this paper is twofold as I draw on insights from Indigenous literary and environmental studies, settler- and postcolonial, as well as ecocritical and discard studies: on the one hand, I examine how literary works by Indigenous authors of Turtle Island, such as Thomas King (Cherokee), push against notions of the Anthropocene and the postcolonial in North American contexts as they reveal and deconstruct the ‘necropolitics’ (Mbembe) of settler colonialism that forcibly renders Indigenous peoples and their environments disposable and ‘ungrievable’ (Butler). On the other hand, I seek to pay close attention to the ways in which Indigenous writers explore literature’s capacity of restor(y)ing those bodies and ecologies deemed disposable and ungrievable by settler-colonial politics to the sphere of grievability and sovereign subjecthood within extended kinship networks, as their literary works both inhabit the ruins and resist the epistemological and ontological bind of necropolitics’ ‘death-worlds.’ Furthermore, in interrogating the function of storytelling and narrative as practices of kin- and world-making in the ruins, I am also interested in the ways in which readers may become implicated in corresponding reading practices.

Biographical Note

Alisa Preusser (M.A., M.Ed.) is a PhD researcher and lecturer in American Studies at the University of Potsdam. She has previously taught and worked as a research assistant at the University of Muenster and the University of Augsburg. Her current research examines Indigenous literary interventions into waste colonialism as embedded within questions of environmental in/justice. Her research interests include Indigenous studies, decolonial and postcolonial studies, ecocriticism and waste studies as well as border studies, focusing on North American contexts and transoceanic perspectives.

PANEL 5: EXTRACTIVISM

Extractive Necropolitics and Visions of Decolonial Alterlife: Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade's *We Are Water Protectors*

David Kern (University of Cologne)

Abstract

Children's literature, as Kimberley Reynolds reminds us, is "replete with radical potential" (2007, 1) to explore how "societies could be different in some significant ways...in the organization of families, the distribution of resources, or the circulation of power" (ibid. 2). In this presentation, I want to revisit this potential in the context of thinking through the settler colonial Anthropocene, which lays bare the lethal synchronicity of settler colonialism, resource extraction, parts per million atmospheric CO₂.

Noting how much Indigenous activism continues to manifest on the pages of childrens- and particularly picturebooks, this presentation explores Carole Lindstrom and Michele Goade's radical aesthetic practice which refuses settler colonial resource extraction on Indigenous land in an intermedial celebration of the #NoDAPL movement and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's organizing to protect the water. Mobilizing the slogan "Mni-Wiconi" (Water is Life), *We Are Water Protectors* asserts life and presence against the racist necropolitics of "settler industrial campaigns" paving the way for "industrial and capitalist collective actions whose ecological footprints contributes significantly to today's climate destabilization ordeal" (Whyte 2017, 209). In its representation of life and community as resistance, it is a verbal-visual call to decolonize, and an invitation to address how, often, 'environmental crisis' "is a rhetorical device that people invoke so they can believe they are addressing a crisis without having to talk about colonial power" (Whyte 2021, 57).

What is the potential of Indigenous picturebooks to imagine resistance against colonial and extractive erasures of Indigenous life (cf. Wolfe 2006, Betasamosake Simpson 2011, 2017, Spice 2018, Yazzie and Baldy 2018, Liboiron 2021)? And how to theorize the complicated and uneasy relationship between representational practices and decolonization considering Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang's seminal argument that decolonization "is not a metaphor" (2012)? Tracing these questions in a close reading of *We Are Water Protectors*, I argue that Métis scholar Michelle Murphy's idea of the "Alterlife" as "a figuration of [petro-]chemical exposures that attempts to be...about figuring life and responsibilities" that

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are radically oriented “toward decolonial futures” (2017, 497) offers a highly generative approach for thinking through tensions and incommensurability.

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Biographical Note

David Kern is a PhD candidate at the University of Cologne's English Department, where he teaches courses on Indigenous Australian and Canadian writing, post-colonial theory and the intersections of literature, art, and activism. His doctoral project explores forms- and representations of resistance to the colonality of resource extraction in Indigenous Australian and Canadian fiction, comics, graphic novels, and picturebooks. Together with Katrin Althans and Beate Neumeier, he has edited the collection *Migrant Australia - From Botany Bay to Manus Island* (2022, WVT Trier).

