**Atelier 30 : Postcolonial Literatures and Arts – SEPC**



**62e congrès de la SAES**

**« Transmission(s) »**

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Responsables de l’atelier :

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**Atelier  « Postcolonial Literatures and Arts » (SEPC)**

The tension between continuity and transformation, tradition and renewal, filiation and rupture, which underpins the notion of transmission, is at the core of postcolonial studies, which is primarily defined as a “quarrel”, “a pugilistic practice, contending with those discourses of power that arrested the past and have remained to reconstitute a new imperium for the present and future” (John McLeod 2017). The discipline itself would thus consist in a ceaseless quarrel against the transmission and perpetuation of hegemonic discourses and practices of (neo)colonial domination as well as in a reclaiming of lost or erased legacies, knowledges, cultures and filiations, in particular of oppressed minorities and silenced subalterns.

Notwithstanding the vast geographical, historical and cultural diversity of postcolonial societies and cultures, they have all been disrupted by the colonial encounter, which fundamentally altered, and sometimes interrupted or destroyed, pre-colonial processes of cultural, linguistic and economic transmissions and established new ones. Uncle Chacko’s metaphor of the House of History in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*(1997) aptly captures both the interference with ancient processes of transmission and the establishment of new colonial filiations and legacies. This contradiction is also perfectly embodied by the disgruntled retired judge Jemubhai Patel in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*(2006), a character illustrating that the erasure of minoritarian cultures and narratives has not ceased with political independence and continues up to this day.

Whether at a diegetic or formal level, postcolonial literatures have continuously explored the many ambiguities of colonial transmission which is never a seamless process but often implies approximations, failures, adaptations or subversion, processes suggested in Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry.Interested as they are in (post-)colonial expansion through migratory routes and the multiplication of connections, postcolonial studies also examine how such contacts have exponentially increased with globalization while simultaneously more real and symbolic borders have interrupted transmission and thwarted contacts (a telling example being literatures on refugees, migrations and their heavy casualties). More recently, a turn to island and archipelagic spaces has complexified the previously continent-dominated colonial and postcolonial mapping of the world by drawing attention to so far marginalized *in-between*island spaces which served as stepping stones to the colonial expansion and remain links or complex nodes of transmission between continents.

The postcolonial project implies the unveiling of these ambiguities as well as the reclaiming of the history and agency of once colonized people, the unearthing of forgotten narratives and the retrieval of lost connections, languages, literatures in order to complicate any linear narrative of modernity and progress. At the same time, far from extolling a supposedly pure culture impervious to colonial encounters, postcolonial writers and artists keep probingthe meanings of culture and identity(articulated to issues of race, class and gender) and expressing their discomfort with the notions of tradition and roots (Edouard Glissant). Troubled filiations have been explored by diasporic thinkers and writers, whose works capture a form of double consciousness (W.E.B. Du Bois, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy) and fluctuating identity. Associated with the question of filiation, postcolonial literatures and arts question and challenge old lineages and patrilineal or/and patriarchal transmission of power (political, social, economic) but also offer alternative indigenous modes of (af-)filiation (for instance matrilinear).

Postcolonial texts that explore traumatic tragedies over several generations open discussions on transgenerational transmission(s), intergenerational connections, ruptures and conflicts and (post-)memory (Marianne Hirsh 2012). Narratives such as Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Gaiutra Bahadur’s indenture narrative *Coolie Woman* (2013) perfectly illustrate these issues. Fictional reconstructions of the past also interrogate how today’s memorial practices and spaces, competitive or multidirectional (Michael Rothberg 2009), can ensure the transmission, reconfiguration, safekeeping and even patrimonialization of collective pasts. Additionally, memorial transmission might be articulated through an embodied reconstruction of the past, in particular when trauma is involved. Shauna Singh Baldwin’s novel *What the Body Remembers* (1999)*,* a counter-narrative focusing on the marginalized gendered violence met by Indian women against the backdrop of 1947 Partition intercommunal killings, is a good case in point. Counter-narratives enabling the transmission of marginalised memories and histories might emerge through discreet material and sonic traces, ripples of sounds, echoes (for instance in Arundhati Roy’s *Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) where the laughter of a eunuch gives voice to a revisionist history of the Red Fort).

