

# **Spectres of Ruptured Time: Distemporalities and Their Afterlives**

## **Symposium & Evening Book Launch**

This event features a symposium on how experiences of violence, colonialism, displacement and environmental destruction disrupt and reshape temporal lifeworlds, alongside a book launch on the politics of statues and the contested legacies of empire.

**24 April 2026**

**Pathfoot Lecture Theatre, Pathfoot Building, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA**

## **Symposium description**

This symposium examines the complex relationship between time and its ruination, focusing on how communities navigate temporal disruptions resulting from mass violence, genocide, colonialism, enslavement and racial capitalism, forced displacement, and environmental destruction. The symposium considers how habitual modes of communal time-reckoning – both evental and everyday social rhythms – fare against such contexts of forced disorientation. It asks how these temporalities might manifest within spaces of exile and return, the economies of enslavement and dispossession, as well as in rituals, dreams, storytelling, and artistic practices. We are concerned with more-than-human temporal relations and their systemic unravellings. Our discussion seeks to critically interrogate the role of imperialism and the state in the processes of distemporalisation-understood as a variety of projects that deny, restructure, or obliterate temporalities deemed nonconforming.

In thinking distemporalisations, we take time both as a structuring force and a matter of unfolding encounters, feelings, and exchanges, entwined with space, ideologies, infrastructures, and bodies. The symposium thus asks what occurs when temporal lifeworlds are ruptured. Do temporal structures disappear, merge with, or resist new orders? Do they haunt? How are disrupted temporalities commemorated? Contributors address nationalism, colonialism, systemic enslavement, archival violence, gendered, and racialised time-making, as well as the affects and economies of time, offering insights into the lives and afterlives of distemporalities.

## **Book Launch of Rahul Rao's *The Psychic Lives of Statues***

Statues around the world have become lightning rods for public debates over the meaning of our imperial past and postcolonial present. Rahul Rao's latest book, *The Psychic Lives of Statues: Reckoning with the Rubble of Empire* (Pluto, 2025), is an

insightful exploration of these global controversies, demonstrating that beneath their surface lie deeper struggles over race, caste and the politics of decolonisation.

The book has already received significant critical acclaim. It has been described as ‘an unimpeachable, erudite jewel of a book’ and ‘a necessary and vital piece of work’ (Neel Mukherjee), ‘compulsively readable’ (Laleh Khalili), and ‘powerfully grounded and eminently thoughtful’ (Priyamvada Gopal). As Gargi Bhattacharyya writes, ‘there is no better book on what statues are to public space and why it matters’.

Rahul Rao explores both the toppling of colonial statues and the erection of postcolonial ones, illuminating how statues remain powerful and compelling forms of memorialisation. Engaging with artists, scholars and activists, Rao offers a fresh and exciting perspective on how we understand our past and present through iconography.

Rahul joins us at the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory, University of Stirling, for a celebration of the book, notes on its Isle of Mull connections, and a discussion featuring reflections from John Sutton and Paul Max Morin.

## **Programme**

### **24 April 2026, Pathfoot Lecture Theatre**

09:30 – 10:00 **Coffee & Welcome**

10:00 – 10:15 **Introduction**

### **Session 1: Colonial Archives & Historical Legalities**

10:15 – 10:40 **Vanja Hamzić** – “*Bonsoir, Seigneur Négritte*”: Interruptive Truth-Claims in the Colonial-Legal Ordinary

10:40 – 11:05 **Alice Finden** – Unsettling Feelings: Colonial Archives, Decolonial Possibilities

11:05 – 11:35 **Conversation**

### **Session 2: Disaster, Memory & Heritage**

11:35 – 12:00 **Vanicka Arora** – Earthquake Afterlives: (Re)Constructing Heritage, (Re)Claiming the Past in Bhaktapur, Nepal

12:00 – 12:25 **Safet HadžiMuhamedović** – Surviving Chronocide in the Bosnian Highlands

