

Postcolonial Narrations 2022:

Bonn, 20-22 October

POSTCOLONIAL MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

The last decades have brutally shown that not all lives and bodies are equally grievable. War, increased migratory movements, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the climate crisis demonstrate that hierarchies of life and death continue to be dominated by colonial and racialized criteria as well as political and social power structures. In her much-referenced work *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler asserts that "[s]ome lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability [...] operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a liveable life and a grievable death?" (XIV-XV). Her assessment raises further questions about the conception and boundaries of 'the human' and who controls them. Since the European Enlightenment the predominant understanding of 'the human' has been shaped by a universalizing focus on individualism and rationality. These humanist notions do not only foreground an immaterial understanding of human essence, neglecting any question of the material existence of the body, but more so indicate a sharp distinction between subject and object, self and other. Recent posthumanist scholarship seeks to expose these binaries and tries to negotiate new understandings of 'the human'. Examining marginalised lives and deaths through a focus on black, female, queer, or non-human agents, critical posthumanism investigates who counts as 'human'. This endeavour is especially relevant in a postcolonial context, where existing ideas of the human mind and body are continuously reconsidered, and the imagining of alternative ways of life is a central concern. Emerging from this framework, we hope to explore postcolonial matters of life and death in next year's Postcolonial Narrations Forum.

The controlling and policing of life and death, which dominate our screens again and again in the form of racially motivated police shootings, the discoveries of mass graves of Indigenous children, and the violence at Europe's borders, have long been central to colonialism and its continuous aftermath. Consequently, the institutionalised regulation of human life and bodies has attracted notice as a major focus in literary and cultural studies, postcolonial studies, medical and environmental humanities, and other fields. Concepts such as biopolitics (Foucault), bare life (Agamben), necropolitics (Mbembe), and slow death (Berlant) are only a few among the many tools which are useful to examine the abovementioned issues. Literary genres as diverse as life-writing, memoir, dystopia, and SF as well as other media have not only voiced criticism in this regard, but have narrated forms of resistance,

resilience, and survival. These cultural trends reflect political discourses surrounding, for instance, the Black Lives Matter movement, the reclaiming of bodies through mourning rituals, and #RefugeesWelcome. We would like to invite fellow PhD candidates and early career scholars to join us in a multifaceted exchange on postcolonial matters of life and death. We welcome a wide range of contributions on the following and related issues in postcolonial contexts:

- the body as the site of life/death/change
- death and grief / rituals of mourning
- birth / reproduction (rights)
- violence / genocide / war / pandemic
- queer bodies / erotic sovereignty
- toxic environments / toxic bodies
- survival / resilience / resistance
- ageing and decay / preservation
- suicide / assisted suicide
- images of the afterlife
- genre theory: life-writing / autobiography / autobiografiction / memoir
- genre theory: utopia / dystopia / SF / futurism

CONFIRMED SPEAKERS:

Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee, Universität Mainz (keynote lecture)
Alecia McKenzie (artist's talk and reading)
Dr. Jennifer Leetsch (workshop)

Please send **abstracts for 20 minute-long talks** (ca. 300 words + 5 keywords) and a **short bio note** to postcolonialnarrations@g-a-p-s.net by **31 May 2022**. We will send out acceptance e-mails and further info by mid-June.

We are planning to hold the conference in person in Bonn, following current COVID-regulations. In case the circumstances change, the format might switch to an online event. In either case, single events or panels may be held in a hybrid form. There will be no conference fee and a limited amount of travel bursaries can be organised. Please let us know if you require further information on this.

We are currently exploring possibilities for the publication of a conference volume. Further information on this will follow.

ORGANISERS:

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<https://postcolonial-narrations.net/>

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