     The panel invites proposals which interrogate, discuss, open up these avenues of reflection, as well as interventions on the ways in which postcolonial literatures and arts appropriate, reclaim, repurpose aesthetic codes inherited from colonial rule and still associated with cultural hegemony: how do writers use, reconfigure, or subvert canonical genres? What is their relation, in turn, to the postcolonial canon itself? One may think of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s complex self-positioning vis-à-vis Chinua Achebe, or of the ambiguous role of Salman Rushdie as a tutelary figure for Indian Anglophone writers.

Finally, probing the *material*dissemination and consumption of postcolonial literatures and arts, is crucial: it prompts us to interrogate the role of English as a global language as well as the impact of the selective promotion of postcolonial works by the global literary market on our reception of these works (Huggan 2001, Brouillette 2007).

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**Anachronism, Affect and History in “The Headstrong Historian” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

The final story of *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) jars with the rest of the collection. “The Headstrong Historian” pays critical homage to *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, and borrows to the genre of the historical novel. Critics have praised the conclusion of the narrative, a tour de force which connects past and present formally with a striking prolepsis. They have also underlined the historiographic disagreement with Achebe that the short story assumes, basing itself on the work of feminist anthropologists to counter a patriarchal bias on colonial memorialization, especially that of Igbo society. This paper intends to show that by focusing on the inner psychological life of Nwamgba, specifically on her “ugly feelings” (Ngai, 2005), the story also intends to reconstitute a more psychoanalytical matrilineal lineage. This pathological legacy evoked in interviews by Adichie (“I don’t think it’s a very healthy legacy”, Mustich, 2009) hints at the way colonial domination exerts a “psychic life of power” (Butler, 1997) on descendants, be they first or second-generation migrants. However, the inherent difficulties in undertaking such a history of emotions, with a lack of archive that is aggravated by a colonial context, is also reflected in the text which seems to proceed backwards, moulding the portrayal of Nwamgba after the model of the granddaughter Grace, and perhaps more biographically, after Adichie herself or her mother. We will argue that Adichie’s choice of an affective narrative implies “necessary anachronism” (Lukács, 1955) which echoes Achebe’s avoidance of the ethnographic burden of authenticity. Still, the slight unease that this anomalous short story can produce also points out what Spivak has called the “the loneliness of the gendered subaltern” (Spivak, 1987), whose incommensurable specificity has to be understood in relation with the fracture of imperialism. Opening a comparison with a collection by Jhumpa Lahiri, entitled *Interpreter of Maladies*, I will show how the form of the collection itself allows for ruptures which nuance the horizontal cooperation that might be presumed between present stories of diaspora and historical postcolonial narratives, substituting vertical dynamics of power over sorority in the conflictual community of women that the text depicts.

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**Decolonialism: Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the Case for Afriphone African Literature in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari***

Literature is not only a source of entertainment but also a vehicle for cultural transmission. Whether oral or written, literature has to rely on a language to perform its functions. In the context of African literature, we must come to the disconcerting realization that although the continent has been decolonized, its cultural, linguistic, and literary fields are still dominated by European languages. Focusing, then, on the question of language, I would, first, like to take a look back at the early post-independence controversy regarding the language of African literature. Whereas writers such as Chinua Achebe and Amadou Kourouma argued that African literature is about transmitting the African imaginary and culture regardless of language, a few others, including Ngugi wa Thiong’o, insisted that the language in which that African imaginary is transmitted must be the defining factor of African literature. While this debate might seem outdated nowadays, the fact remains that African languages are critically underrepresented in African literature. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi not only laments this situation but also defends his case for African languages to become the principal vehicle of cultural transmission in African literature. However, Ngugi’s call for Afriphone literature comes up against internal and global factors such as the linguistic diversity and poor language policies of the African, readership, and financial concerns of both publishers and writers. To mediate between his objective and these imperatives, Ngugi decides to write his novels, starting with *Devil on the Cross*, in his native language for Gikuyu readers before translating them into English for global readers. While considering both the original and translated versions of *Matigari*, I will, first, discuss the merits and downsides of his strategy and why this call for the decolonization of African literature remained virtually unanswered till today before offering potential paths for reflection and action.

