Methodologies for Imagining an Alternative Politics of (Human) Rights

Book of Abstracts

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LSE Department of Gender Studies

Keynote lecture by
Professor Nikita Dhawan (TU Dresden)

Panel 1A: Vernacular Rights, Political Struggle & Resistance
Chair: Professor Sumi Madhok (LSE)
9.30-11.00

1. Güneş Daşlı: "Different stories but the same wound" The Saturday Mothers' Experience of Reframing Justice

Transitional justice (TJ), a response to conflict-based violations, promises a toolset to re- establish legal accountability. In post-conflict settings, TJ is usually narrowed into criminal processes. Although the recent critiques reckon other paradigms of TJ, like restorative justice, the individualistic understanding of crime and punishment remains markable in practice and theory. However, the victims' movements show alternative ways and methods of (re)doing justice on the ground.

I argue that the victims' movements engage different vocabularies in the pursuit of justice and rights by analysing the Saturday Mothers in Turkey. The 21 interviews were conducted with the relatives of the disappeared and human rights defenders for my PhD research. The findings unveil that the organised victims practice a sense of justice at a micro level despite the lack of transitional justice or conflict resolution. This form of justice has a different language from the conventional human rights discourse. Applying the "relational autonomy" concept of the feminist theory, I discovered that the relational values – care, friendship, solidarity - shape the relatives' imaginations of justice. The relational aspect of justice is usually neglected in TJ; the field tends to endorse the western-based human rights language, affirming that victims are individuals who are merely rights bearers.

Relational values explored in this research play a tremendous role in the victims' empowerment by the transition of helpless "why" to a demanding "why", challenging the conservative understanding of family based on kinship with an alternative definition of family grounded on care and friendship. Moreover, the victims are not passive receivers of rights, as traditionally conceived in TJ; they are active political agents who have capacities to frame their justice agenda. Overall, the paper attempts to contribute to justice after conflicts by examining the relational aspect of justice and proposes a feminist concept that unfolds the relational values in constructing the victims' agency as political agents.

2. Laurenne Ajayi: Abortion as (deathly) marronage: Policy, resistance, and reproductive freedom in Lagos State

This paper develops the concept of *marronage* as a form of decolonial feminist praxis. Explored through analysis of the Lagos State Government's newly developed and then rescinded Guidelines on Safe Pregnancy Termination for Legal Indications, this work shapes and applies a critical lens of (freedom as) *marronage* in order to both

expose the limited liberatory capacity of human rights and theorise locally-acted, embodied modes of feminist resistance. Against the backdrop of critiques of rights as tools of governance, facilitating assimilation into liberal order/s rather than facilitating freedom, this paper argues that rights' lack of liberatory capacity provides a justification for why people continue to seek freedom outside the limits of both rights and the law. This is illustrated by reframing an act of *petit marronage* — illegal self-administered abortion — as a radical feminist act of freedom. This paper argues that, given this context, calls for liberation within the framework and structures of human rights continue to implicate and embed the subject in states of unfreedom, and that the radical yet deathly act represented by self-administered abortion serves as a mode of feminist *marronage* through which subjects seek, articulate and claim their own definitions of freedom outside the normative bounds/bonds of rights. In doing so, this study makes a contribution to the study of abortion in Nigeria, shifting the narrative from one of victimisation to agency, and develops the concept of freedom as *marronage* as a method of reimagining the possibilities beyond rights.

3. Nour Almazidi: life-worlds of stateless subaltern political struggles in Kuwait

Through its ethnographic and historical storytelling, the paper provides a context of power, political dissent, and collective practices of resistance that centres a subaltern group not often recognised as having a political and epistemic presence: those who are known as the stateless *Bidoon Jinsiyya* (translating to 'without citizenship') in the Arabian Peninsula. As a group that organically exceeds methodological nationalism, the Bidoon are Northern nomadic tribes who travelled across the region following seasonal changes as a way of life prior to the establishment of the modern state, the introduction of nationality laws and citizenship registration committees. The erasure of their transnational and nomadic histories and existing ties with the land was central to the nation-building project following independence from Britain in 1961. The paper draws on my PhD research that uses the oral and life history method to document different registers of the stateless' intergenerational struggles, their political imaginaries, intersectionally gendered subjectivities and political agency that informs their subaltern struggles. In particular, the paper focuses on how the Bidoon's vernacular rights mobilizations, their political and ethical self-fashioning practices, and subaltern encounter of rights challenges the politics of origins of human rights that rely on statist, institutional and Eurocentric stories of global human rights (Madhok 2021).

Panel 1B: Exploring Tensions in Transnational Human Rights through Queer-Feminist, Metaphorical, and Spatial-Affective Frameworks

Chair: Dr Leticia Sabsay (LSE)

9.30-11.00

1. Dr Lena Holzer: Assemblage Thinking as a Queer-Feminist Methodology to Study Rights

In this paper, I will explore "assemblage thinking" as a queer-feminist methodology that can offer an alternative to individualistic and Eurocentric conceptualisations of human rights. Assemblage thinking recognises that "things" obtain their meaning in relation to other "things". For instance, Puar has shown that the meanings of gender, race, and religion in international affairs depend on their relationships with each other (Puar 2007). Looking at the concept of rights through the idea of assemblages thus helps to see that subjects gain their rights in relation to other subjects, which also integrates knowledge of legal pluralists (e.g. Manji 1999). Rights are therefore relational (Escobar 2020; Nedelsky 2013), rather than being given to individuals by top-down regulators, such as states. This perception of rights decentres agency and challenges notions of legal formalism since rights are constituted through plural (unequal) relationships between subjects who are located in various normative orders. The effectiveness of legal or political reforms to transform inequalities thus depends on how they influence relations in diverse local, national, transnational and international spaces.

The paper will use discussions on the rights of persons other than "women" or "men" as a case study for exploring assemblage thinking as a counter-hegemonic tool to examine rights. Subjects whose experience of gender cannot be grasped by the state-imposed binary categories exist in diverse locations and express themselves in a plurality of forms. As feminists have long argued, experiences of gender (identity) are influenced by the specific relations in which subjects are embedded, including relations of inequality based on class, race, caste, disability, ethnicity, and geographical position (Anzaldua 1987; Crenshaw 1989). Yet, despite the variety of contextual and relational experiences of gender, international human rights discourses increasingly treat gender identity as an individual experience that can be captured by neat and universally true categories attached to individuals' legal personhood. Relying on assemblage thinking to analyse these developments promises to shift the focus on the relational character of gender and rights, opening avenues for reimagining rights altogether.

2. Dr Christopher Griffin: Displacing the "Clash of Rights" Narrative: On the Coloniality of Rights Metaphors

For Sylvia Wynter (2015a, 2015b), the proclaimed universality of human rights is symptomatic of the "overrepresentation of Man," in which a particular form of human life constructs itself as the timeless and transparent image of the human qua human. This remarkable feat of self-aggrandisement has been achieved, Wynter argues (e.g., 2003), through the creation of sociogenic-autopoietic narratives which obscure their own specularity, attributing the "truth" of human origins to seemingly universal and objective agencies such as biological evolution. Wynter's argument has serious implications for how we study rights. The methodology that I propose in this paper highlights the contingency and constructedness of European conceptions of rights by examining their metaphoricity.

Following critics of the proprietary formulation of rights (Nedelsky 1990; Madhok 2009; Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Sabsay 2016; Devenney 2019), I argue that the presentation of rights as properties not only reinscribes possessive subjectivity, as well as legitimising the authority of executive bodies to differentially "grant" rights to "claimants" per their own criteria, but also organises the political arena according to principles of opposition and scarcity, leading to a zero-sum conception of rights (Aviel 2019). To illustrate, I consider an ongoing and divisive debate in British politics which is characterised by the assertion that the rights of transgender women "clash" with the rights of cis women. This invidious narrative has not been effectively countered, I suggest, because mainstream intersectional discourse is founded on a model of "interlocking" rights, identities, and oppressions, which presupposes the proprietary schema.

