

Stranger on the Land of One's Ancestors: Archipelagic Dismemberment and Global Circulation in the Indian Ocean

Description:

Nestled in the Mozambique Channel, the island of Mayotte is a French overseas department, wrenched away from the Comoran archipelago in 1975. This act of colonial mutilation gave birth to a peripheral European territory that persists as a beacon for clandestine migrants: Hundreds of people die on the treacherous sea crossing every year, between shores once freely circulated by their ancestors. How might literature help us grapple with the multiple entwined layers of irony and tragedy that constitute this situation? Furthermore, Mayotte exists as a blind spot for global media, while paradoxically entwined in a transnational network of consumer capitalism and self-serving foreign intervention. How, then, does one strike an equilibrium between considering the Indian Ocean tragedy on its own terms and relating it to other migratory movements across the world (e.g. the Mediterranean "crisis")? What are the creative, ethical and political stakes of each approach?

Presenter Bio:

Nikhita Obeegadoo is an incoming Assistant Professor in Francophone Studies and African Transcultural Studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO). Her current project is titled "The Silence of the Seabed: Reimagining Traumatic Water Crossings in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean". Drawing from a multilingual contemporary corpus, it explores how contemporary writers grapple with the blanks of history by reimagining oceanic crossings (the Middle passage, the kala pani crossing, and contemporary clandestine migration) from ecological and subaltern perspectives. Find out more at nikhitao.com.