

COVID LEGACIES

LONG-TERM SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EFFECTS

9-11 OCTOBER 2026 | ISTANBUL

PROGRAMME | ABSTRACTS | BIOS

ANAMED • MINERVA HAN

PROGRAMME

Day 1 - Friday 9 October | ANAMED

14.30-15.00	Registration & Coffee
15.00-15.45	Welcome Remarks Inge Uytterhoeven (Koç University) • Senem Aydın Düzgüt (Sabancı University) • Şima İmşir (Koç University) • Ayşecan Terzioğlu (Sabancı University)
15.45-16.45	Opening Keynote I - Claire Chambers (University of York) Decolonizing Disease: Pandemics, Public Health, & Pathogenic Novels
16.45-17.00	Coffee Break
17.00-18.00	Opening Keynote II - Önder Ergönül (Koç University) Title tba.
18.00-19.30	Welcome Cocktail Divan Brasserie Beyoğlu

PROGRAMME

Day 2 - Saturday 10 October | Minerva Han

09.30-10.45 | PANEL 1: Power and Knowledge

Chair: Zeynep Akçakaya (Kadir Has University)

İsmail Yaşayanlar (Düzce University) - "A Weapon of the Ruling Classes": Physicians, Epidemic Fear, and the Long History of Medical Mistrust from Ottoman Cholera to Covid-19

Büşra Şengül (Boğaziçi University) - Breathing Room: The Body from Servet-i Fünûn's Plague to Covid-19

Ahmet Ergün (Koç University) - Omicron, Its Threat, and Booster Jabs: A Cross-Linguistic Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study of COVID-19 Vaccine News in English and Turkish

Eilis Nolan (Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology) - Encounters With COVID-19 Residue: Inattention And Abandoned Public Health Messaging

10.45-11.00

Coffee Break

11.00-12.00 | PANEL 2: Embodiment and Bodily Practices

Chair: Ayşecan Terzioğlu (Sabancı University)

Hande Güzel (University of Cambridge) - Re-Virginisation during Covid-19: Interrupting Medical Control over Women's Bodies

Zeren Sevim Sipahioğlu (Sabancı University) - Entanglements of Disordered Eating: Women's Pandemic-Era Experiences in Turkey

Serap Cinoğlu (Sabancı University) - Making Health(y) Visible: TikTok, Wellness Culture, and the Legacy of COVID-19 on Bodies

12.00-13.15	Lunch
13.15-14.30 PANEL 3: Genres	
Chair: Şima İmşir (Koç University)	
Bihter Şabanoğlu (Sorbonne Paris III) - The Porous Body: Contagion, Vulnerability, and the Visual Imagination in Turkish Contemporary Art	
Seda Yücekurt Ünlü (Boğaziçi University) - COVID-19 in the Detective Genre: The Aesthetic of the Pandemic in Meraklı Adamın On Günü	
Tarun Athmika (Indian Institute of Technology Delhi) - "COVID Comics" in India: Narrative, Form, History	
John Paolo Sarce (Polytechnic University of the Philippines) - The Lexicon of Contagion: Articulating the World of COVID-19 through Philippine Poetry	
14.45-15.45 PANEL 4: Intimacies	
Chair: Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim	
Ceylan Engin and Ada Canıgüz (Boğaziçi University) - Intimate Life During COVID-19: Economic Strain, Unpaid Labor, and Relationship Dynamics in Turkey	
Sultan Serter (Işık University) - Contactless Intimacies: Spatial Socialization and the Psychology of Returning Home after COVID-19	
Birte Spreckelsen (Freie Universität Berlin) - The Intimate on Full Display: İfşa under Covid in Turkey	
15.45-16.00	Coffee Break
16.00-16.45 PANEL 5: Work and Labour	
Chair: Jasmine Erdener (Koç University)	
Arzu Wasti (Sabancı University) - Metaphors of Remote Working: Contemporaneous Records of Pandemic Sense-Making	
Rümeysa Çamdereli (Kadir Has University) - Precarity of Musicianship and the Pandemic: An Unavoidable Tragic Scenario	
16.45-17.00	Photography Contest Award Announcement
18.30	Conference Dinner Venue tba.

