



Thanatic Ethics: The Circulation of Bodies in Migratory Spaces

Workshop #6: Mare Nostrum, Morte Nostra

15-16 October 2026, Montpellier, St Charles Campus, Auditorium 2



Book of Abstracts and Biographical Notes

Panel 1: Translational Thanatics

Cornelia Ruhe (University of Mannheim) — Translational Thanatology: Appropriation, Responsibility, and the Mediterranean Dead in Taina Tervonen's *Au pays des disparus*.

This paper approaches Taina Tervonen's *Au pays des disparus*. PM390047, *un mort en Méditerranée* (2019) through the concept of thanatology understood as a translational practice. It argues that the text does not merely represent death in migration, but constructs narrative meaning through multiple, intersecting acts of translation – linguistic, forensic, administrative, and relational – at sites where ritual, legal, and political frameworks prove insufficient. Focusing on one unidentified migrant who died in the Mediterranean, Tervonen's writing follows processes of forensic identification in Europe, travels to presumed countries of origin, and encounters possible relatives. These movements are read not as documentary supplements, but as translational operations that mediate between fragmented remains, bureaucratic abstraction, and personal memory. Translation here does not resolve anonymity into full narrative coherence; rather, it sustains a fragile passage between number and name, absence and addressability. In dialogue with the workshop's interrogation of *mare nostrum*, the paper proposes that Tervonen's thanatology reconfigures appropriation through translation. While the Mediterranean dead are neither claimed as "ours" nor left in radical otherness, translation enables a form of narrative responsibility detached from sovereign possession. By translating voices, traces, and silences across linguistic and spatial divides, the text articulates responsibility as a practice of response rather than ownership. Thanatology thus emerges as an ethics of translation: a mode of engaging with the dead that accepts involvement without mastery and acknowledges loss without closure.

Cornelia Ruhe is Professor of Romance and Comparative Literature at the University of Mannheim. Her research focuses on contemporary French and francophone literature, with particular emphasis on representations of violence, death, memory, and ethical questions of narration. In recent years, she was the co-editor of several volumes on contemporary French authors (*Une femme puissante. L'œuvre de Marie Ndiaye*, co-edited with D. Bengsch, Brill/Rodopi 2013; *Chutes, ruptures et philosophie. Les romans de Jérôme Ferrari*, co-edited S. Burnautzki, Classiques Garnier 2018; *Mathias Énard et l'érudition du roman*, co-edited with M. Messling, L. Seauve et V. de Senarclens, Brill/Rodopi 2020; *Le labyrinthe littéraire de Mohamed Mbougar Sarr*, co-edited with S. Burnautzki et A. Imorou, Brill/Rodopi 2024 and, in 2025 with Brill, the collective bilingual volume *L'écrivain national par temps de mondialisation*, co-edited with A. Gefen and O. Panaïté) and authored a monograph: *La mémoire des conflits dans la littérature française contemporaine* (Leiden/Boston: Brill/Rodopi 2020).



Lisa Ann Senecal — Sonic Topographies: Listening to Mare Nostrum as Morte Nostra.

What does the Mediterranean sound like when it is not imagined as a space of circulation, leisure or exchange but heard as uneven exposure to death? The presentation opens with a 4:40 soundscape, composed of ethnographic field recordings and fragmentary narratives gathered across a beach, café, airport terminal and common graves in Malta, followed by a brief analytic reflection. Sonic Topographies examines Malta's internal borders not as lines but as acoustic fields in which inequality is registered rather than seen. Silence, distortion, resonance and interruption index differential exposure: some lives insulated, others made disposable. Sound is not illustration but trace – of what Balibar calls “internal borders” and what Sayad names “double absence” – infrastructures that sort bodies into categories which facilitate mobility, containment or risk. Engaging the workshop's reframing of mare nostrum as mare nostra, the project interrogates how claims of shared sea and shared heritage coexist with a regime that renders certain deaths inevitable or ungrievable. Listening becomes method and demand. It translates the everyday mechanics of bordering into a sensory encounter that resists the pacifying metaphor of “flow” that obscures frictions of exclusion and stratification. To listen is to be positioned. Waves and lifeguard whistles, airport announcements, a crowded dance floor and cicadas near grave 159 unfold as uneven acoustic exposures to mobility and mortality. By shifting from sight to sound, the soundscape asks what responsibility to the dead requires when exposure to death is unevenly distributed – and where the listener stands within that distribution.

