

# Blue Hauntologies and Spectral Seas

30 August, 2023 ##conf1222

Sponsored by the Climate Change Research Group (CCRG)

Panel convenors:

Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa (Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research)  
Irina Rafliana (University of Bonn & the German Institute of Development and Sustainability)  
Iqbal Hafizhul Lisan (Climate and Society Program, Columbia University)

**Aug 30 2023, Session 1 – Online only: 14.10-15.50 (BST)**  
(via the Fourwaves dashboard)

<b>Stranging, Remembering, Resisting</b> Chairs: Rapti Siriwardane & Iqbal H. Lisan		
<b>Tidal Timespace: Imprints &amp; Palimpsests</b>	Prof. Owain Jones (Bath Spa University) & Asst. Prof. Heather Green (Arizona State University)	<a href="mailto:owain.oj@btinternet.com">owain.oj@btinternet.com</a> <a href="mailto:Heather.J.Green@asu.edu">Heather.J.Green@asu.edu</a>
<b>The deified <i>Kappiri</i> - A symbol of slavery and resilience in Fort Kochi</b>	Sridhar A., independent researcher	<a href="mailto:njaansridhar@gmail.com">njaansridhar@gmail.com</a>
<b>Unearthing the Colonial Plantation of the Indian Ocean World through 19th-Century American Periodicals: A Study of <i>Harper's Weekly</i> Records on Nutmeg Plantations in Penang</b>	Mohammad Ataullah Nuri (University of North Carolina)	<a href="mailto:m_nuri@uncg.edu">m_nuri@uncg.edu</a>
<b>Experiencing cyclones in the era of climate change: Stories from Lakshadweep Islands</b>	Lakshmi Pradeep Rajeswary (National University of Singapore)	<a href="mailto:lakshmirpradeep@u.nus.edu">lakshmirpradeep@u.nus.edu</a>
<b>Disaster, maritime crises, memory-making and memorialisation from a multimodal lens in the Bengal Delta</b>	Dr. Debojyoti Das (Edinburgh University)	<a href="mailto:ukdebodas@gmail.com">ukdebodas@gmail.com</a>

Aug 30 2023, Session 2 – **In-person only session: 16.20 – 18.00 (BST)**  
Imperial College London, Sir Alexander Fleming Building Room 119

## Invoking, Tracing, Enduring

Chair: Irina Rafliana

<b>Ghostly traces on an abandoned island</b>	Prof. Uma Kothari (University of Manchester)	<a href="mailto:uma.kothari@manchester.ac.uk">uma.kothari@manchester.ac.uk</a>
<b>Spectres of Tryweryn: Carrying-Waters and the Resistance of the 'Unabsorbed'</b>	Dr. Jamie Matthews (Goldsmiths University of London)	<a href="mailto:J.Matthews@gold.ac.uk">J.Matthews@gold.ac.uk</a>
<b>Suspended geographies and infrapoetic haunting: M. NourbeSe Philip's <i>Zong</i></b>	Dr. Kate Lewis Hood (Queen Mary University of London)	<a href="mailto:k.lewishood@qmul.ac.uk">k.lewishood@qmul.ac.uk</a>
<b>"What happens on the vessel stays on the vessel": Perceptions, narratives and everyday life stories of seafarers and scientists on a German research vessel</b>	Ramona Haegele (German Institute of Development and Sustainability / IDOS)	<a href="mailto:ramona.haegele@idos-research.de">ramona.haegele@idos-research.de</a>
<b>Staying with the problem in the Open Sea: On the plastisphere as hybrid ecological formation of the Chthlucene *</b>	Asst. Prof. Chiara Certomà (University of Turin)	<a href="mailto:chiara.certoma@unito.it">chiara.certoma@unito.it</a>
<p>* This presentation is associated with the photographic exhibition "<a href="#">Explorations in the Plastisphere</a>" on display during the conference. The United Nation Ocean Decade has endorsed this work and it is also presently a part of a series of visual events encompassed in the EU project <a href="#">SeaPaCS</a> (please refer to page 13-14 for more information on the exhibition).</p>		

