



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

## Thanatic Ethics : the Circulation of Bodies in Migratory Spaces

Workshop #1 – Online – April 1-2, 2021

# ABSTRACTS & BIOS

Convened by **Bidisha Banerjee** (CPCH, The Education University of Hong Kong),  
**Judith Misrahi-Barak** (EMMA, Montpellier 3) and **Thomas Lacroix** (MFO)

Markus Arnold

French & Francophone Studies, University of Cape Town

### **“The pleasure of drawing while people are drowning”: Graphic Literature and the Critical Engagement with Death in Migratory Spaces**

Over the past two decades, graphic literatures have been substantially diversifying to the point of now occupying numerous symbolic locations both within the artistic field and other areas of representation and social discourse. If the generic opening and hybrid formats have contributed to increased legitimization and visibility of the medium, (auto)biographical, testimonial, and non-fictional graphic storytelling plays a notable role; it has indeed become particularly fertile in addressing complex political issues such as war, displacement, and migration.

Yet these newly “engaged” productions of a polysemic medium – in most cases between the image and the text – touch on several complex, partly interrelated issues. On the one hand lingers the reduction to the solely illustrative, on the other the suspicion of simplification and superficiality – all of which cannot be easily dismissed when graphic texts become simple pre-texts for other presumably extra-textual matter: identity, politics, society, etc. At the same time, like for literature, certain forms of fictionalization and aesthetic play may meet with (ethical) reservations for topical issues which seem to rather call for ‘serious’ and ‘factual’ attention. And, of course, discursive and visual expression entertain a multiple relationship, where one may compensate for, double, or strategically contrast the other.

Informed by such interrogations about the specificity of the medium and the intricacy of its new “engaged” formats, this paper investigates into the graphic work on migration and displacement of several contemporary French authors (such as Edmond Baudoin and Troubs, Yvan Alagbé, Charles Masson, Hippolyte and Vincent Zabus, and Jean-Philippe Stassen) and asks the specific question of how death of migrants and refugees is represented and reflected in these narratives. Close analysis of selected excerpts will show that *writing* about such delicate topics does neither have the same scenographical implications nor trigger the same (sensitive and critical) response as *drawing* them – ultimately revealing that the aesthetic and political relevance of these works lies in the medium’s characteristic interplay between the two modes of representation.

**Markus Arnold** is Associate Professor in French and Francophone Studies at the University of Cape Town. His interests cover Francophone and Comparative literatures and cultures from the ‘Global South’ (notably Indian Ocean), postcolonial theory, graphic literature, and contemporary cinema. His publications comprise the monograph *La littérature mauricienne contemporaine* (2017) and the co-directed volumes *L’image et son dehors: contours, transitions, transformations* (2017, with M. Allaoui) and *Borders and Ecotones in the Indian Ocean: Cultural and Literary perspectives* (2020, with C. Duboin and J. Misrahi-Barak). He is editor-in-chief of the journal *French Studies in Southern Africa* and currently works on notions such as ‘Afropolitanism’ and on the relation between graphic literature and fine art.

## Catherine Bernard

Contemporary Art and Visual Studies, Université de Paris – UMR 8225 LARCA

### **“Contemporary Art’s Thanatic Work: Re-embodying the (Absent) Migrant Body”**

Contemporary art has insistently turned to the experience of migration with a view to making us see, and possibly to making us experience and reflect on the embodied politics of migration. The documentary mode has featured prominently in art’s attempt at accounting for the reality of global migration. Yet other, more indirect strategies, privileging sometimes a combination of allegory and empiricist experientiality, have also been favoured by artists who aim at triggering an embodied thought experiment and thus invite us to ponder the brutal and tragic truth of migration.