12:25 – 12:55 **Conversation**

**12:55 – 14:50 Lunch Break & Visit to the Pathfoot Stone**

### **Session 3: Law, Hauntology & Temporalities**

14:55 – 15:20 **Gina Heathcote** – Arboreal Jurisdiction

15:20 – 15:45 **Emily Jones** – The Hauntology of International Environmental Law and The Slow Cancellation of the Future

15:45 – 16:15 **Conversation**

### **Session 4: Sensings & Worldings**

16:15 – 16:40 **Mark Rego** – Cave Paintings, Death Masks, X-Rays, Cinema, and Flesh: The Unravelling and Entanglement of Time in Places of Erasure

16:40 – 17:05 **Mijke van der Drift**: *Trans Aesthetics: Senses Against Empire*

17:05 – 17:35 **Conversation**

**17:35 – 18:00 Break**

**Book Launch – 18:00 – 19:30 – Rahul Rao's *The Psychic Lives of Statues***

with **Rahul Rao, John Sutton and Paul Max Morin**

### **Speakers**

**Vanicka Arora** is Lecturer in Heritage at the University of Stirling and an Associate Member of the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory. Trained as an architect, their interdisciplinary research centres on built heritage, with particular expertise in heritage under conditions of crisis, including disaster and climate change. Drawing on over a decade of professional experience in India in planning, conservation and urban regeneration, they examine disaster risk reduction, adaptive reuse and the longer temporalities of reconstruction and recovery. Vanicka's current work explores the temporalities of disaster, climate-driven transformations of heritage and memory, and innovative methodologies at the intersection of psychoanalysis and generative AI.

**Mijke van der Drift** works on transfeminist and anti-imperial ethics through philosophies of movement, collective action, and counter-cultural production. This work takes the form of writings, performances, and sound pieces, often by way of inter-disciplinary collaborations. Mijke co-authored with Nat Raha *Trans Femme Futures* (Pluto 2024). Mijke published in *Alternatives*, *Social Text*, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, with Cambridge University Press, and many other outlets. Mijke is Tutor (Research) at the Royal College of Art, London and is co-chair of its Union branch. Mijke is founding member of the arts collective *Red Forest*.

**Alice Finden** is an Assistant Professor of International Politics at Durham University. Their research explores the normalisation of colonial violence through counterterrorism law and policy, drawing on feminist and postcolonial perspectives to interrogate how 'extremist' communities are produced through racialised, gendered and classed logics. Engaging decolonial feminist methodologies — including counter-mapping and archival work — they examine the colonial histories and presents of counterterrorism in Britain and Egypt. Their monograph, *Counterterrorism and Colonialism: Everyday Violence in Britain and Egypt* was published with Routledge in 2025.

**Vanja Hamzić** is Professor of Law, History and Anthropology at SOAS University of London. Their research examines the formation of human selfhood at the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, language and religion. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Pakistan, Indonesia, Senegal and Louisiana, Vanja explores Islamic legal traditions, racial capitalism and colonial archives, with particular attention to gender-nonconforming communities and their insurgent vernacular knowledges. Vanja is the author of *Sexual and Gender Diversity in the Muslim World: History, Law and Vernacular Knowledge* (2016/2019) and is currently completing a major book on gender variance, cosmological pluralism and legal worldmaking in eighteenth-century Senegambia and colonial Louisiana.

**Safet HadžiMuhamedović** is a Research Fellow at the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory at the University of Stirling and an anthropologist of politics and religion whose work explores the entanglements of memory, place and belonging in landscapes marked by nationalist violence, displacement and environmental change. They have previously lectured at the universities of Cambridge, SOAS and Goldsmiths (University of London), Bristol and Goethe Frankfurt. Their ethnographic research in the Bosnian Dinaric highlands examines sacred geographies, disrupted temporalities and more-than-human ecologies in the aftermath of genocide. Safet is the author of *Waiting for Elijah: Time and Encounter in a Bosnian Landscape* (Berghahn, 2018/2021) and is currently completing a major study of Bosnia's sacred sinking rivers, extending their work on ritual, restoration and the fractured times of post-conflict return.