## Panel Introduction & Abstracts

Oceans, tidal flats, mangrove forests and other seascapes have long served as sources of inspiration and dread in contemplating, sensing, and narrating the extraordinary and the supernatural. In contrast to early post-Enlightenment sensibilities, the ocean has long been churning its own metaphysical histories and politics of life – replete with spirits, deities, aquatic beings, currents, and other lively matters/energies. This double session brings together contributions from the humanities and social sciences spanning all matters spectral, ghostly and beyond, while contemplating hauntology/ies as metaphor and as method, however expansively ‘haunting’ might be conceptualised.

We also seek to explore sensibilities of time, place, space, and co-habitation spanning events such as arrivals (of ‘invasive’ species, disease, contagion and other misplaced entities), phenomena and materialities (such as illicit vessels, toxic spills, plastics, tsunamis, tidal incursions), epistemic hauntings (implicating data, models and belief systems), alongside extraordinary and mundane geographies of such spaces as swamplands, ‘ghost forests’, dumpsites, mass graves, flood zones, marine deadzones, post-nuclear islands, including contested waterfronts and the overbuilt urban. These varied contexts may embody not only the dynamics of discard and dis/appearance, but also moments of desire, nostalgia and (be)longing.

Thus, while affording as much agency to the more-than-human (from aquatic species to subjects such as floating plastic, roving cyclones, technologies and financial capital), we also encourage explorations into the more performative aspects of watery spaces. Such contexts may reveal dis/appearances and long forgotten histories that are embodied in submerged artifacts and other kinds of resurfaced materials that trouble the present, while reframing futures and interpretations of the past.

Taken together, our panellists will explore contexts of multiple hauntings within the lively interstices of land, water, the atmospheric and the oceanic. We also bring together work that combines sensory, embodied, and affective approaches in reading with and sensing across such spatio-temporal contexts and their concomitant relations of power. Taken together, this double panel also calls for a concerted effort in rethinking the place of haunting (whether in relation to the spectral or beyond), and the extent to which its many materialities and metaphors are good to think / live with.

**Aug 30, Session 1, 14.10 – 15.50 BST, online only (via Fourwaves dashboard)**

## **Stranging, Remebering, Resisting**

### **Tidal Timespace: Imprints & Palimpsests**

Professor Owain Jones<sup>1</sup> and Assoc. Professor Heather Green<sup>2</sup>

1. Emeritus Professor of Environmental Humanities, Bath Spa University
2. Associate Professor, School of Art, Arizona State University

Tides, especially ones active in estuaries and mudflats, perform diurnal writing and erasing, concealing and revealing, leaving their spectral traces at ebb-tide. Each delicate set of tracings is unique, drawn by the movement of water, snails, skates and other creatures, and are wiped away by the following tide and await a new performance with fresh inscriptions. As quintessentially liminal spaces, these landscapes provide a fleeting platform for entanglements with humans and non-humans—and any given state of becoming is haunted by what has recently been and what is soon to become again. In our collaborative project *Tidal Timespace*, we think of these visible remains witnessed at low tide as palimpsests, and we capture them in plaster casts that record the still-wet, intricate patterns inscribed by invertebrates, currents, and other beings, mapping the diversity and signature of both Bahía Adair in Sonora, Mexico, and the Severn Estuary in the UK. The project also includes a set of artist books that intertwine ecological and historical narratives, personal and communal memory, imagery of tidal inscriptions, and scientific data to revere, share and care for these fragile landscapes. We seek to develop a sense of haunted temporal ecology, which, on mudflats during the ebbing tide, feels the strangeness of the same space at high tide. Air becomes water: sound, light and visibility are transformed, the haptic is recast, and the community completely refashioned. This is part of the wonder of estuaries and part of their vulnerability. And all this is now overlain by a darker future specter of climate change, sea level rise and storm surge induced erosion which might erase such performative ecologies more finally, but with, perhaps, the possibility of currently 'dry land' coastal areas becoming new tidal inter-zones.

