

# Thinking Futures from Elsewhere

07-08 March 2023 / Collegium Helveticum, ETH / [www.collegium.ethz.ch/](http://www.collegium.ethz.ch/)



## *CONVENERS*

**SIDHARTHAN MAUNAGURU | BENEDIKT KORF**

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE & UNIVERSITY OF ZURICH

## *PANELISTS*

**ASEBE REGASSA | RAJI STEINECK | DEBJANI BHATTACHARYYA  
| MELUSI NKOMO | SHIVANI GUPTA | IAN KLINKE | JASNEA SARMA |  
NAVEEDA KHANI | AISHA FINCH | HANNES BAJOHRI | SAMEENA  
MULLAI | ANDREA MUEHLEBEACH | SHONA LOONGI**

## *VENUE*

Room: Meridian-Saal, Collegium Helveticum  
ETH Zurich/STW  
Schmelzbergstrasse 25  
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Schweiz

THIS CONFERENCE IS FUNDED BY COLLEGIUM HELVETICUM AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY, DEPARTMENT  
OF GEOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ZURICH

# Thinking Futures from Elsewhere

Sidharthan Maunaguru & Benedikt Korf

The future is often thought through the present and the past; as entanglements, or as potential or multiple or yet to come. The Covid-19 pandemic, the impending threat of climate change, financial meltdown, global migration waves and other global and local crises have resulted in greater concern about the future, and futures facing our social and ecological worlds. This workshop proposes taking the 'future' seriously - as a subject of scholarly enquiry, a theoretical orientation, or an analytical paradigm. We invite contributions from across disciplines to engage in comparative and connected deliberations on 'thinking with/in the future,' i.e. thinking the future and thinking with and within (multiple) future/s.

Discourses around future continue to be shaped by concerns around predictions, governance and management of uncertainties, resources and survival that have emerged with modernity, capitalism and neoliberalism (Bryant and Knight, 2019, Salazar 2017). Moreover, social sciences engage with the future through proximate concepts such as potential, prospection, anticipation, waiting, and hope as well as broader questions of temporality, while paradigms of 'common futures' and multiple futures have emerged through theorizing around the Anthropocene and ecology. Appadurai's (2013) call for a politics of the future is crucial in locating the inequities and presents at stake in futuring practices and who can engage in them. Even as modernity and capitalist temporalities seek to produce cadres of entrepreneurs and workers who are acculturated into values of maximization and temporal discipline, 'multiple temporal vistas' come into play in the ways in which people seize the space 'between what exists and what is possible' (Dolan and Rajak, 2018).

But the unknow and uncertain that are attached to future/s also bring forward the fragility, vulnerability of life and an openness to surprise or politics of possibilities that have yet to come. Even an openness and attunement to the non-human and multiple temporalities may speak to a non-linear vision of the future and time (Tsing 2015). Further, the future and past are often articulated as 'place' – where we were and will be (Bryant and Knight, 2019) – layered with the place of the present. Conceptualizations of frontiers, borders, edges and thresholds have given us a new spatial grammar of thinking about time and space and of the geographical imaginations of future/s.

This raises a set of questions: (1) Might thinking with the future entail more complex entanglements of the spatial and temporal? And (2) how does attending to the spatial and temporal entanglements of futurity speak to the question of knowledge production? If we think the future/s is/are made and unmade in the everyday life and the everyday as an 'eventful' with surprise and danger (Das 2007), then (3) how does the future unfold into the everyday and how does the everyday render a language about future, space and time?

Furthermore, the idea of the future includes the envisioning of a moment of apocalypse or end, where the new future is only imagined through the complete annihilation of the existing or known present and past. The destruction and rapture that mark future/s rather than continuity, entanglement or assemblages may require a different way of thinking: How do we begin to think about futures through the notions of entanglement, rapture, frontiers, breaks, limits, destruction, and everyday from which the future is lived, (un)made or imagined? How do we open to a sense of mystery rather than mastery and work from the fragility, vulnerability, uncertainty of life where people learn to live with unknown?