**Komi Akakpo** is a final-year doctoral student in English at the University of Upper Alsace in Mulhouse. His dissertation offers a new look at the notion of madness through the works of Nuruddin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong’o by suggesting the existence of a spiral of madness in which postcolonial African dictators maintain their power through contradiction and insanity. Komi AKAKPO has been teaching part-time at his university since 2017. During his research, he has given many talks, some of which have been published in *Dialogues Mulhousiens*, a multidisciplinary research platform hosted by the University of Upper Alsace.

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**“Weaving the story of my aiga”: poetics and politics of transmission in Sia Figiel’s *Where We Once Belong***

This paper examines the politics and poetics of transmission in the novel *Where We Once Belong* (1996) by Samoan writer Sia Figiel (b. 1967). This coming-of-age first-person narrative centered around the character Alofa, has been widely considered as a response to the oriental representations of Margaret Mead’s controversial anthropological study *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and in Paul Gauguin’s paintings (Keown 2004). Instead of a society where girls are free to explore their own sexuality, Figiel depicts a repressive tradition-bound community that disciplines women and controls their bodies. While the novel debunks the mythologies created by colonial powers, it also looks critically at gender politics in Samoan culture.

Thus, the novel rejects any straightforward cultural narrative of transmission, whether neocolonial or indigenous. Through the eyes of a teenage girl, the narrative doesn’t just pin *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way) against *fa'apalagi* (western culture). It challenges vertical (parent to child) and horizontal (gossip) transmission while showing that the Postcolonial knowledge that a few Samoans may acquire by studying in New Zealand universities is mostly inoperative in the culture: openly transgressing the community Christian values leads to exclusion and marginalization. Instead of a model of transmission as replication, Figiel introduces weaving as a pacific paradigm that is both aesthetic and political. Weaving transforms western linearity into circularity. Stories are passed down in a circle associated with women, the Moon, myths, dreams and collective memories. Weaving is all the more powerful as it is also a linguistic and discursive tool that transmits while obscuring: Samoan words and phrases are woven into the narrative as well as oral forms of Samoan storytelling such as poetic performance and fagogo, so that the narrator brings the monolingual reader into the semiotic space, but keeps her in the margins. Thus, Figiel’s hybrid writing extends outside the bounds of postcoloniality and subalternity.

**Valérie Baisnée** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Paris Saclay. She holds a PhD in English from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her research and publications address twentieth and twenty-first century women life writing and poetry, with a particular focus on New Zealand writers (Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame, Selina Tusilata Marsh, Fiona Kidman). She co-edited the collections *Women's Life Writing and the Practice of Reading* (2018) and *Text and Image in Women’s Life Writing: Picturing the Female Self* (2021) published by Palgrave Macmillan. She is also the author of *Gendered Resistance: The Autobiographies of Simone de Beauvoir, Maya Angelou, Janet Frame and Marguerite Duras* (1997) and *In the Long Corridor of Distance: Space and Place in New Zealand Women’s Autobiographies* (2014) both published by Rodopi (Brill).

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**Living Archives: Performing and Transmitting the Memory of the Windrush Through Visual Arts and Museology**

June 2023 will mark the 75th anniversary of the Windrush’s arrival in England. While the commemoration of this milestone of British contemporary history only started in 2018 in response to the “Windrush Scandal”, the question of transmission remains a burning issue for those who have inherited the legacy of the Windrush. While first-generation Caribbean authors (George Lamming, Dereck Walcott) paved the way for their contemporary counterparts (Andrea Levy, Caryl Philips) by narrating the history of the Windrush and questioning its sense of belonging in Britain, visual arts and museology are also of paramount importance. This paper explores transmission as a protean voyage. Focusing on the voice of Windrush children, I propose to concentrate on visual arts as an *in-situ* language which bears witness to the Black Caribbean experience in the UK, as well as a performative gesture that allows second generation Black Caribbeans to cope with the doubleness they inherited. Paul Gilroy (1993) understandably qualifies Black art as “Art of Darkness” for its agenda remains quite obscure if subtracted from its cultural substance and political dynamics.

Three forms of expression standing as witnesses deserve to be explored. I will first focus on visuals arts as intrinsic and *cathartic* manifestations in Keith Piper’s “Ghosting the Archives” (2005) and Tony Fairwealther’s “Home” (2022) exhibitions. I will then assess the place of Caribbean cultural and collective memory as part of British identity – a status conveyed by the presence of stone witnesses such as Basil Watson’s “National Windrush Monument” (2022) as to the involvement of museums (Black Cultural Archives, Tate Britain’s 2022 exhibition “Life Between Islands” including the plastic works of Sonia Boyce). I will finally introduce the work of non-Caribbean photographers (Jim Grover’s 2018 “Portrait of a Generation”, Ernest Dyche as migrants photographer) standing as static performances that give form to and immortalize memory.

