New Ecotones
Montpellier, June 11-13, 2015
Abstracts for Keynote Speakers

Romesh Gunesekera, Writer, London
Keynote address: Finding the Line
This keynote address will explore how imaginative writing develops and a writer finds the right balance for a piece of fiction or poetry engaged with the world. What is the ecology of a writer’s life? What is the process of negotiation between text and story? Where is the line between fiction and reality in our lived environment? What lies between the lines?

Elizabeth DeLoughrey, UCLA, USA
Keynote address — Maritime Futures of the Anthropocene
The sea has long figured in scholarship as a space of diasporic crossings, a fluid space where national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries are dissolved. But new oceanic imaginaries are expanding from fluidity across transoceanic surfaces to theorizing ways of embedding, animating, and submerging, rendering the planet’s vast oceanic space into place. This paper explores the development of a new oceanic imaginary catalyzed by our most visible aspect of climate change: sea-level rise. While discourse about the epoch of the Anthropocene imagines a global ocean, this paper turns to how contemporary Caribbean works have articulated more regional and historicized claims to the sea through reference to the middle passage and contemporary ecological threats. I read these ‘sea ontologies’ in their recent turn to a submarine poetics of multispecies engagements. The challenges of representing the more-than-human temporalities of the ocean are addressed by artist Jason DeCaires Taylor, whose submarine Caribbean sculptures are subject to the erosion and transformation by maritime currents as well through multispecies relations with fish, algae, sponges, and coral. These multispecies figures raise vital questions about the sea as a site of human history and a more-than-human planetary future.

Gaurav Desai, Tulane University, USA
Keynote address — Crabs that Rule the Tide of Destiny: Imagining the Ecotone in Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide
The Hungry Tide, published in 2005 by Harper Collins, and recipient of the Crosswords Book Award in India, presents a compelling model for understanding the lived experience of ecotones by humans, animals and vegetation. Set in the Sunderbans in the Bay of Bengal, a precarious ecotonal zone whose boundaries fluctuate depending on the rise of the tide, this novel brings together a number of urgent issues that are increasingly confronting us as we continue to witness rapidly rising oceanic waters. As such, the stories and tensions between the human and the rest of the animal kingdom, between human rights and responsibilities, between embracing the natural and attempting to control it, between love and duty, or again, between reportage and poetry – issues that insistently press upon us in this age of what has been called the ‘anthropocene’ are central to Ghosh’s work. In my talk, I will draw upon The Hungry Tide as an important postcolonial contribution to new ways of imagining the ecotone and what such zones may teach us about new modes of ethical living and being in the world.
Abstracts for Speakers

Joshil Abraham, IP University, Delhi, India  
‘Papilio Buddha: A Movie that Exposes Different Ecotones in Caste-Ridden India’  
Modernity vs Tradition has been extensively discussed in contemporary India. In this paper I would like to argue that the ‘powerless’ in India, ie the lower castes, neither rely on modernity nor on tradition. They belong to a different space all together, at the outskirts of several other spaces. This would be analysed using the Malayalam movie *Papilio Buddha* (2013) by Jayan K Cherian. In the Indian context, it is the upper castes who dominate the discourse of both tradition and modernity. Analysing *Papilio Buddha* I would like to argue that the lower caste characters Kariyan and Shankaran have an organic relationship to the environment, while the upper caste police officer or the American lepidopterist searching for the *papilio buddha* unique to Kerala, have a more external relationship with the environment. Without making sweeping generalisations, it seems these two categories live in different ecotones. In this paper I would like to probe these differences and meeting points of these conflicting ecotones in the light of tradition and modernity in the Indian context, and how environmental issues associate and overlap with politics and governance, gender roles and sexuality. Keeping in mind that the movie was denied censor certificate for a long time, one can wonder whether tackling environmental issues can actually channel political resistance and lead to a certain form of empowerment for the lower castes, and to the creation of a new space for the ‘powerless’.

Vanessa Agard-Jones, Yale University, New Haven, USA  
‘Body Burdens: Genealogies and Geographies of Biopower in Martinique’  
In Martinique, a French territory in the Caribbean, narratives about the origins of gender transgression and same-sex desire have shifted recently to include a story about their relationship to bodily contamination by a pesticide once used widely on the island’s banana plantations. As a source of rising levels of estrogen-like chemicals in the environment, the pesticide chlordécone has been linked to both male infertility and prostate cancer. Concerns about the effects of this contamination have been heightened by uncertainty about the range of its impacts, and popular responses have included panic about male effeminacy and intersex births as well as critiques of the postcolonial dynamics that drive uneven exposure. This talk explores the various kinds of burdens — those that are material and those that are metaphorical — that a body might bear, plumbing the ways that the Caribbean has functioned as an imperial laboratory for the elaboration of European techniques of (bio)power.