To imagine an alternative, I propose María Lugones's (1994, 2007) critique of the interlocking model, suggesting that her metaphors of "enmeshed" and "curdled" identities may help us not only displace the proprietary paradigm, but also avow the specularity of rights discourse, allowing us to choose our metaphors deliberately and carefully, while avoiding naturalising and universalising them.

3. Sam Morgan: Community advocacy and neo-colonial guilt: how space and affect shape the Jamaican LGBTQ+ rights landscape

In this paper I aim to show how using a spatial and affective framework can illuminate some of the tensions that exist in the transnational human rights landscape on LGBTIQ+ rights between UK-based Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and local community organisers in Jamaica. I examine how the neocolonial direction of decriminalisation public advocacy undermines this relationship.

LGBTQI+ organisers in Jamaica have a long history of human rights engagement. Although there is little documentation of these histories, researchers working on archival projects continue to show the nuanced ways social movements aim to

deconstruct colonial myths of power whilst strategically engaging with international human rights language and bodies. These histories are often excluded from global LGBTIQ+ rights narratives, overshadowed by tropes of death and despair that are privileged in international human rights discourses.

At a time when there are several active cases in the Caribbean challenging British imposed legislation, it is important to pay attention to on-going tensions that permeate these spaces. The growth of UK-based NGOs aiming to engage with LGBTQI+ rights in the Caribbean has far from confronted tropes. Rather, this form of public advocacy often instils misconceptions, whilst difficulties build between actors in transnational networks.

Not only do these misconceptions overlook the trajectories of strategic activism in Jamaica, but they also get infused with the developmental narratives framing human rights politics. This is depicted in the types of advocacies UK-based NGOs selectively focus their attention. For example, decriminalisation has become a central indicator for progress, despite only telling a partial story of queer life and subtly disconnecting sexuality from race and class formations in the Caribbean.

Within the paper I conceive of space and affect as intimately linked and focus on how this forceful direction of public advocacy hinders the relationship between organisers Jamaica and NGOs in the Global North. I draw from Sara Ahmed's (2006) theory of "orientation" to focus on the ways spaces and bodies are shaped by one another in these transnational circuits. Ahmed suggests that these impressions and interactions can be a process of normativity, creating trajectories which organise how others engage in the world, shaping the imagining of futurity.

I use this framework to set out some of the normative assumptions that underpin modes of advocacy undertaken by UK-based NGOs. I examine how the strategy of decriminalisation continues to embed the notion that it is British responsibility to challenge anti-sodomy laws. I explore how responsibility is tied up with guilt, fuelling a discourse of atonement for the colonially imposed legislation. I suggest decriminalisation is a limited strategy. I interrogate how this assumed responsibility is tied up with different emotions and developmental narratives which directs the actions of UK-based NGOs.

Panel 1C: Breaking out of the Fishbowl: Imagining New Frontiers of Justice and Human Rights Recognition
Chair: Dr Mai Taha (LSE)

9.30-11.00

1. **Dr Laura Luciani: Beyond human rights (promotion): EU interventions and decolonial imaginations in the South Caucasus**

In the realm of international relations, the decolonial critique of the human rights discourse has denounced its availability for manipulation by western powers as grounds for intervention in the global South. This is based on a hierarchical interpretation of difference, resulting in a homogenizing norms promotion agenda that mirrors Western experiences and achievements, while failing to match the need and priorities of the receivers. In the former Soviet countries of the South Caucasus, the spread of the human rights agenda coincided with the domination of neoliberal discourse and structural adjustment policies, alongside the formation of an NGO-ised, donor-driven civil society unable to contentiously address the material and gendered inequalities generated by rapid socioeconomic transformation. Drawing on postdevelopment and decolonial thinking, this paper proceeds through a two-fold move: first, it deconstructs the dominant categories of "human rights promotion" as they are mainstreamed in the European Union's (EU) foreign policies, by exposing their depoliticising, homogenising and geopoliticising underpinnings. Second, it engages with alternative vocabularies, forms of socio-political organising and emancipatory struggles that are voiced by left-wing, feminist and anti-war groups across the South Caucasus region. By juxtaposing the EU's paradigms with the epistemologies emerging from the ground, the paper sketches out alternatives to human rights (promotion), as it is currently envisioned by the EU. This would be based on different forms of socio-political organizing oriented towards the grassroots, the recognition of justice claims beyond rights-based legal frameworks, the refusal of a 'catching up' logic of capitalist development, and a critical rethinking of the EU's engagement on the global stage. The paper is based on in-depth interviews, multi-sited observations and the analysis of relevant documents and (social) media sources.

2. **Dr Nora Jaber: Beyond international human rights: 'Islamic feminism' as alternative legal praxis**

This paper examines Islamic Feminism (IF) as a rights discourse and practice formulated beyond the framework of International Human Rights Law (IHRL). IF

is a gendered epistemology and rights framework that grounds demands for gender and social justice in Islamic sources rather than secular legal instruments. In exploring IF as an example of alternative (non-Western, non-liberal) rights praxis, the paper exposes conceptual and epistemic challenges to IHRL. It also demonstrates the significance of non/counter- hegemonic rights practices to the development of human rights scholarship and praxis by accounting for real examples of feminist resistance from the Global South.

In particular, the article focuses on IF as it is engaged by Saudi women's rights activists in their petitions for the reform, authored in Arabic since the 1990s. The analysis of Saudi women's petitions, as a site of rights claim-making, allows for a meaningful engagement with alternative rights discourses and normative frameworks, in terms of how they challenge (or reproduce) epistemic hierarchies and offer different (or overlapping) emancipatory possibilities to those envisioned within what Ratna Kapur calls the 'liberal fishbowl' (Kapur, 2020).

Drawing on the example of Saudi women's activism and building on critical approaches to human rights scholarship, such as Third world Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) and post/decolonial feminist critiques, the paper challenges the notion that IHRL is the only/main framework for emancipation, where the notion of freedom is constructed through a liberal lens and highlights the limits of this discourse in non-Western/liberal contexts. Therefore, by analysing the petitions as a site of knowledge production about human rights, the paper interrogates the ways in which the epistemic core of rights claims from the 'margins' differ from those produced in and through IHRL, and thus, may produce alternative visions of rights and justice.

3. Luisa Castaneda Quintana: Counteracting human rights: The multilayered and jurisgenerative narrative of the Indigenous Peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

Indigenous Peoples' international movement influenced substantial changes in International Human Rights Law (IHRL). Their cosmovisions, relationship with Mother Earth, and the collective nature of their rights, and self-determination were decisive in counteracting IHRL's dominant paradigm of liberalism. The movement incrementally brought to the formation of an Indigenous Peoples' international normative framework, as especially made evident by ILO-Convention 169 and UNDRIP. These results testify to the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' struggles by the international community and were instrumental in boosting the acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples in Latin America at a time when normative development was otherwise fashioned towards establishing neoliberal states. Despite enshrinement of Indigenous Peoples' values and entitlements in several Constitutions, however, Indigenous Peoples in the region continue living in the

contradiction of being granted rights while governments adopt decisions that make those rights unrealizable. This reality has, therefore, driven Indigenous Peoples, at the country level, to challenge liberal and neoliberal values that constrain the exercise of their rights.

Although extensive research exists already about how Indigenous Peoples influenced the formation of international law, little scrutiny has been devoted to exploring how, at a national level, Indigenous Peoples struggle to scale down recognition and obtain respect of their human rights from public and private actors. This paper attempts to address this gap and show how IHRL's liberal and neoliberal scripts have been challenged and renegotiated by Indigenous Peoples. More specifically, I argue that, in the encounter with pre-existing liberal approaches to human rights, Indigenous Peoples often initiate jurisgenerative actions by resorting to their traditional institutions, harnessing international human rights discourse, and braiding inter-legalities. To corroborate this, I consider the political and judicial activism of the Indigenous Peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia, with whom I collaborated as lawyer and advisor over the years.