**Gina Cesto** is a PhD Student and Teaching Fellow in Anglophone Literature at University of Paris Nanterre. She specializes in Postcolonial and Diasporic Studies, more specifically in Caribbean Studies. Her dissertation explores the role of migrant novels and photography in the restitution of the history of the Windrush since 1948 up to the Windrush Scandal (2018), apprehending Britain’s relation to its Caribbean counterparts and the latter’s adaptation to British metropolitan life.

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**“She knew, just by looking at Abbas then, without knowing anything about him, that he had done things”: Discontinuous Lines of Transmission in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *The Last Gift* (2011)**

*The Last Gift* opens with the following words: “One day, long before the troubles, he slipped away without saying a word to anyone and never went back. And then another day, forty-three years later, he collapsed just inside the front door of his house in a small English town” (1). The first two sentences highlight a temporal ellipsis and unspoken words. The novel alsorevolves around the haunting presence of a family secret. As the father, Abbas, suffers from repeated strokes, his wife Maryam has him record his story on audio cassettes, which underlines the imbrication of technology and orality/aurality in the process of transmission. The narrative insists upon the extent to which the father enjoyed telling tales to his children, which testifies to the existence of alternative ways of transmission operating within the family. Meanwhile, the narrative ponders upon Maryam and her incapacity to speak about her past since she herself was a foundling raised by foster parents. The novel discusses transgenerational transmission, especially within immigrant families, since the two children, Hannah and Jamal, born in England, feel that their absence of belonging is predicated upon the untold secrets: Hannah once explains “What I want from them is a story that has a beginning that is tolerable and open, and not one that is tripped with hesitations and silences” (2011, 44). The novel may be read as an invitation to think of transmission not as a linear process but one that may imply the recollection (or not) of fragmentary elements as well as collective agency. The paper will therefore discuss transgenerational transmission (or lack thereof) and Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory”. What happens to the intergenerational memory of past events when the latter are shrouded in silence? The silence surrounding the family secret is materialised through the accumulation of terms referring to that which has not been or cannot be spoken: contrary to a hackneyed conception of silence as verbal absence, silence is granted material substance in the novel.

**Jaine Chemmachery** is Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Literatures at Sorbonne Université. She wrote her 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 postcolonial and decolonial theories, and postcolonial literatures. Her current research focuses on mobility studies, body studies and the representation of precarity/precariousness in literature. She co-edited with Bhawana Jain a collected volume entitled*Mobility and Corporeality in Nineteenth to Twenty First Century Anglophone Literature: Bodies in Motion*(2021) and edited a special issue of *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* on Renaissance (2022).

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**“[H]e was able to assemble a sketch, a story”: The Transmission of Contested**

**(Post-)Colonial History in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Afterlives* (2020)**

Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Afterlives* can be read as a postcolonial historical novel transmitting non- Eurocentric historical knowledges that have long been relegated to footnotes or simply forgotten. Gurnah unearths (fictional) (post-)colonial stories and, similarly to Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, seems to consider that “[t]he [postcolonial African] novelist [is a] teacher” whose role is to pass on (decolonised?) knowledges. Achebe used to consider fiction as a valuable source for the study of history.

The issue of “truth” (or fact) will be important in this paper especially in the context of the historical novel genre. From the very beginning of Afterlives, the destiny of individuals is intrinsically linked to significant historical events. Towards the end of the novel, a character named Ilyas goes to Freiburg, Germany, in order to explore WW2 archives. In a self-reflexive passage that says much about the making/writing of history, the narrator explains that the transmission of knowledges is central, both inside and outside the diegesis.