Saving the Other Bees: Grievability and Conservation of Australian Native Bees

Anabell Fender (University of Potsdam)

Abstract

In the winter of 2006/2007, beekeepers across the United States, and later across Canada and Europe, reported of millions of formerly healthy worker bees disappearing. The phenomenon was later termed Colony Collapse Disorder, and it is considered to be the “worst recorded crisis in the multimillennial history of beekeeping” (Kosek). This disaster sparked multispecies solidarities, with many people and companies out to ‘save the bees’, turning this “charismatic mini-fauna” (Sponsler & Bratman) into a ‘poster child’ of the environmental movement. Curiously, these bee-saving initiatives often centre around one specific bee species—the Western honeybee (*Apis mellifera*). However, while the health of honeybees has indeed declined due to various factors (among them: habitat loss, increased use of pesticides and insecticides on monocultures, as well as climate change), their species is not actually endangered. The concentrated focus on honeybees may be best explained by their relevance for our food production systems, as their extinction would seriously threaten “the global human food supply and ecosystem functions ultimately resulting in ecosystemic collapse” (Hendlin). As such, their well-being is not only a matter of life and death to them, but essentially to humanity itself.

In striking contrast, the numbers of their wild and native pollinator cousins are dramatically declining with far less public attention. In the aftermath of the devastating Black Summer bushfires in 2019-20, concerns about the loss of biodiversity have centred on vertebrates, while species like the Green Carpenter Bee, one of Australia’s estimated 1650 native bee species, have attracted only little attention. That is even though researchers found at least eleven bee species that meet the IUCN Red List criteria for being vulnerable (9) and endangered (2) in the bushfire regions—although actual numbers are likely higher. The lives of honeybees became “grievable” because of their (threatened) involvement in capitalist industrial agriculture. This paper traces Indigenous and non-Indigenous conservation efforts of native, wild, and stingless bees in Australia and asks: in the time of “insect apocalypse” (Goulson), how can we effectively foster multispecies kinship to make the lives of those bees grievable that are not integrated in capitalist processes?

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Biographical Note

Annabell Fender is/will be a doctoral fellow at the RTG minor cosmopolitanisms (University of Potsdam). She studied English and History to become a teacher and received her M.Ed. at the University of Potsdam with a thesis on “Fat Representation in Young Adult Fiction and the Multidirectional Relationship between Fat Studies, Fat Activism and Fat Fiction”. Her PhD project, tentatively titled “Thinking with Bees in the Patchy Anthropocene: Multispecies Kinship in Histories and Futures”, is situated in the fields of environmental humanities/ecocriticism, critical animal studies, posthumanism, and postcolonial studies.

PANEL 6: MEMORIES AND TEMPORALITIES

(via zoom)

Living and Dying with One Another: Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* and the Art of Dying in Utopia

Manuel Sousa Oliveira (University of Porto)

Abstract

Literary utopias, critics have noted, have consistently failed at dealing with death and finitude. In her experimental novel *Always Coming Home* (1986), Ursula K. Le Guin imagines the utopian culture of the Kesh by extrapolating from traditional non-Western values how a post-capitalist culture could better deal with death and dying - among many other issues. This paper will argue that even though the way that this utopian culture appreciates finitude may be counterintuitive, the appreciation of living-with and dying-with as represented in *Always Coming Home* creates a deeper sense of interconnection and motivates empathy in the present. The approach taken here will combine Utopian studies and the ethics of death and dying to suggest how, in this novel, Le Guin perfected the art of dying in Utopia by drawing on traditional values, particularly from traditional Native American and ancient Eastern cultures. In the Kesh language, there is a single word for both human and non-human animals: people. First, the focus will be on the funerary practices and mourning rituals for the dying of human people. These are brief, but deeply affecting, and they illustrate this culture's sense of community and belonging to the dirt. Second, the focus will be on the dying of non-human people. There are two main distinctions to be made here: killing for food, and the death of domestic animals or pets. In all of these it becomes evident how the Kesh views on life and death are structured by their concept of time which is ongoing and present-centered, rather than linear or cyclical. In *Always Coming Home*, the Kesh conception of living and dying with one another suggests that empathy in and for the thick present - to borrow Haraway's term - could be a new utopian way to face death and finitude.