Clara Rachel Eybalin Casseus, MIGRINTER, Université de Poitiers, France  
‘Creolization, Citizenship and Mobilities: The Case of Haitian Associations in Guadeloupe and Martinique’  
The transnational literature on creolization has tended to narrow itself to the marking out of identities without engaging much deeper with the notion of mobility at the conceptual level. While still contributing to the elaboration of the concept of transnationalism, this article seeks to answer two questions. What meanings do Haitians of Guadeloupe and Martinique give to their associational experience via a complex of networks from their homeland to the hostland? How do such meanings influence and shape attitudes towards feelings of belonging in a creolized culture? The article is based on multi-sited field research, comprising 38 in-depth interviews, and draws upon concepts of transnationalism, citizenship and creolization as theoretical frameworks. It examines the process by which Haitians negotiate their citizenship/non-citizenship, organize their networks and contribute to this sort of long-distance civic engagement in relation to their homeland. The findings suggest that the factors of change that describe best their experience reside in the fluidity of a common socio-cultural matrix grounded in a culture of mobility.
Anne Cirella-Urrutia, Huston-Tillotson University, Austin, Texas, USA
‘Transcendent Communities and The Edge Effect in Dominique Mwankumi’s Picture Book’
The association of the natural world with postcolonial studies is not new to critics of African literature. Collectively, their conversations disclose an abiding interest in the way African writers rely upon the natural world to structure their texts and even critique the ‘injustices’ of the human world. I privilege water as a site of inquiry and ‘African ecocriticism’. I argue that the premise of ecocriticism — the way human and nonhuman worlds are interconnected and mutually informed — is sustained in children’s literature. I conceptualize ecocriticism as a means to fulfill two different but related objectives: first, to uncover how the interdependence of the natural, human, and ancestral worlds meaningfully expands the ecocritical canon; and second, to address how Mwankumi’s books present a metaphor of ecotone between the coastal and the noncoastal; the rural vs the urban; water vs steel. What happens in the liminal spaces where young African people(s) cross and meet? What happens when African literature crosses over the diaspora space? I augment this theoretical discussion with close readings with *Les petits acrobates du fleuve*, Wagenia and *Prince de la rue* set in the Democratic Republic of the Congo given that each revolves around the very idea that structures my discussion — namely, the interrelationship between water, animist, human/urban, non-animist, and non-human bodies. I will discuss Mwankumi’s literary and artistic representations of the ecotone of the estuary formed by the Congo River and its transient communities where young people evolve, willingly move to, or are forcefully displaced by their communities.

Magali Compan, The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA
‘Street Art and Palimpsest Memories on Reunion Island’
The association of the natural world with postcolonial studies is not new to critics of African literature. Collectively, their conversations disclose an abiding interest in the way African writers rely upon the natural world to structure their texts and even critique the ‘injustices’ of the human world. I privilege water as a site of inquiry and ‘African ecocriticism’. I argue that the premise of ecocriticism — the way human and nonhuman worlds are interconnected and mutually informed — is sustained in children’s literature. I conceptualize ecocriticism as a means to fulfill two different but related objectives: first, to uncover how the interdependence of the natural, human, and ancestral worlds meaningfully expands the ecocritical canon; and second, to address how Mwankumi’s books present a metaphor of ecotone between the coastal and the noncoastal; the rural vs the urban; water vs steel. What happens in the liminal spaces where young African people(s) cross and meet? What happens when African literature crosses over the diaspora space? I augment this theoretical discussion with close readings with *Les petits acrobates du fleuve*, Wagenia and *Prince de la rue* set in the Democratic Republic of the Congo given that each revolves around the very idea that structures my discussion — namely, the interrelationship between water, animist, human/urban, non-animist, and non-human bodies. I will discuss Mwankumi’s literary and artistic representations of the ecotone of the estuary formed by the Congo River and its transient communities where young people evolve, willingly move to, or are forcefully displaced by their communities.

Anny-Dominique Curtius, University of Iowa, Iowa City, USA
‘Cannibalizing the Blue Guide and Conceptualizing the Morne: Suzanne Césaire’s Creolized Ecopoetics’
In their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2010), DeLoughrey and Handley proposed ways to expand the critical underpinnings of the Anglo-American ecocritical canon to include diverse ecocritical methodologies and discourses from the global south. My objective is to involve the silenced voice of Suzanne Césaire (1915-1966), wife of Aimé Césaire, in this henceforth-fertile postcolonial engagement with an aesthetics of the earth. I explore how, as the co-founder and main theoretician of *Tropiques* (1941-1945), a major Martinican journal, she shapes, in her thought-provoking essays, the epistemological underpinnings of an ecopoetics in opposition to two contested modes of contact, namely exoticism or *doudou* literature, and the assimilationist ideology of the Vichy government in Martinique. I examine how through her critique of the edenic iconography of the Caribbean, she decrees the ‘death of a *doudou* literature’ (‘Blue Guide and hammock literature’), opposes assimilation, and calls for a ‘cannibal Martinican poetry’. Thus, she conceptualizes the *morne* [Caribbean hill], as a geological and historical marker of the trauma and struggles of disenfranchised Caribbean communities, and as a key matrix for Caribbean critical theory.
I propose that her ecopoetics is a new ecotone, namely a locus of entanglements where agency, ethnic hybridity, mimicry, land dispossession, and ecological disturbances are interrelated. As a nature-centered practice of theorizing that brings the anthropology of historicized bodies into the realm of a new literature, her ecopolitical aesthetics echoes Brathwaite’s tidalectics, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s riches of poor theory, Lionnet’s and Shih’s creolization of theory, and prefaces Glissant’s relational aesthetics of the earth.