PROGRAMME

Day 3 - Sunday 11 October | Minerva Han

09.30-10.45 PANEL 1: More-than-human Perspectives	
Chair: İsmail Yaşayanlar (Düzce University)	
Zeynep Akçakaya (Kadir Has University) - Spatiality of disease: dead animals, human-animal relationships, and an Animal Cemetery in 1937 İzmit	
Cristina Douglas (University of Edinburgh) - Learning with dogs about crises-to-come: Later life in a more-than-human world of the (post) COVID-19 pandemic	
Gül Bilge Han (Mälardalen University) - Pandemic Scales: Rethinking Distance and Intimacy in Bernadette Meyers and A.C. Conrad's Poetry	
Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim (Kadir Has University) - The Art of Vanishing Worlds: When the Pandemic Meets Extinction	
10.45-11.00	Coffee Break
11.00-12.00 PANEL 2: Temporality and Life Stages	
Chair: İlkan Can İpekçi (Sabancı University)	
Demet Lüküslü (Yeditepe University) - From Life Stage to Political Subjectivity: Age-Based Identities in and beyond Pandemic Turkey	
Gizem Silistre Çakıray (Ege University) - From "Innocents" to "Problems": Reconceptualising Childhoods after COVID-19 Pandemic	
Fahime Serhatti (Middle East Technical University) - Reconfiguring Form in COVID-19 Fiction: Intrusions and Temporal Ruptures in Ali Smith's Companion Piece	
12.00-13.15	Lunch

13.15-14.30 PANEL 3: Cultures of Pandemic	
Chair: Seda Yücekurt Ünlü (Boğaziçi University)	
Abdullah Başaran (Hitit University) - Post-Pandemic Disembodiment: A Carnal Hermeneutics of the Intertwined Crises of Touch and Reading	
Jasmine Erdener (Koç University) - Playing Spiritfarer in the Pandemic: a cozy game about dying	
Eser Selen, A. İdil Akın and Aylin Sunam (Kadir Has University) - Resilience and Creativity: The Emotional and Structural Reconfiguration of Contemporary Art Worlds in Turkey During the COVID-19 Pandemic	
Mehmet Kerem Çetrefli (Sabancı University) and Berkay Minkara (Charles University) - Interruption and Eventification: Rethinking Cinema-Going Theory After COVID-19	

14.30-14.45	Coffee Break
14.45-15.45 PANEL 4: Identities, Struggles and Solidarities	
Chair: Kenan Sharpe (Sabancı University)	
Aydan Kartaltepe & İlkan Can İpekçi (Sabancı University) - Pacing Our Proud Steps: Everyday Struggles of LGBTQIA+ People Living with Long Covid in Turkey	
Bahar Genç (Sabancı University) - From Crisis to Routine: The Cultural Afterlife of Pandemic Fan Practices in BTS Fandom	
Ece Naz Hepgüler (Koç University) - Who Gets to Be Intellectual Online? Aestheticised Learning and the Reconfiguration of Cultural Authority after Covid-19	
16.00-17.00 PANEL 5: Will There Be Songs About the Dark Times?	
Chair: Burcu Alkan (Yeditepe University)	
Cristina Franco-Rosillo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) - COVID-19 Fiction and the Necropolitics of Infection: Triage and Conflict in Hari Kunzru's Blue Ruin (2024)	
Julia Mollenthel (University of Florida) - Langston Hughes and the Racial Contract in the 21st Century	
Nesrin Koç (Bournemouth University) - Unequal Lockdown: Covid-19 and Structural Injustice in Ali Smith's Summer	
17.00-17.15	Coffee Break
17.15-18.15	Round table - Closing remarks Chisomo Kalinga • Deniz Mardin • Nükhet Varlık

ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

Saturday 10 October 9.30-10.45
1.Power and Knowledge

Chair: Zeynep Akçakaya (Kadir Has University)

İsmail Yaşayanlar (Düzce University) - “A Weapon of the Ruling Classes”: Physicians, Epidemic Fear, and the Long History of Medical Mistrust from Ottoman Cholera to Covid-19

During the Covid-19 pandemic, attacks on healthcare workers, rumours that doctors were deliberately killing patients, and deep suspicion of state-sponsored medical intervention became recurring headlines across the world. These episodes were often presented as signs of something new and alarming -- a crisis of trust specific to our polarised, post-truth moment. This paper pushes back against that assumption.