Panel 2A: Making Justice in a Trans*national Frame: Solidarity, Counter-Hegemony and Gendered Subjectivities

Chair: Dr Ayça Çubukçu (LSE)

11:30-1.00

1. **Dr Shirin Saeidi & Dr Julio César Díaz-Calderón: The Politics of Researching and Building Transnational Solidarity With Iranian Women**

The death of a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman, Mahsa Jina Amini, sparked an uprising in Iran that quickly started to cross international borders and, as a result, brought an increase interest in exchanging resources at the global political economies of knowledge re-production on Iranian women. This article uses ethnographic, discourse, and narrative methods to map the intellectual and political disputes across academic communities in Iran and the Iranian diaspora through four axes of difference about the meaning of the uprising. Those axes are: whether the uprising in theory and practice is revolutionary or reformist, feminist or non-feminist, nationalistic or cosmopolitan, and a product of a specific form of Muslim patriarchal State or a result of a State system dependent on the regulation and control of women's bodies and sexualities. By delimiting and analyzing both sides of each axis through Iranian women's perspectives, this article illuminates the paradoxical political ecosystems structuring the lives of Iranian women and the contradictory logics of value and exchange at the global economies of knowledge re-production on Iranian women. Within this context, this article explores the ethical conundrums faced by Iranian scholars in the diaspora while doing research and building transnational solidarities with Iranian women on the ground.

2. **Daniel Brown: Counter-Hegemonic Human Rights and International Solidarity with Kurdistan: Potentials, Pitfalls and Translations**

Human rights have long been theorised as a contested terrain filled with both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic potentials (Odysseos et al, 2015). Their privileged position as "the lingua franca of global politics and transnational solidarity" (Çubukçu, 2018: 17) is reflected by a vast array of liberal NGOs and international institutions, and conversely by their role in many grassroots and anti-systemic struggles globally.

This paper draws on the political struggle of the Kurdish Freedom Movement to examine the counter-hegemonic potentials of human rights. An anti-systemic movement present not just in the four states that lay claim to the geographies of Kurdistan, but also across Europe through Kurdish diaspora and internationalist

solidarity networks. Political work to build international solidarity in such networks often involves both the mobilisation of rights claims and criticism of liberal human rights' emancipatory claims of neutral apolitical justice.

By analysing the practices and discourses of militants involved in such solidarity networks, this paper explores the limits and possibilities of human rights as counter-hegemonic practice. Such practice may involve both tactical appropriations of human rights and even radical re-conceptualisations of rights. In either case, the question of translation is key to understanding rights' counter-hegemonic potentials and pitfalls. What is made possible by such translations of radical politics into the language of human rights? And what is lost or untranslatable? After all, such counter-hegemonic practices are simultaneously constrained by and able to appropriate the legitimacy of liberal human rights discourses and institutions.
Examining such practices through this lens of translation allows this paper to raise key questions surrounding themes of internationalism, alternative politics of human rights and counter-hegemonic navigations of liberal civil society.

3. Dr Hasret Cetinkaya: The Kurdish Women's Justice Movement in Rojava: Realising a Moral-Political Society Through Self-fashioning

Women activists, both in North East Syria and around the world are playing a central role in furthering a feminist dispensation of justice in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES, also known as Rojava). These activists, both situated in the territory of, and the deterritorialised transnational symbolic space of Rojava, are the key actors in constituting a new society as part of a pioneering experiment in democratic autonomy (democratic self-organisation without a state). In this paper, I trace how certain notions of justice are cultivated by these women, and how these concepts and sources of justice emergence through acts of self-fashioning. All moral orders, like human rights (in both universal and vernacular forms), call upon people to become subjects of those orders and to cultivate a sense of self in relation to those moral norms. These processes of self-fashioning, therefore, take place in relation to sources and texts which contain the Truth of those orders within a given political community, and in the context of its cultural and communal notions of the good. In the AANES, part of this justice dispensation involves the need for women to cultivate new models of feminist power and knowledge through jineolojî (women's science) and forms of self-study that seek to establish a break with hegemonic patriarchy. Through jineolojî, processes of self-study and ethical formation coincide. For the female activists, particularly the members of jineolojî, justice is horizontal, it is upheld by people (not the state), and thus established intersubjectively and in relation to all living beings. I argue that their understanding of justice is an avenue through which these women inspire new ways of living under conditions hostile to life itself. I focus on justice, rather than human rights per se, so as to open up spaces to explore and expand on our foreclosed ideas

about human rights, and their relation to global justice, planetary life and survival. To this end, my paper proceeds in two movements, both of which are methodological in focus. First, I begin to sketch out the pragmatics of such a process of self-fashioning and its relation to rights claiming/making. I explore how we can understand the virtues, needs and desires that the subject of justice for Rojava must embody. Second, I question and offer some reflections on my own location as a researcher in relation to the activists I work with. Rojava is a space that has been held up by researchers as a critical resource for knowledge extraction, as such I am particularly concerned as I ask what a mutual relation of support looks like for both myself and the women who have shared and invited me into their space and practices of self-formation and becoming.

Panel 2B: Re-defining Human Rights through Disruptive Synergies: Counter-Narratives, Artful Imaginaries and Data Production

Chair: Dr Nazanin Shahrokni

11:30-1.00

1. Professor Kate Nash: Imagining human rights through film

Most people learn about human rights abuses through media. (And given that injustices must be defined to be known as such, media may even inform those suffering violence and oppression that rights are being abused.) Film involves a very particular epistemology of rights: the viewer sees, and very often, hears for themselves. More than just a window on the world, however, film is of course always narrative, and situated in contexts that can be different for film-makers, people represented in and by a film, and viewers. Film is sensual, emotional and aesthetic, ethical and political, and always plural. Today, moreover, film is relatively easily circulated and shared. In this paper I will address the question of how films that are explicitly linked to human rights fit with or disrupt dominant definitions of rights, and of what it is to be (truly) human. The feature-length human rights films I will discuss are undoubtedly linked to global structural inequalities: even when they are 'low budget' such films are expensive to make, and while funders tend to be located in the North, very often the abuses films narrate take place in the South. In this paper I draw on interviews with film-makers who are reflexive about global structural inequalities, and consider how they try address audiences in ways that go beyond colonial imaginaries. If the international context of human rights is dominated by UN definitions, can films open ways of knowing that are different in form and in content?

2. Daniela Silvestre Jorge Ayoub: Returning the Gaze of Surveillance: The Murder of Shireen Abu Aqleh

The murder of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh in Jenin refugee camp in May 2022 has generated extensive debate on how she was killed. Israeli authorities claimed that Abu Aqleh was killed by Palestinian gunfire, circulating a video captured by Palestinian fighters from the morning of Abu Aqleh's death that showed the use of arms within the camp. Yet independent investigations have shown that this video– captured and circulated by Palestinians to document resistance activities - was used, in conjunction with other evidence, to disprove Israeli authorities' claim. In this paper, I examine the role of the datafication of everyday life, the authority of interpretation and the importance of counter-data production as both a disruptive tactic and an alternative modality of claim-making in the

aftermath of Abu Aqleh's murder. Data extracted from our enabling of becoming increasingly archivable subjects is framed and articulated as objective, even neutral, material evidence through hegemonic patriarchal narratives. In conjunction with the spectacle of political rhetoric and military theatrics, an asymmetric interpretation and subsequent instrumentalization of digital archives obstruct the inclusion of those subjected to harm as interpreters of their own experiences, shaping public perceptions and further exposing oppressed populations to continued violence. To challenge the material effects of these narratives, counter-data is produced to invert and disrupt a largely unilateral authoritative gaze. These interventions not only push against and reclaim the generation and collection of data, but also challenge the authority to access and interpret it. Grounded in critical security studies, post-colonial studies, as well as other critical bodies of work, this paper uses the case of Abu Aqleh's murder to demonstrate how reappropriating and reimagining distorted approaches to claim-making offers a lens to challenge Israeli impunity and to think about epistemic justice.