In order to explore such thought experiments and the experiential contract they elaborate, this paper will turn to some of the works exhibited in the show *When Home Won’t Let You Stay: Migration Through Contemporary Art*, that toured from the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and to Stanford University in 2019 and 2020, and to the works of Adel Abdessemed, Nino Sarabutra and Enrique Ramírez. I will aim to show how the “necropolitics” (Achille Mbembe) of global migration or forced exile is re-mediated through visual experimentations that harness the sensorial, sometimes at its most paradoxically tenuous, to a politics of consideration and a rehistoricizing of the gaze.

**Catherine Bernard** is Professor of English literature and art history at Université de Paris. Her research hinges on the politics of form, from Modernism to contemporary aesthetics. She has published extensively on modernist and contemporary visual culture and art (from the Bloomsbury group, to Andy Warhol, David Hockney, but also Gillian Wearing, Rachel Whiteread or Sam Taylor-Johnson). Among her recent research pieces on contemporary aesthetics, one may mention: “In the Turbine of Experimentation: Tate Modern and the New (?) Rationale of Collective Performance,” Anne-Laure Fortin-Tournès, Hélène Lecossois, Brigitte Félix (eds.), “Experimental Art”, *Angles*, mars 2018, as well as the soon to be published “Re-imagining Art’s Body Politic after/with Modernism: Views from the Digital Scene and More,” Alda Correia, Alcinda de Sousa et Angélica Varandas (eds.), “From Manuscript to Digital | New Pathways,” *Anglo-Saxonica*, University of Lisbon, 2020. She has recently published a book with the Sorbonne University press turning to the body politics of contemporary British fiction and visual arts: *Matière à réflexion. Du corps politique dans la littérature et les arts visuels britanniques contemporains* (Presses de l’Université Paris Sorbonne, 2018).

## Jaine Chemmachery

Postcolonial Literatures, Sorbonne Université, Paris

**Discussing the Repatriation of the Brother/Terrorist’s Body in Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire***

This paper wishes to examine the issue of body repatriation as it is touched upon in Kamila Shamsie's 2017 novel *Home Fire*. Part of this modern rewriting of Sophocles' *Antigone* deals with Aneeka's attempts to have the body of her twin brother, Parvaiz, repatriated from Pakistan to London so that he could have a proper burial, despite the fact that he has been characterised as a terrorist by the British government, and consequently refused repatriation.

The novel raises many questions pertaining to belonging and law, among others. Before being killed, Parvaiz expressed a desire to return home which echoes the case of Shamima Begum, a British teenager who left England in 2015 to join ISIS in Syria and who, in 2019, pregnant with a boy, tried to return to England so that her son could benefit from medical care there. The novel seems to respond to Spivak's call to "listen to the other, as if it were a self, neither to punish nor to acquit" ("Terror: A Speech After 9/11", 2004, 83). Referring to Judith Butler's reflection on public mourning and grievable lives, "on how a life that is not supposed to be grieved is also a life that is not supposed to have existed at all, whose 'negation' is built into its very public definition", I will discuss how the novel compels us to listen to a great variety of voices, ranging from voices that uncompromisingly condemn fundamentalists, whatever their relation to terrorist ideology is, to others that state that criminalising the bodies of terrorists means dehumanising the corresponding subjects.

**Jaine Chemmachery** is Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Literatures at Sorbonne Université. She wrote a PhD dissertation on R. Kipling's and S. Maugham's short stories on Empire and the relation between colonialism, modernity and the genre of the short story (2013). Her main research fields are colonial and postcolonial literatures, Victorian and Neo-Victorian literatures, and modernity. Her current research focuses on mobility studies, body studies and the representation of precarity/precarioussness in literature. She is currently working with Bhawana Jain on a collected volume entitled *Mobility and Corporeality in English Literature: Bodies in Motion (19th-21st centuries)*.

