

01.08.2019  
31.07.2023

## Multiple Artworks – Multiple Indian Ocean

### Summary

The project focuses on the multi-layered co-presence and circulation of verbal arts in relation to narratives, imagery, and sound travelling the Indian Ocean. In line with the Cluster's agenda of multiplicity, we do not conceive of literary works as neatly delineated units, but as internally multiple and dynamic configurations in relation to other literary works and artworks. Taking into account networks of literary multilingualism and going beyond the monolingual straitjacket of modern literary histories and disciplinary boundaries that partition Luso- and Francophone literature from Swahili and Arabic, we adopt a multi-sited and multilingual approach. Bringing in our joint competences, we firstly, focus on the multilingual (foremost English, French, Portuguese, Swahili and Arabic) and multimedial practices of authors, the dynamic configuration of imagery, narratives and sounds in specific works and their relationship to other media and art forms (foremost film, music, installation). Our joint project focuses on the Indian Ocean, which lends itself to theorize artworks as multiple configurations that inhabit many worlds, which do not belong to one timeline, space, language and medium. Our project brings together three fields of inquiry, i.e. 1) recent multilingual approaches to circulating literatures; 2) Indian Ocean Studies and its emphasis on fluid connections, and 3) aesthetic approaches to consider the specific ways of the arts to evoke worlds.

### Key Questions

Our main question, which speaks to the Research Section's interest in practices of worlding, is: Which multiple world(s) do literature and other artworks inhabit, imagine and construct and critically deconstruct? Furthermore, how can one think of artworks relationally by considering the multiple layers and traces of various languages, imageries and narratives beyond unilineal diffusion? How do artworks reshape political boundaries of worlds by conveying an experience of alternative worlds? How do artists and artworks of the Indian Ocean relate to other artists and artworks, for instance, from India or Oman, as well as the Caribbean? What are the intermedial connections between literary and performative, musical, and/or audiovisual aesthetics?

### Methods, Case Studies and Concepts

We combine fieldwork methods of participatory observation

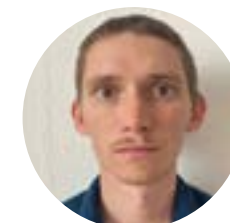
to find out about locally entrenched poetic practices with interviews with writers and artists. The latter allows us to inquire about their repertoires, perception of textual relations, and worlds, as well as to expand on the intellectual concepts that inspire and engage them (e.g. relationality (Glissant), "coolitude" (see Bragard 2008, Carter and Torabully 2002)). Furthermore, we have also systematically created encounters of writers and artists, as for instance, during workshops like the one in October 2022 in Mauritius "Naviguer le tout-monde de l'Océan Indien : poétiques relationnelles entre écritures et arts visuels" ("Navigating the All-World of the Indian Ocean: relational poetics between writing and visual arts")

The project is subdivided into **three case studies** conducted at different sites, the Comoros, Mozambique, Mauritius, La Réunion, Zanzibar and Oman with outlooks to India (Goa), Oman and Europe (France) to deliberately transgress linguistic, national, and continental frontiers. We bring to the overall project our individual research on a variety of lusophone and francophone literatures in relation with other media (Fendler), francophone novels (Tchokothe) and swahiliphone and Arabic poetry (Vierke and Tarrant). While each case study is in itself multi-sided, we draw on the contrast of the sites and their different histories of relations and forms of expression.

Rémi Tchokothe's research which he entitles "Entré en tant que cousin, sorti en tant que gendarme" Visa Balladur, Kwassa Kwassa, (Im)mobilité et Géopoét(h)ique relationnelle aux Comores" lies at the intersection of Europe-Africa political geography, Indian Ocean Francophone Literatures, and Critical African Studies. It builds on 18 works cutting across 5 genres to analyse literary actualizations and representations of notions of territory as they play out in the Comoros archipelago by asking this central question: how can works of imagination on "migration" to Mayotte build a kind of collective social therapy and social in(ter)vention?



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Poetry Convention, Zanzibar 2022 (Photo: Clarissa Vierke)

**Duncan Tarrant and Clarissa Vierke** have been examining transoceanic memories and shifting notions of oceanic space in Swahili popular poetry on Zanzibar working with a group of over 20 poets. Research by Duncan Tarrant focussing on the relationship of Swahili poetry in Zanzibar and Oman, entangled through back and forth migration, has engendered new questions about diasporic identities adding to Clarissa Vierke's research on layered poetic maps. The poetry recently composed by Zanzibari poets for a workshop organized with the Zanzibar State University points at the capitalist entanglements of cultural production, hints at moments of forgetting and stasis but also adds ecocritical aspects, and demands a critical revisit of Indian Ocean perspectives.

**Ute Fendler's** work focuses on literary texts and art works (paintings, films, installations, and sculptures) from La Réunion, Mauritius, and Mozambique. Using the concepts of relationality and polyrhythm, historically genetic and thematic interconnections allow to seize the outlines of thematic fields that are part of a shared imaginary, like imaginaries on the memories of enslaved persons and indentured laborers, on complex oceanic relations in a multidirectional diachronic and multidirectional synchronic perspectives. The overall objective would ask for a – partially – shared relational poetics.

### Vision

Our aim is to break through the monolingual straightjacket and dominant canon of Indian Ocean literature and contribute a relational and multilingual perspective on the Indian Ocean. The choice of the Indian Ocean speaks to the Cluster's agenda of reconfiguring African studies as well as relationality, since it critically questions the boundaries of the African continent by opening up the view on multidirectional relations in a diachronic and synchronic perspective – which also reject the West as the only centre. Furthermore, the project brings in a genuinely aesthetic perspective to reflexivity by focusing on artists and artworks' contingent, discursive and non-discursive way of criticising social realities and evoking alternative worlds. In this way, literature becomes a major critical tool which generates new perspectives, concepts and questions. Questioning our own positionalities and restricted views, we have systematically expanded the cooperation with local poets and writers but also guests and artists in Bayreuth, creating productive/dynamic moments of encounter.

Skizofan (Bactory, Mauritius), 2022 (Photo: Ute Fendler)



Poets Wanimo B. Wanimo (left) and Jalala Sikudhani (right) discussing poetry on Zanzibar. (Photo: Clarissa Vierke)

### Key References

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### Further Links

Find more information on the project here:

[www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/Research/1research-sections/art\\_aesthetics/Multiple-Artworks---Multiple-Indian-Ocean/index.html](http://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/Research/1research-sections/art_aesthetics/Multiple-Artworks---Multiple-Indian-Ocean/index.html)

Ilha de Moçambique 2022. (Photo: Ute Fendler)



Pekiwa (Mozambique, 2022). (Photo: Ute Fendler)