For Harold Orel, “[h]istorians thought it possible to recapture the past through careful research; an artist, no less than an historian, was obligated to deal with ‘real life’, and the historical novelist, if he were to be taken seriously, had to respect the basic materials that he shared with historians”. Gurnah’s novel is characterised by a realist imperative. I will borrow from Hamish Dalley’s *The Postcolonial Historical Novel* (2014) in order to explain that “fictional narratives about history ought to be treated as serious interpretations of the past, open to dialogue with rival accounts and archival sources”. Moreover, I will explore how “fiction [can be] a way of knowing the past” (Fleishman) and will demonstrate that Gurnah also makes use of what Orel calls the “didactic elements in the historical novel” so as to transmit historical knowledges. I will try and figure out “how notions of historical truth intersect with aesthetic form” (Dalley), how this historical novel aims to mediate knowledges about contested (post-)colonial history. How does postcoloniality (or decoloniality?) impact historical imagination? I will argue that in *Afterlives*, Gurnah contributes to decentring this traditional approach to historical fiction and, in so doing, he “delinks” (Mignolo) from Eurocentric approaches to history and “dewesternizes” (Mignolo) the historical novel.

**Cédric Courtois** is Senior Lecturer in Anglophone studies at the University of Lille, France. He specialises in Nigerian literature, which was the focus of his PhD dissertation on the contemporary Nigerian rewritings of the *Bildungsroman*. He has published various articles and book chapters on mobility studies, refugee literature, LGBTQIA+ studies, etc. Among his recent publications are "Politics and Poetics of (De)colonization in Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift* (2019)" (2023) for *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, “Visibilizing ‘Those Who Have No Part’: LGBTQIA+ Representation in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction in English” (2022) for *Études anglaises*, “‘Into the Mutation’: Osahon Ize-Iyamu’s ‘More Sea than Tar’ as Climate Fiction” (2021) for *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, or “Bernardine Evaristo’s ‘Black’ British Amazons: Aesthetics and Politics in *Girl, Woman, Other*” (2021) for *Études britanniques contemporaines*.

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**“Flipping stereotypes on their head”[[1]](#footnote-1): a revaluation of transmission through incorporation in Namwali Serpell’s *The Old Drift* (2019)**

In *The Invention of Women*, Oyèronké Oyěwùmí points to a one-sided transmission of knowledge and theory at work in African studies: “Reaction, in essence, has been at once the driving force of African studies and its limitation in all its branches. It does not matter whether any particular scholar is reacting for or against the West; the point is that the West is at the centre of African knowledge-production” (1997). European Studies of the African novel in the 21st century have repeatedly engaged with the continued impact of the West and imperialism on the African continent through their focus on social disruption, emigration and the diaspora. In *The Old Drift* (2019), Zambian author Namwali Serpell allows for a shift of perspective to focus on immigration to the African continent as a contribution to the nation’s narrative. With what she has labelled a “broad democratic embrace of many styles and many genres”, Serpell steers the reader towards a critical reading which interrogates the agentive and selective incorporation – that is the possibility not only to write back but to reappropriate, to make one’s own, or to absorb past narratives or different knowledges – into a narration of Zambian history.

The aim of this paper will be to analyse the shift from reaction to incorporation at work in Namwali Serpell’s first novel as a step towards regaining agency in narrative transmission of the country’s history. By connecting, among others, colonial discourses, social realistic depictions of life in Lusaka and Afrofuturist dystopia, the author creates new networks of narrative transmission which undermine the authority of one type of narration above others and offer a different reading of Zambian history, from one of colonial imposition to one of emancipatory incorporation.

**Jehanne Eveno** is a PhD candidate at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon (France) where she teaches Postcolonial literature and translation classes. Her research, conducted under the supervision of Vanessa Guignery, focuses on transgenerational and transnational transmission in contemporary fiction in English, and in particular the works of Amitav Ghosh, Yaa Gyasi, Caryl Phillips, Kamila Shamsie and Namwali Serpell.

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**“Red pills,” “Databodies” and viruses: figures of transmission in Hari Kunzru’s novels**

Drawing examples from three selected novels by Hari Kunzru, this talk seeks to explore the different forms and figures of transmission in the writer’s works. Kunzru, a British writer with Kashmiri origins on his father’s side, has been publishing novels since 2002 and living in New York since the early 2010s. Since his first novel *The Impressionist*, the theme of transmission has pervaded his fiction. It has influenced his writing of the body, with frequent representations of miscegenation and contagion. On a symbolical level, transmission also appears in questions of cultural appropriation, ideological border-crossing and the circulation of information and belief. The concept is used as the title to Kunzru’s 2004 *Transmission*, a novel which engaged both with post-9/11 fears and with a digital world in the making at the turn of the century.