Lisa Ann Senecal received her PhD with distinction in Migrations and Anthropology from ICS-ULisboa. Her research examines how the regime of borders structures racialized mobility, noncitizenship and stratified exposure across the Mediterranean. Working at the intersection of migration studies and critical border theory, she analyses how internal borders operate through everyday infrastructures that differentiate mobility, belonging and risk. Her work combines ethnography, counter-mapping and multimodal methods to trace how borders are lived, sensed and contested.



Al Khoder Al Khalifa — Documenting the Unburied, Resisting Erasure: The Mediterranean Continuum, Untranslatability and Death

There has been a noticeably increased tendency towards producing writings, fictional and/or non-fictional, that offer a sufficient space to document unspeakable atrocities, violence and the spectacle of drowning refugees face while crossing borders. They register the voices of the voiceless coming from either the impenetrable darkness of forests or the bottom of the Mediterranean. However, these works have largely given less attention to see how crossing this “liquid frontier” is a necropolitical continuum of a pre-crossing death. Taking into consideration the importance of mediated and/or translated testimonies to Mediterranean death, this paper foregrounds the journalistic accounts found in *My Fourth Time, We Drowned: Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route* by Sally Hayden. Elucidating moments of suffering, of disappearance and of drowning but also the failure of care and the circulation of bodies, the paper highlights how translation, like the sea, is supposed to carry across to the other side cultural nuances. It examines what happens linguistically, culturally and politically to the bodies when the other side does not accept the mediation of these testimonies to this exceptional Mediterranean death. Illustrating this untranslatability as a continuity of other pre-crossing trajectories, the paper uses Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* to discuss the disruption of ethical responsibility towards the dead. The calm rhythm of the ritualistic practice of washing, shrouding and burying a body is radically disturbed by the presence of “corpses scattered all over the streets”, piling up in “fridges” and “severed heads”. Moreover, the journey of transporting the corpse of Bolbol's father within a fragmented territory

from Damascus to be buried in Aleppo is obstructed in Khaled Khalifa's *Death is Hard Work* since "bodies weren't important in war."

Al-Khoder Al-Khalifa has a Ph.D. degree from the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. The title of the thesis is *Dystopian Macabre: Political Aesthetics, Death and Bare Life in Contemporary Mashriq Literature*. It critically studies recent texts centralizing around death. They are voices of mourning and resistance through a dead body, of a Faulknerian "hard" journey during a war to bury a body; of surreal deformities and a child deprived of smiling, yet one "who can kill people with a joke"; of nightmarish "screams"; games of crossing borders and Borgesian puzzles of a refugee "camouflaging" identity; of a death that is "always late ... while the march of life becomes another death". In his academic engagements and publications, Al Khalifa directs the focus of his research towards contemporary writings on death, war and prison literature, historicization of forced migration/refugeehood, diaspora/exile literature and politics and/of aesthetics.



Panel 2: Mourning the Lost Body

Freya Powell (New School, NY) — EE IO, EE AI AI: Non-translations to impart an embodied experience.

This multi-media talk explores translation, poetics, and embodied sound utilized in my ensemble-based, immersive sound projects that attempt to access a sense of collective mourning and complicity for the lives lost during migration. Anne Carson wrote: "A translator is someone trying to get in between a body and its shadow." While translation typically is understood as the reckoning of one language into another, a form of translation also occurs in the creation of poetry and artworks. It is here that an idea is translated into poetic form to be understood by a reader or audience through the senses. In her translation of Sophocles *Elektra*, Anne Carson made the distinct choice to leave *Elektra's* lamentation in the original ancient Greek. She imagined *Elektra* screaming, uttering cries that are on the edge of language. Using Carson's non-translations in my scripts and the affective capacities of the voice, I reach my audience through the senses, engaging ancient Greek to create an experience of embodied listening. Their lamentations exist in a non-verbal, yet bodily space. They point to language without making meaning. They reference something internal. In the choral passages of 'A Maritime Haunting', an immersive sound installation about ambiguous loss in migration across the Mediterranean, I activate my listener through poetic sound. Inviting the audience to experience the work through their senses, to grapple in a bodily capacity with their own complicity. Through these works I am asking my audience to 'listen toward', to listen as a radical act.