Asis De, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India
‘The Arrow and the Axe: Ecotone and Cultural Transformation in Mahasweta Devi’s Chotti Munda and His Arrow’
The idea of an ‘ecotone’ can be applied both to diverse ecological systems as well as human socio-cultural diversity. An ‘ecotone’ may be seen as the ‘contact zone’ between two cultural spaces within a single geo-political reality, i.e. a nation. This is the zone of intercultural encounter where the seeds of transculturality germinate and gradually grow over several historical periods. In the Indian context, the tribal people living in small villages inside the forest through the ages face intercultural encounter with the clearing of the forest to create agricultural field or mining industry. Here the ‘ecotone’ is purely the product of human activity. In this proposed paper I would take Mahasweta Devi’s Chotti Munda and His Arrow as case study. This novel, written by Devi originally in 1980, has been translated into English in 2002 by Spivak, and it concentrates on the slow and gradual transformation of a tribal community called the ‘Mundas’. How the local life of these people, who live in the contact/ friction zone of two cultural spaces — the tribal and the non-tribal Hindu, between the field and the forest, between the feudal system of agrarian economy and the fast expanding industrial (coal and mica mines) economy, are gradually ‘changed’ through the colonial and postcolonial periods, could be seen as a point of investigation.

Caroline Durand-Rous, Université de Perpignan Via Domitia, France
‘Going Places and Going Native: Reinventing Totems in David Treuer’s Novels’
Contemporary American Native literature addresses social and environmental justice issues, underlining the moral mayhem resulting from centuries of estrangement politics toward an aboriginal people on their own land. Meanwhile, Native writers have shown a renewed interest into totemism. Their writing draws on totemism both in its traditional form and in a reinvented form, as hybrid totems, part Native American, part European. Totemism originates in ancient animistic beliefs. It encompasses a dual social role by linking the individual to his community as well as to his environment. Indeed, ancient Native American totemism allowed the initiates to find their rightful place into the clanic organization while it also insured the clan’s material survival in its surrounding nature through a complicated set of rules and taboos. David Treuer has written three novels, each exploiting totemism in different forms and in different environments: in Little, a disabled half-breed child on a poor, remote Indian reservation; in The Hiawatha, a deer appearing in the middle of an urban reservation; and in his last novel The Translation of Dr. Apelles, an ancient and most improbable indigenous manuscript found in an alienating distant city. In each novel, protagonists in disarray attempt to ground their existence into the complexity of ambivalent contact places where they confront their own cultural multiplicity. This paper seeks to explore how these reinvented totems participate in recreating a meaningful bond between today’s Native Americans and their immediate environment thus enabling them to reinvest those ecotones and to claim a renewed Indian identity.

Kathleen Flanagan, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA
‘Garden to Graveyard: American Samoa in John Kneubuhl’s Think of a Garden’
Samoan-American writer John Kneubuhl sets his 1991 play Think of a Garden solely in the liminal area surrounding the American Samoa coastal home of American trader Frank Kreber and his Samoan-European wife Lou’is’a in 1929. Lou’is’a transforms the house’s yard, packed-down dirt and sand on which nothing grows, into a ‘garden’ by placing in it artificial flowers from New Zealand. As the play makes clear, Samoans frequently bury dead loved ones in front of their homes, making graveyards where Lou’is’a has made a garden. Recurring dialogue between the Krebers’ ten year-old son David and the spirit of a Samoan boy who died in 1889 (the year the Samoan archipelago was divided into American and European realms) substantiates the edge effect of ‘garden’ into graveyard. David, attacked by the dead boy’s
living descendant at the same moment his distant relative, the historical Mau (independence) leader Tupua Tamasese Lealofi-o-a'ana is assassinated by New Zealand troops in Western Samoa, seems the placeholder for missing Samoan freedom advocates in Eastern (or American) Samoa. While the Kreber residence on the west coast of Tutuila in American Samoa retains its ‘garden’, the relegation of Mau activity to Western Samoa under New Zealand control also suggests a symbolic graveyard for Samoan self-rule on American Samoa. Although Samoan chiefs ceded the lands to the U.S. in 1900, the U.S. did not ratify the terms until 1929, instead placing the territory under a series of U.S. Naval commanders. Possibly colliding interests of western traders such as Frank Kreber, while alluded to in slight references to copra in the play, are minimized by the absence of settings such as store and plantation, means of production and distribution that the U.S. Navy used to support its true interest, the port in Pago Pago. The fixed setting of the play in a private merchant’s garden draws attention to conflicts between a Western market economy and the traditional Oceanic economy based on exchange of commodities to strengthen social relations. The littoral area of port moves to the ‘garden’ of a merchant’s residence, creating an ecotone that blurs his son’s cultural and economic identity.

