

# PEDAGOGIES OF THE SEA

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**Faculty of Education  
Faculty of Environmental Studies  
Department of Humanities  
Department of Anthropology  
Office of the Vice President, Research  
Founders College**

**Convened by Daniel Yon  
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**Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
305 Founders College  
York University  
9:30 AM–5:00 PM**





**9:30 – 9:50 am: REGISTRATION**

**9:40 - 10:00 am: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS,  
INTRODUCTIONS and OVERVIEW**  
Daniel A. Yon

**10:00 - 11:00 am: THE DEEP SEA**  
Anna Zalik  
Katherine Anderson  
Othon Alexandrakis

**11:00 - 12:00 pm: OCEANIC ORIENTATIONS**  
Sandra Widmer (Chair)  
Tyler Ball  
Kass Banning

**12:00 - 12:45 pm: LUNCH**

**12:45 - 2:00 pm: CROSSINGS**  
Andrea Davis  
Arun Chaudhuri  
Rinaldo Walcott  
Andrea Medovarski

**2:00 - 3:00 pm: REIMAGININGS**  
Patrick Taylor  
Ken Little  
Yutaka Yoshida

**3:00 – 3:30 pm: BREAK**

**3:30 – 5:00 pm: KEYNOTE – Professor Isabel Hofmeyr**

**PEDAGOGIES OF THE SEA: HYDROCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES**

**INTRODUCTION:** Tyler Ball



*Isabel Hofmeyr is Professor of African Literature at University of Witwatersrand, as well as visiting Global Distinguished Professor at New York University. Over the past two decades she has pioneered research on global, oceanic and transnational forms of literary and cultural history, and is a leading scholar of the Indian Ocean world.*

Rising sea levels have shifted the ways in which we do oceanic studies. Whereas older styles of oceanic histories treated the sea as surface and backdrop for human movement at sea, a new oceanic studies seeks to engage with the materiality of the ocean, attempting analytically to go off shore and below the water line. This scholarship seeks to make visible the deep-seated land- and human-orientations of much research. Terming these “dry technologies”, this work seeks to “immerse” concepts and theories to produce new modes of analysis.

Using the rubric of hydrocolonialism, this talk will outline a range of emerging methods and techniques, exploring how these might be employed as pedagogies of the sea.

**5:00 - 5:12: CONCLUDING REMARKS** Andrea Davis





## **10:00 - 11:00 am: THE DEEP SEA**

### **The Deep Seabed and Colonial Redress**

Anna Zalik, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University

In the 20th century tensions concerning the future of the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction expressed ongoing conflict between Global South and North on redress for formal colonialism. As interest in mining the international seabed has increased since the turn of the millennium, a Bandung era discourse that frames the deep sea as the 'common heritage of humankind' has been reinvigorated. This paper examines current and historic tensions at the International Seabed Authority, the UN agency charged with regulating potential extraction from the ocean floor beyond state jurisdiction. In the context of increasing alarm at the possibility of extreme extraction from marine depths, the debate over the ocean floor exemplifies how a Keynesian legacy confronts both radical and neoliberal environmentalism in the contemporary period. Maritime history, in turn, prefigures this legacy, as the genocidal heritage on the deep sea floor intersects with mining concessions under ISA jurisdiction.

### **Sight and the Modern Ocean**

Katharine Anderson, Department of Humanities, York University

In 1927, the American naturalist William Beebe mounted an expedition to Haiti to study coral reefs that was largely funded by private donors through the auspices of the New York Zoological Society. As was his established practice, Beebe later described the expedition in a popular work, *Beneath Tropic Seas*, published by G. P. Putnam in 1928. Beebe's salesmanship and prose invites us to

frame his oceanic projects within a conventional tradition of underwater worlds as natural spectacle, the 'other' of the terrestrial and human environment. Yet the Haiti expedition can also be read within a different framework of debates about methods – both how to organize and fund the modern expedition, and how to manage the demands of both scale and observability in the marine environment.