Drawing on Ottoman archival sources, including records of the Meclis-i Umurı Sıhhiye, and contemporary medical literature, the paper examines how strikingly similar dynamics played out during the cholera epidemics that struck Ottoman territories in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Physicians were accused of poisoning patients, spreading disease on the state’s behalf, and acting as instruments of class warfare. Two episodes stand at the centre of the argument: the threatened expulsion of a missionary doctor from Antep during the 1848 epidemic, and the attacks on municipal physicians in Trabzon in 1910, where an angry crowd nearly lynched a doctor they held responsible for a patient’s death.

These are not isolated curiosities. Comparable patterns have been documented in Germany, Russia, Tunisia, and the United States during the same period, pointing to a structural logic that repeats itself whenever epidemic fear meets social inequality and political distrust.

The paper argues that what Covid-19 brought to the surface was not a new pathology but an old wound -- and that taking the long view of history may help us understand it more clearly.

Bio: İsmail Yaşayanlar completed his undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral studies in the Department of History at Bursa Uludağ University, specialising in modern history. His doctoral research, supported by the TÜBİTAK 2211 National PhD Scholarship Program, examined the organisation of quarantine and public health services in the Ottoman Empire during the cholera epidemics at a micro-historical scale. His subsequent research has focused on Ottoman institutions, urban history, and the history of medicine, with a particular emphasis on Bursa. His work is grounded primarily in Ottoman archival sources. He has taught at Bursa Uludağ University and Düzce University, where he currently holds a position in the Department of History.

Büşra Şengül (Boğaziçi University) - Breathing Room: The Body from Servet-i Fünûn's Plague to Covid-19

This paper traces a genealogy of epidemic representation from the late Ottoman press to Covid-19, asking how popular cultural narrative, rather than medical discourse alone, has historically mediated our understanding of contagion, the body, and the boundary between self and other. Analyzing plague writings in the periodical Servet-i Fünûn in fin-de-siecle, I argue that these texts popularized a biopolitical transformation of the body: no longer a private, self-evident entity, the body emerged as a site simultaneously of danger and of care, subject to new regimes of discipline, hygiene, and collective visibility. This shift reorganized domestic and public space, redefined political authority, and produced new affective vocabularies for isolation, fear, and proximity to the (potentially contagious) other.

Reading this historical case against Covid-19 coverage in the contemporary Turkish popular magazines Kafa and Varlık, I ask whether present-day narratives replicate or depart from these earlier dynamics. Do current representations of isolation, loss, and resilience continue a long popular tradition of transforming epidemiological knowledge into lived affective experience, or do the closure of physical borders and the simultaneous expansion of digital ones generate genuinely new forms of sociability and intimacy unavailable to earlier epidemic publics? I further consider how both historical and contemporary narratives distribute grievability unevenly, exposing whose bodies are protected and whose losses are rendered visible. By situating Covid-19 within this deeper

genealogy of epidemic storytelling, the paper seeks to examine and understand how popular narrative mediates between medical crisis and its transformation into meaning, memory, and social value.

Bio: I graduated from the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Uludağ University in 2017 and completed my MA in the same department at Boğaziçi University in 2023. Supervised by Erol Köroğlu, my master's thesis, "Lost Bodies and Lost Souls: Disabled Men in Early Twentieth-Century Turkish Novels", contributed to the growing field of disability and literary studies. In the same year, I began my PhD in the same department at Boğaziçi University. Under the supervision of Veyisel Öztürk, I am currently conducting doctoral research on the popularization of medical and health-related texts in late Ottoman periodicals at the fin-de-siècle. My research interests include the medical humanities, Ottoman medical history, Ottoman fin-de-siècle, disability studies, and ecocriticism.