Freya Powell creates ensemble performances, immersive sound installations, and essay videos that center the political potential of the voice. Powell has built an ensemble of actors and singers to create experimental projects that reveal connections between language, loss, and memory. She creates experiences of embodied listening for her audience to witness lesser-known political events or ideas, such as a mass grave of undocumented migrants or the violence of US border policy. Collaborating with performers, she explores the expressive and elegiac capacities of the voice. She has presented her work nationally and internationally at institutions including, Triennale Milano, MoMA PS1, Videotage, Art in General, Arts Santa Monica, and Socrates Sculpture Park. She has received grants from NYSCA, Queens Council on the Arts, and NYFA. Powell is Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art Practice at Parsons, The New School.



Khaled Mattawa (University of Michigan) — The Mournable Body: Literature as a Forensics of

Recovery.

This presentation argues that literature performs its own forensics of recovery, restoring particularity to the dead when institutions fail, deny, or destroy the machinery of identification. Reading Greek poet Constantin Cavafy, pre-Islamic poet Imru' al-Qais, and Hisham Matar's novel *The Return* against Mediterranean migrant burials and Gaza's ruined morgues, it asks what naming and elegy owe the ungrievable.

Khaled Mattawa is a Libyan-American poet and the William Wilhratz Professor of English Language and Literature, at the University of Michigan. He has published several collections of poetry, including *Fugitive Atlas* (Graywolf Press, 2020), *Tocqueville* (New Issues Poetry & Prose, 2010) which won the San Francisco Poetry Center Award for best book of poetry and the Arab American Book Award in Poetry, *Amorisco* (Ausable Press, 2008), *Zodiac of Echoes* (Ausable Press, 2003), and *Ismailia Eclipse* (The Sheep Meadow Press, 1995). He has also written two essays, *Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet's Art and His Nation* (Syracuse University Press, 2014) and *How Long Have You Been With Us?: Essays on Poetry* (University of Michigan Press, 2016). He has translated numerous volumes of contemporary Arabic poetry, including Adonis's *Concerto al-Quds* (Yale University Press, 2017) which won the PEN-American Center Poetry in Translation Prize and the Saif Al-Ghobashi Prize, *Shepherd of Solitude: Selected Poems of Amjad Nasser* (Banipal Publishing, 2009), *Miracle Maker: Selected Poems of Fadhil Al-Azzawi* (BOA Editions, 2003) and *Without an Alphabet, Without a Face: Selected Poems of Saadi Youssef* (Graywolf Press, 2002) for which he won PEN-American Center Poetry in Translation Prize in 2003, Joumana Haddad's *Invitation to a Secret Feast* (Tupelo Press, 2008), Iman Mirsal's *These are not oranges, my love: selected poems* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2008), Maram Al-Massri's *A Red Cherry on a White-Tiled Floor: Selected Poems of Saadi Youssef* (Bloodaxe Books, UK, 2004 / Copper Canyon Press, USA, 2007), Fadhil Al Azzawi's *In Every Well A Joseph Is Weeping* (poems of *Quarterly Review of Books*, 1997), Hatif Janabi's *Questions and Their Retinue: Selected Poems* (University of Arkansas Press, 1996). He coedited *Beyond Memory: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Creative Nonfiction* (University of Arkansas Press, 2020) in addition to coediting the anthologies *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Arab American Fiction* (University of Arkansas Press, 2004) and *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (Syracuse University Press, 1999). His own work has been widely anthologized as well.



Panel 3: *Los Nadie* - Death and Disappearance in the Mediterranean

Félicien de Heusch (University of Copenhagen) — Boundaries of Times and Spaces of Participation: Building Public and Private Commemorations around Migrant Deaths and Disappearances in the Spain-Morocco Borderlands.