3. Dr Marcus Vinicius De Matos: "Christ and the Brazilian revolutionary process": religion, politics, human rights

Human rights and religion have often been portrayed as opposing discourses. This is because there is a tendency in the Global North to understand human rights as a bundle of expectations for fulfilment – sometimes in open conflict with religious values. Human rights and religion share a long history in Natural Law concepts and Theology but have recently been understood as conflicting languages.[1] On the one hand, religious discourse has been presented as raising different and opposing expectations to those granted by human rights.[2] On the other, human rights have been criticized for their compatibility and acceptance of social & economic inequality.[3] Nevertheless, this phenomenon is fairly recent and largely brought into perception by the Western world. In other parts of the world, such as the Global South, human rights and religion have often produced a synergistic discourse to denounce violence and violation of human dignity. This paper presents the first findings of a research project in Human Rights & Religion funded by the Brunel Institute of Communities and Socieites. This memory and truth archive project weaves the stories about the persecution of Brazilian religious leaders during the Cold War. It aims to build an original digital archive of video-interviews with those – then young – activists of religious and student organisations who were directedly involved in the 1962 Brazilian Evangelical Conference, and later persecuted. In this short article we will investigate a few outcomes and findings about this Conference whose

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[1] Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2015).

[2] Rowan Williams, 'Human Rights and Religious Faith' <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2370/human-rights-and-religious-faith> accessed 8 February 2022.

[3] Costas Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights: Critical Legal Thought at the Turn of the Century* (Hart Pub 2000).

title was shocking to both political and ecclesiastical authorities of the time: "Christ and the Brazilian revolutionary process" – a conference that reshaped the borders between human rights and religion in the 1960s, by changing the understanding of church and society relations in Latin America. We presently hold an original collection of 17 video interviews (3 hour-long each) with those religious leaders. In these interviews, we learned about the religious context of Brazil and Latin America during the Cold War, and of the challenges posed by the authorities who suspected the professed Christianity of religious leaders as being sympathetic to communism. These rare interviews are remnants of a now erased past, and will be edited into a public digital archive and made available online for further research. This paper aims to contribute to unmasking invisible truths about these minorities diurnal struggle for human liberation and democracy. As summarised by Dom Helder Câmara: "Every time I help the poor, they call me a saint; but every time I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist."

Pictures from original archive:

(*Fig. 1 – Reverend Davi Malta gives interview about Church & Society in Brazil in the 1960s*).

(*Fig. 2 – Anivaldo Padilha gives interview about the struggle for democracy and the role of Churches in Latin America in 1960-1970s*).

Panel 2C: Re-narrating the Human: Indigeneity, Story-telling and the Politics of Onto-Epistemic Resistance
Chair: Dr. Niharika Pandit (LSE)
11:30-1.00

1. Charlotte Spear: "Unimagined Communities" and Re-Imagined Justice in Louise Erdrich's The Round House

In her seminal work on "being human as praxis", Wynter highlights the reliance of imperial notions of the "human" – and thus its exclusions – on the category of the (post)colonial nation state (2015). Following Wynter, we can suggest that access to human rights themselves depend upon discursive and structural inclusion in a nation state. Emphasising settler colonialism as a mode of nation-state exclusion, Nixon theorises a pattern of exclusion through the notion of "unimagined communities" (2011). Nixon examines the exclusion of certain communities from humanity through a "[discursive] evacuation" (Nixon, 2011) which enables a physical displacement "under the banner of [national] development" (Nixon, 2011). Through an analytical framework based in Wynter's (2003; 2015) and Nixon's (2011) works, this paper proposes reading Indigenous literatures as contributing new understandings of justice for human rights abuses through an active reimagination and re-spatialisation of those communities frequently erased in narratives of national development. I explore Louise Erdrich's The Round House (2012) as a form of imaginative protest, rewriting land rights and justice in the context of contemporary pipeline politics, in particular the Dakota Access Pipeline protests (Estes, 2019). To do so, I examine the text's titular "Round House" from two key perspectives: the "Round House" as a historicised and peopled space in the text; and the text itself as a form of imaginative space-making through its title, "The Round House". Through this exploration of the text's plot, including the brutal rape of a woman in the "Round House", and her family's quest for justice both within and outside of (neo)colonial legal structures, I propose a study of literary production as imagining alternative modes of justice for human rights abuses. In turn, this enables alternative methods of understanding human rights, through a re-imagination of the category of "human" on racialised, gendered, and geopolitical lines.

2. Raghavi Viswanath: Rethinking cultural rights using Global South epistemologies

My research investigates how cultural rights in international human rights law can be re-articulated using Global South epistemologies. The starting point is the ongoing oppression of the Irulars in India. The Irulars are a semi-nomadic community based in and around the south of India, who have been historically criminalized for their traditional subsistence activities such as snake catching, prevented from speaking in their tribal tongue(s), and displaced from their ancestral lands. Typically, under

international human rights law, such treatment would qualify as violations of "cultural rights". However, cultural rights are absent from the discourse that has emerged in relation to the Irulars.

I surmise that one reason for the lack of engagement may be that cultural rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – which are the primary human rights treaties binding India – are under-equipped to capture Irular readings of culture and "rights". Illustratively, the interpretive bodies of the Covenants still read "indigeneity" as denoting nature-society harmony and ascribe grammars of empiricism/uniqueness to culture. However, in fact, several Irulars reject mainstream labels such as "tribe" and "indigenous", which they associate with colonial ordering. For the Irulars, culture is predominantly spiritual and relational. Irulars rely on oral histories and musical/dance-based conversations with nature/deities, departing from the purely written frameworks prevalent in international law.

Drawing on collaborative fieldwork with the Irulars, this paper makes a case for why and how cultural rights in the Covenants can be re-articulated using Irular epistemologies: both in form and substance. In particular, it unpacks the lessons one can learn from seeing the Irulars' dance and music as epistemologies and methodologies. Through this recasting exercise, the paper theorizes a revised epistemic framework for the Covenants that can benefit Global South communities more generally.

3. João Telésforo: From the Plurinational State to Plurinationality against the State: two strategies of indigenous struggles for autonomy and decolonization in Latin America

The new rights discourse adopted by the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Constitutions of 2008 and 2009, respectively, are widely known: "Plurinational State", "rights of nature" and "Vivir Bien" as cornerstones of a project of decolonization of the State, economy and society. It is also known, however, that in the years that followed the promulgation of these Constitutions, despite progressive social policies and, especially in Bolivia, a significant increase in indigenous representation in positions in the three branches of the State, the permanence of a primary-export, neo-extractivist economic model led to violations of socio-environmental rights, particularly of indigenous communities.

More recently, in 2022, the Chilean Constitutional Convention proposed a new constitutional text that would also incorporate the recognition of the rights of nature and the affirmation of Chile as a plurinational State. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of the population, in a plebiscite, rejected the proposed constitution. In this case, therefore, the strategy of carrying out transformations through state institutions

failed at an even earlier stage. Moreover, during the period of the Constitutional Convention, the Chilean government, which presents itself as favorable to plurinationality and indigenous rights, decreed a state of exception to repress the struggle of the Mapuche people.

Based on these analyses and on marxist and decolonial theories, the article critically assess the limits to the guarantee of rights by the strategy that focuses its efforts on the production of norms and on the attempt to "concretize" them mainly through state institutions. The article states that this strategy tends to produce merely "symbolic" norms and discourses that do not promote transformation of the productive model and the reorganization of political power (which goes beyond the occupation of positions in the State), and that can reinforce the legitimation of capitalist state, under new legal phraseology. In addition, it proposes a research agenda that focuses more on the strategy of insurgent mass direct action by peoples, communities and social movements, as exemplified by the victorious resistance against the *de facto* government in Bolivia, after the Coup d'État in 2019.