Ahmet Ergün (Koç University) - Omicron, Its Threat, and Booster Jabs: A Cross-Linguistic Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study of COVID-19 Vaccine News in English and Turkish

This paper examines coronavirus vaccine news published in English and Turkish by BBC News and BBC News Türkçe, using a corpus-assisted discourse study (CADS) approach. Corpus features such as keyword and collocation analysis are merged with the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, holding that discourses partake in the forming of systems of knowledge and belief. A preliminary analysis of the corpora presents the keywords and indicates that the term Omicron stands out in each corpus. Examining the concordance lines for the term 'Omicron' reveals two major interrelated topics: The threat of Omicron based on its transmissibility and severity, and the relationship between Omicron and the vaccines. The analysis reveals that both news channels adopt a predominantly cautious attitude that foregrounds the variant's high transmissibility despite its low severity. The patterns regarding the vaccine-variant interaction emphasize the inadequacy of two doses of vaccines and the consequent need for booster jabs, without representing the vaccines as utterly weak so as to preserve the faith in their overall efficacy. Ultimately, each news channel uses coinciding patterns to represent a topic in similar ways, while the rigidity of these patterns and the conceptual frameworks of the channels are not fully symmetrical. This research aims to illustrate the discursive construction of knowledge about pandemic-related issues such as vaccination and the Omicron variant, alongside how this construction operates in two different language services springing from the same news institution.

Bio: Ahmet Ergün is a graduate teaching assistant and a master's student in Comparative Literature at Koç University, with a bachelor's degree in Western Languages and Literatures and Translation Studies from Boğaziçi University. He has presented at several undergraduate and graduate level conferences and published in the undergraduate journal Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism. He is a co-coordinator of the multilingual earthquake termbase TermQuake. His research interests include medical and health humanities, the Gothic genre, posthumanism, and the 19th-century novel.

Eilis Nolan (Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology) - Encounters With COVID-19 Residue: Inattention And Abandoned Public Health Messaging

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary visual method for information dissemination by the HSE in Ireland was the poster, both as physical images and as digital images. Tens of millions of posters were ultimately disseminated between March 2020 and December 2021 across businesses and public forums. In its broadest sense, a poster can be defined by both its form and the function; functionally, a poster seeks to create communication between an "active force" and a "re-active" force in a public space, and the form is generally that of a mass produced combination of image and text. The function of the public health poster is to create communication between an "active" and "re-active" force that informs and changes the behaviour of the public. What, then, when the poster no longer provokes a reaction? This paper is concerned with the mass abandonment of COVID-19 imagery in the aftermath of mass restrictions due to the public health crisis. Referring to HSE posters, social distancing posters, and painted surfaces, a survey has been conducted of what will be referred to as "post-COVID residue" that is left over from the period of restrictions. Using the methodological framework of encounter as practice, as defined by Sara Ahmed, the hypothesis of this paper is that there has been a semiological breakdown of communication between the "active" and "re-active" forces in the encounter due to the temporal displacement of the contemporary encounter with the poster. It also raises the issue of inattention blindness, discussing whether or not the COVID-19 poster has become integrated in the urban landscape, or whether the trauma of COVID-19 resists the integration of its images.

Bio: Eilís Nolan is an academic and an animation professional. She is currently an Assistant Lecturer at Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Ireland. Her research is primarily focused on the relationship between disease and visual media. Her MA by Research in 2022 explored the relationship between societal perceptions of disease and its portrayal in visual media. She is currently a PhD candidate through the co-supervisory scheme between IADT and Maynooth University. Her research concerns "post-COVID residue" in visual culture, which is defined as both the visual residue left over from the period of social restrictions (March 2020-December 2021) and the visual indicators of COVID-19 in visual culture after January 2022.

11.00.12.00

2. Embodiment and Bodily Practices

Chair: Ayşecan Terzioğlu (Sabancı University)

Hande Güzel (University of Cambridge) - Re-Virginisation during Covid-19: Interrupting Medical Control over Women's Bodies

The association of women's virginity with marriage persists in many contemporary cultures, including Turkey. To meet the impossible demand of being a 'technical' virgin, many women resort to re-virginisation. Hymenoplasty is the medical re-virginisation method, aimed at generating bleeding in the next penetrative sexual intercourse.