Public commemorations of migrant deaths and disappearances at European borders and beyond have become transnational arenas that combine advocacy and memory work. For example, annual “commemor’actions” are organized as collective expressions of “grief activism” (Stierl, 2017; Denaro & Boccagni, 2025) across Europe and Africa. Yet, little attention has been paid to the negotiations and tensions involved in the micropolitics of building local-transnational communities of grief. Even less attention has been given to the parallel experiences of migrants' families (Stimmatini, 2023), who develop their own practices of memorialisation and remembrance within the domestic sphere. This work in progress draws on ethnographic research conducted in two Spain-Morocco border regions: the Canary Islands and the Melilla-Moroccan Oriental region. Based on fieldwork with activists, associations, and relatives of disappeared migrants, it examines diverse events and experiences that shape the boundaries of the times and spaces of commemoration and remembrance. First, it explores communing as both a strategic and contested terrain among advocates who negotiate boundaries between transnational and local scales of action. Second, it examines the performative dimension of commemorations across different arenas, questioning their audiences and forms of

reception. Finally, it focuses on the private and intimate experiences of relatives who coexist with the disappeared migrants in everyday life, extending beyond the scope of public commemorative practices.

Félicien de Heusch is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow within the ERC-funded project “The Social Life of Dead Bodies: A new ethnographic approach to migrant deaths in and around the Mediterranean Sea (SOLID)”, at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. His PhD thesis “Mobilizing for and through the Dead: An Ethnography of Senegalese Migrants’ Transnational Death Management in Europe” was conducted within the ERC-funded project “Migration, Transnationalism and Social Protection in (post-) crisis Europe (MiTSopro)” at the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies, University of Liège. In 2023, he was awarded a Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Latin American Institute, UCLA. In 2024, he published at Sofia Comics the graphic novel *Au-delà l’exil* with Gaspard Njock, which was later translated to English, Spanish and Italian.



Film Screening and Discussion (in French)

Valérie Cuzol’s research focuses on funeral choices in the context of immigration, Muslim ritualities of death, and the social, professional, and religious dynamics surrounding Muslim funeral practices in France, as well as visual sociology. She was awarded grants under the “Islam and Society” research funding program of the Central Office of Worship [Bureau Central des Cultes] of the French interior ministry in 2021 and 2025. She received the second doctoral thesis prize from the Syndicat des Arts Funéraires and the academic network “Les Morts.” She has published many articles in academic journals and has directed two short films: *Chibanis, Mémoires d’exil* (2015) and *Quel côté de l’absence?* (2018), co-directed with Frédéric Lecloux.



Sergio Illescas & Mario-Paul Martínez — An investigation into the Melilla massacre through comic journalism.

With the graphic novel *Los Nadie (The Nobodies)*, we address something that is both simple and profoundly complex: the lives of migrants matter too. We focus on those who die trying to cross the border and are buried in Morocco without names or identities. They are not treated as human beings, not even in death. Mothers are denied the right to mourn their children. In *Los Nadie*, we reconstruct the stories of five young people who lost their lives in the massacre that took place on 24 June 2022 at the Barrio Chino border crossing in Nador, Morocco, on the border with Melilla, Spain. They were killed by Moroccan security forces, with the support of the Spanish authorities. These stories are brought to life through the artwork of five Afro-descendant illustrators, whose drawings recreate the richness of African imaginaries and perspectives that remain largely unknown in the Global North.

Sergio Illescas is a writer, storyteller, and journalist. At the national television network LaSexta, where he has worked for the past nine years, he specializes in migration, anti-racism, and human rights. His reporting has taken him to some of Spain's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, where he has covered migration and border issues. He received a national award from the Scientific Committee of the Network against Tuberculosis and for Solidarity for the investigative series *Sin ellos (Without Them)*, which explored the vital role of migration in Spain. He was also awarded a grant from the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), based in Washington, D.C., to produce *Damaris*, a documentary on the criminalization of abortion in the Dominican Republic, currently in

post-production. In September 2022, with Mario-Paul Martínez, he published a multimedia feature for LaSexta titled *Los Nadie (The Nobodies)*.