Biographical Note

Manuel Sousa Oliveira is a PhD candidate at the University of Porto, and a Doctoral Research Fellow at the "Mapping Utopianisms" research area of the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS) with funding by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and

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Technology (FCT) (ref. UI/BD/151368/2021). His doctoral project is on ethics and utopianism in the contemporary period. Recently, he earned his MA degree in Anglo-American Studies from the same institution with a dissertation on Paul Auster. In 2018, he collaborated with the ALIMENTOPIA - Utopian Foodways research project as a trainee. He is currently the international spokesperson for the Emerging Scholars' Forum of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-Speaking Countries (GKS), and the coordinator of the new International Network of Emerging Scholars in Canadian Studies. He received two research grants from Porto's Portuguese British Association (ALBdoP), both in 2019, and two Margaret Atwood Society Awards, most recently in 2021.

Structures of End-Feeling: Wartime Eschatologies and Etel Adnan's *l'Apocalypse Arabe*.

Laila Riazi (University of California Berkeley)

Abstract

Literary-historiographical attempts to reckon with wartime writing often lean on chronological classifications to make their claims. As Mary A. Favret puts it: "The desire is powerful to put period to and step outside of the time of war, to contain and manage it, to behold and be still" (War at a Distance, 30). But what might we gain from working against this prevailing tendency to periodize, making instead wide leaps across historical time in our comparative literary practice? Bringing together Etel Adnan's 1980 collection *l'Apocalypse arabe*—which recalls the siege of a Palestinian refugee camp at the start of the Lebanese Civil War—with its 1989 translation into English and its reprint in 2007, this chapter considers the iterative relationship between these distinct literary-historical moments. What interpretive possibilities are reopened by reading these fragmentary textual flashpoints together; and what can this approach teach us about the resurgent afterlives of wartime writing? Drawing upon Jalal Toufic's forward to the 2007 edition alongside Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," this chapter argues for an "apocalyptic" literary historiographical method that shatters the continuum of history by bringing to bear the reappearances staged by Adnan's text on their prior forms. The chapter concludes by interrogating how the particular poetic features of Adnan's text open up a suppressed Palestinian past—as well as its revolutionary potential.

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Biographical Note

Laila Riazi is a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature and Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research expounds upon postcolonial theories of violence by engaging contemporary Anglophone, Arabophone and Francophone literature through the dual lens of militarism and ecology.

The Untouched Glory: Love, Death, and Resistance in South Asian ‘Poetic Knowledge’

Rhitama Basak (Delhi University)

Abstract

The passion of love and the passion of revolution appear interchangeably in post-colonial, Progressive Poetry in the Subcontinent. The overarching spiritual, and socio-political ethos of *love* marks the South Asian *landscape*, where post-memory of dissent and loss informs the collective conscience (di Michel 2014). The reception of pre-modern/ medieval Sufi imageries of love, longing, and loss are re-contextualized in the framing of Resistance Poetry of later years - Urdu Progressive Poetry being resplendent with received and re-textualized thematic elements in voicing the “new literary aesthetics” in the 20th Century (Zaheer 1936). The execution of the 9th Century Sufi Mansur al-Hallaj in Baghdad for claiming oneness with the Divine Beloved can be thought of as a significant moment of spirituo-political dissent. The *intermedial* ‘remembering’ of the execution procured from pre-modern South Asia is imperative to the study of the re-emergence of the ‘Hallaj Matter’ in post-colonial South Asian poetry. The Sufi imagery of celebratory death, with a *parwaana* (moth)-like energy drawn to the *shamma* (flame), emerge as a thematic lens to view South Asia’s collective memory - where the act of dying for the sake of love transforms into an act of resistance. The study aims at understanding cultural memory in shaping the South Asian ‘Poetic Knowledge,’ functioning as a cognitive and affective domain of meaning-making in the region (Ali 2016). The paper would locate the ways in which collective memory informs and constructs newer paradigms of resistance, addressing post-colonial realities in the region, marked by shared loss following the colonial rule and the 1947-Partition. The paper would take note of the Progressive remembering of death, as response to post-colonial dictatorial regimes in the region, where the poet claims, “I too am Hallaj” (Jalib). The