Despite the ethical controversies surrounding the operation, the medical market and social norms surrounding women's sexuality create the space for women to turn to hymenoplasty as a 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti 1988). As women seeking re-virginisation are unable to discuss it with friends or family members, online platforms have always been relatively safer spaces for women to form a community around their experiences. During Covid-19, these communities became even more of a lifeline for women, as operations got postponed and communication with healthcare personnel rapidly declined.

Against this backdrop, I argue that women took control over their bodies and re-virginisation during Covid-19, inadvertently temporarily decentring medicine's role in re-virginisation. Based on approximately 2600 entries on online forums posted between March 2020 and August 2021 among women seeking re-virginisation, I illustrate how, due to decreased access to healthcare services and workers, women had to rely more on homemade alternatives to hymenoplasty and consulted their online community rather than doctors to make sense of their bodies during their healing process by, for instance, sharing images of their post-operation vaginas. This also altered women's relationship to time, which felt suspended during the pandemic. Yet it was possible to endure time (Baraitser 2017) by sharing it in intimate online communities.

Bio: Hande Güzel is a sociologist researching gender, health and illness, and migration. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Cambridge. Her most recent research projects focused on migration of healthcare workers to and from Turkey, from an intersectional perspective. She is currently a research affiliate at the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge and an Associate Editor for the European Sociological Association's European Societies journal.

Zeren Sevim Sipahioğlu (Sabancı University) - Entanglements of Disordered Eating: Women's Pandemic-Era Experiences in Turkey

COVID-19 imposed profound psychosocial strain, with international scholarship documenting that individuals with disordered eating were disproportionately affected by lockdown and disrupted routines (Branley-Bell & Talbot, 2020; Machado et al., 2020; Nutley et al., 2021). Women experienced sharper mental

health declines than men, linked to caregiving burdens and reduced coping resources (Ausín et al., 2020; Etheridge & Spantig, 2022; Penninx et al., 2022). Qualitative work characterizes lockdown as fostering heightened awareness about food, increased restriction and binge eating, and intensified body dissatisfaction (Corno et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022; Miniati et al., 2021).

My study draws on qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in Turkey as part of broader doctoral research examining women's disordered eating, from which pandemic-era narratives organically emerged. Collected data shows that lockdown was not experienced as simply beneficial or harmful, but as an entangled set of conditions in which participants simultaneously gained and lost contact with pre-existing disordered eating patterns. Some narrated lockdown as conducive to dietary control, others described heightened restriction or emotional eating entangled with uncertainty, while also experiencing isolation and anxiety. The home emerged as a contested site, simultaneously a potential space of security and a site demanding disciplinary labor around food, body, and self.

Extending the only Turkish qualitative work by Özdil and Küçük Öztürk and complementing Elkin and Kalabaş's correlational evidence, this study contributes a disordered eating lens and treats chronic dieting as a culturally reinforced mode of bodily governance amplified by the pandemic and lockdown (Elkin & Kalabaş, 2023; Özdil & Öztürk, 2022).

Bio: I am a PhD candidate in Gender Studies at Sabancı University, Türkiye. My research explores the intersections of gender, embodiment, visual culture, and eating disorders through feminist visual ethnography, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of women in Turkey. I am interested in feminist methodologies, digital cultures, media representation, and the politics of the body. Alongside my dissertation, I research the representation of eating disorders in digital games and online communities. My work brings together feminist theory, visual studies, and qualitative research to examine how bodies are shaped, experienced, and represented across everyday and digital spaces.

Serap Cinoğlu (Sabancı University) - Making Health(y) Visible: TikTok, Wellness Culture, and the Legacy of COVID-19 on Bodies

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed how humans understand and practice health in everyday life. While public health measures taken by governments emphasized the collective responsibility of society to prevent spread of the virus, the way social media platforms used translated health into more individualized projects of self-management. In this paper, I argue that by transforming cultural and social meanings of what healthy means, TikTok became one of the most important tools to think about covid pandemic. Rather than understanding TikTok as a platform that affect bodily images negatively, I try to look at it as a cultural space where the notions of health, care, and selfhood have been reconfigured through practices and trends such as calorie counting, clean eating, intermittent fasting, body transformations, wellness routines, and what i eat in a day videos. By drawing on qualitative discourse analysis from TikTok healthy lifestyle trends between 2020-2024, the paper tries to explore the algorithmic visibility of certain understandings of health while marginalizing others.