Mario-Paul Martínez is a graphic artist and filmmaker, as well as a professor in the Art Department at Miguel Hernández University in Elche. He has published his work with publishers such as Tirant, McGraw Hill, Salamanca, Cinestesia, the Juan Gil-Albert Institute, and Libros.com, as well as in print media such as *Diario Información* (Alicante), *La Opinión* (Tenerife), *Risbel* (Madrid), and *Diario de Mallorca*. The *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Venice, the *BilbaoArte* Foundation, the *Telefónica* Foundation, the *Sinaloa Science Center*, the *Valencian Institute of Modern Art (IVAM)*, the *Sabadell Cam Foundation*, the *Las Cigarreras Cultural Center*, the *L'Escorxador Cultural Center*, and the *University of Alicante Museum (MUA)*, among others, have exhibited his works.



Panel 4: Mobilities and Transnational Thanatic Ethics

Ronnel Keith Berry (Austin Peay State University) — The Ethics of Free Movement: James Baldwin, Nabil Fares, and the Mediterranean Thanatosphere.

My discussion brings James Baldwin into conversation with the emerging field of thanatic ethics to show how freedom of movement in its physical, psychic, and existential dimensions shapes his critique of American racism. I approach this question through Baldwin's nonfiction prose, where the essay functions as a site of witness that records the pressures placed on Black mobility and the moral imagination that resists those pressures. For Baldwin, desegregation was never a matter of simple spatial access. It was, but the claim to move in the world without the constant threat of premature death. His departure from the United States and his life in France can be read as a counter thanatic act, a refusal of the racial order that seeks to regulate the movement of Black bodies and Black interior life. Placing Baldwin alongside *Un passager de l'occident* (1971) by Algerian writer Nabile Farès allows me to trace a transnational grammar of movement that links the African American experience with the colonial and postcolonial histories that bind France and Algeria. Farès reflects on expatriation and the unsettled conditions of life across the Mediterranean, and his work offers a parallel meditation on the moral and political stakes of belonging. Read together, Baldwin and Farès demonstrate how the circulation of bodies that are desired, restricted, or endangered exposes the (un)ethical structures that determine who may move, who must remain still, and who is forced to flee. Their works show that movement is a form of knowledge, a mode of survival, and a measure of the world's (un)willingness to recognize the intrinsic value of human life.

Ronnel Keith Berry is an Assistant Professor of Literature at Austin Peay State University whose research examines African American and African Diaspora prose, Black travel narratives, transatlantic aesthetics, and Critical Whiteness Studies. His work includes the chapter "Reimagining a Community: The Spectrality of Whiteness in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*" in *The Routledge Companion to James Baldwin* (forthcoming September 2026), as well as the co-authored article "Reading the Sensual in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*" in *Transatlantica* (2023). Dr. Berry is also completing a chapter for the edited collection *Calling it by its Name: Analyses of White U.S. Literature*. His essay, "A Ritual Sacrifice: The Black Gaze on Whiteness in Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*," reads Vidal's novel through the critiques of Whiteness articulated by James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks, and examines the sacrificial logic that structures racial identity in the United States.



Alexandra Délano Alonso (The New School) and Benjamin Nienass (Montclair State University) — Violini del Mare: Grief as Material and Political Transformation.

Critics of grief activism around border deaths have increasingly questioned the transformative potential of symbolic acts of public mourning and have highlighted, at best, their futility in challenging mortal border regimes, and, at worst, their complicity in sustaining them. However, many of those critics understand (the absence of) political transformation largely in terms of (the absence of) policy change or shifts in public opinion. Based on the Orchestra di Mare/Metamorphosis project led by the Fondazione Casa dello Spirito e delle Arti in Milan, which takes discarded wood from migrant boats at the Mediterranean coast to prisons in Italy where incarcerated people turn them into musical instruments, this paper reflects on alternative notions of transformation in the encounter with migrant deaths. While the organizers of Metamorphosis aim at reaching wider audiences with their message of empathy for migrants through public performances with renowned musicians and orchestras, the transformations implied by this project are more layered than swaying the “public” through aesthetic experiences that are deemed universal. Grounded in our visits to the workshops in Milan and in interviews with the organizers of the project and the artists who make the instruments in jail, we reflect on a broader potential of art and activism in shifting our relationship to a deadly border regime: Starting from the material transformation of the wood and the transformation of the lives of those who craft the instruments, we suggest that the solidarity implied by this project does not rely solely on abstract humanism, but, more often, on the tangible connections drawn between the issue of border deaths and other systemic forms of injustice, precarity, and violence, such as mass incarceration.