### **Biographies**

Owain Jones is a cultural geographer and became the first Professor of Environmental Humanities in the UK in 2014 at Bath Spa University, and was deputy director of the Research Centre for the Environmental Humanities, 2016 - 2019. He has published over 80 scholarly articles on various aspects of nature-society relations, many focusing on tidal cultures and tree cultures. He has co-authored/edited five books on aspects of nature, society, place and memory. He has supervised four Environmental Humanities

PhDs with art practice and conducted various creative/academic collaborations with artists.

Heather Green's projects and installations examine historical and ecological narratives of the Northern Gulf of California and Sonoran Desert. The collaborative nature of her work has allowed her to ally with a diverse range of individuals including scientists, poets and fishermen. Her work has been shown in Spain, México, Uruguay, and in museums and galleries both regionally and across the United States. A native of Tucson, Heather works in Tempe as Associate Professor of Book Arts at Arizona State University.

## **The deified *Kappiri* - A symbol of slavery and resilience in Fort Kochi**

Sridhar A., independent researcher

Trade histories across the Indian Ocean, including the trading of enslaved peoples between Asia and Africa, have shaped the legacies of both these continents. The slave trade across the Indian Ocean was rampant for thousands of years, and particularly so during the colonial period. Fort Kochi India's Kerala State was one of the historic trading ports along the networked coastlines of South Asia. *Kappiri*, a local slang term for enslaved Africans brought to Kerala by the Portuguese in the 16th century, forms a quintessential part of Kochi Fort's folklore. According to legend, when the Dutch defeated the Portuguese in the 17th century, Portuguese traders escaping from Kerala buried their riches, while chaining or sacrificing African slaves so that their ghosts would guard the treasures of the Portuguese. Today, *kappiri* exists in local legends and stories of the coastal communities of Fort Kochi, as a feared yet benevolent spirit that helps people. It is believed that their spirits have inhabited the "kappiri trees" in the area protecting the treasures; the "kappiri fear", which compels people to avoid going by boats at night and the offerings of *puttu* (steamed cylinders of rice), toddy, meat at "kappiri muthappan" shrines indicate firm beliefs rooted in powers of the revered *kappiri*, all of which thrive in the living history of Fort Kochi. This study traces how various myths related to *kappiri* continue to grab the imaginations of marginalized coastal communities in Fort Kochi and contribute to transforming the once "oppressed slaves" into the now "powerful folk deities." It also puts into conversion broader currents around the littoral slave trade during the colonial period along the coast of Kerala, many of which are only but sparsely represented in mainstream Indian historiography but preserved largely in such oral, fragmented, euhemeristic and collective memories of local communities.

### **Biography**

Sridhar A. is an independent researcher working at the interface of water, environment, and society. He holds a Masters in Water Policy and Governance from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Migration and Diaspora Studies from Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi. He has worked on several research projects with extensive fieldwork across diverse states in India. His research interests include environmental justice, resource politics, water conflicts, coastal worlds, migration and climate change.

## **Unearthing the Colonial Plantation of the Indian Ocean World through 19th-Century American Periodicals: A Study of *Harper's Weekly* Records on Nutmeg Plantations in Penang**

Mohammad Ataullah Nuri, Department of English, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC

In the 1780s, the British East India Company established its first trading post in Penang, Malaysia. Within the next few decades, the island was transformed from a lush tropical place into a vast British plantation where various cash crops were introduced including tobacco, pepper, sugar cane, and nutmeg. The rise of the British plantation in Penang and its subsequent effects on the environment, the local communities, and the non-human species is a prime example of how the extractive policy of the Western plantation had serious environmental repercussions in the countries and islands connected by the Indian Ocean during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Several books, monographs, and numerous papers have recently come out on this subject including Amitav Ghosh's 2021 work *The Nutmeg Curse*. However, much of the historical records on the colonial plantation in the Indian Ocean World remain largely unexplored. This research aims to investigate the nutmeg plantation in Penang as revealed through the records of the 19th-Century American periodicals, especially *Harper's Weekly*. In my paper, I aim to address the following question: what were the effects of the colonial policies and practices of the nutmeg plantation on the multispecies communities in Penang during the 19th century, as revealed through *Harper's Weekly*, and other 19th-century American periodicals? The research draws on the theoretical framework of the plantationocene, which emphasizes the connection between plantation agriculture, colonization, and the present-day ecological crisis. The study is expected to provide insights into the environmental, social, and economic consequences of the nutmeg plantation in Penang in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the role of American periodicals in shaping the discourse on the plantation system in the Indian Ocean world.