Looking at transmission from a generic and aesthetic standpoint, Kunzru has in turn played with and actualized the legacy of postcolonial fiction, by revisiting its tropes – particularly in *The Impressionist* – but also by relocating postcolonial preoccupations with purity and contagion within contemporary contexts such as the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe (in *Red Pill*), or racial politics in the US (in *Red Pill* and *White Tears*). In that sense, Kunzru’s writing frequently echoes Said’s claim that “[n]o one today is purely one thing” (2014: 407).

This talk will approach the role of transmission in representations of the body, of place and of ideology as they appear in Kunzru’s works. I would like to read Kunzru’s figures of transmission in light of anthropologist Tim Ingold’s opposition between transmission and what he calls “wayfaring.” Rather than a conception of transmission where one “act[s] out a script received from predecessors,” Kunzru’s novels introduce journeys of constant re-negotiation with one’s place in the world, leading to accretions, diversions and self-reinvention (Ingold 2011: 162).

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**“Living on the edge of legend”: broken transmission lines and Hawaiian identity in Kawai Strong Washburn’s *Sharks in the Time of Saviors* (2020)**

 Kawai Strong Washburn’s debut novel, set partly in Hawaii, partly in mainland America, pictures a family saga. Malia, Augie and their three children Noa, Dean and Kaui’s lives are changed forever when, during a boat excursion, Noa falls overboard and is saved by a shark. Gifted with healing powers, Noa is thought by his parents to be the recipient of the immemorial power of Hawaiian gods, while this power estranges him from his brother and sister, who must learn to live in the shadow of their god-like brother.

 When all three siblings leave the island to go to university (in Portland, Spokane and San Diego), their link with the island starts dissolving – yet Noa’s sudden death somehow forces them to interrogate their heritage, their identity and how the latter are affected by the constant tension between Hawaiian tradition and Western modernity.

 My paper intends to analyse the various ways in which the characters, and the novel, navigate the precarity of Hawaiian identity and *make up* for what has been lost. Indeed, even though transmission often appears either as impossible, or as a burden to some of the characters, the desire to grasp what “being Hawaiian” means permeates Kawai Strong Washburn’s novel. I would like to show that even though transmission, and a possible re-connection to the origins, appear as seriously hindered if not completely impossible, this novel suggests that the “precarity” of Hawaiian identity is by no means restrictive or a synonym of loss, but might be the only desirable way to be Hawaiian in the age of globalisation.

**Elsa Lorphelin** holds a PhD thesis in postcolonial literature entitled « Intertextuality, interdiscursivity and authority in the short stories of Jean Rhys, Janet Frame and Anita Desai » from Sorbonne Université. Her research focuses on postcolonial literature, and especially on the questions of discourse, rewriting and authority. She has been published in *Sillages Critiques*, *Commonwealth Essays & Studies*, and *Women: A Cultural Review*. Her publications include “De "sujets" à "objets de discours": exclusion et affabulation dans trois nouvelles de Jean Rhys”, *La Clé des Langues*, 2022; *“*The Voices of Others: Intertextuality and Authorial Presences in Jean Rhys's Short Fiction”, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2020; “Fairy Tale, Tragedy, Fantastic: Three Generic Exceptions in the Short Stories of Anita Desai”, *Commonwealth Essays & Studies*, 2020.

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**Re-reading history in the *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand**

“Reading Ambedkar alerted me to a gaping hole in our pedagogical universe” (Roy, 2016:17), states Arundhati Roy in her annotated introduction to Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of caste* (first published in May 1936). She reveals the gaping holes in schooling in general in the Indian subcontinent, especially in the context of History.

Roy’s gaping hole points towards Gandhi’s and Ambedkar’s dichotomous visions of history and society that discreetly popped up in the Indian literature pre-1947 after the publication of *Untouchable* (1935), a novel that dealt with the daily routine of an outcast. Post-independence, the representation of the practice of Caste and Untouchability in literature almost remained restricted to the autobiographical writings of the writers from the Dalit community, which brings to the fore the vacillation of the postcolonial novel when it comes to the concept of caste, albeit the lack of shyness of the (postcolonial) novel in revealing other atrocities related to the class system and/or the Partition(s) of the Indian subcontinent.