4. Dr Lara Montesinos Coleman: Struggles for the Human: Violent Legality and the Politics of Rights

My contribution would draw on my book, Struggles for the Human, which is currently in production with Duke University Press, Global and Insurgent Legalities Series. This ethnographically-infused blend of political philosophy and critical theory reorients the debate about the politics of human rights and anti-colonial struggle through attention to contested understandings of legality, ethics and humanity at play in struggles over rights. Its major methodological contribution is that it develops a embodied approach to knowledge production, drawing upon almost two decades of engagement with peasant, worker and indigenous organisations in Colombia. The book itself makes two main contributions, although it is the second part that I plan to focus on here. (1) A major statement on the specific ways in which human rights bolster systemic violence at a juncture where corporate power has had unprecedented success in shaping ethics in its own image. The incorporation of human rights into neoliberal necro-economics is not because of anything inherent to human rights, but because of a specific understanding of 'rule of law', and a specific style of cosmopolitan ethics fuelled by perniciously optimistic attachments to abstract values. (2) An original theorization of how human rights can be part of a politics of resistance that exposes the violence of existing legal orders, through use of law as a tool of immanent critique within struggles striving towards alternative understandings of legality and – crucially – an alternative praxis of being human as subject of rights. By refusing to foreclose upon human possibilities, these struggles point the way to what the book characterises as a critical, 'insurgent humanism'.

Panel 3A: Queer Activism and Political Mobilisations: Anti-Queer Retalitations, Humanness and 'Modernity'

Chair: Dr SM Rodriguez (LSE)

2.00-3.30

1. **Dilara Asardag: Feminist Performative Digital Assemblies As a Way Of Becoming: Notions Of Empowerment and Subordination Through Hashtag Activism and Online Feminist Publics in Turkey**

The overall aim in my study is to comprehend to what extent and how does queer/ feminist online/ offline activism and cultures of visibility against gender-based violence and their various entangled performative articulations are expanding the space of politics in Turkey. Moreover, to what extent this feminist activism is facing hindrances such as disinformation, misogynist, homophobic, and transphobic backlash as well as surveillance, censorship, and algorithmic discrimination. My doctoral study explores the impact of social media for feminist activists in order to voice grievances, perform consciousness-raising and claim the most fundamental right, "the right to live" through a novel feminist discursive-materialist multi- sited/ multi-modal assemblage ethnography (Marcus, 1995; Saukko, 2003: 176; Hine, 2015), bringing together different sites, scapes (Appadurai, 1997) and methods. In this specific paper, I am combining social network analysis with qualitative content analysis and reflexive feminist participation to analyze important feminist and anti-feminist hashtags between 2016-2023. Online digital activism/ advocacy is understood in connection with offline, non-media centric activism and embodied, affective experiences of violence and resistance. Moreover, a broader question related to the value of human life forms the backbone of this research by reflecting on whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered grievable and ungrievable (Butler, 2015).

In order to build bridges between discursive bodies, I argue that a form of radical affective empathy, "openness", "emergence" and notions of "drive" and "desire" is necessary. Precarity and vulnerability as Butler mentions (2015), can be a condition that would make different bodies realize that they belong to each other, however it is only through affirmative action through affective bridges that the bodies can change their condition for the better. In my research, I am aiming to build on the important concept of intersectionality and further develop the concept of affective bridges and combine it with Judith Butler's (2015) performative theory of assembly and space of appearance to address the potential and emergence of coalitional politics.

2. Dorothy Rau and Meriç G. Doğan: Queer Discomforts with and Activist Articulations of the Language of Rights:

In this era of exponential increase in discourses of queer 'rights' as well as anti-queer retaliation, it is critical to consider questions of language in assessing the relevance of hegemonic human rights to the daily lives and politics of grassroots queer activist movements. In this paper we detail the ways in which queer activist language in Turkey differs from and is thus untranslatable to the dominant language of rights. Through personal accounts and ethnographic research of queer activism in Turkey, we reflect on the implications of the language-based discomforts activists face navigating both community-centric activism and engagements with the rights regime and institutional rights work.

In particular, we emphasize the centrality of queer humanness, politics of care, emotion, and accessibility to activist vernacular as constituting the foundation of activist solidarities, communal survival strategies, and adaptability to shifting violences. These attributes are largely absent from rights regime discourses which prioritize rigid standards of predictability, efficiency, and false-objectivity. Such dominant language does not require the 'human' (assumed to be claiming said rights) to be present and speaking and is thus central to the maintenance of Euro-American hegemony within the rights regime.

This multidirectional analysis of the language of queer rights contributes to existing critiques of the rights regime as being misaligned with the aims of activists, but does not allow such a critique to obscure the ongoing radical and innovative organizing around the subject of queer rights exemplified in the Turkish context. We excavate the potential of queer humanness to bridge this lexical chasm and inspire novel vernaculars of rights and rights-based solidarities beyond participation in the bureaucratic networks of the rights regime.

3. Dr Francesca Ammaturo: Towards Progress? Interrogating the 'Rainbow Modernities' of Pride Events:

This contribution engages with the idea, widely held by a wide variety of institutional actors, both at the national and international level (see for instance the European Union or the Council of Europe), that the organisation of Pride Events represents for a country a sort of watershed moment that grants a linear entrance into 'modernity', or carve out a path towards the establishment or consolidation of democracy and human rights. Whilst it is undeniable that Pride Events contribute to a more equal or inclusive society, these claims of 'modernity' are dangerous insofar as they create a rigid dichotomy between countries who are 'modern' and those held

to be 'premodern'. This paper offers a theoretical and epistemological interrogation of the frameworks used in human rights research in relation to Pride Events, freedom of expression and freedom of association. Building on decolonial ideas about 'Modernity' and the specific epistemologies underpinning this concept, particularly through the work of Connell, Mignolo, Rao and Smith, this paper challenges this idea of Pride Events as being the uniform markers of 'modernity'. Through an appraisal of the critique of the concept of 'Multiple Modernities' (Eisenstadt) offered by scholars such as Bhambra and Boatcă, this paper offers a discussion of the concept of 'Rainbow Modernities' that the creation of Pride Events engenders in different latitudes and contexts. This contribution will demonstrate that 'Rainbow Modernities' should not be understood in human rights research by the yardstick of European or Western modernity but should be seen as emerging from the specific local configurations where Pride Events take place.

Panel 3B: From Critique to Creation: Dystopias, Utopias, and the Power of Worldmaking
Chair: Nancy Breton (LSE)
2.00-3.30

1. **Nitzan Amitay: "Utopian Methodologies for Utopian Studies?"**

Alongside academic research, all around the world, there are groups of people who are engaging in practice-based research in the hopes of bringing the then-and- there of utopian realities one step closer. These group consciously experiment in imagining and trying out alternative ways and modes of being- they offer knowledge in the form of prefiguration, reimagining concepts and offering anti-hegemonic sites (heterotopias). These knowledges include ecology, gender, economics, rights and the ways all of them intertwine. I would like to argue briefly for the academic relevance and importance of such spaces as a form of activism, and to constitute them as "utopian spaces", insofar as their intention is to create an opening towards another world.

The history of utopia has for many years been tied with authoritarianism and different forms of creating unified imposed visions that erase diversity. I would then like think along the lines of what it means to study utopian spaces using methodological tools that part from blueprint versions of utopia, but rather dives into subjectivities and creates a version of utopian studies that speaks to different ontologies and epistemologies.

Using auto-ethnography and affect theory as main points of entry, I discuss these topics using an example of research conducted on an intentional community in Sweden – Suderbyn.