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paper aims at exploring the association of glory (*shaan*) with death in understanding 'martyrdom' in 20th Century Progressive Urdu Poetry.

Biographical Note

Rhitama Basak is pursuing MPhil. in Comparative Literature at the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, Delhi University. She has completed her Master's Degree from the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, India. She has specialized in Latin American Literature and Culture for her graduation Area Studies. She has been a recipient of Erasmus+ scholarship and RUSA research and travel grant. Rhitama is currently working on Sufi reception in Progressive Urdu Poetry as part of her M.Phil. project at Delhi University. Her M.Phil. dissertation is titled: Reception of the Sufi 'landscape' in framing Resistance in South Asia. Her recent work includes a book chapter in an upcoming volume on Memory Studies.

ARTIST TALK

The Joy of Sadness: Looking at Loss Up and Down

Alecia McKenzie (Jamaica/France)

Biographical Note

Alecia McKenzie is a Jamaican writer based in France. Her first collection of short stories, *Satellite City*, and her novel *Sweetheart* have both won Commonwealth literary prizes. *Sweetheart* has been translated into French (Trésor) and was awarded the Prix Carbet des lycéens in 2017. Other books include *Stories From Yard* (first published in Italian translation as *Racconti giamaicani*), *Doctor's Orders* and *When the Rain Stopped in Natland*. Her most recent novel is *A Million Aunties* - longlisted for the 2022 Dublin Literary Award. Her work has also appeared in a range of literary magazines and in anthologies such as *Stories from Blue Latitudes*, *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, *Global Tales*, *Girls Night In*, and *To Exist is to Resist*. She was longlisted for the Sunday Times Audible Short Story Award in 2019.

WORKSHOP

PhD Defence and Beyond: A Workshop for Early Career Scholars

Dr. Jennifer Leetsch (University of Bonn)

Abstract

You've handed in your thesis, and now what? This workshop is aimed at early career scholars who want to know more about the ins and outs of PhD defences, the oral examination that follows years of writing. We will cover a range of topics aimed to prepare you for the defence, including debunking myths, insights into others' defence experiences, dealing with anxiety, and the opportunity to bring to the table questions and concerns among your peers. We will end with a little outlook on what to expect after you have defended, and which paths to walk towards the publication of your book.

Biographical Note

Dr. Jennifer Leetsch is a postdoctoral research fellow at Bonn University's Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies. Her first book on contemporary Afro-diasporic literature was published with Palgrave in 2021. She has published and forthcoming work in, among others, *Interventions*, *EJES* and *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* and is currently co-editing a volume on migration imaginaries across visual and textual spheres (De Gruyter 2023).

PANEL 7: IMMIGRATION AND BORDERS

'Mosquito-Americans:' Reading the Pathogens within the US Body in Gayl Jones's *Mosquito*

Mérule Chancia Mbang Mba Aki (Nantes University)