Gandhi’s vision is accessible due to the school and university curriculums in India, and is also somehow well-tuned in with the colonial discourse of ‘status-quo’. Dealing with Ambedkar’s vision thereby entails rewriting a large part of history in order to bring to the fore certain nuances as for him the colonial processes also disrupted the Caste system, unsettling the pre- colonial era protocols. History’s (re)transmission through literature thereby becomes not only a socio-political necessity but also calls for a radical approach towards the reading of our (India’s) history. The focus will be on the fact that instead of bringing to the fore the sociocultural and political debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar, our historical fiction has unjustly camouflaged it by solely deifying Gandhi. This debate requires to be scrutinised in order to enrich the thinking process and render possible a rational inquiry that would transcend the banality of the popular discourses on minority cultures, which are compelled to remain tributaries to the majority cultures.

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**A Buddhist Writing Back to Brahmanist Doctrine: Non-violence and Compassion in “The Kukkura Jataka”**

In “How the Crab Cut the Crane’s Neck,” a warrior-crab uses its weapon-like pincers to save a lake of fish from “mass slaughter” by a predatorial crane. This folk tale from the *Panchatantra* illustrates the necessity of violence in order to maintain social order in Brahmanism, an ancient form of Hinduism. It thus legitimises Brahmanist institutions of caste and kingship (the crab is a “natural” warrior-king or kshatriya). Around 500 CE, a new doctrinal school – Buddhism – would emerge, borrowing core Brahmanist tenets such as the karmic cycle of reincarnation. But it would also contest its parent-religion’s assertion of the necessity of physical violence (*himsa*) and social violence (caste) through a counter-philosophy of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion (*karuna*) towards all sentient life. This tension between transmission and transformation finds expression in the Buddhist folk tales or jatakas that recount the previous lives of the Buddha as he worked his way to spiritual perfection across five hundred lifetimes.

This paper will focus on specifically on the “Kukkura Jataka” in which the Buddha takes birth in a previous life (*bodhisat*) as a pariah dog living in a cemetery. When a vindictive king orders the massacre of all non-aristocratic dogs, the pariah bodhisat selflessly endangers his own life to save his canine brethren. But he does so non-violently, using reasoned argument, giving a *dhamma* talk, and “converting” the king to Buddhism. This paper will explore the “Kukkura Jataka” as an instance of Buddhism “writing back” to Brahmanism, subversively perpetuating the latter’s karmic apparatus to articulate a specifically Buddhist counter-narrative of non-violence and compassion. It will conclude with the continuing transmission of such oral traditions in critiques of violence in the anti-colonial context (M.K. Gandhi) and partition (Intizar Hussain). Heeding the call of Indologists like Sheldon Pollock, it aims to demonstrate that postcolonial forms of critique can be productively applied to the transmission and transgression of indigenous discourses of power in precolonial contexts.

**Sneharika Roy** teaches comparative literature at the American University of Paris. Her book *The Postcolonial Epic: From Melville to Walcott and Ghosh* (Routledge, 2018) traces the emergence of a postcolonial form of classical epic. Her focus on ancient epic is reflected in her contributions to *MLA Approaches to Amitav Ghosh* (2019) and *The Epic World: Comparative Approaches* (upcoming, Routledge). She continues to eclectically bridge classical and contemporary traditions in her teaching and research, which range across classical Indian epic, Buddhist literature in Asia, mystical influences in science-fiction and the ecological Relation of Édouard Glissant.

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**“Whose story am I missing?”: transgenerational transmission against colonial disruption, in *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi**

*Homegoing* explores the lineage of two Ghanaian sisters, one sold into slavery and the other married to a slave trader, and each chapter alternates between their descendants, some of whom remained in Ghana, the others living or surviving in the United-States. Through the story of this family, Gyasi explores centuries of Black history in both countries. One of the characters, leaving in contemporary Ghana, is a history teacher and, warning his students about the danger of partial history, he invites them to challenge the narratives they are told: “Whose story am I missing? Whose voice was suppressed so that this voice could come forth?” (Gyasi 2016, 226-227)

At the beginning of *Homegoing*, a genealogical tree highlights the coherence of the novel’s structure, enhanced by recurring patterns and symbols, but each chapter could nonetheless be read as a short story, so that a tension appears between disruption and transmission. This transgenerational story follows a lineage of women transmitting elements of their pasts to their sons and daughters, as if Gyasi intended to write “herstories”.In so doing, she puts forward voices that were erased, or might have been erased, were it not for their presence in fiction.