2. Dr María Célleri: Dystopian Speculative Fiction for Rethinking "Rights": Hemispheric Analysis of Quito 2023 and Lunar Braceros 2125-2148

Informed by true historical accounts, dystopian speculative fiction serves as the bridge between what has been and what could be through fantastical accounts that while fictional are eerily reminiscent of present circumstances and people's lived material realities. And while dystopian speculative fiction demonstrates the disastrous effects of our current moment—such as uncontrolled globalized capitalism, racialized labor exploitation, exorbitant land and mineral extraction, and environmental devastation—they leave open the possibility of resistance and even spaces to imagine decolonial feminist utopian imaginaries. I conclude that a critical engagement with speculative fiction in film and literature can help us understand our current sociopolitical moments and imagine what material changes need to take place to create more equitable global worlds. I juxtapose the film, Quito 2023 (Izurieta and Moscoso 2013)—Ecuador's first full-length science fiction film—and the U.S. Latinx novella Lunar Braceros 2125-2148 by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita, to think about the possibilities of decolonial feminist utopian world-making. While Quito 2023 is an anti-utopian film that demonstrates the pessimism of local cultural producers in imagining a radical change in the country, in part due to the government's failure to combat social inequities, Lunar Braceros considers what

alternative modes of relationality would entail within an anti-capitalist model that honors Indigenous concepts of land and life. As I speculate about utopia in relation to contemporary Indigenous organizing in Ecuador under "socialism of the first century," I ask: what would Ecuador, and the Andean region at large, look like in the future if it centered Indigenous colonial histories of genocide as well as postcolonial presents of Indigenous displacement and land extraction, and worked towards a feminist decolonial future of land repatriation and the absolution of the heteropatriarchal nation-state? While an exercise of the imagination, my paper is rooted in local struggles for justice—such as Indigenous fights against petroleum and mining extraction in the Ecuadorian Amazon and escalating government attacks against Indigenous organizations such as CONAIE and ECUARUNARI.

3. Manuela Camargo de Assis:
The Kairological Internationalist: On the Right for Feminist, Queer and Decolonial Interventions

Feminists and queer failed attempts to change international legal theory and practice, such as those culminating in international conflict feminism and homonationalist propaganda, highlight the discipline's challenges in advancing a radical political agenda. Following Paul Chan's one might as well say that, in the same way it happens with tradition in art, international law tends to incorporate critical voices in order to prove a commitment to innovation and transformation, thus presenting this incorporation as a form of self-justification and reinforcement of international law's right to advance its rule in perpetuity. Reflecting a strategic understanding of how feminist, queer and decolonial political agendas are embedded in networks of power and knowledge that operate within the discipline and in the material conditions of the worlds they help to create, this work proposes the idea of a 'kairological internationalist'. Since, for Butler, the norms of political life become depoliticized if defined in advance, the imagination of kairological time as the time of critique provides creative resources to rethink the role of critical perspectives and the time for taking transformative actions, allowing critical internationalists to resist the endurance of naturalized and hegemonic logics of progressivism. Maybe the kairological opportunity can provide internationalists means to negotiate the compromises they are intended to support.

4. Dr Miranda Hallett: Accompanying Utopia: ethical and methodological questions in ethnographic work on Salvadoran cooperativist movements

This paper examines the problems and potential of ethnographic methods for both non-extractivist forms of research, and for conveying alternate regimes of personhood and modes of rights-making to global publics. Building on the work of

Chakrabarty (2007) on provincializing the Global North and Escobar (2010, 2017, 2020) on "relational ontologies," the essay considers these methodological and ethical concerns in light of the author's long-term fieldwork accompanying Salvadorans, both in the diaspora and in El Salvador, as they enact cooperativist praxis to navigate the landscape of late capitalism.

Many Salvadorans experience displacement and precarity under the current global economy, as for most descendants of indigenous Americans. Dispossessed and vulnerable, many Salvadoran communities organize collectively and engage in improvisational (agri)cultural practices based on ideals and knowledge rooted in collectivism and the commons.

These movements and actors draw on visions of interdependence based on cosmological and transcendent concerns, enacting an emancipatory project from a standpoint quite distinct from that of liberal "human rights." From a permaculture cooperative established on lands abandoned by a plantation owner in El Salvador, to backyard gardens among Salvadorans in Sacramento, California, the ethnographic data show how Salvadorans' navigate and resist the hyper-commodified landscapes of late capitalism by drawing on alternate values.

Drawing on the philosophical and political logics of informants themselves, we see Salvadorans engage in cooperativism not only for the sake of survival, but as a counterhegemonic and utopian effort. They engage in this work mindful of its ecological and political dimensions and their interrelatedness, unsettling forces of privatization as well as resisting commodified relationships to plants. This essay asks: what role can ethnographic accompaniment play in relation to these movements? How can our research be conducted and disseminated with close attention to issues of epistemic justice and a commitment to decolonizing rights and justice work?

Panel 3C: Re-imagining the Subject(s) of Rights and Decentering the Human
Chair: Senel Wanniarachchi

2.00-3.30

1. **Rana Cheaito: Re-imagining the Right to Life: Towards a Pluriversal Understanding of Human Rights**

This paper reads into the right to life as a passage into understanding the problematizations of the global (human) rights discourse. The right to life, which is characterized as an individual right in United Nations' language, reduces rights-

making and claiming to a state-individual relational ontology. This produces epistemologies that do not reflect the collectiveness inherent to the right to life. We live in conspiracy with/against each other, with/against our land and waters, and with/against our intelligent creations. In a sense, the right to life is a necropolitical question of who/what gets to live, rather than a state's liability to individual protection. By engaging with the work of Arturo Escobar, and with theories of the pluriverse, this paper hopes to distance the rights discourse from the hegemonic legal framework onto a speculative one. It asks us to re-imagine the right to life which underwrites all rights-making and claiming as a contingency. In doing so, we can begin to create different lives and worlds.

2. Dr Marie-Catherine Petersmann: Becoming Common – Ecological Resistance, Refusal, Reparation

This article thinks with a concrete practice of 'posthumanist commoning' to imagine an alternative politics of (human) rights. It explores both the posthumanist and the commoning dimensions of the legal and political collective actions at hand. It does so by focusing on the case around the 'insurgent lake' of Rome – the *'lago bullicante'*. *Bullicante* is an archaic Italian term that signifies both 'to boil' (*bollire*) and 'to get agitated' (*agitarsi*). The 'lake that boils and gets agitated' refers to the artificial/natural lake that was accidentally created in 1992 when an underground parking lot was illegally constructed, inadvertently hitting an aquifer, thereby flooding the construction site and nearby area, creating a one-hectare large lake in the heart of the city. With the lake, an insurgent political subjectivity emerged to resist and care for its preservation. Both the subjectivity and the struggle are articulated and practiced in non-liberal, non-individualistic and in-human (or more and less than 'human') terms, revealing a particular mode of becoming common. Drawing on the example of the *lago bullicante*, I argue that this mode of 'posthumanist commoning' enacts practices of ecological resistance, refusal, and reparation that reject a politics of rights. The transversal alliances forged within networks of transnational resisting collectives enable to (re)think how posthumanist theory and practice emerge as alternatives to both human and nonhuman rights.

3. Jolein Holtz: Collective Human Rights as a Vehicle towards Ontological Flexibility in Human Rights Law

Recent years has seen an exponential growth in legal scholarship and advocacy of rights-based approaches to the environmental crises. However, the human rights approach is also one that embraces the singular ontological roots of human rights law. To elucidate, human rights law is the embodiment of a Western-centric philosophy, where the individual as ultimate rightsholder is equated to the most rational thinker, oftentimes the white, able-bodied male. This bias can be traced back to the works of Descartes and Kant, who considered the mind as separate from matter. The ratio became the defining characteristic of personhood, with the human

body and emotions external hereto, resulting in an exclusionary operationalization of the legal subject.

This highly exclusionary nature created a myriad of dichotomies such as object/subject, nature/culture, public/private, fact/value. Firmly embedding these dichotomies in law has contributed to the environmental crises today. The fact that the human rights regime reflects a singular way of being in the world, or ontology, results in its inability to address the environmental crises inclusively and effectively by firmly engraining the racialised, exploiting and exclusionary individual as its centre and viewing nature as an external object to be probed. To be able to address this dominant model of law that is feeding the inequalities created by the neoliberal system, this paper tackles these human rights roots by exploring an alternative conceptual approach to collective human rights. Particularly, a theory of collective human rights which hinges on the idea of allowing different ontologies to be integrated within the rights system. Through an analysis of indigenous peoples' rights in particular, it conceptualizes a general theory of collective human rights as a vehicle towards ontological flexibility within the rights regime. Such a conception of collective rights would allow for a different way of viewing and interpreting human rights including its relationship with the environment.