Claire Gallien, IRCL, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier, France
‘From Colonial Condominium and Post-Colonial Nation-States to Literary Ecotone: The Reconfiguration of Space in Leila Aboulela's Lyrics Alley’
Lyrics Alley, a novel published in 2011 by the Sudanese born writer Leila Aboulela, offers a poignant insight into the history of Sudan at the time of independence through the destiny of the Abuzeid family. The reader follows the itineraries of the main characters as they walk the lyrics alleys of Umdurman, the cosmopolitan streets of Cairo, Alexandria, and of postcolonial London, and as they experience mounting ethnic, religious, and nationalist tensions and violence. These arise locally, at points where tradition and modernity meet and clash, and repeat at the level of the family unit, causing frictions and divisions between its members. The sea at Alexandria and the boundary between Sudan and Egypt are also re-semantized as transitional spaces shaped by the crisscrossing of past and present. Lyrics Alley is an exploration of the political and cultural legacies of colonialism and nationalism as reactivated in postcolonial spaces. Rather than using the concept of the ‘contact zone’ as place of encounter, I argue that in Lyric Alleys Aboulela reconfigures Sudan, Egypt, and Britain into an ‘ecotone’. The oppositional construction of colonial territories and the adversarial formations of nation-states built on the remains of empire are replaced by a transnational and transitional space. She thus challenges the tectonics of power, sutures territories which the British colonial state divided and ruled, and reveal the mutually formative nature of space construction.

Wendy Harding, CAS, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, France
‘Ecotones or Fields of Force?: Mutations in the Tule Lake Region (U.S.A.)’
Emphasizing the transformational nature of the contact zone where distinctive entities meet is a way of valorizing interaction and exchange over separation or confrontation. Yet imagining two homogenous territories interacting in a border zone prevents us from perceiving the tectonic activity that diffuses throughout communities in contact. To test the ecotones concept, we look at a region of the western United States that have undergone extensive uniformizing schemes designed to impose a European agricultural model on the land. What becomes of the ecotones under these drastic circumstances and how is the territory affected by this remodeling? The Tule Lake region could be seen as a site of ‘natural’ecotones where indigenous Indian tribes interacted with the early settlers and miners and the resident or migrant fauna contributed to defining various ecological zones. The land was restructured in two distinct waves. First, it was reapportioned into grid-like patterns, as Tule Lake was drained and the water rechanneled for irrigation. Next, central government imposed new institutional structures. Rather than a harmoniously remodeled region, this has resulted in a chaotic, sometimes illegible landscape. To conceptualize both the disappearance of contact zones and their reappearance as fault lines affecting the whole of the territory we turn to Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophy. Instead of the ecotones we prefer to see territories as mutant fields of force. Territories are in a state of flux that not only modifies their definition as independent entities but also affects their interactions with near or distant zones, co-determining their mutations.
John Hawley, Santa Clara University, USA
‘Why Can’t We All Just Get Along: Politics and the Tangibility of Place’
The existence of a literary journal named Ecotones, which celebrated its first decade of publication this year with a collection of some of its best short stories (Astoria to Zion) suggests the currency of this conference’s agenda. It is a magazine ‘for reimagining place (…) in an age where place has never seemed more tenuous and abstract’. In this paper I would like to dispute this contention. While admitting the distractions of the internet that make it ‘easier than ever (…) to be anywhere but here only’, this is far from our contemporary ‘default human condition’.
In seminal works like Edward W. Soja’s Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory (2011), and more accessible works like Tim Cresswell’s Place: A Short Introduction (2004) and William McClay and Ted V. McAllister’s Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America (2014), it is the interstices, the ecotones, that underscore at once the most pressing political crises of our day, as well as the places of greatest hope and creativity. I will argue this point with examples drawn from David Elmer’s The Emperor Far Away: Travels at the Edge of China (2014) and Alistair Bonnett’s Unruly Places: Lost Spaces, Secret Cities, and Other Inscrutable Geographies (2014), where literal borders remain permeable, and contact zones open the prospect for something hybridized and vital. What do these multiple contestations against totalization and ‘unity’ preserve and create?

Charles Joseph, Université d’Angers, France
‘Rereading the Origins of Postmodern Urbanity: Los Angeles Coming of Age or the Result of Mediatized Colonization’
This paper goes back to the very origins of Los Angeles to understand how the annexation of California and other territories set the premises for a new ecotone that would shape the very ideology on which Los Angeles thrived to become the megalopolis it is today. From the very start, the terminology was quite unclear to determine how the Mexican-American war resolution fit into the overall American movement towards the West, the Frontier ideal and the federal history of the country. Because of this somewhat blur, a new kind of colonialism emerged in order to build upon this new addition and capitalize on its intrinsic value with the help of the ever-growing media. With the exponential development of the press which became a mass-media at the same time, Los Angeles shaped its very urban forms according to ideals that were forged by its principal buyers and investors, and whom did not hesitate to rewrite the territory’s history in order to create one of its own, one that would sell better. This dynamic is one of contact between immigrants and place, but mostly between two conceptions of space and history. There is an existing place and culture with a linear and classic conception of history, and capitalists investors who rely heavily on marketing strategies to shape a city according to the people’s desires. Could we we try to identify an ecotone that solely rests upon the idea of supply and demand?