Abstract

Gayl Jones's *Mosquito* (1999) has a predominantly political scope through its antagonist dynamics. Nadine, nicknamed Mosquito, is an African American independent trucker driving a route along the border in Texas, where she ships industrial detergent from the U.S.A. After a pregnant Mexican woman Maria hides in her truck, Mosquito becomes immersed in the new underground railroad that provides sanctuary to immigrants. While depicting the various dangers faced by these immigrants –sometimes hunted by organized U.S. citizens who claim to prevent the U.S. healthy body from the proliferation of pathogens, or interned and tortured in camps when captured by border patrols– it uncovers the jeopardy of the American myth of racial purity. Like the protagonist's allergic reaction to the bite of a mosquito, an episode that earns her the nickname, the American society shows a strong aversion to these immigrants. The reference to mosquito, a vector of diseases associated with the poor regions of Asia, Africa and South America, dramatizes the U.S. abjection of immigrants from these regions. In *Mosquito*, not only Mexicans, but all the U.S. minorities are depicted as bare lives entering the toxic dynamics of American materialism, utilitarianism, and consumerism. Opposed to the image of “mosquitoes” is that of the “gringo”– a Latino-American derogatory term to name White Americans – used as a trope for the U.S. bio- and necropolitics. The geodynamics of mosquitoes is set in the text as a collateral result and a subversion of colonialism, multiculturalism and universalism actually disclosed as a gringo estheticism designed to shape and control peoples' imaginaries and cultures. The backward flow logic of the main character involvement in the sanctuary then represents an ideological turn. In reference to the insect's high reproductive capacity through Maria's childbirth on the American soil, the proliferation of these pests definitely suggests the overrun of the U.S.A. by this Third World bane.

Biographical Note

Merile Chancia Mbang Mba Aki is a PhD candidate at Nantes University. She studies American Literature, working on “The aesthetics of blood in Gayl Jones’s writing” under the supervision of Michel Feith. She is attached to the research center C.R.I.N.I. (Centre de Recherche sur les Identités, les Nations et l’Interculturalité), and is the delegate of its PhD candidates. Merile takes part to the reading committee of the journal *TransversALL*, and coorganizes the seminar W.I.P. (Work In Progress) intended for the PhD candidates from the C.R.I.N.I. to present and expound their research works. Her first article on “The figure of the Medusa in Gayl Jones’s *Eva’s Man*” is being published in *Cahiers du CRINI*. Apart from her research work, she is a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology and the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures in her university at Nantes.

Frames of Life: Refugees and Border Thinking in Zeyn Joukhadar’s *The Map of Salt and Stars*

Christina Slopek (HHU Düsseldorf)

Abstract

The 21st century is marked by large numbers of people fleeing their homelands to escape hunger, poverty, environmental catastrophes, persecution and war. This refugee mobility both complicates and is complicated by national borders and cultural boundaries. Zeyn Joukhadar’s prize-winning debut novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* (2018) lends refugee experiences the gripping voice of the child narrator Nour, who calls into question parameters of grievability and privilege. Grappling with the participation of mapmaking in demarcating territories and boundaries, the novel interlaces the story of a family of refugees traversing the African continent in contemporary times with a historical 12th century cartography project. I argue that *The Map of Salt and Stars* breaks up boundaries through its content and form and thus interrogates frames of life, to borrow freely from Judith Butler (2009).

Mapping spaces across times, Joukhadar’s novel meditates self-reflexively on storytelling and its participation in acts of mapping, reimagining maps to break up boundaries.

The novel can further be interpreted in terms of Walter Mignolo’s “border thinking” (2000, 66). Mignolo understands borders as an “intersection” which produces a form of “double critique” involving both sides of the

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border (67). For him, then, the border is a site of creativity. On the level of form, Joukhadar's novel uses borders creatively by connecting the different storylines through spaces, routes and symbols as well as by fusing narrative genres: With regard to genre, *The Map of Salt and Stars* combines and pluralizes multiple forms. For instance, while both narratives can be read as Bildungsromane, they diverge heavily from the original model to demonstrate that Eurocentric and privileged modes of Bildung do not account for postcolonial matters of life and death and especially not for female and/or refugee subjectivity and thus reflect on frames of life.

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Biographical Note

Christina Slopek is a second-year doctoral student at Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf, Germany, where she also works as lecturer and research assistant in the department of Anglophone Literatures and Literary Translation. Her principal research interests are postcolonial studies, queer theory and culture and medical humanities. Currently, Christina Slopek is working on a PhD project about psychology in Anglo-African and African-diasporic fiction. So far, she has published an article on queer masculinities in *Ocean Vuong* in *Anglia* and an article on Aboriginal speculations in *Gender Forum*. Several chapters for edited volumes are forthcoming.