Alexandra Délano Alonso is Professor of Politics and Global Studies at The New School. Her scholarship examines state–diaspora relations, transnational citizenship, and sanctuary and mutual aid as political practices. Her publications include *Mexico and its Diaspora in the United States* (Cambridge University Press), *From Here and There: Diasporas, Integration and Social Rights beyond Borders* (Oxford University Press), *Brottes* (2021), *Las luchas por la memoria contra las violencias en México* (co-editor, El Colegio de México, 2023), *New Narratives on the Peopling of America* (co-editor, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024), and *se acerca, se aleja* (Elefanta, 2024). Across these works, she bridges migration studies, lived experience, poetry, and alternative political imaginaries.

Benjamin Nienass is Associate Professor of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University. His research on the politics of memory and grief activism has appeared in *The Review of Politics*, *Politics and Society*, *Globalizations*, the *Latin American Research Review*, *Sociologica*, the *German Studies Review*, *Memory Studies*, and many other journals. He is the co-editor of *Silence, Screen, and Spectacle: Rethinking Social Memory in the Age of Information* (Berghahn), *Las Luchas por la memoria contra las violencias en México* (Colegio de México), *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (Routledge), and of several special journal issues, among which “Borders and the Politics of Mourning” (in *Social Research*, with Alexandra Délano Alonso).



Panel 5: A Reading

Mohammad Alsadhan (Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, Praxiling UMR 5267 - CNRS & ReSO UR 4582) & Claudine Raynaud (Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry, EMMA, ITEM/CNRS) — “Angel of Migration” or Conjuring a Death Foretold: Abdel Wahab Yousif’s Poetic Testament.

On August 27, 2020, Sudanese poet Abdel Wahab Yousif, better known as Latinos, died when a rubber boat packed with 45 African immigrants sank after setting off from Libya on its way to Europe. Abdel Wahab Yousif, also known as “Latinos,” was born in Manwashi, Southern Darfur, and studied at the University of Khartoum. He was the author of around fifty poems and frequently shared his

poetry with his friends. His tragic death, anticipated in his last poems, endows his poetry with a chilling prophetic tone, while giving its readers an insight into the young poet's frame of mind and aspirations. This proposition consists in a reading of two poems of Abdel Wahab Yousif in Arabic by Mohammad Alsadhan, followed by a reading of their French translation. An additional translation of a poem in English by Adil Babikir will also be read. These consecutive readings in three languages highlight the commemorative and performative power of translation. Untimely death uttered in anticipation becomes in translation a tombeau in the other languages as a result of the time lag, while reading in the original Arabic restores the silenced voice and makes it heard anew. The ethics of 'memory' are questioned in this gesture of mourning: while Abdel Wahab Yousif's voice resounds and re-lives in another's voice, this moment 'in memory of' demands revisiting Derrida's reflections on *Gedächtnis* (thinking memory), *Erinnerung* (memory and interiorization) and the proper name. Two homages to Abdel Wahab Yousif will close this presentation: a song based on the lyrics of Abdel Wahab Yousif composed by singer and songwriters Fiona Bevan and Adam Beattie, "Scare Away the Darkness," commissioned by PEN International (Creative Witnesses) and poet Philip Metres's "Qasida for Abdel Wahab Yousif," from his collection *Fugitive/Refuge* (2024). In both instances, the poet's words are embedded in the new work to bring to the fore his creative voice in defiance of his passing.

Mohammad Alsadhan is a researcher at the University of Montpellier Paul-Valéry in Language Sciences (Praxiling and ReSo) and a teacher of Arabic language and civilization at its Department of Arabic and the Department of History, and of Arabic language at the Centre de Formation Linguistique spécialisé ACB-ILO Langues. An associate professor in the Department of French language and translation at the University of Homs/Syria, he is the author of *Paroles syriennes en exil. Expériences, représentations et identités multiples* (PULM, 2022). Podcast, Web TV of University of Montpellier

Paul-Valéry:

<https://webtv.univ-montp3.fr/video/paroles-syriennes-en-exil/585720330914e5dc73d08d1361ec208b>