Marie Kruger, University of Iowa, Iowa City, USA
‘Memorial Spaces: Encounters between Witnesses, Curators & Visitors in a former Apartheid Prison’
Located in central Johannesburg, Constitution Hill is a vast memorial site devoted to the commemoration of apartheid atrocities in the former prison complex. Of significance are the multi-media exhibitions in the Women’s Jail since they provide a rare opportunity for women to publicly share their experiences and recount how apartheid infiltrated the daily routines and intimate details of work and family life. My presentation intends to offer a series of reflections on what shapes the encounters between different constituencies (witnesses; curators; visitors) and what this case study implies for our understanding of memorial sites as specific ‘ecotones’:
To what extent did the former prisoners actively participate in the design of the installations and thus transform the role of witnessing to include curatorial responsibilities and other forms of ownership of the site? Equally important than the testimonies of political and common law prisoners is the role of the visitor as a secondary witness to traumatic experiences. What types of engagement are encouraged by the multi-media installations, given their emphasis on the deeply personal, embodied and gendered dimension of political violence and resistance? How does the physical place of the prison mediate the experience of the visitors as they move from the confined space of the former isolation cells, which feature individual testimonials, to the general exhibition space on the first floor of the Atrium, the beguiling architecture of which hides the punishing function of the Panopticon?
Megan MacDonald, Koç University Istanbul, Turkey
‘When Water becomes Wall: A Critical Re-thinking of Liquidity in the Mediterranean’
At what point does water become a wall? Claudio Fougó (2010) argues that the Mediterranean Sea has ‘clearly marked geographical boundaries’, while ‘the flow of metaphors around the theme of Mediterranean-ness is virtually infinite.’ If this space is in some way overdetermined, I will argue that, contrary to Fougó’s claims, the boundaries of the Mediterranean only appear ‘clearly marked’ on static two-dimensional maps. Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau in When the Walls Fall: ‘The temptation of the wall is not new. Each time that a culture, or a civilization did not succeed in thinking the other, in thinking itself with the other, in thinking the other within itself, these stiff protections made of stones, iron, barbed wire, or enclosed ideologies, were raised, collapsed, and come back to us again through new stridencies.’ In this paper I will explore limits and borders in reference to current migration patterns and States of Emergency in the Mediterranean. I will argue, following Glissant and Chamoiseau, evoking Fougó at an angle, that Mediterranean borders are no longer clearly marked. The liquid Mediterranean has become a wall, albeit a mobile wall, one that consists of floating nodes in the form of boats: smugglers, border controls, national Navy boats, and European Union controls. What kind of tensions and horrors arise when the hitherto imaginable wall becomes another creature entirely—a wall that is liquid until it becomes solid? Finally, I will connect books (francophone literatures from the Maghreb and France) and bodies (migrants attempting to cross from one side of the Mediterranean to the other), asking, can literatures in transit work against shifting borders? They bring together mobility, urban migration, capital flight, and spatio-temporal Mediterranean configurations at the intersection of current debates about transnational and francophone literatures, as well as histories of migration and aesthetic renderings of precarious bodies.

Bénédicte Meillon, Université de Perpignan Via Domitia, France
‘Postcolonial and Ecocritical Readings of Liminality in Linda Hogan's Solar Storms and People of the Whale’
Delving into Linda Hogan’s Solar Storms (1995) and People of the Whale (2008), this paper aims to cast light on liminality—as defined by Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner—as a ruling concept at the heart of Linda Hogan’s writing. Both novels take place in actual ecotones, one in James Bay, on borderland Cree territory located in between Quebec and Minnesota, and one in a coastal region inspired by the State of Washington. In both cases, the landscape acquires a symbolical dimension calling for postcolonial and ecocritical readings. Caught in transitional periods between ancestral and modern ways of living, the Native American communities Hogan presents engage with non-human nature—whether animals, plants, or even water—in a way that draws on the totemism and myths of their elders. Reterritorializing American cartographies, Hogan’s writing often resorts to magical or spiritual realism when telling the stories of her characters and their relationship to their land, the coast, forests, and water they inhabit, as well as to the co-creatures sharing their natural environments. Focusing on liminal states, threshold phases, and in-between spaces and moments in time, this paper seeks to establish Hogan’s contribution to contemporary American Literature, specifically in the light of post-colonial studies and ecological responsibility. My claim is that Hogan’s work helps raise awareness of man’s participation in nature in a way that can move Natives and non-Natives alike to take part in a biocentric communitas. Consequently, this article contends that by challenging pre-conceived boundaries between Self and Other, Hogan’s writing seeks to reenchant our relationship with nature and provide deeper insight into the world as a fragile, yet precious web of interconnected beings.