**Félicien de Heusch**

Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies (CEDEM), University of Liège

### **Transnational Engagements Around Senegalese Migrant Deaths**

The aim of the research is to focus on transnational forms of engagement around Senegalese migrants' death. From the incipient stages of the research, body repatriation has emerged as an important preoccupation among Senegalese migrants. This challenging transnational practice reveals how solidarity networks are deployed to insure a bottom-up 'funerary social protection'. By focusing specifically on the cases of Belgium, Spain and Senegal the research will address the following questions: how do Senegalese migrants' community and family networks construct transnational relationships of solidarity around body repatriation? How do social movements emerge, and home and host state authorities (dis)engage around Senegalese migrants' deaths? Based on a multi-sited ethnography, the research focuses on the diversity of responses implemented by the heterogeneous Senegalese migrants' community associations in different

North-South European settings. In particular, the research shows how transnational multi-level states engage or disengage according to the type of death. Finally, the research raises the issue of the transnational political and religious management of Senegalese necropolis. In a nutshell, the research will provide a better understanding of transnational expressions of social protection around death: a core concern not only for Senegalese migrants, but also for other migrant communities in the context of restrictive European welfare regimes.

**Félicien de Heusch** joined the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies (CEDEM) at the University of Liège (Belgium) in September 2018 as a PhD candidate within 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. Before joining the CEDEM, he completed a double MA degree in Immigration Studies at the University of Liège and the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, as well as a BA in Anthropology at the National University of Córdoba in Argentina. His research interests include social protection, community and family strategies, transnationalism, Senegalese and Haitian migration, migration routes, street vending and social movements. He conducted fieldwork in Argentina, Brazil, Senegal, Spain and Belgium.

### **Charles Heller**

Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), Graduate Institute, Geneva

### **Forensic Oceanography: Contesting Border Violence and Aesthetic Boundaries**

In this presentation, I will reflect on the shifting forms of liquid violence inflicted upon illegalised migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean, and the role imaging, mapping and listening practices play both in reproducing this structural violence but also in contesting it. I will begin by discussing the way images and image practices have been used to selectively reveal migrants' unauthorized mobility but conceal border violence within the "border spectacle". To contest border violence, Forensic Oceanography had to challenge as well these aesthetic boundaries by mobilizing surveillance means against the grain. I will then discuss how our practice has shifted over the years from the assemblage of multiple sensing devices to create a composite image of violent events in the near absence of available photographs characteristic of Forensic Oceanography's early work on the « left to die boat » (2012), to the navigation through 3D space modeled on the basis of a profusion of video imagery that we mobilise in our video « Mare Clausum » (2018) produced with Forensic Architecture. These distinct methodologies raise challenging ethical questions in terms of the documentation of migrants' deaths and demand careful positioning to avoid reproducing racialised imaginaries of invasion.

**Charles Heller** is a researcher and filmmaker whose work has a long-standing focus on the politics of migration within and at the borders of Europe. In 2015, he completed a Ph.D. in Research Architecture at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is currently Research Associate at the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), Graduate Institute, Geneva. Together with

Lorenzo Pezzani, in 2011 Heller co-founded Forensic Oceanography, a collaborative project based at Goldsmiths that has developed innovative methodologies to document the conditions that lead to migrants' deaths at sea, and which has generated human rights reports, articles and videos that have been exhibited internationally.

### **Carolina Kobelinsky**

CNRS/LESC, Paris

#### **Making a Place for the Dead by Migration: Experiences from Catania (Sicily)**

Between 2015 and 2018, Catania was one of the main arrival ports for border crossers trying to reach the European Union without the necessary authorization from nation-states. In 2017, a small group of locals involved in migrant reception in the port with the Red Cross, decided to work together in order to find a way to “respect” the dead by migration. This led them to design a database compiling all existing information about the dead buried in the municipal cemetery that could contribute to endeavors to identify the bodies and return them to their families. Drawing on ethnographic material, I will examine here this particular initiative by raising a set of related questions: how could the bodies be identified through this database? What are the modes of attachment to these dead at play here? What are the politics underpinning and running through the project? And eventually how is it related to the broader question of hospitality?