Looking at the future/s makes the politics of the present more visible. On the one hand, the politics of futures may not be about transcending but descending into the everyday for making something possible and liveable in the present. On the other hand, it is also about politics of possibilities that are only achievable at the beginning of an end/apocalypse or possibility of nothing thereafter. In the diverse political engagements where humans and non-humans encounter each other in and through varied temporal and spatial configurations, might there be scope for developing an analysis of the unknown futures? How do we live with, think with, do politics with the unknown? This brings back fundamental questions such as whose future(s) we are talking about, for whom and by whom. The politics of future remind us how different cultures, histories and religions produce languages and concepts of futures and thus seek for decolonizing the notion of futures from modern and Eurocentric concepts of future.

This workshop therefore invites scholars to engage future/s conceptually and ethnographically by bringing temporal and spatial axes along with the notions of vulnerability, fragility, unknown, uncertainty, frontiers, limits and thresholds.

## TUESDAY, 07 MARCH 2023

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 09:00 – 09:30 | CHILLING IN: REGISTRATION AND CHATTING  |
| 09.30 – 10.00 | WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS  |
| 9.30          | <b>Director, Prof Sebastian Bonhoeffer</b> , Collegium Helveticum, ETH  |
| 09:40         | <b>Thinking Futures from Elsewhere: Some Thoughts</b><br><b>Sidharthan Maunaguru</b> , National University of Singapore and <b>Benedikt Korf</b> , University of Zurich |
| 10.00– 11.45  | IMAGINING SPACES OF THE FUTURE  |
|               | Chairperson   <b>Shona Loong</b> , University of Zurich   |
| 10:00         | <b>Panpsychist Geography, Space Colonisation and the Origins of Astropolitics</b><br><b>Ian Klinke</b> , Oxford University  |
| 10:30         | <b>Settler Colonialism and the Frontier: Imagining the Future Through the Past</b><br><b>Asebe Regassa</b> , University of Zurich                                       |
| 11:00         | Questions & Answers   |
| 11:45– 13:30  | LUNCH BREAK   |
| 13:30 – 15:00 | ROUNDTABLE: DECOLONIZING FUTURES  |
|               | Chairperson   <b>Sidharthan Maunaguru</b> , National University of Singapore  |
| 13:30         | <b>Shona Loong</b> , University of Zurich<br><b>Melusi Nkomo</b> , University of Zurich<br><b>Naveeda Khan</b> , Johns Hopkins University                               |
| 15:00 – 15:30 | TEA   |
| 15:30 – 17:15 | INHABITING ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURES  |
|               | Chairperson   <b>Nicolas Martin</b> , University of Zurich  |
| 15:30         | <b>Amarendra Ghosh's Char Kashem and the Future of Food Insecurity</b><br><b>Naveeda Khan</b> , Johns Hopkins University  |
| 16:00         | <b>Water Future</b><br><b>Andrea Muehlebach</b> , Universität Bremen  |
| 16:30         | Questions and answers   |
| 17:15         | CHILLING OUT  |
| 19:00         | DINNER ( for speakers and chairpersons)   |