### **Biography**

Mohammad Ataullah Nuri is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC. His research interests span the environmental humanities, multispecies justice and the Global South.

## **Experiencing cyclones in the era of climate change: Stories from Lakshadweep Islands in India**

Lakshmi Pradeep Rajeswary, South Asia Studies Programme, National University of Singapore

This paper is a geoanthropological exploration into the hauntologies of the winds across the Lakshadweep Islands of India. It describes the 'malevolent' presence of the winds as *toofan*/cyclone in this archipelago. Unlike the 'benevolent' currents which aid

the sailors and island growth, the *toofan* wreaks destruction. With the help of oral histories, the paper describes the remnants and repercussions of the cyclonic pasts and present in Lakshadweep. The memories of cyclones vary from the destruction of life, houses, property, and boats to the events of the separation of islands. The spectral presence of the wind that divided the island into pieces continues to be felt in its geography. The islanders recollected the howling and untamed arrival of the cyclones of 1847, 1891, 1909, 1922, 1941, 1965, 1977 up until the present day. The winds continue to return to inflict anxiety and uncertainty on island lives. The islanders perceive these cyclones as signs of the end of the world, as per Islamic eschatology. The *toofans* mark their increasing presence in the discourses of disaster management and climate change in Lakshadweep. Along with these discussions, the paper will also put into conversation 'animistic' practices of taming and redirecting the wind for island protection. This work aims at unraveling complex stories of winds by considering them as 'earth-beings' (de la Cadena 2015), whose hauntologies provide an alternate archive into Lakshadweep (hi)story. Finally, the paper also addresses what it means to habituate to the patterns of destruction while anticipating the 'end of the world' through climate change.

## Biography

Lakshmi Pradeep is a Ph.D. candidate in the South Asian Studies Programme at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests include Anthropology, Political Ecology, Science and Technology Studies, and Island Studies. Her doctoral research is an ethnography on coral conservation, climate change, and island protection of the Lakshadweep Islands in the Indian Ocean. She holds an MPhil in Sociology from Jawaharlal Nehru University and an integrated Masters in Sociology from the University of Hyderabad, India.

## Disaster, maritime crises, memory-making and memorialisation from a multimodal lens in the Bengal Delta

Dr Debojyoti Das, Edinburgh University

Life in the Bengal Delta is like living on the end of a knife. In the past three decades cyclones such as Aila, 2009, have led to mass migration of people out of the delta to mainland Indian cities and prosperous agrarian states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu among others. The out-migration of men have meant the immobility of women and children who are left behind given age, gender, caregiving practices, and patriarchal norms within Bengali society. My research concentrates on the less discussed and often ignored cases of immobility after a disaster and the crises it produces among littoral households with female de-facto household heads in deltaic villages in the expansive Sundarbans. I used photo voice, an art competition, student testimonies, essay-based storytelling, and interviews with teachers to reflect from a multimodal perspective, the agency of children as they live with their grandparents and mothers in nuclear and joint family settings in villages across the Sundarbans. Some of them include voices of young day scholars and boarding school students whose

parents were away from home in urban 'squatter' settlements, earning a living for their families. This paper will evidence how the agency of young children is shaped by their immediate environment and the changes that have been experienced in the delta due to climate change-induced and recurrent cyclonic disasters. Given the contextual background of immobility, I will explore the trauma, nostalgia and moments of happiness and despair that children's experience when they are left alone by their parents at a tender age in boarding schools. It will also showcase how such reflections can help us rethink about respondents' active consciousness and meaning making about their turbulent and ever-changing coastal environments periodically inundated by floods and cyclones.