What Does It Mean to Feel Alive? Embodied Awareness in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*

Loredana Filip (LMU München)

Abstract

Biotechnological approaches to life dominate the public sphere and literary fiction. Yet, contemporary dystopias question the anthropocentrism that regards all organic matter, including the human body's cellular data, as

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marketable objects. Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, for instance, combines a dystopian perspective with the 'life writing' of postcolonial subjects, as the text is a collection of journal entries and e-mail correspondence. This literary strategy allows Shteyngart to enact an extended critique on the commodification of life and the human body, a devastating outcome of America's cultural imperialism. The novel does not only expose the biomedica's "hyperattention to molecular biological data" at the expense of the "body's affective sensuality" (Defalco), but it also crafts a space for the body to reemerge anew. Rather than approaching life in terms of quantity, the aging body or as a countdown clock that leads to unwanted death, his novel proposes a qualitative approach: what does it mean to feel alive? Life is no longer 'just' about age, able-bodied people or survival, but the ability to feel alive, a theme which resurfaces in the novel's uses of confession. The ability to remain vulnerable, dependent and affective subjects is what, paradoxically, ensures survival - even when future survival takes the form of a book. As such, Shteyngart's novel also makes a case for the importance of reading and writing - not as noble, humanist pursuits that showcase the power of imagination, but as practices that embed the individual selves in a network of embodied affects. Books raise embodied awareness; they are the last stronghold for the endangered body in a society governed by biotech corporations and digital landscapes.

Biographical Note

Loredana Filip is a PhD candidate at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and a fellow of the Collaborative Research Centre "Cultures of Vigilance." She received her Master's degree in North American Studies at Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg where she was a lecturer, research assistant and tutor for international students. Her dissertation explores the ways in which science communication and practices of reading use confessions as a rhetorical tool, particularly in the current age of self-help. Her research interests include the history of science, affect theory, and critical posthumanism. She has published blog entries on *Vigilanzkulturen*, a book chapter with Routledge and a few journal articles on the topic of human enhancement (in *COPAS* and *Medical Humanities*).

PANEL 8: RESISTANCE AND SURVIVANCE

From Reconciliation to 'Idle No More': 'Articulation' and Indigenous Struggle in Canada

Matthew Robertson (Métis Nation Ontario)

Abstract

How do different discourses lead to changes in understandings of the world, identity, meaning and practice in Indigenous politics in Canada? This article introduces the poststructuralist theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to Canadian Indigenous studies and demonstrates that it is a unique and effective theory for understanding this question. It finds that in the last few decades, two principal discourses regarding Indigenous peoples and colonialism have circulated in the Canadian body politic—namely, (1) “reconciliation” and (2) “Idle No More.” These discourses shape the identities of both Indigenous peoples and settlers, construct understandings of the world, and determine the meaning of related political struggle, leading to real world practice and politics. The reconciliation discourse has at times been effective at becoming a dominant discourse and has often been able to constitute the meaning of important terms such as ‘decolonization.’ It serves to pacify Indigenous resistance to colonialism. Counter-hegemonic discourses on reconciliation such as ‘Idle No More’ have been able to challenge that discourse. Academic literature, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, podcasts developed by Indigenous scholars, public letters and speeches delivered by Canadian politicians are analyzed to examine the utterances and enunciations of the two discourses.

Biographical Note

Matthew Robertson is Intergovernmental Relations Lead with the Métis Nation of Ontario. He was previously Strategist for the Tripartite Self-Government Negotiations Department of the Manitoba Metis Federation. He resides in Toronto.