### **The Distance to Nowhere: Rethinking Mediterranean Ocean Crossings and European Futures with Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Greece**

Othon Alexandrakis, Department of Anthropology, York University

On water one's perception of horizontal and vertical distance can become uncertain. Proximity to ground and grounding phenomena of all description is easily misjudged: distant objects and land can feel like they are swimmable, or at least a floatable distance away; the depths and what they may hold—watery menageries, museums, morgues—can seem immediately present beneath the waves. Since 2015, thousands of unaccompanied minors travelled across the Mediterranean Ocean from Turkey to the Greek island of Mytilene. For many of these children, the intense experience of being on water was punctuated by being in the water, losing things and sometimes people below the surface. Bringing Deleuze's writing on becoming-child together with anthropological work on child agency and migrant geographies, this paper considers how liquification of markers and perceptual uncertainties are formative elements of young migrant subjectivities on ocean crossings. I argue that this aspect of becoming migrant on water encourages the imaginative production of unfixed futures among unaccompanied migrant children. This paper concludes by positing these imaginings as a critique on a fraught modern European political continentalism.



## 11:00 - 12:00 am: OCEANIC ORIENTATIONS

### **Oceanic Orientations as Decolonizing Pedagogies: Of Maps, Bombs and Plastics**

Sandra Widmer, Department of Anthropology, York University

This presentation will present devices I have employed to orient North American and European audiences toward the significance of Pasifika lives, labours and worlds. In the process, I reflect on how engaging with these devices engages oceanic thinking as decolonizing pedagogies that make certain relationships visible about places and facts that have been made invisible to people in particular places, often with planetary consequences.

### **The Semiotic Sea: Oceanic Literacy in Indian Ocean Literature**

Tyler Ball, Department of English, York University

In literary studies the sea is often understood as little more than a reservoir for the extraction of metaphorical meaning. The established conventions of the field, including the analytic category of setting, flatten the lively seascape by rendering it the passive backdrop upon which exclusively human dramas might unfold, and obfuscate its role as an active force with the power to change (or end) the lives of characters or affect the trajectories of plots. This paper considers how the sea is discussed in literary studies and asks whether it is possible to learn to read the ocean differently. In her most recent work, Karin Amimoto Ingersoll (2016) defines *seascape epistemology* as an embodied engagement with the ocean demonstrated in the Indigenous Hawaiian practices of *he'enalu* (surfing). She describes the process of developing an *oceanic literacy*, which attunes the wave rider/reader to their position

within the larger forces of a seascape that encompasses the waves and winds as well as the rider. This paper approaches the sea as a site of knowledge production and evokes the lessons of oceanic literacy to read the material semiotics of the sea in the context of Indian Ocean Literature.

### **Oceanic Disorientation: John Akomfrah's Poetics of the Sea**

Kass Banning, Cinema Studies Institute, University of Toronto

John Akomfrah's most recent moving image practice conjoins postcolonial and geological preoccupations, conjuring post-anthropomorphic temporalities of the sea. This dual focus is poignantly addressed in Akomfrah's three-channel video installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015): a work that explores the ocean as a site of conflict set within histories of the watery graves of slavery, migration, exploration, geological materialism and environmental devastation. Like the essay film, this work negotiates the human and the non-human, presented in a non-logocentric structure, yet forging distinct paths of free association. While Akomfrah's works have continuously adopted the essay form, it is the precise workings of the multi-screen installation apparatus itself that morphs the essayistic into new affective and political registers, ones that approximate thought itself, offering novel formal means to keep both colonial and posthumanist methodologies in play. Eschewing the single spatio-temporal construct for multi-screen projection, Akomfrah de-centralizes the viewer, fostering a more open-ended consideration of oceanic habitus beyond the sublime. While exploring the precise machinations of his recombinant practice of bricolage, this paper will argue how the oceanic has undergirded Akomfrah's aesthetic, evinced in tropes of multivalent fluidity and movement.



## **12:45 - 2:00 pm: CROSSINGS**

### **Caribbean Sea Memories and the Traumatic Past**

Andrea Davis, Department of Humanities, York University

This paper invokes Caribbean women's "rememory" (Morrison 1987) through the trope of the sea and readings of Dionne Brand's novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (2000) and Ramabai Espinet's novel *The Swinging Bridge* (2003). Specifically, the paper intervenes into Black Diaspora Studies' use of water as primarily a metaphor of Black displacement (Jackson 2019) by bringing into conversation the intersecting memories of African and Indian women in the Caribbean. In their portrayal of the rememory of the traumatic histories of chattel slavery and indentureship, the two novels allow us to examine the ways in which the sea functions as a deep repository of shared memory, as well as to re/imagine patriarchal national accountings of the past through matrilineal oceanic histories that lead to diasporic futures.