Drawing on from Foucault's work on governmentality and biopolitics and making a feminist critical analysis, I argue that pandemic anxieties over the body became embedded within a digital economy of wellness. Thus, in time, health is associated not only with the absence of illness but continuous display, monitoring, and optimization of the body and self.

By situating TikTok health content within a broader social and cultural legacy of Covid-19, the paper demonstrates how bodies, everyday life, and health are imagined in the post-pandemic "normal", thus how legacies of covid is not limited to medical crisis itself.

Bio: Serap Cinoğlu (they/them). I graduated from Political Science and International Relations at Boğaziçi University. Currently doing my masters in Cultural Studies at Sabancı University. I have worked on limitations on hormone access of trans people by the AKP government and how politics of hormone access affected the trans community in Turkey as well as their relationship with their bodies. Apart from that my areas of interests are labor, academia, and youth in relation to sociology of work.

13.15-14.30

3.Genres

Chair: Şima İmşir (Koç University)

Bihter Şabanoğlu (Sorbonne Paris III) - The Porous Body: Contagion, Vulnerability, and the Visual Imagination in Turkish Contemporary Art

Contagion thinks through bodies. So, it turns out, does art. The body, long taken for granted as the medium of social life, became during the COVID-19 pandemic the primary site of danger, speculation, and reimagination, and was suddenly rendered suspect: porous, contagious, and dangerous to others. This paper examines how Turkish contemporary artists responded to this transformation by reimagining the body as an unstable, contested condition of existence: a site where suppressed fears and desires crystallize into form.

Focusing on works produced during the pandemic by Çınar Eslek, Neş'e Erdok, Volkan Aslan, and Kemal Özen, the paper moves across painting, drawing, video, sculpture, and textile to trace recurring preoccupations with isolation, vulnerability, fragmentation, tactility, and the failure of physical presence. Rather than reading these works as documentary witnesses to a historical crisis, it argues that they enact a deeper shift in the visual imagination of embodiment.

Drawing on phenomenological approaches to corporeality, and in particular Jean-Luc Nancy's account of existence as irreducibly singular plural, always constituted through exposure to others, and Bernard Stiegler's understanding of the human as constitutively incomplete and technologically supplemented, the paper asks how contemporary art negotiated a moment in which the body became simultaneously hyper-visible as biological matter and increasingly unreachable as a social and affective entity. In doing so, it proposes that Turkish contemporary art constitutes a distinctive visual archive: not simply of suffering or survival, but of the pandemic's lasting reconfiguration of what it means to be bodily present in the world.

Bio: Bihter Sabanoğlu is a PhD candidate at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III, where she also completed her MA in English Language and Literature. Her doctoral research examines the reception of Byzantium in the visual arts of Victorian England. An author and art critic based between Paris and Istanbul, she publishes widely on art history, contemporary art, history, and literature. She has edited volumes on Jacques Derrida and Ricardo Porro for Arketon Publications and is the author of the novel Şüpheli Şeylerin Keşfi (2022).

Seda Yücekurt Ünlü (Boğaziçi University) - COVID-19 in the Detective Genre: The Aesthetic of the Pandemic in Meraklı Adamın On Günü

This talk analyzes Mehmet Eroğlu's novel Meraklı Adamın On Günü (Ten Days of the Curious Man, 2021) within the context of the intersection between the spatial, psychological, and sociological transformations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the traditional narrative conventions of detective fiction. Rather than serving as a mere background setting, in this novel the pandemic is examined as the force of the plot through the elements such as the natural camouflage provided by mandatory mask-wearing and the disruption of physical surveillance. In this novel, the mask is used as a narrative device to make everyone inherently suspicious. Therefore, this talk questions that how the mask equalizes the criminal and the innocent. The protagonist of the novel is not driven by a financial gain, but by psychological survival against isolation. Consequently, this talk argues that the novel expands the boundaries of the detective genre while offering a literary narrative of COVID-19 Pandemic. Additionally, this talk offers a comparative analysis of the novel and its film adaptation. Linda

Hutcheon's A Theory of Adaptation will ground this comparative reading. In this way, intertextuality and intermediality will be some key concepts to discuss this novel.