**Gina Heathcote** is Professor of International Law at Newcastle Law School and a leading scholar of public international law, feminist legal methodologies, collective security, and the international law of the sea. Gina's work develops feminist, queer and posthuman approaches to ocean governance, maritime security, and the law on the use of force, with particular attention to decolonial encounters, non-Western custodianship and more-than-human relations. Gina is currently a Leverhulme International Fellow (2025–2027) for their project *Saltwater Law*, which examines decolonial legal methodologies and two-way research methods in shaping international law and ocean governance. Previously Professor of Gender Studies and International Law at SOAS University of London, they held senior research leadership roles and is Series Editor (with Tamsin Phillipa Paige) of the Routledge Feminist and Queer International Law series. Their publications include *Feminist Dialogues on International Law* (OUP, 2019) and *The Law on the Use of Force: A Feminist Analysis* (Routledge, 2012), alongside extensive work on gender, conflict, security and oceanic legal thought.

**Emily Jones** is a Senior Research Fellow in the Newcastle University Academic Track (NUAcT) programme based in Newcastle Law School. Emily's interdisciplinary research applies critical theory including feminist, queer, posthuman, postcolonial and critical

disability studies, to analyse and re-imagine international law. Their work spans several fields of international law, such as international environmental law, international human rights law, science, technology and international law and gender and conflict, among others. They are currently working on projects focusing on intergenerational equity and the rights of future generations, the nonhuman in international law, the right to a healthy environment and reparations in international law. Jones has also published in the humanities, primarily within the fields of gender, posthuman and interdisciplinary studies. Jones' monograph, *Feminist Theory and International Law: Posthuman Perspectives*, was published with Routledge's GlassHouse series in 2023. Jones is the co-author of *The Law of War and Peace: A Gender Analysis, Volume One* (Bloomsbury 2021) and has co-edited three volumes: the *More Posthuman Glossary* (Bloomsbury 2022), *International Law and Posthuman Theory* (Routledge 2024) and *Posthuman Convergences: Transdisciplinary Methods and Practices* (Edinburgh University Press 2025).

**Paul Max Morin** is a Research Fellow at the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory, University of Stirling, and an associate researcher at Sciences Po (Cevipof). Paul specializes in Memory studies, the sociology of youth and comparative politics. Paul's research interests surround the study of postcolonialism, meaning the social and political legacies of colonialism. Paul explores how colonial history, memories and contemporary politics are articulated to impact on issues such as political socialisation, identity building, cultures, race and racism, immigration, nationalism and national identity. Paul is involved in a number of scientific, educational and cultural projects on the matter.

**Mark Rego** is an architect and philosopher whose work examines the dynamic relationship between design practice and theory. They have earned their professional architecture degree from the Boston Architectural College, completed a master's degree in philosophy at the University of Glasgow, and received their doctorate through the Glasgow School of Art and the University of Glasgow.

They have served as supporting faculty for the Moving Boundaries initiative, a transdisciplinary forum that brings together scholars and practitioners from neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and design to explore and debate shared conceptual and methodological questions. They currently lecture and supervise graduate theses in architecture and historic preservation at the Boston Architectural College. They are also the guest editor of ArchiDOCT, overseeing a special issue dedicated to framing memory within the built environment.

Specialising in the philosophy of Henri Bergson, their research focuses on the intersection of philosophy and architecture. Their work investigates how philosophical inquiry can deepen our understanding of architectural experience, drawing particularly on Bergsonian concepts of duration, memory, perception, and creativity.