## WEDNESDAY, 08 MARCH 2023

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>09.00 – 10.45</b> | <b>FUTURES' PAST I</b>   |
|                      | Chairperson   <b>Shivani Gupta</b> , National University of Singapore  |
| 09:00                | <b>Climate Futures' Past: Law and Weather Knowledge in the Indian Ocean World</b><br><b>Debjani Bhattacharyya</b> , University of Zurich |
| 09:30                | <b>Making Worlds from Futures Past: Afro-Latin Feminism, Marronage, and Fugitive Time</b><br><b>Aisha Finch</b> , Emory University       |
| 10:00                | Questions & Answers  |
| <b>10:45 – 11:00</b> | <b>TEA</b>   |
| <b>11:00 – 12:45</b> | <b>FUTURES' PAST II</b>  |
|                      | Chairperson   <b>Benedikt Korf</b> , University of Zurich  |
| 11:15                | <b>Life in View of the End Times: Looking at the Future from Medieval Japan</b><br><b>Raji Steineck</b> , University of Zurich           |
| 11:45                | <b>Hans Blumenberg's Speculative Histories of Reality</b><br><b>Hannes Bajohr</b> , Collegium Helveticum                                 |
| 12:15                | Questions & Answers  |
| <b>12:45 – 14:00</b> | <b>LUNCH BREAK</b>   |
| <b>14:00 – 15:45</b> | <b>VIOLENCE, WOUNDS AND VULNERABLE FUTURES</b>   |
|                      | Chairperson   <b>Christine Schenk</b> , University of Zurich   |
| 14:00                | <b>Predicting the Future: Sentencing, Anti-Blackness, and Interpreting Potentiality</b><br><b>Sameena Mulla</b> , Emory University       |
| 14.30                | <b>Vulnerable Aspirations: Utterances of Interrupted Bodies</b><br><b>Shivani Gupta</b> , National University of Singapore               |
| 15:00                | Questions & Answers  |
| 15:45-16:00          | <b>TEA</b>   |
| <b>16:00 – 16:45</b> | <b>FINAL DISCUSSION   Sidharthan Maunaguru and Benedikt Korf</b>   |
|                      | <b>FLASH LIGHT: Thinking Futures from Elsewhere (all participants)</b>   |
|                      | <b>Closing Remarks</b>   |
| <b>16:45</b>         | <b>END OF WORKSHOP</b>   |

## Panpsychist Geography, Space Colonisation and the Origins of Astropolitics

IAN KLINKE

University OF Oxford, UK

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This paper takes its cue from two recent intellectual trends. The first is the formation of astropolitics, a military strategic genre that extends geopolitical concepts and practices into outer space and thus into an imagined future of space colonisation. The second is a renewed interest in panpsychism, the philosophical view that the universe is already conscious or besouled, whether humans colonise it or not. In many ways, the two are not just ontologically incompatible, but they are also seemingly situated on two ends of the political spectrum opened up by the current decolonial moment. Whilst one promotes the colonisation and militarisation of space (Dolman, 2001; MacDonald, 2007), the other chimes with indigenous cosmologies which criticise such political projects (Bawaka Country, 2020). And yet, the two are perhaps not as irreconcilably opposed as it might seem. In order to understand better the intersection of panpsychism and astropolitics, I return to the later writings of the geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904). Although known primarily for his theorisation and promotion of terrestrial colonisation, Ratzel had a keen interest too in astronomy and used what he knew about the universe to theorise time and space in the social world. He had also come under the influence of Gustav Fechner's panpsychism and sought to weave panpsychist ideas into his human geography. In uncovering this intellectual history, I caution against attempts to find solutions to the unresolved problems of settler colonialism at the level of ontology

**IAN KLINKE** is a political and historical geographer at the University of Oxford. His research covers the history of geopolitics, war and the intellectual far right. He has written two books to date. *Cryptic Concrete: A Subterranean Journey into Cold War Germany* (Wiley, 2018) examines West Germany's now abandoned nuclear military landscape. *Life, Earth, Colony: Friedrich Ratzel's Necropolitical Geography* (University of Michigan Press, 2023) illuminates Ratzel's ideas and traces their reception from the late 19th century to the present. He co-edits a book series with Lexington.

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## Settler Colonialism and the Frontier: Imagining the Future Through the Past

**ASEBE REGASSA**

University of Zurich, Switzerland

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The making and unmaking of frontiers entails geographical imaginations of spaces and populations. It stretches the present into imagined but unknown future, but it also entails pulling the future into the present or sometimes into the past to justify interventions in frontier spaces. In settler colonial contexts, frontiers entangle spatial and temporal dimensions of resource expropriation and political power consolidation – providing the incentives of territorial control over distant space and time. In this paper, I will discuss settler colonial system in Ethiopia and how it imagines and produces frontiers. With the formation of the modern Ethiopian state through a form of internal colonialism, peripheries served the state as endless spaces of bounty. It was such future-looking (both temporal future and spatial future on the move) that characterized frontier dynamics. By taking some empirical cases of “development” projects in frontier sites, I will analyze how the settler colonial system shapes frontier making.