**Carolina Kobelinsky** is an anthropologist, research fellow at the French National Scientific Research Centre (*Laboratory of Ethnology and Comparative Sociology*). After having worked on the treatment of asylum seekers in France and the experience of waiting, her current research deals with border deaths. Drawing on an ethnographic approach, she studies the material and symbolic treatment of dead border-crossers at the Southern borders of Europe (Spain, Italy). She is the co-coordinator of the [MECMI: Morts en contexte de migration program](#) (funded by ANR/FRSC Québec).

### **Ana Cristina Mendes**

School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon

#### **The Refugee ‘Crisis’ and Ai Weiwei’s Thanatic Shorthand**

For Roland Barthes, mortality is part of photography and cannot be disentangled from it (1981, 14-15). In Ai Weiwei’s reenactment of a photograph of Alan Kurdi that had made global headlines the year before, there is a double evocation of death—of the subject of the first image – the referent of the image, the drowned three-year-old Kurdi, a Syrian refugee of Kurdish extraction – and of the image-making itself – considering that the negativity of time is a precondition of the

analogue condition of the photography that Barthes examined in *Camera Lucida*. By reenacting the photograph of Kurdi, Weiwei adapted and resignified this iconic image by refocusing our attention on its referent, providing a different context for human precarity based on the indexicality of the photograph of a Syrian-Kurdish child lying dead on the shore, showing the human cost of conflict in the Middle East.

Weiwei's reenactment of the Kurdi photograph immediately sparked controversy, perhaps even more intense than that surrounding the circulation on social media of the image of the young refugee's dead body. As part of the 'impromptu publics of moral spectatorship' (Mortensen and Trenz 2016, 346), some responses looked upon negatively at the artist's replacement of Kurdi's body—the visual icon of the Syrian refugee 'crisis', its exemplary referent—with Weiwei's own celebrity body. The photo was not read primarily as a reenactment, adaptation, or resignification, but as an insensitive appropriation and exploitation of the Other, a callous deployment of the shock value of Kurdi's photo to court controversy for the sake of the audience and to further Weiwei's celebrity status as the enfant terrible of the Western art scene. Against the backdrop of the various ethical concerns surrounding this photographic reenactment, this paper focuses on the referential slippage Kurdi/Weiwei and, specifically, on the thanatic shorthand in Weiwei's resignification.

**Ana Cristina Mendes** is Associate Professor in English Studies at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon. She uses cultural and postcolonial studies to examine literary and screen texts (in particular, intermedia adaptations) as venues for resistant knowledge formations to expand upon theories of epistemic injustice. She serves on the board of the Association of Cultural Studies.

### [Lucinda News](#)

Literature and Cultural Studies, Education University of Hong Kong

### **Necropolitical Ecologies: Nature's Death-work in the Borderzone**

In recent years, the increased incidence and hyper-visibility of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean and US-Mexico border have transformed these borderzones into necropolitical spaces (Mbembe) in which migrant lives are expendable in the pursuit of border "security." Images of dead migrants washed up on European beaches were a regular feature of the news cycle in 2015. More recently, President Donald Trump's family separation policy led to the deaths of six children in custody and conditions in detention camps along the US-Mexico border have made them especially susceptible to Covid-19 outbreaks. The pandemic in particular has shown us how nature can be "put to work" in the service of necropolitical border policies, but such approaches are nothing new. Decades of American "prevention through deterrence," such as through the construction of walls and barriers, have driven would-be migrants into more perilous crossing-points and caused further damage to the fragile desert ecosystem of the borderland. This is a phenomenon Gloria Anzaldúa alludes to in her landmark work of border theory, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), which prefigures the current era of migrant "crisis." In its more



poetic and figurative sections, she draws attention to nature's co-optation as necropolitical border agent. Addressing the European context, Armin Greder's graphic novel *Mediterranean* (2017) places nature at the forefront of its wordless narrative of migrant crossing. Both texts are interested in what Jason Moore calls "eco-social relationships". Migrant deaths give us a unique insight into how borders function as unique "bundles" of human and extra-human natures; this is yet another way that nature is made to "work" for humans to maintain the capitalist world system. At the same time, both Anzaldúa and Greder demonstrate nature's agency and resistance to its role as border agent as an integral part of their wider materialist critiques of capitalism and imperialism.