Transgressing the Borders of Being: Posthuman Indigenous Resistance in Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer*

Corina Wieser-Cox (University of Bremen)

Abstract

Nosotros les sembramos el árbol y ellos se comen las frutas
Somos los que cruzaron
Aquí vinimos a buscar el oro que nos robaron
We plant the tree for them, and they eat the fruit
We are the ones who crossed over
Here we came to look for the gold they stole from us
- "Immigrants We Get the Job Done"

Asylum-seeking children kept in cages (BBC News 2021), alleged forced hysterectomies performed on migrant women in US government facilities (Chapin 2020; Bekiempis 2020; Triesman 2020; Lee 2020; Dickerson et al. 2020) and promises to "build the wall" amidst the election of Donald Trump in 2016 have all shepherded in an ever-evolving era of dystopia within the B/borderlands for BIPOC migrants. Javier Ramirez argues, "What our future will look like depends directly on who 'we' are; the future can entail a utopia, a dystopia, or both" (96). In the case of Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* (2008), "we" are the Indigenous, colonized bodies of low-income people residing on the "Third World" side of the border in Mexico. In the film, the divide is clear; those who are exploited and wrecked by digital capitalism and corporate exploitation are those whose "borderlands" are a dystopia. The actual physical border represented in *Sleep Dealer* has become so militarized that one existing on the Mexican side must connect to nodes and upload their consciousness to even fathom transgressing the border at all. Here, dystopia exists to show how a postcolonial and Indigenous society's apocalyptic nightmare is a Western utopian dream. The chief paradox of *Sleep Dealer* lies in the representation of an exceedingly open world that technological advancements and globalization have implemented in the West and the increasingly strict and highly surveilled physical borders that divide the west from 'developing nations.' This presentation explores how "hyper-borders" (Silva 2015) produce western ideas of "terrorists" which are (in Rivera's film) Indigenous fighters who work to gain sovereignty and protect Native land from the destruction and exploitation of large corporations. *Sleep Dealer* questions how power - precisely who holds the power in producing borders and "terrorists" - is integral in constructing the limits of reality for Indigenous peoples: physically and cybernetically. This

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presentation relatedly investigates how one might perceive labor and immigration from a technological, posthumanist standpoint as well as from a militaristic and dystopian background.

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Biographical Note

Corina Wieser-Cox (they/them) was born and raised on the Mexico-US border in Brownsville, Texas and is both Chicanx and a scholar of Chicanx & Borderland theory. Corina holds a BA degree from Troy University in English Literature and Creative Writing and an MA degree from the

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University of Bremen in English-Speaking Cultures. Their MA Thesis titled “Brujeria in the Borderlands: Portrayals of Mexican American Witchcraft in Hollywood Horror films” won the GAPS Graduate Award in May 2021 and the Bremer Studienpreis in March 2022. Corina is currently a Ph.D. student working with Professor Dr. Kerstin Knopf at the University of Bremen. Corina’s doctoral dissertation, titled “We’re Trans, We’re Queer and We’re Here” is funded by the Evangelisches Studienwerk and focuses primarily on the representations of transgender and queer Mexican and Chicanx people within cinema from the past decade, and interrogates how third-world queer sexualities and genders are signified within a post- and decolonial standpoint.

Matters of Life and Death on the Rez: Counter-Storytelling as Survivance in *Reservation Dogs* (2021)

Alessandra Magrin Haas (University of Strathclyde)

Abstract

In 20th century Euro-American thought and representations, Native American reservations have been persistently epitomised as derelict places blighted by multiple crises (economic, environmental, health-related), which have been typically blamed on the Indigenous communities themselves. This trend is finally taking another course in the 21st century, owing to the growing presence of (and interest in) Indigenous voices in the arts and in mass-media productions— fostered by the critical work of Indigenous (Studies) intellectuals.

In their coming-of-age comedy-drama, Indigenous writers-directors Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi bring for the first time on the home screen representations of reservation life as a place of resilience and resistance. By referring to critical Indigenous Studies concepts, this paper argues that *Reservation Dogs* challenges dominant assumptions about life and death on Indigenous reservations through the use of counter-storytelling. In particular, the practice of counter-storytelling binds the Oklahoma reservation community together and heals it from the traumas of colonization and cultural genocide. Mental-health crises, death, the afterlife are, therefore, mediated by the practice of counter-history which represents a strategy of *Survivance*.