### **Manifesting Alien Passengers: The Ambiguities of Race Crossing the Ocean**

Arun Chaudhuri, Department of Anthropology, York University

Archival records on the life and legacy of Bengali mystic A.K. Mozumdar (1864-1953) seem to be ambiguous and inconsistent on who, or rather what, he actually was. In the language of immigration law of the time, he was thought to occupy an absolute and certain racial position: he was categorically not-white, and on this basis, the courts maintained he was not eligible for citizenship in the U.S. However, beyond the surface of this legal language, the figure of A.K. Mozumdar seems to ambiguously cut across a range of categories

(racial, national, occupational, and otherwise). This discussion will reflect how such ambiguities are reflected, and indeed inscribed in, the archival record: the strange traces of records found in ship manifests. As these ship manifests documented the residence, nationality, language, and race of their "alien passengers", Mozumdar comes to occupy these categories in ambiguously inconsistent ways, variously recorded as "White", "Hindu", "Aryan", Bengali, among other things. From this, larger conceptual questions can be raised about how such encounters with record-keeping practices related to large-scale, cross-oceanic travel seeks, translates, and perhaps even obscures, such subject categories.

### **Thinking Seas, Again**

Rinaldo Walcott, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

This paper meditates on the sea and its potential for thinking about contemporary Black movement and its various interdictions. Drawing on the work of contemporary Black visual artists, I argue for a re-enchantment with Black diaspora realities in a time of re-emergent nationalisms of all sorts.

### **Pedagogies of the Sea**

Andrea Medovarski, Department of Humanities, York University

This paper grapples with the ethical complexities of the twin forces of destruction and creation in the context of creative texts which attempt to represent the Middle Passage. As one force pushes us to linger on the enormity of the devastation, the other pulls us outward towards generative creations that emerge from this trauma. Is it possible to exceed the sea as history? (Walcott 1979).





## **2:00 - 3:00 pm: REIMAGININGS**

### **Reimagining Barbados in the Atlantic**

Patrick Taylor, Professor Emeritus of Humanities, York University

My purpose in this paper is to show how a study of the representation of the sea in works focusing on Barbados can contribute to a renewed understanding of the Barbadian experience. Drawing on theories of life-writing, imperial literature, decolonization and postcolonial haunting, I examine stories of the gift and treachery of the sea preserved in archival documents and writings of a white Barbadian family. Although these narratives work to hide their own complicities, their haunting silences cry out for redress and reparation. I compare these writings with Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black* (2018). While George Washington Black's redemptive journey around the Atlantic leads to the establishment of a sea menagerie in London that marks a form of reconciliation with his plantation past, his confrontation with the ghost of colonial whiteness remains an ongoing project.

### **For the Time is at Hand, "Un-Belizable" Beast-time Somethings**

Ken Little, Department of Anthropology, York University

For Miss Grace, the beast-time arrived with the Flood surge and in its wake left the tourists. It felt like the end of the world. "Me, I could feel the Beast comin'," Grace said. "God say we had it comin'," she said. This paper evokes the manner in which Grace feels the signs of "the beast" in the trauma of a deadly Caribbean storm flood that destroyed her beach side village leaving only anguish and hoards of tourist investors in its wake. I take up the question of an alternative

tourist economy that seemed to blow in off the sea, pondering Grace's beast-time encounters as vibratory conjurations, open transductions, contingent as in some quality of an accidental discovery of new feelings. I turn to the power of crazy fluid connections through which Grace's sea-stormy encounters became a make-believe space that composed itself as a dense entanglement of sensation, attention, and matter. I re-imagine the evidence of Grace's beast-time affective economy as a dynamized force, co-constituting enactments of trauma and curiosity: attempts to find room to maneuver in a new tourist real, on a beach, in Belize.

### **Transcending the Pacific, Disrupting Racial Framework: An Incomplete Encounter between Sadao Shinjo and the Colored GIs in Okinawa**

Yutaka Yoshida, Tokyo University of Science

The processes of decolonization in the Pacific and Atlantic regions have been separately analyzed, but the presence of the U.S. military urges us to see them as contemporary phenomenon. First, a declassified document that translated literary practices of Okinawa into the one to which they thought was almost identical in Trinidad: calypso. Second, Okinawa's *tanka* poet Sadao Shinjo, who offers us a chance to escape an ideological, racial, and linguistic code set up in the U.S. occupied Okinawa. Coloured GIs in Okinawa in the late 1960s included the U.S. military personnel of African as well as Caribbean origin, who participated in the demilitarizing movement in Okinawa. Some of them were influenced by Black Power Movement, others by anti-Vietnam War movement in Okinawa and elsewhere. I would argue that Shinjo illustrates these instances in his poems as the blueprint of transpacific solidarity.