Simanique Moody, Leiden University, The Netherlands
‘Contact Zones in Contact: Language and Liminal Spaces in Southeast Georgia ’
Southeast Georgia is home to at least two distinct groups of African Americans whose respective languages and cultures have been shaped by interrelated linguistic, social, and historical forces. In this region, a meeting point between the barrier islands, the coastal plains, and the wetlands of the Okefenokee Swamp, contact among diverse groups has persisted for over two centuries, with language playing a defining role in the way speakers construct, perform, and negotiate their individual and group identities, including their ethnicity (Fishman 1999; Fought 2006). An examination of the language and language-centered cultural practices of
African Americans in southeast Georgia reveals the presence of linguistic features from African American English, a linguistic term used to describe a range of English varieties spoken by many (but not all) African Americans, and the English-based creole known as Geechee, as well as features that have not been described for either variety (Moody 2011). Such research highlights the importance of investigating the linguistic and sociocultural outcomes of contact in communities that appear to be homogeneous on the basis of ethnicity and/or social class, and shows how language and language-centered cultural practices are transformed and subsequently used to define and shape the multiple identities of its inhabitants. This research uses language, history, and memory to recover dehistoricized identities, locating individual African American communities within larger linguistic and cultural contact zones (cf. Pratt 1992) similar to those found in other parts of the African diaspora, particularly the Caribbean.

Aparajita Nanda, UC Berkeley, California, USA
‘Destruction to Regeneration: Octavia Butler’s Oankali and the Hindu Trinity’
Noted ecocritic Lawrence Buell points out that environmental criticism goes back to ancient creation myths that raise ethical issues about the transformation of the earth. According to Paul Virilio, the only way to deal with imminent environmental crises is to combine eschatological concepts with ecological ones when pondering over the consequences of environmental accidents. Octavia Butler’s science fiction trilogy Lilith’s Brood brings together the philosophy of end times and ecology by postulating a nuclear war-torn Earth from which a handful of humans are saved by gene-trading aliens. The Oankali aliens are defined by continual transformation and connectivity to other species and environments while humans are impaired by violent traits emanating from competition and disconnection. Butler creates an ecotone, a ‘contact zone’ wherein the Oankali convince the humans to procreate with them to birth a hybrid human-alien construct, a third identity for a sustainable future. This paper reads ‘Oankali’ as a Sanskrit word, a combination of ‘Aum’ (pronounced ‘Oan[g]) and the Hindu Goddess Kali. ‘Aum’ is a symbol of the Hindu Holy Trinity — Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (Preserver) and Maheswar (Destroyer) — which professes the sustainability of the universe through catastrophe and change. In naming the aliens Oankali, Butler signals an allegorical rendering of Hinduisim that suggests a regenerative process that promises productive creolization of cultures through apocalyptic destruction.

Eunice Ngongkum, University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon
‘Educational Spaces as Contact Zones in John Nkemngong Nkengasong’s Across the Mongolo’
In the contemporary context of multilingual and multicultural Cameroon, formal and informal educational spaces function as important contact zones between people, ideas and cultures. This paper draws from Mary L. Pratt’s and Gloria Anzalda’s ideas on contact/border zones to argue that the family home, the primary/secondary school setting and the university lecture hall can be viewed as contact zones integral to the coming of age experience of Ngwe Nkemasaah, the protagonist of John Nkemngong Nkengasong’s novel, Across the Mongolo. The essay foregrounds this novel as a contact zone narrative in which the hero’s (a prototype of the Anglophone Cameroonian) navigation of these different spaces significantly located in the Anglophone and Francophone parts of fictional Kamangola transforms him for better or for worse. The paper contends that Nkemasaah’s trajectory in this novel point up these physical zones as immanent to the formation of Anglophone subjectivities in contemporary Cameroon; a formation grounded in tensions, divergence, resistance and self-affirmation. Ngwe Nkemasaah’s experiences in these spaces, it would be shown, do not only underscore such complex realities of identity construction for the Anglophone, but also highlight the relationship between the individual and the state in the postcolony; a relationship informed by a logic of violence and domination.

Michael Paye, University College Dublin, Ireland
‘Living on the Ecotone: The Changing Face of Fishing Communities in the Capitalist World-Ecology’
Following Michael Niblett’s call to study ‘the unique political-ecological complexes surrounding the production or extraction of different resources’ (16), my research project traces literary depictions of the socioecological relations in sea-board communities of the circum-Atlantic over the longue-durée. This presentation looks at the capitalist ‘ecological regime’
(Moore) through the herring-frontier on the Scottish east coast and the cod-frontier of Newfoundland, with specific reference to the novels of Neil Gunn and Donna Morrissey. These novels chart the local manifestations of entering a new ‘ecological regime’ in the capitalist world-system. In responding to this CFP, the ‘factor of change’ which runs through these authors’ respective works include particularly violent manifestations of ecological degradation and bodily violence due to technologisation, market-driven liberalism, and core-heapemon control, as the peripheral nature of the peoples’ work (low-value, low-technology, low remuneration) is mirrored by their own peripheral positions on the ecotones of the North Atlantic. Moments which specifically plot the world-system will be shown to have a wider manifestation in the novels in terms of formal and aesthetic discrepancies while diverting plot towards wider issues of the boom-bust nature of the capitalist world-system.