Bio: Seda Yücekurt Ünlü received B.A. and M.A. degrees in Turkish Language and Literature and a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature from Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. She holds a PhD in Turkish Language and Literature from the same university. In her PhD research, she explored the representation of illness in Peyami Safa's novels. After having worked as a research assistant at Boğaziçi University, she spent one year at Columbia University pursuing her studies as a visiting scholar. She currently teaches Turkish literature as an instructor at Boğaziçi University. Her research interests include Modern Turkish literature, illness narratives, and genre theories.

Tarun Athmika (Indian Institute of Technology Delhi) - "COVID Comics" in India: Narrative, Form, History

This paper examines the literary representations of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, focusing on the emergence of "COVID comics" during and after the pandemic. It outlines various artistic responses to the COVID-19 crisis through the medium of comics, including comic strips, webcomics and full-length comic books (or graphic narratives). The paper highlights how artists chronicle the lived experiences of COVID-19 using a mix of humour and satire, and mobilise the medium-specific affordances (following Caroline Levine) to convey scientific knowledge about the virus and vaccines to a general audience. Furthermore, it analyses how these comics engage with history and narrative, particularly regarding their documentation of the pandemic's effects on India's precariat (drawing on Judith Butler). Ultimately, the paper argues that 'COVID comics' enact a politics of form (following Greta Olson and Sarah Copland), challenging and critiquing the official institutional narratives surrounding COVID-19, especially regarding the millions of migrant workers who travelled back to their villages and hometowns during the crisis. The primary texts analysed include When the Virus Hits (2020) by Sharad Sharma, The Summer of Maximum Learning (2020) by Shromona Das, @_inthetimeofcorona by Anushka Gupta, Go Corona Go (2020) by Satish Acharya, and Pandemic and Hunger (2020) by Orijit Sen, Vidyun Sabhaney, and Harsho Mohan Chatteraj, among others.

Bio: Tarun Athmika is a PhD researcher at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. He specialises in medical humanities, with his doctoral research focusing on the literary portrayal of mental illness in autobiographical prose and comics, particularly personality and identity disorders. His broader research interests lie at the intersection of literature, visual studies, and health. He is currently developing a series of articles examining how narrative prose and comics shape our understanding of psychiatric diagnoses. He has presented his ongoing work at numerous international conferences and recently served as a Visiting Scholar at Project Narrative at The Ohio State University.

John Paolo Sarce (Polytechnic University of the Philippines) - The Lexicon of Contagion: Articulating the World of COVID-19 through Philippine Poetry

The COVID-19 pandemic did not merely bring the world to a standstill; it inaugurated a profound crisis of signification, forcing humanity to grapple with an unprecedented reality that defied existing linguistic frameworks. Amidst the disorientation of the early lockdown in the Philippines, poetry emerged as a crucial site for sense-making and resilience. This paper examines a selection of Filipino poetry published during the nascent stages of the crisis, specifically "Pandemic" by Paul Rico De Lara, "Dasal" by Jeseme Dilag-Domingo, and "Swab Test" by Rodrigo Dela Pena Jr. These works serve as essential artifacts articulating the lived experience of Filipinos during the protracted three-year lockdown, a period where conventional language often failed to encompass the gravity and strangeness of the new world order. By integrating perspectives from medical humanities and literary studies, this research explores how these poems deploy a "lexicon of contagion" a specific set of metaphors and linguistic structures that explicate the pandemic experience. This lexicon functions not merely as descriptive imagery but as an affective tool that bridges the gap between biological crisis and human emotion. The paper argues that these poems do more than document the era; they actively produce the body as a site of contention, vulnerability, and observation. Through this lexicon, the poems re-articulate the world of the crisis, transforming the abstract terror of the virus into tangible, readable poetic matter. By interrogating how these texts characterize physical and emotional states, this study demonstrates how the specific historical moment of the lockdown and the individualized health experience coincide. Lastly, this research contends that these poems function as an archive of the pandemic, capturing how poetry allowed Filipinos to imagine, process, and re-articulate their reality when established social orders collapsed. It provides a nuanced understanding of how literature serves as both a reflection of and a response to global health crises, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between linguistic resilience and the physical endurance of the body under siege.