## **Biography**

Debojyoti Das is a social anthropologist at the University of Edinburgh. He explores development and environmental issues, with a keen interest in policies of development and transitional aid in South Asia. While his doctoral research focused on the political ecology of highland farming in northeastern India, Nagaland, his current work studies environmental and livelihood-based changes in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean coastal rim. He is also interested in anthropological research ethics, ethnicity, postcolonial studies and visual anthropology.

**Aug 30, Session 2, 16.20 – 18.00 BST (ICL, Sir Alexander Fleming Building Room 119), in-person only**

## **Invoking, Tracing, Enduring**

### **Ghostly traces on an abandoned island**

Professor Uma Kothari, University of Manchester

The small island of Kandholhudhoo in the Maldives had long been vulnerable to the sea. Exposed on the western edge of an atoll with an extensively mined reef, there was little protection from regular monsoon storms and flooding. Tragically, on 26 December 2004, the day of the Indian Ocean tsunami, a wall of seawater surged over the island compelling its 3000 inhabitants to abandon their home. Unlike most post-disaster sites, the remnants of buildings and infrastructure have not been erased and some former residents regularly visit Kandholhudhoo, wanting to stay with the ruins – to find the remains of their former houses, pray in the ruins of the mosque, and visit the graves of family members in the now much overgrown cemetery. They are haunted by memories of that day and its aftermath. Across the island, ghostly traces of what was abruptly lost, abandoned, and left behind trigger affective, atmospheric, and sensorial resonances. While some previously familiar places are now unrecognisable due to botanical fecundity, traces remain as the sea continues to unearth and redistribute haunted memories across the derelict space. Some former residents feel spooked, sensing ghosts all around them, hearing echoes and voices of people calling and

children crying. Lines etched on walls indicate where the waves had reached, buildings linger in various stages of ruination, scattered objects lie out of place - a child's sandal half buried in sand, a mattress upended on the trunk of a tree, a bathroom sink nestled amongst shrubs. This paper reveals the temporally extended hauntings of an island abandoned as a consequence of the powerful actions of the sea and how rather than flattening the landscape and washing it smooth, the waves repeatedly recreate a haunted landscape.

## **Biography**

Uma Kothari is Professor of Migration and Postcolonial Studies at the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester, UK and Professor of Human Geography, School of Geography, University of Melbourne, Australia. She is a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and was conferred the Royal Geographical Society's Busk Medal for her contributions to research in support of global development. She has recently been awarded a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2022 – 2025) for a project on 'Touring Britain in the 1950s: the adventures of postcolonial travellers.' Her research interests include colonialism, decoloniality and solidarity, mobilities and borders and, environmental change and island geographies. She has recently completed a project on Seafarers: a cultural geography of maritime mobilities and is currently carrying out research on environmental change and everyday life on small Island states funded through grants from the ARC and ESRC. She has curated numerous photographic exhibitions based on these research projects.

## **Spectres of Tryweryn: Carrying-Waters and the Resistance of the 'Unabsorbed'**

Dr Jamie Matthews, Goldsmiths University of London

After the dry summer of 2022, the sunken water levels of the Llyn Celyn reservoir revealed the masonry and gravestones of the Welsh village it drowned in 1965 to provide Liverpool's water. Water's mobilities – floodings, extractions, evaporation – have long marked relations of power and dispossession while exposed gravesites insist on an open and ongoing problematisation; the resonances of climate crisis provide fresh sensitivities for our looking-back to Tryweryn, making it present again in new ways.