**Rahul Rao** is Reader in International Political Thought in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. Prior to this Rahul taught at SOAS University of London and University College, University of Oxford. Rahul has a law degree from the National Law School of India University and read for a DPhil in International Relations at Balliol College, University of Oxford, where Rahul was a Rhodes Scholar. Rahul is the author of three books: *The Psychic Lives of Statues: Reckoning with the Rubble of*

*Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 2025), *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), and *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Rahul's work has been supported by fellowships awarded by the Leverhulme Trust and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences. They are a member of the *Radical Philosophy* editorial collective and used to blog at *The Disorder of Things*. In addition to writing regularly for academic journals and collections, their work has appeared in Southasian literary magazines such as *The Caravan* and *Himal Southasian*.

**John Sutton** Director of the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory, University of Stirling. John is a cognitive philosopher whose work addresses memory, skill, cognitive humanities, place, and distributed cognition. John is author of *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to connectionism* (Cambridge UP), and coeditor of four volumes, most recently *Collaborative Embodied Performance: ecologies of skill* (with Kath Bicknell, Bloomsbury). John's long-standing research projects have addressed collaborative recall, intelligent action, perspective in memory, and cognitive history. Recent papers cover context in memory, film editing, place memory, joint expertise, and Maurice Halbwachs on dreams. John is a fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities

## **Abstracts**

**Vanja Hamzić, SOAS University of London**

### **“Bonsoir, Seigneur Négritte”: Interruptive Truth-Claims in the Colonial-Legal Ordinary**

This paper examines the 1747 trial of Etienne La Rue, a twenty-two-year-old free person of colour from Senegambia, before the Superior Council of Louisiana in New Orleans. The trial record laconically fixes La Rue's gender, age, occupation and ethno-racial belonging in a manner consistent with the expanding French colonial legal-administrative order. Yet this mid-eighteenth-century 'colonial ordinary' was still in formation, and its archive preserves discordant traces that unsettle its classificatory and temporal violence.

At the centre of the case is a gendered and racialised insult hurled at La Rue by a French soldier—an insult that sparked the altercation leading to trial. Mistranslated, misspelt, and later misinterpreted in the archive's afterlife, the phrase exposes a peculiar colonial practice of evidence- and truth-making. Whilst the courtroom sought to stabilise emergent racial hierarchies and a binary gender order, the untameable reverberations of the insult suggest a residue of meaning that exceeds colonial categories and disrupts the linear temporality through which the archive secures its authority.

Reading this episode through the lens of insurrectionary trans cosmologies circulating in the Atlantic world, I attend to the distemporality that surfaces in the archival trace: the persistence of epistemologies and forms of personhood shaped by Senegambian lifeworlds that do not align neatly with colonial time or taxonomy. Although the archive cannot transparently reveal La Rue's self-understanding, its fractures expose the limits of colonial classification and its temporal disciplining of difference.

I argue that La Rue's case demonstrates how colonial legal archives may yield interruptive truth-claims—forms of historical evidence that trouble the temporal and epistemic order of the courtroom and open onto alternative cosmologies of being and belonging.

**Alice Finden, Durham University**

### **Unsettling Feelings: Colonial Archives, Decolonial Possibilities**

How does the turn to colonial archives in social research connect to decolonial politics? In this paper, we explore this relationship by attending to the affective experience of encountering archival materials. By attending to the affective atmosphere of encountering archival materials, we argue that such epistemic openings make possible novel forms of political subjectivity that can usher in decolonial political subjectivities. While there is nothing inherent about the archive in producing decolonial politics, we maintain that by interrupting the everyday modes of engaging with coloniality such affective encounters contain within them the possibility of novel appreciations for the constitutive role of colonialism in contemporary political orders as well as imaginations of decolonial solidarities and subjectivities.