Panel 4A: Rights, Citizenship, and Activism
Chair: Nour Almazidi (LSE)

4.00-5.30

1. **Nayan Prabha: Ethics of listening right(s): Refusals-redirections and self-effacement as methodological strategies**

How does one conduct research around themes of citizenship, rights, and justice while attempting to bring into fore the voices of marginalized and excluded persons? Drawing from the fieldwork conducted in government run shelter homes for transgender persons in in Bihar and Gujarat, this paper foregrounds two methodological strategies to imagine interviewing and research. These shelter homes are run in collaboration with community-based organizations as part of social justice programme of the Indian state. Centring an ethics of listening, this paper discusses two ways to approach conversations and interviewing in such institutional contexts.

The first strategy is to take refusals seriously, and following its methodological implications. A refusal is a redirection towards other modes of knowing, often favouring a fractured methodology. The fracturedness of field sites and archives that emerge from refusals is something that should be favoured vis a vis the traditional

idea of the anthropological field which functions with a sense of territorial boundedness. Secondly, an attention to refusals also resonates with the 'right to opacity' (Glissant 1990) of the marginalized individuals, something which could potentially disrupt the violence of enunciation, which is often sought only in particular ways. Ethical loneliness (Stauffer 2016) refers to the condition of further harm after the experiencing of violence and injustice, which lingers as a result of the social abandonment and failures of hearing. Favouring a kind of 'reparative hearing' rather than 'paranoid hearing', then, how does one interview as a researcher, with their own positional locations, having a 'research plan' in hand? While the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee is not always linear, one could proceed with a 'strategy of self-effacement' when it comes to listening. This form of self-effacement takes detours, reprimands, refusals, and excesses seriously and puts oneself at the disposal of the stories that are being told without the demands of coherence to form narratives around rights and justice.

2. Meena Jagannath: Using a Movement Lawyering Approach to Reimagine (Human) Rights

In the course of the last decade, the racial justice movement in the United States has increasingly incorporated human rights mechanisms and use of the human rights frame into the ensemble of tactics deployed to confront systemic racism and police brutality against Black people and other people of color. Movement lawyers, committed to a critical legal practice that puts legal tools at the service of social movements seeking transformative change, have been key actors in developing these tactics in a way that understands the limitations of the human rights system while recovering its potential for building internationalist solidarity. Several campaigns – from challenging Stand Your Ground laws in the Florida in the wake of the killing of Trayvon Martin and the Ferguson to Geneva delegation - involved applying a "movement lawyering" approach to human rights law practice, by which any engagement with formal human rights mechanisms had to emerge first from a process of rights and demand construction at the grassroots level. The content of human rights must first be defined from the very groups deploying the human rights discourse to vindicate, expand and protect their rights, not treaties and formal mechanisms. Regardless of whether a community or activist group uses the words "human rights" to describe the origins and substance of their demands, we advocates must seek to use what levers we can in the formal system to give validation to their rights claims (on behalf of themselves or even non-human actors). This paper will set forth a general framework of practicing human rights advocacy using a "movement lawyering" approach and draw from examples of campaigns among racial justice movements in the U.S. to demonstrate how this approach serves to rework the content of human rights in an intersectional manner despite the contradictions inherent in formal human rights mechanisms at the UN and elsewhere.

3. Dr Carin Runciman: Uncomfortable collaborations and the double-edged sword of rights-based activism and research in South Africa

What are the limits to scholar-activism within a neoliberal academy? This paper attempts to offer some answers to this question through a reflection on a research project engaged in narrative change about economic rights in South Africa. Rights-based activism has been influential in shaping the post-apartheid political terrain, particularly regarding socio-economic rights. However, activists in South Africa, as elsewhere, have also experienced the limits of rights-based activism to provide a pathway to building more just and equitable societies. The project I engaged in sought to drive narrative change in framing economic rights as human rights. The timing of this project was potentially politically apt – arising at a time when campaigns for a basic income grant had gained traction in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I argue that the project largely became divorced from the political and social realities of activists. The paper considers how relations between scholars, practitioners in NGOs and grassroots activists are managed in a context where the drive for donor funding structurally underpins the possibilities and limitations of such collaborations. In this case, I argue, the project reinforced a narrative about rights-based activism that failed to take into account the history and context of grassroots struggles or to engage with indigenous conceptions and articulations of rights. In reflecting on these failures, I intend to further conversations about the intersections of work between scholar-activists, activists and the role of non-profit organisations in rights-based research and activism. Furthermore, I hope that these reflections also provide insight into alternative ways of working within the structural constraints we find ourselves.

4. Reem Abuzaid: Litigating daily rights of LGBTQ individuals in Lebanon

In the past decade, activists resisted the Lebanese state's attempts at policing queer communities by subjecting its most vulnerable subjects (working-class, transgender, and refugees) to arbitrary punishment. The state relies on Article 534 of the Penal Code to sentence these subjects for engaging in 'unnatural sexual intercourse' for up to one year in prison. The article emphasizes the role of legal activism (strategic litigation and legal mobilisation) as a modality that engages with the law to redefine LGBTQ rights. The premise of legal activism is to delegitimize article 534 on the ground of Lebanon's international commitments, trying to hold the state to its obligations under IHRL with specific focus on individuals' right to privacy in the ICCPR.

The study of legal activism highlights the intersectional aspect of queer politics, migrating from litigation in the court to the wider political space shaping queer

discourse and activism strategies like alliance-making with other political groups. The article informs literature addressing queer politics in Lebanon (like Chamas 2021; Nagle 2021; Moussawi 2015; 2018; 2020) of a greatly understudied modality of activism that approaches the law as a site for resistance as well as a sphere to shape individuals' rights. The article relies on firsthand accounts collected from activists engaged in legal activism. The article places memory work at its center as it constructs a space for activists to revisit hegemonic narratives shaping their political action like the instrumentality of the law in political activism and the utility of legal activism to re-imagine individuals' rights. In doing so, the article relies on Re-membering as a methodology, a feminist method in indigenous, black, and anti-colonial feminist studies because it serves as a counter-history to dominant colonial narratives (examples are Marshall 2015; Grande & McCarthy 2018; Pandit 2022). Re-membering offers a methodological intervention to study the intersection of legal activism with queer lives to understand larger questions about state sovereignty, violence, and individual precarity in Lebanon.

Panel 4B: Challenging the Epistemic Foundations of Legal Theorising: Gender, Intuition and Epistemological Authoritarianism
Chair: Dr. Hasret Cetinkaya (LSE)

4.30-5.00

1. Harison Citrawan: Rights-intuitive legal reasoning method

This paper argues for a right-intuitive method in law and legal reasoning studies. It contends that the expression of right should be understood in terms of its temporal rather than spatial dimension. That is, rights should be examined in its dialectical form, insisting us to escape from rights objectivization. It compels us to view rights in a broader canvass of experiences of human suffering through intuition. Intuition fetches our attention to represent the reality of rights through what we may call the politics of difference. Here, there are two senses of difference at play. Firstly, the difference in degree, which helps us in understanding human suffering in the frame of timeliness and timelessness of a claim (for legal responsibility). Secondly, the difference in kind, which engenders the untimely, that is, a qualitative reality that is not containable, measurable. In this latter sense, time is lived experience construed

upon the juxtaposition between perception and memory. For comparativists-at-law as the common approach in studying rights culture, we could understand two characteristics by using this method, that time is: (1) multiplicity, in the sense that we are experiencing time in a rather dynamic flux. The multiplicity of time implies that rights experience is variegated and sedimented; and (2) homogeneity, meaning that in our practice of reasoning there is a single back-and-forth process of recollection of the virtual past that leaps to the actual present. Based on these characteristics, this study argues that rights intuition concerns with paying attention to how people experience (e.g., continuity, persistence, discontinuity, etc.) suffering within which perception and memory are embedded.