**ASEBE REGASSA** is a senior researcher and teaching fellow at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Dr. Regassa did his PhD in Development Studies at Bayreuth University, Germany, where he researched about human-environment relations within the context of indigenous peoples’ claim to land. He has also researched on federalism and inter-group relations. During his Postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Zurich (2015-2016), he researched on large-scale development interventions in Ethiopia’s pastoralist frontiers. His research areas broadly focus on the political economy of mega-development projects, dispossession, land and land rights, state consolidation, conflict and peace building, multinational federalism, and indigenous knowledge. Geographically, he researches on the Horn of Africa. Dr. Regassa extensively published articles, book chapters and policy briefs on these and other issues including the current political dynamics in Ethiopia.

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## Decolonizing Future: Roundtable

SHONA LOONG

University of Zurich, Switzerland

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What futures sustain and change political orders? Two years since the 2021 coup in Myanmar, various actors continue to debate the military's future in politics. Some international actors wonder about a negotiated solution between the military and various resistance forces. Most resistance forces find this imagined future unacceptable: to them, the struggle they are engaged in is an existential battle for the survival of themselves and their country. Decolonizing the future could require strategies for thinking through these opposing conceptions of the future from the perspective of those who imagine them, and - in the case of conflict and peace - asking how, why, and to what imagined end violence occurs.

**Shona Loong** is a lecturer in political geography at the University of Zurich. Her research is about conflict, peacebuilding, and the politics of development in Myanmar and its borderlands.

## Decolonizing Future: Roundtable

### Youth, Place, and the Anticipation of Nothingness in urban Zimbabwe

MELUSI NKOMO

University of Zurich, Switzerland

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In a place marred by persistent and chronic crises, thinking about the future necessitates a constant choreography of the present, a reinvigoration of a lived or imagined past. The choreographies are thinking, improvisations, and arranging actions to navigate existence in order to make the present bearable. For the most impoverished youth in urban Zimbabwe, a country that has faced a slew of political, social, economic, and other crises since the mid-1990s, the country's future appears suspended, pushed back to an unknown date. Choreographies of the present are best described in local street lingo as "dancing to the tune that is currently being played"), that is, running in circles towards a coming nothingness, but consistently reinvigorating the past, for example, in terms of mistakes (and opportunities missed) in the past. Words, actions, and future visions can only be revitalised elsewhere (in the streets of Johannesburg in South Africa, the restaurants and private homes of the Middle East, or the nursing homes of Western countries, notably the United Kingdom) and not in Zimbabwe. A people's and a place's future can be transferred elsewhere, geographically and imaginatively, while it is numbed or ridiculed in the youths' physical place of existence as a capitalist scam, if not a fraud to buy a time that is not even moving. I want to use the Zimbabwean experience of anticipating nothing and ridiculing the future to question the axiomatic and universalized relationship between "the future" and "things to come" - hope (resilience, survival), ambition, and even future investments

**Melusi Nkomo** is a political geography postdoctoral researcher at the University of Zurich. He is an anthropologist who studies extractive politics (particularly mining) in Southern Africa. His current research focuses on the politics of artisanal and small-scale mining in urban Zimbabwe.



## Amarendra Ghosh's *Char Kashem* and the Future of Food Insecurity

NAVEEDA KHAN

Johns Hopkins University, USA

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Food insecurity looms front and center in projections of the future of climate change and its possible impacts. In this paper I return to the work of Amartya Sen on the Bengal Famine of 1943 to remind ourselves that there is no straightforward relationship between weather events and food shortage, as is sometimes claimed within climate policy discourse. Instead, we must continually ask how and by what routes such insecurity makes its presence known within any context? In this paper I read Amarendra Ghosh's *Char Kasem* which explores how food falls short for the denizens of a fictitious char in East Bengal in the 1940s to draw out the structured and mediated nature of food insecurity, the slow consciousness of hunger and its presence as a force within intimate relations.