Anna Pehkoranta, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
‘Literary Ecotones: Transgressive Asian American Fiction by Chang-rae Lee, James Janko, and Jessica Hagedorn’
This paper investigates a selection of contemporary transgressive Asian American fiction by Chang-rae Lee, James Janko, and Jessica Hagedorn through the notion of a literary ecotone. With specific reference to narratives centered around characters representing different race or ethnicity than that of the author, Shelley Fisher Fishkin (2002) has defined transgressive texts as narratives that challenge conventional or paradigmatic notions of what writers of different ethnic and racial backgrounds should write. Transgressive literature is thus characterized by what Stephen Hong Sohn (2014) has termed ‘racial asymmetry’ between the narrative perspective and the author’s ethnorracial status. This paper examines three recent transgressive Asian American prose narratives, Chang-rae Lee’s Aloft (2004), James Janko’s Buffalo Boy and Geronimo (2006), and Jessica Hagedorn’s Toxicology (2011), as instances of literary ecotones that function as sites of unexpected encounters and as ‘domains of turmoil and trouble’, to borrow Avery Gordon’s (2008) words, in an aesthetic, cultural, political, ethnorracial, as well as ecological sense. Considering the different geographical locations (suburban Long Island, Vietnamese countryside, metropolitan New York), numerous intercultural and interracial encounters, and ecological and communal contact zones (for instance between ocean and land, air and earth, field and jungle, suburb and metropolis) present in the novels under examination, this paper adopts a theoretical approach that combines Asian Americanist, transnational, ecocritical, and posthumanist perspectives to the discussion of literary ecotones.

Luca Raimondi, Alma Mater Studiorum, Universita' di Bologna, Italy
‘Land, River, Sea: The Articulated Space of the Indian Ocean in Amitav Ghosh's Ibis Trilogy’
Imperial encounters have often been portrayed as asymmetrical relations between colonizers and colonized—or, in spatial terms, as the unequal interaction between a European center and a colonial periphery occurring in the frontier spaces of the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt 1992). Rather than considering these relational spaces along the borders of North-South binary oppositions and within the narrow ideological confines of postcolonial nation-states, this paper addresses them as nodal points of intercolonial networks, operating underneath the surface of empire and facilitating the circulation of non-European ideas and the emergence of a transnational public sphere, rooted in the port cities of the Indian Ocean but growing out of ‘amphibious’ imaginings. Taking up Isabel Hofmeyr’s suggestion of the ‘Indian Ocean as Method’ (2012) for literary studies, this paper provides a geo-centered reading of Amitav Ghosh’s yet-unfinished Ibis trilogy in order to examine the spatial articulation of the lateral relations cutting across the region. As the tripartite structure of the novels provides a sequence of narrative locations (land, river, sea, islands, port cities) that are also pivotal in the horizontal networks of the Indian Ocean, this paper will question the layered forms of identification that connect each of these places inwards (to the native motherland), upwards (to the imperial center) and, above all, outwards (across colonies). In so doing, it will discuss how the ‘inland’ and ‘littoral’ dynamics as represented in the two novels initiate, shape and eventually merge into the transnational and porous world of the Indian Ocean.

Srilata Ravi, University of Alberta, Canada
‘Liminality and Resilience: Tropical Cyclones in Mauritian literature’
Tropical storms also known as cyclones are low-pressure weather systems that develop over the warm waters of the oceans, typically between the latitudes of 10 and 30 degrees away from the
equator. In addition to strong winds and rain, tropical cyclones can generate high waves and damaging storm surge. Generally, they weaken rapidly over land where they are cut off from their primary energy source. For this reason, islands and coastal regions are particularly at risk from cyclones. These hazardous weather systems can cause a range of public health concerns and can result in colossal property destruction, massive population displacement, and significant economic hardship. The island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean is constantly threatened by such tropical weather systems. It is hardly surprising therefore, that in Mauritian literature in French, the storm has served as an essential poetic and narrative element. The ‘literary storm’ is present right through from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Ouragan* that caused the tragic shipwreck in *Paul et Virginie* (1788), and Marcel Cabon’s *Orage* in *Namasté* (1965) to Ananda Devi’s *Cyclone in Pagli* (2001). Through a close examination of how Mauritian novels treat ‘storm vulnerabilities’- loss of life, destruction of housing, devastation of agriculture, and damage to infrastructure, I will show how literary ecologies of tropical storms and cyclones have the potential to constitute an important cultural archive for the exploration of strategies of survival. I will argue that these ‘literary storms’ construct liminal zones where existing social orders are questioned and the possibilities of collective resilience are reaffirmed.

**Yvonne Reddick, University of Central Lancashire Preston, UK**

**‘Delta Blues: Conflict, Pollution and Literature in the Niger Delta’**

The Niger Delta is an ‘ecotone’ where the River Niger meets the Atlantic Ocean. This contested environment is the site of one of Africa’s severest international environmental conflicts. I show how Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Genocide in Nigeria* reclaims the Delta for the Ogoni people as a ‘sacred’ site (1998). Saro-Wiwa’s work is well known to postcolonial ecocritics such as Rob Nixon (2013) and Byron Caminero-Santangelo (2014). However, I also demonstrate how Saro-Wiwa’s legacy has inspired the work of later Nigerian writers, especially the poets Tanure Ojaide’s *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998), Onookome Okome’s *The Mammiwata Poems* (1999) and Ogaga Ifowodo’s *The Oil Lamp and Homeland and Other Poems* (2005). These poems will be compared with George Osodi’s harrowing photographs of the Delta, which chart the history of environmental degradation and show how ordinary people attempt to live their lives next to one of the world’s most polluted watercourses.