2. Isadora Dutra Badra Bellati: Unmasking Coloniality within Brazilian Constitutional Court Decisions: The case of unlimited outsourcing of labor

In several cases, when deciding on the constitutionality of laws in the Brazilian legal system, the Supreme Constitutional Court adopts interpretations that follow the logic of "one size fits all". In that logic, it understands that the policies adopted by Global North countries represent the only possible policies to be followed by Brazil (and any other underdeveloped country) in the search for economic progress. Economic progress through capitalism and free global market economies, in turn, is seen as the only possible way to meet the demands for human dignity.

In cases as such, the court often reveals the use of a universalizing rationality that ignores the Brazilian historical and cultural context and authorizes the exclusion of marginalized groups from interpreting the norms and their effects. This phenomenon promotes what can be called an "epistemological authoritarianism".

The paper realizes a close reading of one of those cases; shows the undesirable side effects of the decision taken; and proposes that decisions as such can be better explained and confronted by the concept of coloniality of knowledge, taken from decolonial theory literature.

3. Dr Busisiwe Deyi: The failed promise of human rights equality in Post-Apartheid South Africa – a Marxist feminist critique

Post-apartheid feminist scholarship on human rights has failed to articulate an epistemological and ontological conception of gender equality that accounts for the racial and extractive nature of Gender as a system of resource regulation and extraction. This has resulted in an epistemological conception of Gender equality through a narrow neoliberal conception of human rights. Leading to the sedimentation of capitalist gendered relations rather than their dismantling.

The purpose of this article is to make an argument for the development of a critical feminist theoretical methodology in human rights in general, and Gender equality, in particular. Through reading human rights through a Marxist-feminist interventions, this article hopes to productively raise the problems internal to South African feminist legal theory which require critical undressing.

This article proposes that a reading of gender equality through a Marxist-Feminist theoretical lens will provide theoretical justification for understanding Gender equality material to economic (re)organization beyond the liberal fishbowl. Consequently, in this paper I will be critiquing the dominant narratives of human rights and equality embedded within South African feminist legal thought.

Panel 4C: Decolonising Borders and Migration
Chair: Professor Conor Gearty (LSE)

4.00-5.30

1. Rémy-Paulin Twahirwa: The Poetic Contours of the Exile: Creative Methods and the Sense of the Human Among Exiled People

Recent studies (Picozza, 2021; Mayblin & Turner, 2021; Sharma, 2020; Patel, 2021) suggest that the governance of international mobilities and nationalised bodies are rooted in imperial and colonial historic relations that make some bodies of place and others out of place (Sharma, 2020). In many ways, the figure of the 'migrant' has been able to concentrate in her and through her different discourses, dispositions and practices that seems to impose themselves onto othered bodies, mostly from the Global South (Godfellow, 2019; Davies et al., 2021). In this regard, Mbembe comes to speak about the 'border-body' (corps-frontières) to qualify this phenomenon where the object (border) defines the subject (body) to the point that the distinctions between what makes a 'body' and what makes a 'border' become obsolete or, at the

very least, evade all attempts to define them as two distinct elements, since what makes a body makes a border and what makes a border makes a body.

This contribution will explore the use of creative methodologies to investigate what it means to be labelled a 'migrant' in the United Kingdom. At its root, my presentation examines what I call the poetic contours of the exile by looking into the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees and other displaced people living in the UK. An important methodological tool I use to collect data with participants is what I call 'creative community-based interventions. To be more precise, following an epistemic move from a 'colonial ethnography' (and its extractivist nature) to a 'decolonial ethnography' (Bejarono et al, 2019) (based on collaboration, solidarity and reciprocity), this project prioritise a collaborative and creative approach with participants and community partners in order to produce ethnographic data. In the end, I will discuss about early findings, challenges and benefits of this method following a series of interventions in the UK.

2. **Sofie Roehrig:: Multi-level political narratives: Refugees, NGOs, and governmental institutions as challenging what foreign policy means for whom**

Feminist foreign policies proposed by state actors seem to lack self-reflection of underlying normative claims, such as a neo-liberal and capitalist worldview, and appear to disregard the possibilities and realities that feminist foreign policy itself may be selectively serving some (female) populations while undermining the security and wellbeing of others. To address these shortcomings and offer alternatives, I explore what foreign policy can mean to different actors in different contexts (beyond the state), how normative claims differ, and how different ideas of foreign policy are produced and challenged. Focusing on migration as a foreign policy area, I explore the political and normative claims that displaced third country nationals make, alongside governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), about the foreign policy of the country they are in.

Involving concepts from transitional justice, political psychology, sociology, and feminist, decolonial IR, I propose a theoretical framework that serves to compare political narratives about foreign policy brought forward by these three actor types. I apply this framework to BIPOC refugee women who fled Ukraine during the 2022 Russian invasion and are struggling for the right to remain in Germany. Treating individual biographical narrative interviews as epistemologically equal to reports by ministries and NGOs, I analyse the political narratives of these actors. I demonstrate that the German government has selectively promoted and protected certain individual (human) rights while disregarding others. I argue that NGOs and individual-level political narratives of the above-mentioned individuals are challenging the German government's prioritisation of rights and populations and propose normative foreign policy claims that conceive of identity, belonging, and

responsibility as more fluid, historical, and relational. These should be understood as alternative political ideas of international politics and human rights. I close by outlining various participatory and creative methodologies that are relevant to further study individual perspectives on foreign policy.

3. Dr Sharmila Parmanand: Anti-trafficking or anti-immigrant? Rethinking the centrality of border control in the Philippines' anti-trafficking policy

The Philippine government is recognised as a global leader in enacting anti-trafficking measures to protect its citizens from exploitation. This paper interrogates the Philippines' aggressive border control policies directed at its own citizens seeking to travel to foreign countries, which is a core pillar of its anti-trafficking strategy. Drawing on a review of Bureau of Immigration guidelines, statements from relevant government agencies, and interviews with women passengers who were subjected to immigration inspections and some of whom were 'offloaded', this paper identifies the gendered, classed, and racialised underpinnings of these policies and their effects on the individuals they purport to protect. It argues that extensive restrictions on travelers in their countries of origin perpetuate moral panics around women's independent mobility and legitimise and reinforce global systems of bordering and extractive capitalism.

4. Dr Swati Arora: Under Cover: Insurgent Methods of Border Crossing

Responding to the workshop's theme on social and epistemic justice, my presentation will assemble a few of my thoughts on border crossing and insurgent methodologies. I draw on my co-edited book *Pluriversal Conversations on Transnational Feminisms: And Words Collide from a Place (2023)*, which attempts to counter methodological nationalisms and research designs that are uncritically governed by Euro-American vantage points. Thinking with decolonial feminist texts (Anzaldúa 1987; Sandoval 2000; Lugones 2003; Tlostanova 2018) on border crossing and inspired by the figure of the smuggler, I offer a few insurgent methods of subterfuge and survival as a method for ethico-political scholarship towards justice-to-come. The presentation is a prompt to encourage border-crossing—disciplinary, epistemic and linguistic—as we secure justice for our communities while acknowledging the colonial histories of our institutions.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Professor Nikita Dhawan (TU Dresden): Normative Dilemmas: Human Rights and its Critics

In my talk, I will focus on the normative dilemmas that haunt postcolonial engagements with the legacies of the Enlightenment, in particular human rights. The postcolonial-queer-feminist critique of European Enlightenment is considered guilty of abetting "normative nihilism." In highlighting the distinctiveness of experiences and practices of non-European societies, postcolonial theorists stand accused of denying the universal validity of emancipatory norms such as justice, democracy, and international human rights law. Even though law does not always deliver justice, one "cannot not want" (Spivak) the enabling possibilities offered by it, although one must contest its coercive and violent aspects. I will argue that the legitimacy of human rights principles must emerge from those who negotiate its normative violence. When subaltern groups are granted access to the empowering potential of rights, the master's tool can perhaps be used to dismantle the master's house.