**Naveeda Khan** is associate professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. She is the author of *River Life and the Upspring of Nature* (2023), *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan* (2012) and editor of *Beyond Crisis: Reevaluating Pakistan* (2010) with *In Quest of a Shared Planet: Negotiating Climate from the Global South* forthcoming. She is currently working on two manuscripts "Householding on a Warming Earth" and "Schelling and the Romantic Method."

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## Water Future

**ANDREA MUEHLEBACH**

Universität Bremen, Germany

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This paper explores finance capital and its investment in water infrastructures as assets – that is to say, as forms of wealth that derive their value out of claims made on future payments. This exuberant promissory horizon is opened up by investment firms such as Allianz Global Water, which predict that investors will derive multiple forms of “environmental, social and financial alpha” from their investments (with “alpha” indicating excess rates of profit). The global rush to invest in water is thus as much of a moral as it is a fiscal story, with investors banking on both financial and ethical returns. Yet as anthropologists have long argued, inalienable possessions (which is what many people think water to be) hold transcendent value and are often held in common. They tend to be essential to the continuity of the thread of life between past, present, and future. While these possessions may under some circumstances be counted and priced, they are always priced with questions of justice in mind, and never by outsiders who treat these inalienable possessions as mere resources from which wealth can be extracted. After all, inalienable possessions are never mere economic, but also juridical, political, ethical, affective, and existential facts, and thus cannot easily be rendered equivalent through numbers. The uncertain future of water opens up fraught ethical questions about life in its indivisibility, as well as about futurity and debt – a debt that current generations owe to water as life-giving substance and to human and non-human generations to come. If the principle of investment hinges upon the belief that the future is exploitable, water movements raise different question of futurity and whether limits ought to be set to the future’s - indeed life’s - exploitability.

**Andrea Muehlebach** is a Professor of Maritime Anthropology and Cultures of Water at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Bremen, Germany. Her work lies at the intersection of political, economic, and environmental anthropology and has resulted writing on neoliberalization and financialization, welfare and the state, water and politics, democracy, law and, increasingly, the oceanic. Her first book, “The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Contemporary Italy,” was published in 2012 with the University of Chicago Press. Her second book, “A Vital Frontier: Water Insurgencies in Europe,” is forthcoming in 2023 with Duke University Press.

## Climate Futures' Past: Law and Weather Knowledge in the Indian Ocean World

DEBJANI BHATTACHARYYA

University of Zurich, Switzerland

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This talk argues that the coterminous development of financial instruments of risk management and the British imperial expansion in the Indian ocean critical shaped the very parameters of atmospheric and colonial climate knowledge. Analyzing 18th-century merchants' papers, Lloyd's records, navigational journals and insurance cases fought in the marine courts in India and the admiralty courts in London shows that tropical cyclones, instead of becoming limits to be overcome simply through scientific forecasting, were instead financialized and made profitable through a brisk and thriving trade in speculative underwriting. Bridging economic and environmental history, the talk documents how the modalities and frameworks for producing knowledge about climate emanated out of the very webs of insurance and trade that enveloped the globe during this period.

**Debjani Bhattacharyya** holds the Chair for the History of the Anthropocene at the University of Zürich. Her work lies at the intersection of legal and environmental history and focuses on analyzing how legal and economic structures order our conceptualization of environmental transformations and shape how we respond to climate crises. She is the author of, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), which won the 2019 honorable mention for the best book in Urban History. She is a Non-Resident Fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania.

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## Making Worlds from Futures Past: Afro-Latin Feminism, Marronage, and Fugitive Time

AISHA FINCH

Emory University, USA

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This paper explores the centrality of cimarronaje or marronage to Black feminist thought and worldmaking in Latin America, animating what theorist Kara Keeling has called “futures past.” Marronage, the historical practice of escape from geographies of enslavement, has emerged as one of the most critical sites of intellectual possibility for Afro-Latinx thinkers seeking to dream beyond the limits of coloniality, and conjure up spaces of embodied Black freedom. Colonial documents from the Hispanophone plantation world reveal that marronage was particularly vexing for authorities in part because it disrupted the plantation's mechanisms of tracking Black life and labor. At its core then, marronage represented a failure of captivity. As such, it has produced radical vocabularies for contemporary feminists critiquing state power, extractivist capital, post-catastrophe neglect, and gendered violence. Through a practice that I refer to as fugitive time, enslaved people disrupted the brutal temporal regimes of the plantation and its routine theft of sentience, life force, and energy. In the present moment, fugitive time illuminates the ways in which Afro-descendant feminists have refused the violence of an anti-Black order and engaged in a feminist cimarronaje that generates life, kinship, love, and otherwise possibility. Thus fugitive time reveals, as Keeling has argued, “a sense that the past is not done, and that futures still might be excavated from within it.”

