



Call for papers

Thanatic Ethics Conference #4

"Death and migration in times of conflict: a forensic perspective"

Sciences Po, Paris

in partnership with the Education University of Hong Kong

and EMMA (Paul Valery University Montpellier 3)

Venue: Sciences Po, Paris

Dates: October 17-19, 2024

Language: English

Deadline for submitting proposals: May 1, 2024

Notification of acceptance: May 31, 2024

"Thanatic Ethics: The Circulation of Bodies in Migratory Spaces" explores themes related to death in migration. After several series of webinars, online and on-site workshops, and three international conferences in Oxford, Kolkata and Hong Kong, between October 2020 and January 2024, this international, transdisciplinary project is now seeking proposals for Conference #4 to be held at Science Po in Paris titled "**Death and migration in times of conflict: a forensic perspective**".

Past events addressed the circulation of bodies in migratory spaces from various perspectives: the haunting liminalities of migration between life and death, the death activism meant to provide a respectful identification and burial of victims, the linkages between grievability and migration necropolitics at the border, how death imbues the social intercourse of the living, the sensory underpinnings of migrant death, or the impact of literature and the arts on care and repair.

This conference expands from these interdisciplinary exchanges to focus on the issue of death in migration in times of conflict. Research on migrant death has largely focused on borders and migration necropolitics. While scholars have investigated wars and conflicts as a cause of (forced) migration, the deaths these movements may induce have not been studied adequately. This conference stands at the intersection of both issues with the aim to explore how the relation between migrant death and conflicts has unfolded in past and present times.

We wish to investigate historical and contemporary instances of mass killings of refugees on their way to, or already in, exile, e. g. mass killings of refugees following the Punjab and Bengal Partitions, the disappearance of Jews fleeing the Nazi regime, the bombings of Palestinian camps in Lebanon, the recent massacres in refugee camps of Mozambique, and other such forced displacements that have incurred violent deaths, raising issues pertaining to identification, mourning and multi-generational repair.

The death of individuals and / or communities fleeing war-torn areas come to mind and also prompt questions about those already in exile who have to mourn the loss of relatives from a distance: how do they cope with the distance and uncertainty of their relatives' lives or deaths, with the impossible retrieval of the bodies, or the even more impossible repatriation? Going further back in historical time, how do the descendants address, in the 21st century, such complex issues as the identification or the reburial of remains, sometimes having to negotiate political and national(istic) obstacles as well as emotional and ethical ones?

We wish to address these issues with a specific attention to forensics as a pathway for researching this theme and highlighting the necessary connection between migration (forced or induced) and death in times of conflict. A "forensic turn" in social sciences has expanded from the development of new technologies allowing for the exhumation and identification of the bodies of the dead. It has provided new avenues of research on historical instances of mass violence (Tate 2007; Anstett and Dreyfus 2015; Ferrándiz and Robben, eds. 2015; Maria Teresa Ferreira 2023). Such a turn has also been observed in various artistic domains such as theatre (Frieze 2019), or photography (Lowe 2014). Whether scientific or artistic, forensics can be understood as the endeavour to find in present-day traces the cause and circumstances of past death. It is a method of investigation focusing on the context of death, on the bodies of the dead, their belongings and settings (graves) or the traces they have left before they died (public accounts, images, news coverage, etc.).

In the field of migration, forensic research has been applied to retrace the condition of drifting and capsizing of boats in the Mediterranean (Heller and Pezzani, 2012), or for the identification of bodies retrieved at sea, in desert lands and anonymous cemeteries (Latham and O'Daniel 2018; M'Charek and Casartelli 2019, Cattaneo et al. 2015). It is interdisciplinary by nature, and gathers historians, doctors, archaeologists, social scientists, as well as artists and activists. Indeed, forensics expands far beyond the realm of academic research and has become a form of civic and ethical engagement for those striving to give a decent burial to bodies that have been lost or have been submitted to 'enforced disappearance', or seeking to establish responsibilities of lethal crossings via exhumations.

However, forensics is also a gaze, a way of looking at events and things. It produces its own conceptual framing, its vocabulary, and its aesthetics. It is particularly true for artists who have used forensics in their approach; one can think of documentary choreography for instance (Zaides 2022), or community theatre (Davids 2019; Thompson 2019). Forensics always calls for a counter-forensics (Weizman 2017).

This conference explores the gaze and methods of the three categories of forensic witnesses (the researcher, the artist and the activist) on issues pertaining to conflict and death, in its inextricable links with forced and induced migration and displacement. We invite contributions from the humanities, social sciences, history and other disciplines on the use of forensic methods to decipher past and present violent events leading to death in migration. We seek papers addressing in particular (but not limited to) the following issues:

- Forensic activism: the use of forensic methodologies to establish responsibilities and identification of the dead;
- Mass graves and migration;
- Forensic aesthetics: how can we characterise it?
- Forensics and thanatic ethics: the moral frames of forensic research;
- Killings of refugees in the Global North and South;
- Mass exhumation of bodies and reburials - motives, interest and legitimacy;
- Deaths of colonial troops in mutinies and in camps.

We invite contributors to send their proposals (a 250-word abstract, title, author's name, a 150-word bio, and contact information) to the conference email address: thanaticethics@gmail.com

NB: This conference will be held in person and participants will be expected to travel to the venue and book accommodation at their own cost, obtaining their visa as applicable.

Full description of the Thanatic Ethics Project and past events:

<https://www.thanaticethics.com>

Project Co-convenors:

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