**Safet HadžiMuhamedović, University of Stirling**

### **Surviving Chronocide in the Bosnian Highlands**

Three decades after the genocidal destruction of their towns, landscapes and communities, small groups of returnees to the Dinaric Bosnian highlands are the uncanny timekeepers of an erased world. Based on their stories and my long-term ethnographic research, I trace the religiously plural and more-than-human relations that their temporal structures and devices held together. Following seasonal agricultural work, neighbourly interactions, rituals, feasts and attempts at their postwar

reconstruction, the paper engages with time as, first and foremost, communal orientation. I encounter haunting spiritual matter of the deceased and mass-murdered inhabitants, as well as the exiled supernatural beings, with competing cosmological and political claims over the living and their landscapes. Then, I sketch out the main features of nationalist distemporalising violence, as it latched onto the communities, with attention to the reappropriation of the traditional cyclical calendar and the constructions of the 'wounded history-ominous future' ideological complex employed to perpetuate the genocidal regime. Chronocide, I suggest, is neither straightforward nor immediate; like nationalism more generally, it slowly and insidiously fabricates new worlds out of the rubbles of those it destroys. The fragments of usurped time thus haunt it intrinsically.

**Gina Heathcote, Newcastle University**

### **Arboreal Jurisdiction**

Inspired by Indigenous resistance to the Victorian State government's destruction of sacred Djab Wurrung trees for road construction, I examine human affective and legal relations with trees, alongside legal refusals to recognise nonhuman legal relations as

known within non-Western legal systems. The paper—and the law it examines—is haunted by the Australian genocide, including on Djab Wurrung land, and which reverberates through settler-colonial laws in Australia. I examine the legal temporalities that shape the ways of knowing permitted within Western legal traditions and draw on Indigenous legal knowledge to evidence the role of genocide in haunting contemporary legal arrangements in the region. I argue that the refusal to acknowledge the Djab Wurrung trees, and their presence in Djab Wurrung knowledge structures, repeats the settler-colonial violence that the Australian state is the product of, and denies the affective, intergenerational and cross-jurisdictional claims offered through arboreal encounters. I develop an account of arboreal jurisdiction to address the temporal residue and repetitions of law's violence, and to think beyond Western progress narratives. The building of a road becomes a more-than-metaphor for liberal legalism's obsession with progress, while Direction Trees are felled and the knowledge of intergenerational, ecology-grounded legal relations is refused.

**Emily Jones, Newcastle University**

### **The Hauntology of International Environmental Law and The Slow Cancellation of the Future**

This paper reads international environmental law (IEL) as haunted by its own structural deficiencies. Drawing on Mark Fisher's work on hauntology alongside critical, queer, decolonial and Indigenous concepts of temporality, this paper shows how IEL's attachment to developmentalist futurism produces a highly selective vision of the future. This vision of the future is not only one of no future at all, but also relies on linear forms of temporality, refusing to acknowledge the violences of the past and present and thereby the possibility of a future. The central ghostly figure we draw on in this haunting is the 1.5C temperature target of the 2015 UNFCCC Paris Agreement as an ideal that was never achievable under current material and climate conditions. In examining this target, we analyse the recent ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change from the perspective of temporality and hauntology. We argue that IEL produces a law that is haunted by futures it cannot secure, relying on a gothic impulse to create ghosts that hover over climate negotiations and environmental governance, ghosts that will haunt planetary collective futures as the target is blown past and the conditions for its realisation, and thereby the realisation of other more radical futures yet, recedes. In conclusion, we call for IEL to adopt a different vision of temporality in the aim of fostering a future that not only exists, but which also allows for the flourishing of human and nonhuman entities alike.

**Mark Rego, Boston Architectural College**

### **Cave Paintings, Death Masks, X-Rays, Cinema, and Flesh: The Unravelling and Entanglement of Time in Places of Erasure**

This paper examines places of erasure through Bergson's claim that "matter is an aggregate of images." For Bergson, matter is neither mere representation nor fully self-contained; "[it] is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing – an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation'" (Bergson, 1896, *Matter and Memory*, 9-10). Yet Bergson leaves the

concept of the image undetermined, and he does not provide a clear distinction from representation.