This paper explores the role of water in carrying meanings, affects and possibilities across space and time. It looks at the campaigns to 'Save Tryweryn' and their mobilisation of water's spatio-temporal mediations: the 1956 march asking 'Does Liverpool Want This Spectre In its Water?'; the militant bombing campaign's echoes of anti-colonial resource struggles; and a roadside graffiti – 'Remember Tryweryn' – taking on a life of its own, as a totem gathering national identities around the memory of a submerged village. After reading this history backwards from today, the paper reflects on my work to make material connections between Tryweryn's ghosts and

today's resistance struggles centred on rivers and reservoirs. How can engaged scholarship amplify water's capacity to carry?

The paper interrogates the ways in which water's meanings, affects and materialities are mobilised within practices of cultural resistance and place-making, for a politics of what Raymond Williams has called 'the unabsorbed': social formations marginal to capitalist modernity as such. The significance of this extends far beyond the concrete context of mid-century Wales. The paper considers not only the translations mobilised by each of these activist moments at the time, but also the hauntings and connections that continue to be opened up, as we recognise that what is at stake is not strictly the memory of Tryweryn, but its ongoing problematisation of and in the present.

## Biography

Jamie Matthews is a Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths University of London. His current project 'WaterWays: the politics and poetics of the global water movement' examines the activist repertoires and critical water knowledges of water struggles in Mexico, Spain, the UK and Ireland. He has published work on water in political theory, left populism, movement territories and the political culture of the UK's anti-austerity and Occupy movements. He is Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths. His latest paper titled 'Waves, Floods, Currents: the politics and poetics of water in social movement analysis' was published in *Antipode* in 2023.

## Suspended geographies & infrapoetic haunting: M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*

Dr Kate Lewis Hood, School of English and Drama, Queen Mary University of London

M. NourbeSe Philip's (2008) book-length cycle of poems re-sounds and transforms the durational legal and oceanic geographies of the *Zong* massacre that took place during the height of the transatlantic slave trade. While one of the ways that Philip describes this text is 'hauntological', others locate it in non-linear trajectories of Black feminist labour – as 'wake work' (Sharpe, 2016), as 'poetic infrastructure' (McKittrick, 2021) – (at)tending to and radically reimagining fluid Black spacetimes and practices of care that could maintain and expand them. In this paper, I think between these Black feminist articulations of the hauntological and infrastructural to propose that *Zong!*'s poetics enact *suspended* geographies of water. Through form on the page and spatial performance, these poetics offer necessarily incomplete methods of discerning and responding to water's configuring as *infrastructure* in processes of racial capitalist and colonial space-making. They bring attention to durational materialities and elemental and spectral traces of violence in watery places and processes that remain sites of submerged – and perhaps haunting – spatial knowledges and socio-ecological relations. Finally, I consider how these undissolved watery poetics feed into and reimagine anti-colonial geographical methods of 'following the infrastructure' (Cowen, 2020). Specifically, I think with *Zong!* across and between two watery infrastructural sites. The first is Garrison Creek – a waterway buried and diverted into the sewage system – in Tkaronto (Toronto), where Philip has hosted collective durational readings

of the text. The second is the ‘failed’ City Canal in London, a spectral infrastructure of the docklands made from and for the speculative financing and material accumulations of slavery and colonialism, and also one of my own reading locations. Through spatio-temporal suspensions, *Zong!* holds and holds back from the relations between these geographies, and the violence of their settling.

## References

Cowen, D. (2020) Following the infrastructures of empire: notes on cities, settler colonialism, and method. *Urban Geography*, 41(4): 469–486, DOI: [10.1080/02723638.2019.1677990](https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2019.1677990).

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Philip, M.N. and Boateng, S. (2008) *Zong!* Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Sharpe, C. (2016) *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.

## Biography

Kate Lewis Hood is an interdisciplinary researcher working between the environmental humanities, anti-colonial geographies, and geopolitics. Kate’s doctoral work, undertaken in English and Geography at Queen Mary University of London, considered how Black and Indigenous poetic and spatial practices address watery places transformed by colonialism and racial capitalism in Turtle Island/North America and the Pacific islands. Kate is currently a Research Associate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge. Previous work is published and forthcoming in *GeoHumanities*, *Environmental Humanities*, and *Green Letters*.