Postcolonial ecocriticism about Africa is developing apace, although past publications have displayed a slight bias towards South Africa (see for example DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, Huggan and Tiffin 2009). I intend to redress this imbalance. My research unites recent work by American ecocritic Caminero-Santangelo, with theory by African thinkers such as Nigerian critic Ogaga Okuyade (2013), to create a richer diversity of critical opinions.

**Sabine Sielke, University of Bonn, Germany**

**‘Ecotoning Inter-and Transdisciplinarity’**

Inter- and transdisciplinary work is a collaborative effort to solve research problems that cannot be elucidated within narrowly demarkated fields of expertise. Since most research questions require multiple perspectives, inter- and transdisciplinary communication has become indispensable to knowledge production. Yet such inter- and transdisciplinary conversations remain a challenge, due to established disciplinary divides and fundamental methodological differences between the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. My talk evolves from a larger collaborative project on North American knowledge ecologies (http://www.knowledge-ecologies.de/) and reconceptualizes inter- and transdisciplinarity through the perspectives opened up by the biological term ecotone. Defined as transitional habitats where two or more distinct ecosystems meet and overlap, ecotones are characterized by disturbance, tension, and conflict, which create so-called edge-effects. As a consequence, they are areas of accelerated evolution whose interactants evolve distinct characteristics. Involving non-human agents, ecotones clearly differ from cultural contact zones. My talk shows how such ecological framework offers a particularly suitable approach to effectively examine under what conditions and with what effects inter- and transdisciplinary work thrives. My aim is to critically investigate the assumption that North American settings are particularly conducive to inter- and transdisciplinary work. Reentering the debates and dynamics of inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration with a focus on processes of adaptation and transformation, I reassess both the status of inter- and transdisciplinarity within and beyond North American knowledge ecologies and the repercussions of inter- and transdisciplinary conversations on the habitats of individual disciplines.
Frederick Staidum Jr, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA, USA
‘An American Ecotone: Post/Colonial Pastiche and Early Cartographies of the Louisiana Purchase’
Before the annexation of Texas and the Spanish-American War, the purchase of Louisiana from France exhibits the US’s earliest imperialist desires. An evolving US coloniality trapped the Louisiana Purchase and its most evocative locale, New Orleans, within an imaginative ecotone between established French and Spanish city and savage frontier. In this way, early American New Orleans is an ecotone itself, where discourses of primitive and modern, wilderness and civilization, colony and metropole, and European and American collide. The proposed paper re-interrogates the first American map of the city or better the first map epicting the city as American. The meaning of A Plan of New Orleans & Its Environs (1804) and its companion, A View of New Orleans (1803), by John L. Boqueta de Woiseri turns upon the ordering of space, the enlightenment of the native, and the exploitation of black labor. Through its illustration of marginalized bodies, domination, and biased shading, the map symbolizes an enactment of power over space, resources, and inhabitants. A Plan of New Orleans, more importantly, is a simulacrum of maps by Spanish and French colonial administrators, and its bricolage of early modern mapmaking and post-independence US symbolism registers discursive continuities between imperialism and republicanism. Evoking both, cartographic New Orleans encapsulates the inventive cultural revisionism of American nationalism, where US representational practices make multivalent claims upon the temporalities and spatialities of older empires. The result is an artistic assemblage of past technologies and new contexts, which I describe as the post/colonial pastiche.

Christos Theofiliogianiakkos, UC San Diego, California, USA
‘Islands Ecotones: Mediating the Tide of Change in the Mediterranean during the Long 19th century’
My paper explores the social and political ramifications of boundary changes on people living in a border region by incorporating a new analytical model, which I refer to as, ‘islands borderlands’. This model examines islands and the sea as zones of transnational analysis. It argues that islands demonstrate various nodes of interaction across the Mediterranean Sea and can provide insight into the historical incentives that fostered relationships between, liminal communities with their imperial rulers and nation states. My paper focuses on the Ionian Islands and their eventual incorporation into the Kingdom of Greece in 1864. The Ionian Islands are important as a focal point of analysis as they exhibited some of the key characteristics of a borderland society, especially cosmopolitanism and cultural hybridity. An ecotone perspective, therefore, helps to break away from the ethnocentric and teleological view of Ionian history that dominates Greek historiography today. My paper traces the transmission, circulation and transformation of ideas, politics and economic systems in the 19th century Mediterranean world. It argues that the Ionian Islands were not passive participants during the onset of modernity but played a crucial role in the transmission and modulation of western ideas into Greek society during the long 19th century. As part of a larger trans-regional network of exchange, the Ionian Islands represent a contact zone between East and West and demonstrate that ideas in liminal spaces were not simply imitated from imperial and national centres, but modulated and relevant to local beliefs and politics.