To clarify this distinction, the paper situates Bergson's philosophy alongside twentieth-century reflections on the intrarelations of image and matter: George Bataille's notion of transgression in his reading of the cave paintings of Lascaux; Jean-Luc Nancy's engagement with Martin Heidegger on 'image' and 'schema' through his encounter with the photographs of death masks; the cultural and epistemic impact of x-rays in the turn of the twentieth century; Gilles Deleuze's analysis of cinema; and Merleau-Ponty's ontology of 'flesh' in his 'Chiasm'. Across these readings, the image emerges not as a static representation of a thing, but as a dynamic, relational event – situated between the actual and the virtual, and charged with myriad temporalities.

Building on this philosophical framework, I argue that understanding images as operative and temporally entangled with matter enables what Bergson calls a "widened perception. Such perception is especially vital in relation to places of erasure – sites where histories, cultures, or material environments have been deliberately destroyed, altered, or strategically forgotten. Through case studies including the restoration of the Barber Schoolhouse in Kansas, the reconstruction of the S Domingos Church in Lisbon, and the postwar rebuilding of Dresden, the paper demonstrates how erasure sites persist as aggregates of images in which the past and present interpenetrate.

Understanding matter as an aggregate of images reframes erasure itself: it exposes the agencies and mechanisms through which destruction and memorialisation occur, and it reveals how forgetting is not the opposite of memory but one of its conditions. In this way, places of erasure become not voids in history, but dense temporal fields, or aggregates of images, in which matter, memory, and perception remain profoundly entangled.

**Vanicka Arora, University of Stirling**

### **Earthquake Afterlives: (Re)Constructing Heritage, (Re)Claiming the Past in Bhaktapur, Nepal**

This paper examines the overlapping temporalities of earthquakes and their aftermaths that are in operation in Nepal. A country that is perennially 'between' earthquakes, with a devastating seismic event recurring every century, previous and future disasters continue to haunt public imaginaries. In the aftermath of the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake, as the citizens and local government officials in Bhaktapur rallied to reconstruct over 124 heritage buildings across the city, an opportunity arose to 'right' the wrongs of past reconstruction efforts that followed the 1934 Nepal Bihar Earthquake. A dramatic change in aesthetics and style, returning to a pre-1934 state was chosen across multiple sites, reclaiming, through built form, the identity of Bhaktapur as a political capital and centre of power. But simultaneously, driven by national policy and community sentiment, reconstructed buildings are required to address a future inevitable earthquake and its aftermath. And so, spectres of past earthquakes and their aftermaths coincide with the disruptions sure to be brought upon by future earthquakes. Through a series of cases across the city, I draw attention to the multiple temporalities unfolding in each building, some drawn anew, some reassembled, and others left as ruins

commemorating past disasters, each shaping the current identity of Bhaktapur as a 'heritage city.'

**Mijke van der Drift, The Royal College of Art**

### **Trans Aesthetics: Senses Against Empire**

Where empire relies on *stasis* that claims a hold on the future, an ethics that emphasises social transformation, rests on sensory openness. Imperial principles and norms regularly emphasise conformation and submission, and place knowledge before practices. Instead, if ethics is infused instead with aesthetical sensibilities that are not anchored in embodied forms, shaping new lives moves beyond the need for assimilation, and allows sensing worlds to come. Trans lives are one such example, which hold the door open for practices that emerge neither from knowledge, or adherence to normative principles. Trans emergence grounds itself in legacies and histories to sense more than a single world at once.

### **Practical information**

This event is organised by Safet HadžiMuhamedović with the support of the Centre for the Sciences of Place and Memory. Academic organisation: Safet HadžiMuhamedović and Vanja Hamzić. Logistics and communication: Tania Manuel Casimiro. For questions about the programme or practicalities, please contact Safet HadžiMuhamedović via [safet.hm@stir.ac.uk](mailto:safet.hm@stir.ac.uk) (subject line: “Distemporalities”).