**Aisha Finch** is Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University. Her research focuses on histories of slavery and slave resistance, transnational Black feminism, Black feminist cultural critique, spirituality and the sacred, and African Diasporic practices of freedom. She is the author of *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841-1844*, which won the Harriet Tubman Prize from the Lapidus Center for the Historical Analysis of Transatlantic Slavery. She is also the co-editor of *Breaking the Chains, Forging the Nation: The Afro-Cuban Fight for Freedom and Equality*. She is currently developing a project on Black feminist intellectual histories in Latin America, and on histories of Black women and the sacred in the plantation world.

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## Life in View of the End Times: Looking at the Future from Medieval Japan

**RAJI STEINECK**

University of Zurich, Switzerland

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In medieval Japan (11th-15th century CE), people often identified their time with the start of the "Final Dharma Age," a period associated with the ultimate decline of the Buddhist teaching and with dreadful social and environmental conditions. Indeed, it was a time of earthquakes, floods, and diseases, exacerbated by political and military conflict. The concept of a "final age" has invited comparisons with millennialism in general and the Christian apocalypse in particular. A closer investigation shows, however, that the "Final Dharma Age" was invoked by various parties to promote different kinds of measured responses, all designed to postpone a catastrophic future. This general difference to apocalyptic thought is decisive when contemplating how to react to a potentially dismal future.

**Raji C. Steineck** is Professor of Japanology at University of Zurich (UZH), president of the International Society for the Study of Time (ISST), and principal investigator of the European Research Council's Advanced Grant project "Time in Medieval Japan" (TIMEJ). His research interests combine the history of ideas in Japan, the theory of culture, and the philosophy of time. He has published widely on the critique of symbolic forms, medieval Zen Buddhism, and modern Japanese philosophy and ethics.

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## Hans Blumenberg's Speculative Histories of Reality

HANNES BAJOHR

Collegium Helveticum, ETH, Switzerland

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Among the research paradigms that could be subsumed under the heading of “historical epistemology,” from Cassirer and Fleck to Kuhn and Foucault, the concept of ‘reality’ is always implicit as the historical horizon against which meaning can appear in an epoch – but also as that which allows for any thought of the future. Hans Blumenberg has argued that it is so by necessity: The invisible background of all what is ‘reality’ as the embodiment of the limits of the epistemically possible cannot itself be made thematic, or it can be done only by addressing it negatively, as that what it is not. The concept of reality for Blumenberg is an “implicative predicate” that can only be studied as a trace present in historical discourses.

What differentiates Blumenberg from the reconstructive impetus of other “historical epistemologies,” however, is that he engages in a transcendental approach to the history of reality. In extending the technique of Husserlian “free variation,” he sketches a “historical phenomenology” that investigates not only past realities as but also the possibilities that were embedded in them even though they might not have been brought to fruition. Taking cues from phenomenology as well as Paul Valéry, Blumenberg writes speculative histories of reality, that allow to think the future as paths not taken in the present.

In my talk, I outline Blumenberg's argumentative framework and its genesis as an emancipation from Heideggerian Seinsgeschichte, and show how he applies his historical phenomenology to distinct fields of knowledge. Blumenberg, I argue, must be understood as a theorist of reality who exceeds the limits of the standard scope of historical epistemology by excavating a multiplicity of histories as well as futures.