**Lucinda News** is a current Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Literature and Culture Studies at EdUHK. She has previously held lectureships at Queen Mary University of London and the University of Manchester. She is the author of *Domestic Intersections in Contemporary Migration Fiction: Homing the Metropole* (Routledge, 2019) and is currently researching a new project about the relationship between human migration and the natural environment in postcolonial and world literature.

## Rachid Oulahal

Psychology Studies, Université de La Réunion, DIRE (Déplacement, Identités, Regards, Écritures)

### **How can the Burial Sites of Forced Migrants Influence the Identity Processes of their Descendants? Encountering Descendants of Algerians in New Caledonia**

We propose to investigate the issue of death in migration and the placement of bodies through the case of descendants of Algerians in New Caledonia.

The first Algerians to arrive in this territory were sentenced by the French colonial administration, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, to terms which they had to serve in New Caledonia. Most of them will never be able to go back to their home country.

A first research enabled us to focus on how the descendants of these deportees define themselves in the contemporary political situation of New Caledonia (a consultation process for independence currently underway). The data were collected through semi-structured interviews carried out with 9 of these descendants.

Considering the objectives of the Thanatic Ethics project and its questioning related to the placement and movement of dead bodies in migration, we would like to consider the impact that the places of burial can have on the identity processes of the descendants of migrants. Based on the situation of descendants of Algerians in New Caledonia, we will see that the creation of a Muslim cemetery at the end of the 19th century served as the first burial place following the Muslim rite for the first Algerians who were not authorized to return to their home country. According to the data we collected through the interviews but also from historical sources, it



appears that this cemetery became a gathering place for other Algerian convicts who decided to settle near the cemetery to be buried there once they die.

This cemetery became a first place of heritage for the descendants of these convicts and opened the way to a new process of identity reappropriation. Our communication proposes to highlight the modalities from which a burial place can have an impact on the identity of descendants. From this specific historical case, our contribution will examine current migration situations where the place of burial of bodies, between both origin and host country, can be closely linked to how descendants will define themselves later in their host society.

**Rachid Oulahal** is an Assistant Professor in Psychology in the University of La Reunion, in France. His research field focuses on intercultural psychology and the way cultural backgrounds and cultural contacts impact individuals' identity and memory processes. More precisely, his investigations consider the autobiographical memory and its specificities in intercultural situations, such situations being related to migration, multicultural backgrounds... Rachid Oulahal is part of DIRE research center (Déplacements, Identités, Regards, Ecritures).

### **Ravinder Singh Rana**

English Studies, Université Grenoble Alpes

### ***Life of Pi* or a Survivor's Dilemma**

*Life of Pi* (2001), a novel by Yann Martel focuses on the certainty of loss and the uncertainty of survival in the sea. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean the protagonist Piscine Molitor Patel loses his family and the animals that his family had reared at the zoo owned by them in Pondicherry, India. The shipwreck takes place in the course of their journey between India and Canada where they are moving to take refuge from the political volatility back home. Piscine manages to find a raft in the midst of that gigantic ocean, and thus becomes one of the raft people. Bodies of animals and humans left behind in the ocean, Piscine knits a complex fractured tale of his survival resulting from the trauma of the disaster that calls into question the notion of rationality.

This presentation investigates the literary dimension of a survivor account through the narratives posited in the novel. As many historical accounts have revealed, survivors have to live with a trauma, a trauma of having survived while others were perishing. Piscine- the protagonist-narrator- bears the death of his people and animals on his conscience. The notion of fictionality deep-rooted in the literary genre emerges to fill the vacuum left by the absence of a real survivor, encompassing thereby a reality that could otherwise be lost, as Primo Lévi insinuated in his *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), there cannot be a real witness account, as the real witness is dead, referring to the Auschwitz gas chambers.