## “What happens on the vessel stays on the vessel”: Perceptions, narratives and everyday life stories of seafarers and scientists on a German research vessel

Ramona Hägele, Environmental Governance Programme, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) and the University of Bonn

Imagine being on a seven-week research cruise crossing the North Atlantic and moving up and down the Labrador Sea. Imagine being surrounded by the vast ocean, not seeing land, another vessel, oil platforms or other human traces. Imagine seasickness, sleep deprivation, a feeling of anxiety and extreme loneliness alternating with a feeling of freedom and of being far away from responsibilities accompanying the cruise. Imagine the smell and sound on the vessel, the engine room buzzing 24/7, and the Diesel odour always up in the air. Did you know that you cannot smell the ocean in the high seas? Its scent only reappears close to shore.

The perception of the vast and remote ocean clashes with the narrow and intimate life on the research vessel. Diving into life stories and life worlds of seafarers and scientists through interviews and informal talks, this ethnography examines the diverse interactions of crewmembers and scientists with marine species, technologies on board, weather conditions and its effects on science-making.

Crewmembers going to sea since the last 45 years tell stories of nostalgia, physical withdrawal, solitude, and their belonging to the sea and the research vessel, while they are constantly clashing with belief systems of frequently changing and invading scientists on board.

The observations and circulations of people, technologies, ocean waves and knowledge itself shed light on human and more-than-human relationships and the complex interplay between space, place, objects and time at sea.

The presentation will combine reading out a melange of ethnographic field notes, own positionality, interview quotes and thoughts on experienced human and more-than-human interactions in everyday life on a research vessel accompanied by film and photographic material.

## **Biography**

Ramona Haegele is a researcher at the German Institute for Development and Sustainability (IDOS) and a PhD candidate at the University of Bonn. After graduating in social and cultural anthropology and political science, she is currently pursuing her PhD in Knowledge Sociology, investigating processes of interdisciplinary and transcultural knowledge production in marine carbon observations with a focus on the Baltic Sea, the North Atlantic and the Brazilian coast. Her research is situated at the intersection of STS, political geography, and social anthropology.

## **Staying with the problem in the Open Sea: On the plastisphere as hybrid ecological formation of the Chthlucene**

Dr. Chiara Certomà and Federico Fornaro<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant Professor Chiara Certomà, Department ESOMAS, University of Turin
2. Director, Italian Naval League in Anzio & Managing Director, Raw-News (Italy-UK)

Following the session's call to elaborate on "new materialisms work to foster the possibility of thinking with the oceanic in order to develop new ecologies" we propose a provocative exploration of hybrid assemblages that are re-signifying the ecological global life supporting systems in the Open Sea.

Building upon the material semiotic and politics of more-than-human assemblages we suggest that Haraway's speculations on the Chthlucene (2016) can help us at reversing the capitalocentric narrative of the Anthropocene and coping with pressing environmental problems, notably ocean pollution. We engage with the sympoiesis as the chief process forging new kins between societies and the sea so to "stay with the problem" (Haraway, 2016); and draw on the compositions of materialities, imaginaries and forces in the liquid space (Neimanis, A. 2017) to reconceive our common belonginess to the ocean (Peters et al, 2022).

Through photographic documentation we explore the emerging ecologies of the plastisphere (i.e., the new biodiversity patterns that have evolved to live on microplastics in marine environments, Zettler et al. 2013) as exemplary topoi of the Chthulucene. These include underwater rests of the Anthropocene (e.g., relicts, ghost nets, infrastructures, and polluted sites...) largely present in the Mediterranean Sea. The sympoietic process of microplastic bacteria is fore-front biological research and at the same time allows us to exercise the Chthulucene “tentacular thinking” (Haraway, 2016).

Framed within the marine social science perspective, this perspective makes biology to appear as “a process of constant change and transformation, of ‘posthuman becoming’ and ‘biocultural hope’” (Chandler, 2020, p.102). Therefore, the human/non-human/more-than-human kinship allows us to understand and shape relational values connecting human society and the marine word to deliver behavioral change (McKinley et al., 2020).