**Hannes Bajohr** received his PhD from Columbia University, New York, with a dissertation on Hans Blumenberg's theory of language. His research focuses on the history of philosophy in Germany in the phenomenological and anthropological tradition, political theory, as well as theories of the digital. Before joining Collegium Helveticum as a Junior Fellow, he held postdoctoral positions at Berlin's Leibniz Center for Cultural and Literary Research as well as at the Department of Media Studies at the University of Basel. His most recent books are *Schreibenlassen: Texte zur Literatur im Digitalen* (Berlin, 2022), a volume of essay on digital writing, as well as the forthcoming *Ad Judith N. Shklar: Werk – Leben – Gegenwart* (Hamburg, 2023, co-authored with Rieke Trimçev), an introduction to political philosopher Judith Shklar.

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## Vulnerable Aspirations: Utterances of Interrupted Bodies

SHIVANI GUPTA

National University of Singapore, Singapore

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There is an intrinsic link between aspirations and the future. Aspirations are expected to be held and mediated by a healthy, socially well-adjusted, ambitious, and articulate body. This body usually takes the shape of a middle-class, cis-abled, privileged man, and at times a woman, who exemplifies the transglobal nation. In this paper, I examine the aspirations of bodies interrupted by violence. This violence is manifested in physical, verbal, emotional, and mental forms underpinned by the control and containment of patriarchy. Interrupted bodies are not assumed to carry aspirations but are required to dwell upon the past and its redeemability. I argue that aspirations exist as fragmented utterances and in the footnotes of the everyday, by women who also carry experiences of violence. Thus, interrupted bodies express aspirations not necessarily as a singular event culminating in the future nor as an ambitious mode of operating. Rather these are hopes and desires that have passed them by or need to be revived for a sustainable future. The sounds and visualizations of such desires are mundane and occur in the quotidian and are therefore easy to neglect. Yet, there remain aspirations to persist for a world that differs and offers an alternative sociality. This ethnographic study of interrupted bodies with vulnerable aspirations was conducted in the city of Banaras, North India, with women. Banaras, also known as Varanasi and Kashi, occupy relevance within South Asia and global imagination for the holy, mystic, and antiquated rhetoric it has purported. In this narrative, an androcentric claim to the city, knowledge, and the bodies therein has dismissed the lived and embodied experiences of those on the margins. I shift the lens to study women's everyday lives and their articulation, interpretation, and perspectives on sustaining the city and formulating social worlds through various forms of subversions and insistences. In this process, aspirations get minutely woven into an imagined future.

**Shavani Gupta** is a lecturer at NUS College (honours college), National University of Singapore (NUS). Her focus at the college is on gender and sexuality studies, in addition to sociology and anthropology courses. She is part of the Impact Experience programme, where she supervises students undertaking projects on gender and sexuality, through rigorous interdisciplinary training, to engage in long-term impact work with non-profit and social organizations in Singapore and the region. Previously, she completed her postdoctoral fellowship on the topic of sexual violence on university campuses in Singapore from the department of Communications and New Media at NUS. She completed her PhD in South Asian Studies from NUS. Prior to pursuing her PhD, Shivani worked with not-for-profit organizations in India

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## Predicting the Future: Sentencing, Anti-Blackness, and Interpreting Potentiality

SAMEENA MULLA

Emory University, USA

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This talk examines the sentencing hearing as the site of contestation over the potential future of people who have been convicted of sex crimes in Milwaukee, WI. In the court's calculation of punishment, rehabilitation, and community safety, they evaluate the social worlds of adjudicants. As adjudicants, their attorneys, and kin plead for leniency and demonstrate the meaningful ways in which their rehabilitation can be achieved with the support of their communities outside of the prison or jail, judges invalidate these arguments. Care plays a role in this process of invalidation. In the course of a trial or a hearing, judges, attorneys, and witnesses often appeal to particular notions of community and public good. These forms of community are predicated on the recognition of particular forms of care, while they fail to see or even condemn others, often along lines of race. As testimony emerges, courts cultivate a worldview that casts suspicion on what the court perceives as Black kinship, community, and household. Sentencing decisions are embedded in whether the court imagines the community as a place where care and rehabilitation can take place. Drawing on fieldwork from Milwaukee County felony courts, this talk works through the entangling of race, power, and sexuality driving the ways in which community emerges and is reconfigured in the courts. These processes are driven by the future that the court predicts, and demonstrates a friction between the future that adjudicants imagine and claim, and what the court allows itself to hear.