I will foreground the role of a literary fiction in underlining the despair and trauma associated to the loss appearing in the form of dead bodies in the middle of nowhere that becomes a tangible geographical location, and will also emphasize on the representation of a bigger tragedy, which is also a common denominator between Lévi's death camps and Martel's deadly ocean: a survivor's

predicament of mourning those personal losses and concurrently overlooking them in order to concentrate on the survival in real-time.

**Ravinder Singh Rana** teaches English at Université Grenoble Alpes. His main focus is on British and Commonwealth literature and civilization. He defended his PhD thesis in December 2015 at Paul-Valéry University, Montpellier 3, in comparative literature on the theme of Holocaust. It was titled *Race, langage et culture dans l'œuvre de Jonathan Littell, Les Bienveillantes*. His current areas of research include Holocaust and Partition studies.

### Alan Rice

English and American Studies, University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

### **Jade Montserrat's Fugitive Traces, Earth-Splattered Bodies and Thanatic Ethics: Making African Atlantic Homespace in Alien Environments Then and Now (1758–2020)**

This article discusses the Scarborough-born Black British artist Jade Montserrat, interrogating her multimedia work in the light of the history of slavery and Black British presence, postcolonialism, thanatic ethics and ecocriticism. It looks specifically at the video works *Clay* (2015) and *Peat Bog* (2015), discussing them in the context of their relation to Black presence in the North and the history of Black agency including new information about runaway slaves and an extended discussion of the form of the work and its relation to death and memory. It discusses specifically the work in this context of death and ways of memorialisation in the African Atlantic diaspora. The watercolour *Toes* (2018) and the installation piece *No Need for Clothing* (2017) are discussed in these terms as well, while the latter is used also to describe how charcoal traces from the work illuminate the physical cost of the work on Black bodies and the way traces of presence outlive them hence enabling a mourning for artist and audience through a sharing of the remnants of the work itself. The article uses theoretical work by Edouard Glissant, Paul Ricoeur, Michael Rothberg, Katherine McKitterick, Ian Baucom, and Hannah Arendt, as well as the context of Black British history, to help illuminate the multiple meanings the work engenders.

**Alan Rice** is Professor in English and American Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston. He has degrees from the University of Edinburgh, Bowling Green State University, Ohio and Keele. He has worked on the interdisciplinary study of the Black Atlantic for the past three decades including publishing *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (Continuum, 2003) & *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool UP, 2010). Alan was academic advisor to the *Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project* in Lancaster, was editor in chief of Manchester's *Revealing Histories Website* and a co-curator of the Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester's 2007-8 exhibition *Trade and Empire: Remembering Slavery*. He has given keynote presentations in Britain, Germany, the United States, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Poland and France and has contributed to documentaries and news programmes for the BBC, Korean Television, Border Television and public broadcasting in America. In May 2014 he launched as co-director, the Institute for Black Atlantic Research (IBAR) at UCLAN with special guest writer, Caryl Phillips. He has recently co-written a monograph on the works of the 2017 Turner Prize winner,

Black British artist, Lubaina Himid With Celeste-Marie Bernier, Hannah Durkin & Lubaina Himid. *Inside the Invisible: Slavery and Memory in the Life and Work of Lubaina Himid (1985-2018)* (Liverpool University Press, 2019) and is currently curating an exhibition *Lubaina Himid's Memorial to Zong* at the Lancaster Maritime Museum.

### [Edwige Tamalet Talbayev](#)

French, Middle East and North African Studies, Tulane University

#### **The Residual Migrant: Dissolutive Ontologies and Necropolitics in the Mediterranean**

This talk seeks to answer one of the key questions on which the thanatic ethics project hinges: what happens to the submerged bodies of migrants who perish during their ill-fated, maritime journey to Europe? Reflecting on the drownings punctuating the clandestine trans-Mediterranean crossings brought to the world's attention during the so-called "migrant crisis" of the mid-2010s, this argument spotlights what happens to migrant bodies excluded from the usual social practices surrounding death and bereavement (e.g., repatriation or rituals surrounding burial in a clearly circumscribed grave). Anonymized and left to die at sea, their bodies cannot even claim the fate of entombment in a maritime "cemetery" as the circulatory nature of water functions as a principle of dispersal and virtualization. They are left to decompose in the elements, dissolved through the corrosive effect of seawater and bereft of proper memorialization.