This paper aims at analysing how Gyasi writes against the disruptions brought about by colonization. How does the transgenerational dimension of the novel illuminate the long-term consequences of colonisation? How does its formal aspect reflect as well as challenge the ruptures due to colonisation? In *Feminismo Urgente, ¡a despatriarcar!*, María Galindo writes: “you can’t decolonize without depatriarchalizing” (8, our translation). One of the objectives of this paper will be to clarify how the focus on a lineage of women participates to a “depatriarchalizing” of the telling of one’s (his/her)story.

**Julia Siccardi** teaches English at Paris 3 Sorbonne-Nouvelle and holds a PhD from the ENS de Lyon. In her PhD dissertation, “Towards transculturalism: writing alterity in the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Monica Ali, Bernardine Evaristo, Jhumpa Lahiri and Zadie Smith” she analysed how alterity can hinder cultural encounters and how transcultural writing throws light on such mechanisms. Some of her articles on Zadie Smith and Jhumpa Lahiri’s novels were published in *The Journal of the Short Story, The African and Black Diaspora Journal* and in a collection of essays published by l’Harmattan.

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**Transmission as Survival Strategy in Diana Evans’ *26a***

In her first novel, *26a*, published in 2005, the Nigerian-born British author, Diana Evans, winner of the Orange Award for New Writers, explores the complexity of diasporic identities in terms of cultural heritage and conflict. 26a Waifer Avenue in the London neighborhood of Neasden is home, in the ’80s, to identical twins Georgia and Bessi Hunter as well as to their older sister, Bel, and younger sister, Kemy. The story follows their transition into womanhood as they all grow up with a Nigerian mother, Ida, overwhelmed by homesickness, and their alcoholic English father who struggles to overcome his own childhood trauma. Despite familial tensions, the girls enjoy their early years until they journey to Nigeria, where a terrifying event triggers the twins’ estrangement, leading to the suicide of one of them. The present study, based on Esther Rashkin’s *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of the Narrative* and on my reading of Laurajane Smith’s *Uses of Heritage*, aims to analyze transmission in the context of displacement, separation and loss. Choosing a deceased grandmother as a role model in order to escape a forced marriage, replacing an entire homeland with the imaginary presence of a mother in the host country, continuing to live with one's twin sister after the latter’s death all constitute survival strategies made possible through the preservation of individual or intergenerational memories, their integration to daily routines as a form of resistance to an unfriendly environment, and, eventually, their transformation into vivid companions for a more bearable existence.

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**Remembering Border Violence: Tracing Asylum Detention in Contemporary Refugee**

**Literature**

Contemporary refugee literature, as Gallien reminds us, reflects the constitutive principle of postcolonial studies “to intervene in and disrupt the power dynamics as embedded in discourse and as they regulate the relationship between north and south” and thus represents vital “directions for postcolonial futures” (2019). If refugees constitute the “new subaltern” (Farrier 2011, 5), then the uniquely precarious and liminal condition of asylum seekers renders their voices particularly marginalized. Yet the literary works of detained asylum seekers allow for the transmission of knowledge of hidden sites of border violence: the asylum detention and processing centres where refugees have been illegally incarcerated. This paper proposes to read Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* (2019) and the short stories of Melatu Uche Okorie (2010, 2019) as significant counter discourse contributing to the cultural memory surrounding hostile asylum policies in the Global North. Drawing upon Manus Prison Theory (Tofighian 2020), it will consider the sites of asylum detention represented in the works - the result of the Australian Pacific Solution and the Republic of Ireland’s Direct Provision - as “neocolonial experiment[s ]” (1144) deeply rooted in the colonial histories of these so-called “host” countries. In the context of the demolition of Manus Regional Processing Centre in 2017 and the upcoming scrapping of Direct Provision by the incumbent Irish government, it will explore how these works confront the erasure of such sites in dominant asylum narratives, ensuring their transmission through topographies and mappings, within literary imaginaries and indeed through transformations of the English language itself.

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1. Ideastream Public Media, “Namwali Serpell, Anisfield-Wolf Fiction Honoree Profile,” October 2, 2020, video, 5:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13-BKAR6aaM [↑](#footnote-ref-1)