**Sameena Mulla** is Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University and associated faculty with the Department of Anthropology. Her work examines the intersections of legal and medical approaches in U.S. interventions into sexual violence, and the ways in which they are invested in regimes of gender, race, and power. In particular, her research maintains a focus on the ways in which healthcare, law, and policing configure sexual violence as a social and political wound. She was recognized with the American Anthropological Association and Society for Applied Anthropology's Margaret Mead Award in 2017 for her first book, *The Violence of Care: Rape Victims, Forensic Nurses, and Sexual Assault Intervention* (New York University Press, 2014). Her second book, a collaborative ethnography with Heather Hlavka, *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, Science and Sexual Assault Adjudication* (New York University Press, 2021) was awarded the AES Senior Book Prize. With Dána-Ain Davis, Mulla was the founding co-editor of *Feminist Anthropology*, the official journal of the Association of Feminist Anthropology.



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## ABOUT THE CHAIRPERSONS

**Christine Schenk** is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies at the University of Zurich. In her research, Christine studies the relation between religion and social orders in the context of crises, conflicts, and disasters with a regional focus on Indonesia and Sri Lanka. At present she leads a project that studies the influence of Muslim organizations on legal jurisdictions at Muslim courts and how civil society organizations renegotiate these jurisdictions and the underlying legislation in Sri Lanka.

**Nicolas Martin** is Professor at the Department of Indian/South Asian studies at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies. He received his Bachelor's and Doctoral degrees in social anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). His PhD, which he completed in 2009, resulted from 18 months of intensive ethnographic fieldwork exploring rural politics and power relations in Pakistan. During his tenure as a teaching fellow at LSE Anthropology Department, he wrote several academic articles and a book called 'Politics, Landlords and Islam in Pakistan,' published in 2015 in the Routledge Exploring the Political in South Asia series. Subsequently, in 2012, he became a Senior Research Fellow on an ERC project investigating democratic cultures in South Asia at UCL. He carried out 15 months of further ethnographic fieldwork, but this time in the Indian Punjab. Currently, Professor Martin is completing a monograph based on this research, delving into the practice and meaning of democracy at the 'grassroots' in rural India. In 2017, he received a four-year SNSF grant for a project entitled 'The Reproduction of Caste? Economic, political, and kinship strategies among Jats in Punjab.' Additionally, he has recently joined another UCL-based ERC project that examines extortion practices across the globe. He plans to conduct fieldwork in Italy to document and analyse the experiences of Punjabi migrants in the agricultural sector there.

**Benedikt Korf** is Professor in Political Geography at the University of Zurich. His research studies «culture» as a terrain of struggle wherein the political fabrication of territories and the articulation of collective life are contested and negotiated in sites that experience political disorder and protracted violence with field work in Sri Lanka and the Horn of Africa. His work has appeared in journals, such as *Anthropological Theory*, *Development and Change*, *Political Geography* and *Progress in Human Geography*. His most recent book is «Schwierigkeiten mit der kritischen Geographie» (transcript, Bielefeld), which reflects on the potential and pitfalls of critique in post-critical times.

**Sidharthan Maunaguru** is Associate Professor in Anthropology at Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and South Asian Studies programme at National University of Singapore. Currently, he is a senior fellow at Collegium Helveticum, ETH. His research focuses on anthropology of war, violence, migration, politics, religion, sovereignty, conscience, ethics and future/s. Sidharthan was an Assistant Dean at the Faculty of Art and Social Science, National University of Singapore. He has published in number of peer-reviewed journals including *Current Anthropology*, *American Anthropologist*, *Modern Asian Studies*, *Comparative Studies on Society and History*, and *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. He is the author of *Marrying for a Future: Transnational Sri Lankan Tamil Marriages in the Shadow of War*, 2019 published by University of Washington Press. He is currently working on two research projects: Anthropology of conscience and Anthropology of futures.