## Biography

Chiara Certomà is an Assistant Professor at the University of Turin and a Visiting Professor at the Institute of Management at Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa. She is also a research affiliate with the Centre for Sustainable Development at Ghent University, where she conducted an EU Marie-Curie project titled “Crowdsourcing Urban Sustainability Governance. Exploring innovative governance models for addressing urban sustainability through ICT-people interaction”, from 2017 to 2019. Her most recent research project “Exploring Digital Social Innovations ecosystems and Urban Governance models in a quadruple helix perspective” is supported by the Ca'Foscari University of Venice, with a SPIN Research Grant.

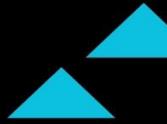
Federico Fornaro is an oceanic sailor and Director of the Italian Naval League in Anzio. He won the Esprit Marin prize 2013 for the Atlantic solo-crossing Mini Transact. He is also Managing Director at the independent hard-news agency Raw-News (Italy-UK).

*This presentation is associated with the showing of the video “In search of Plastic” and the photographic exhibition that will be on display during the conference in the Directors’ Gallery at RGS -IBG Building:*

### “Explorations in the Plastisphere”

“Explorations in the Plastisphere” is the title of the new photo exhibition promoted in the series of public engagement activities by Dr. Chiara Certomà’s research team [DIGGEO@ESOMAS](#) at the Department ESOMAS – University of Turin (Italy) documents new hybrid ecologies of the plastisphere, a collective of plastic-colonising organisms, as well as various anthropic debris in marine environments (including relicts, ghost nets, and polluted sites...). The initiative is supported by the EU project IMPETUS4CS – subproject [SeaPaCS “Participatory Citizen Science against Marine Pollution”](#). Underwater photographer Giuseppe Lupinacci/Raw-News and

independent video-maker Federico Fornaro, Director of [Raw-News](#) media agency documented in 16 amazing shoots, the emerging ecologies of the plastisphere in some spots of the Tyrrhenian Sea. They will be present during the sessions' slot and the sensory walk through the exhibition to answer visitors' questions. The exhibition proposes an unconventional perspective on one of the most cogent issues of our time, i.e. the marine plastic pollution, by visually investigating the new hybrid ecologies emerging on the plastisphere, a collective of plastic-colonising organisms (biofilms, organisms that stick to each other and other things), including bacteria and fungi and complex ecosystems, that have evolved to live on microplastics, and various anthropic debris in marine environments.



# EXPLORATIONS IN THE PLASTISPHERE //ESPLORAZIONI NELLA PLASTISFERA

PHOTOGRAPHY

GIUSEPPE LUPINACCI/RAW-NEWS

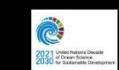
VIDEO//TECHNICAL SUPPORT

FEDERICO FORNARO//DAVIDE RINALDI

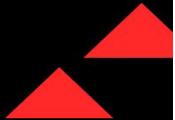


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NEW HYBRID ECOLOGIES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA  
//NUOVE ECOLOGIE IBRIDE DEL MEDITERRANEO



ORGANISATION CHIARA CERTOMA//LUIS MARTIN SANCHEZ



## SEARCHING FOR PLASTIC// IN CERCA DELLA PLASTICA

VIDEO

GIUSEPPE LUPINACCI-FEDERICO FORNARO  
/RAW-NEWS



*MARINE PLASTIC SAMPLING ON SAILBOAT//  
CAMPIONARE LA PLASTICA MARINA IN BARCA A VELA*



30-31.08.23 ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY WITH IGB  
CONFERENCE, LONDON  
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CHIARA CERTOMA', UNITO-  
ESOMAS //  
FEDERICO FORNARO & GIUSEPPE LUPINACCI, LNI-RAW-NEWS



ORGANISATION CHIARA CERTOMA'

CON IL PATROCINIO DI