Taking the becoming-residual of drowned bodies as a starting point, I shed light on the process through which water implicates the human and the geophysical in a bilateral process of mutual alteration and eventual amalgamation. Rescripting bodies as corruptible matter through this seawater epistemology, I lay bare an ontology of dissolution premised on loss and decomposition. I argue that this process brings to material, hyperbolic completion the obliteration of migrants instigated by the disciplining forces of European sovereignty (Mbembe's "necropolitics"). Through close readings from Youssouf Amine Elalamy's novel *Seadrinkers*, this presentation reveals how water partakes of modernity's grotesque (as in deformed, tumefied drowned bodies) obliteration of abjected forms of life barred from the privileges of unconditional humanity. The figure of the residual migrant therefore queries the ethical resonance of dying at sea as it uncovers the biopolitical mechanisms of disavowal and foreclosure of "unlawful" life in a Mediterranean recast as a necropolitical space.

[Edwige Tamalet Talbayev](#) is Associate Professor of French and Director of Middle East North African Studies at Tulane University, New Orleans, USA. A scholar of Maghrebi literature and Mediterranean Studies, she is the author of *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* (2017) and the co-editor of *The Mediterranean Maghreb: Literature and Plurilingualism* (2012) and *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis* (2018). She is currently at work on two edited volumes: *Remembering Hospitality in the Mediterranean* and *Water Logics*, the proceedings of the international conference on the same topic that she co-organized at Tulane in April 2019. She is Vice-president of the Center for Francophone Studies at the University of Leipzig (Germany) and Secretary of the Executive Committee of the CLCS Mediterranean Forum at the Modern

Language Association (USA). Since 2015, she has served as the Editor of *Expressions Maghrébines*, the international journal of Maghrebi literature published under the auspices of the *Coordination Internationale des Chercheurs sur les Littératures Maghrébines* (CICLIM).

### Kelly Yin Nga Tse

Literature and Cultural Studies, Education University of Hong Kong

#### **“The Sea is History”: Archiving Vietnamese Refugee Stories**

This paper critically examines the representation of the deadly sea and bodies of water in refugee narratives pertaining to what the Americans designate the Vietnam War or what the Vietnamese call the American War. Specifically, through a comparative reading of the fictional stories of writers Viet Thanh Nguyen and Lan Cao, this paper shows how both writers construe the deadly ocean as a material and symbolic space traversed by Vietnamese “boat people.” In so doing, this paper argues for the centrality of the sea in constituting an alternative archive of the Vietnamese conflict that recognizes refugees (both alive and dead) as historical agents. Importantly, this oceanic view of the Vietnamese conflict is key to enacting critiques towards both national (Vietnamese) and imperial (American) regimes of exclusion.

While images of air raids and devastated lands have been common in cultural depictions of the war in Vietnam, not much attention has been paid to the oceanic (and oftentimes thanatic) aspects of the conflict. By demonstrating how Vietnamese refugee writers animate treacherous oceanic routes of escape, this paper redirects our attention to the neglected maritime spaces as conflict spaces. This re-articulation of the sea as history allows us to contest both aerial and terrestrial-based modes of knowing the war, as it radically expands the spatiality and temporality of the conflict in Vietnam.

**Kelly Yin Nga Tse** is an Assistant Professor at the Education University of Hong Kong. She received her DPhil in English from the University of Oxford, and her MPhil and BA from the University of Hong Kong. Her research and teaching interests lie in postcolonial and world literatures (with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region), environmental humanities, law and literature, gender studies, and media studies. She has published in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, *The Journal of International Women’s Studies*, *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, amongst others.

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#### **For further details**

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