Claudine Raynaud is Professor Emerita at the University of Montpellier Paul-Valéry. She has taught in England (Birmingham, Liverpool) and the United States (Michigan, Northwestern, Oberlin). A Fellow at the Du Bois Institute, she headed GRAAT, a nationwide African American Studies Research Group (EAA in Tours) and a research unit at ITEM/CNRS (Paris). Her publications include *Toni Morrison: L'Esthétique de la survie* (1996), an essay on memory in *Beloved* (Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison), many coedited volumes and articles on black autobiography (Hurston, Wright, Lorde, Angelou, Brooks, Baldwin, and Ward). She translated *Sojourner Truth's Narrative* (2016) into French. A member of the editorial board of the James Baldwin Review, her latest contribution is a study of spectrality in *Beloved*: <https://journals.openedition.org/caliban/13497?lang=fr>



Panel 6: Book Launch

Paolo Boccagni is a sociologist at the University of Trento. He has researched and written on migration, home, displacement, social welfare, and death. Starting from everyday life, his fieldwork tries to scale up and out local insights and findings by way of comparison, resonance, metaphor, and functional equivalence. His emerging research concerns include the practice of homing, the production and scaling of relevance and memory, and the ways of coping with absence, distance and disappearance. Recent publications include [Challenging ungrievability for missing people at sea](#) (coauth., 2025), [Undoing nothing: Waiting for asylum, struggling for relevance](#) (OA, 2025), [Death in migration](#) (coauth., 2026) and [On the \(past\) verge of death: Private memory or public concern?](#) (2026).

Morgane Crotti holds a PhD in Italian Studies and is a literary translator. Her research focuses primarily on the poet Alfonso Gatto, Italian Hermetic poetry, and the relationship between poetry

and the visual arts, particularly the dialogue between text and painting. She teaches Italian and has translated several edited volumes, including collections of short stories and poetry, as well as the poetry collection, *Isola*, written by Alfonso Gatto. Her areas of interest include modern Italian poetry, literary translation, the relationship between literature and the arts, and the cultural history of Italy.

Thomas Lacroix is a geographer, research director at the CNRS, affiliated with the Centre for International Research at Sciences Po. His work focuses on the relationship between immigrants' transnationalism and the State. He has published numerous books and articles on diasporic memory, the moral geography of migration and the theory of transnationalism. He is a co-investigator of the programme 'Thanatic Ethic: the circulation of bodies in migratory spaces'.

Gaspard Njock is a multidisciplinary artist, editor at Sofia Comics and PhD candidate in Musicology at La Sorbonne University. His thesis focuses on the relationship between image and sound in the scenography of Richard Wagner's operas. Among his artistic works, he published the graphic novel *Au-delà l'exil* with Félicien de Heusch in 2024, the comics documentary "Mauvaises Aires" in 2021; "Un voyage sans retour," a watercolor docu-fiction, around the drama of migration in 2018, and with Andrea Aprile "Aldo Manuzio," a graphic novel around the origin of printing, in 2015.

- Gaspard Njock & Félicien de Heusch: *Au-delà l'Exil* (Sofia Comics, Italian translation, Master LEA & LUK)
- Thomas Lacroix & Paolo Boccagni: *Death in Migration* (Lacroix & Boccagni, University of Bristol Press, 2026)
- Paolo Boccagni & Morgane Crotti: *Vies à l'arrêt* (Boccagni & Crotti, PoCoPages, forthcoming 2026)

Note that on the occasion of the [International Translation Day](#) two roundtables around *Au-delà l'exil* and its translation into Italian and Russian and around *Vite Ferme* and its translation into French will gather Gaspard Njock, Félicien de Heusch and the students who translated the graphic novel, as well as Paolo Boccagni and Morgane Crotti. They will be held on **Saturday 17 October** in Auditorium St Charles 2 from 9.30 am to 12 am. All welcome.



Panel 7: Death at Sea

Aina Vidal-Pérez (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya): Mediterranean Uncanny: Migrant Bodies and the Limits of the Fable in Philippe Claudel's *L'Archipel du Chien*.