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Biographical Note

Alessandra Magrin Haas is an Early-Career researcher who received her PhD from the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. She holds a Master's degree in American Studies from the University of Glasgow, and a B.A. in Anglo-American Literature from the University of Milan (Italy). She has published articles and book chapters on Silent Cinema, Travel Writing, and on the reception of the Western genre in Europe. She is editing the manuscript of her first monograph, a study of Italian interest in the Wild West myth and its media representations, drawn from her award-winning PhD thesis (Obama Dissertation Prize, University of Mainz, 2021).

THE ORGANIZERS: WHO WE ARE

Marie Berndt

Marie has studied a BA and an MA degree in English Literatures and Cultures at the universities of Bonn, Swansea and Perugia. Her MA thesis “Jamaicans wid ah different flag’: Representations of Precarious LGBTQ Lives in Jamaican Fiction of the New Millennium” has won the GAPS graduate award in 2019 and is published by the Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies. Marie is currently employed as an academic researcher at the Department for English, American and Celtic Studies of the University of Bonn where she is teaching and working on her PhD project with the preliminary title “Precarious Life and Death in Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean Short Fiction”.

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Angela Benkhadda

Angela Benkhadda is a PhD student at the University of Bonn and a research assistant at the DFG Research Training Group 2291 *Contemporary/Literature*. She earned her B.A. in “English Studies” and “Languages and Cultures of the Islamic World” from the University of Cologne (2016) and her M.A. in “North American Studies” from the University of Bonn (2019) with a thesis on gender and genre in the Canadian short story cycle. Her PhD project explores the negotiation of conflicting epistemologies in Native American historical fiction and the role of contemporary political discourses in the representation of the past. Her research interests include Native American literature, postcolonial studies, decolonization, and feminist theory.

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Lena Falk

Lena Falk has studied a B.A. and M.A. in English Literatures and Cultures at the University of Bonn, where she is currently employed as a research assistant. Her research interests include Postcolonial Studies, Posthumanism as well as Queer and Gender Studies, and she has recently submitted her M.A. thesis titled “Queering the Binary: Genderqueer Representation in Contemporary Speculative Fiction”. She is currently preparing to pursue a PhD project in the same field.

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Peri Sipahi

Peri currently occupies a position as research assistant at the chair for English, Postcolonial and Media Studies at the English Department of WWU Münster, where she is also enrolled as a PhD student. Her PhD project is concerned with deconstructing the (neo-)colonial discourses surrounding Anthropocene temporalities in anticolonial climate fiction. Consequently, her research interests lie in representations of time and temporalities, ecocriticism and postcolonial theory. Since 2020, she holds a M.A. in English Literatures and Cultures from Bonn University, where she was also employed in various positions. Additionally, she completed a M.St. in Modern Languages at the University of Oxford in 2018.

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USEFUL INFORMATION

Conference Venue

Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Haus, Königstraße 88, 53115 Bonn
(ca. 12-minute walk from Bonn central station)

Conference Dinner

Phoenicia Lounge, Clemens-August-Straße 34, 53115 Bonn
(ca. 8-minute walk from the conference venue)

Food and Necessities

A large selection of restaurants and cafés can be found on Bonner Talweg, a three-minute walk from the venue. Exiting the venue, turn left and follow Königstraße for 400m until you reach Bonner Talweg. From here, turn right.

More restaurants can be found on Clemens-August-Straße, an eight-minute walk in the other direction, beyond the botanical gardens.

You can find a pharmacy right on the corner of Königstraße and Bonner Talweg.

The nearest grocery store to the venue is *Edeka*, located at Königstraße 79-81.

Places worth a visit

The university's botanical gardens are a five-minute walk from our conference venue. They are open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursdays.

The Art of Books is an independent bookstore and café with a nice selection of books in English and German. The shop is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Friday (until 8 p.m. on Thursdays), and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. The address is Bonner Talweg 28a, a short six-minute walk from the conference venue.

If you are in Bonn for the weekend, you might enjoy the *Rheinaue* if the weather is nice. If the weather is unpleasant, the *Haus der Geschichte* is a museum that is well worth a visit.