This paper examines Philippe Claudel's *L'Archipel du Chien* (2018) as a contemporary fable about the migratory crisis in the Mediterranean, interrogating the ethical and aesthetic implications of its insular allegorical narration. Set on a fictional Mediterranean island, the novel stages the discovery of three migrant bodies washed ashore, whose anonymous, agentless presence unsettles local authorities more concerned with real estate negotiations than with human dignity. When nature ultimately rebels and destroys the island, Claudel frames ecological catastrophe as moral retribution. This paper questions the extent to which the fable, as a structurally moralizing genre, can sustain a critical engagement with the realities it invokes. While its allegorical ambition generates concern for humanitarian and environmental crises, it also tends to keep the migrant bodies at a symbolic remove, positioning them as uncanny narrative devices that trigger the plot and undermine their subjectivity and agency. Their anonymity and radical otherness sit uneasily against the Mediterranean's inherited narratives of cultural hybridity and exchange—a sea long imagined as an ancient crossroads of civilizations—exposing the tension between those stories of encounter and the contemporary reality of border control, illegalization, and disposable lives. Drawing on scholarship

that has explored Mediterranean islands not as exotic spaces but as laboratories of political imagination, this paper explores the tensions between the novel's fabulist and allegorical register and the political contingencies it seeks to address.

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Martina Balassone (Sorbonne University) — Mediterranean Mediations: Fictional (Re)framings of Death as a Site of Refugee Singularity in Rabih Alameddine's *The Wrong End of the Telescope*.

This paper argues that Rabih Alameddine's *The Wrong End of the Telescope* (2021) pushes back against dominant narratives of migrant suffering by staging death as a final site of refugee agency. Set at the height of the so-called "refugee crisis" on the shores of Lesbos – a crucial site for the regulation of migration from the Eastern to the Northern shores of the Mediterranean – the novel mobilizes two intertwined strategies to reinstate the grievability of refugee lives. The first is the explicit thematization of euthanasia as a reclamation of sovereignty over one's own death, which takes shape through the relationship between medical volunteer Mina and her terminally ill refugee patient Sumaya. The second leverages metafictional strategies: through the work of the "Writer" – the author's narrative double – Ancient Greek literature emerges as a tool for the fashioning of a Mediterranean continuum, in which contemporary refugee deaths echo distant myths, and are thus restored to the singularity that dominant discourses deny them. In both cases, Mina and the Writer – diasporic individuals of Syrian and Lebanese origin, differently positioned in relation to the refugees they engage with – operate as cultural translators for the Syrian refugees of Lesbos, aiming to break through the frames that render their lives ungrievable. While this translational work draws on a shared linguistic and cultural background, the novel unsettles the assumption of a stable or self-evident sense of community, revealing these acts of mediation to be sites of tension through which a contested Mediterranean inheritance is negotiated rather than assumed.

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Bidisha Banerjee (Education University of Hong Kong) — "Who is saving whom?": Abject Migrant-hood and the Weaponized Mediterranean in Khaled Mattawa's *Mare Nostrum*.

The relevance and importance of postcolonial theory to the study of migration and mobility is long established. More recently postcolonial ecocriticism has emerged to bridge postcolonial studies and environmental studies, examining how colonial legacies intersect with environmental degradation, land rights and injustice. The figure of the refugee and the perilous journeys undertaken by refugees in the postcolonial era, bring the postcolonial in dramatic convergence with the migratory and the environmental. This convergence can be seen in the ways in which the “prevention through deterrence” border regimes of Western nations have led to the co-opting of natural landscapes and the weaponization of deserts, seas, mountain ranges and rivers in the service of borderization. What often remains unacknowledged in such discourses is the intersectional violence of environmental destruction, and anti-refugee border policies, and the intensifying relations between the depleting landscape and the death of the migrants. The human/more-than-human interminglings between the abjected migrant and the ravaged environment call into question policies and practices of border strategies and environmental extraction. This paper considers these intersections through a reading of the Arab American poet Khaled Mattawa’s *Mare Nostrum* (2019), a lyrical account of the plight of migrants adrift in the Mediterranean. I argue that the poems in this collection bring together the abject migrant and the necropoliticized Mediterranean in order to highlight the twin catastrophes of the refugee crisis and environmental collapse.

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