Bio: John Paolo Sarce, LPT, MA LCS is an Instructor I at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. Previously, he taught at Ateneo de Manila University (English Department), where he earned his Master's degree, and served as Assistant Principal and English Teacher in the Basic Education Department at Our Lady of Fatima University. His teaching interests encompass cultural studies, literature, and pedagogy. His research focuses on postcolonialism, queer theory, medical humanities, digital humanities, and pedagogy. In his free time, he likes to watch Ru Paul Drag Race and anime and then cram for his writing projects. Zodiac sign is his guide to life while reading books is his way of breathing life.

14.45-15.45

4.Intimacies

Chair: Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim

Ceylan Engin and Ada Canıgüz (Boğaziçi University) - Intimate Life During COVID-19: Economic Strain, Unpaid Labor, and Relationship Dynamics in Turkey

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a global health crisis, it was also a period of time in which economic uncertainty, employment-related pressures and the reorganization of everyday life became increasingly concentrated within the household. Existing literature suggests that closures of schools and workplaces with broader lockdowns intensified gendered division of both paid and unpaid work, while raising questions about how overlapping stressors reshaped intra-relational dynamics. Drawing on feminist social reproduction theory and Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation perspective, this study examines the association between economic strain, changes in unpaid domestic labor, and changing relationship dynamics among couples who shared a household together during the pandemic in Turkey in three dimensions: changes in tolerance, fights and arguments, and emotional bond. Our independent variables center on the changes on both paid unpaid labor: the perceived economic comfort, changing household economic conditions during the period of pandemic, and the amount changed in housework, while controlling for gender, age, educational attainment, and the number of children. Using nationally representative data from the 2022 Turkish Covid-19 Values Study, multiple OLS regression models were examined and revealed different patterns (N=507). Household economic stability, compared with worsening conditions, was associated with positive tolerance levels ($p < .05$). In contrast, increased housework burden was associated with decreasing tolerance ($p = .001$) and more negative conflict outcomes ($p = .006$). While emotional bond was not found to be significantly associated with economic strain or unpaid labor in the initial model, when

sexual activity frequency change was added to the model as an exploratory variable, (N=492), it shows that increased sexual activity was strongly associated with more positive changes in emotional bond ($p < .001$). Taken together, these findings, especially in times of large-scale crisis, highlight the importance of understanding different inequalities and pressures that enter intimate life through economic, domestic, and emotional mechanisms. They further suggest that changes in relationship dynamics during COVID-19 need to be approached with a multidimensional perspective, understanding both economic pressures and the reorganization of everyday life within households.

Bio:

Ceylan Engin is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Boğaziçi University. Her areas of interest include survey research, the demography of gender and sexuality, and population health, with a specific focus on Turkey. She is the principal investigator of the Turkish Covid-19 Values Study (TCVS) and the Turkish Social Values Study (TSVS), through which she conducts survey-based research to examine changes in Turkey's demographic and social fabric. Her work has been published in journals such as Social Politics, Deviant Behavior, Population Review, and Turkish Studies.

Ada Canigüz is a Sociology graduate of Boğaziçi University, where she will continue her studies in the MA program in Sociology. Her research interests include gender and sexuality studies, with a focus on intimate life, family, and care, as well as their relationship to broader structures of power, inequality, and processes of negotiation through feminist social reproduction perspectives. Her long-term goals are producing sociological research in academia that also contributes to feminist activism, public discussion, and policy-making.

Sultan Serter (Işık University) - Contactless Intimacies: Spatial Socialization and the Psychology of Returning Home after COVID-19

This study examines the transformation in individuals' socialization practices following COVID-19, focusing on restaurants, cafés, and public spaces. The pandemic has not only been a global health crisis but also a critical turning point that reshaped spatial experiences, social relations, and behavioral patterns. Socialization has shifted from physical proximity and prolonged interaction toward shorter, more controlled, and distanced forms of engagement.

Before the pandemic, restaurants and cafés were not only sites of consumption but also key social environments where relationships were built and everyday life unfolded. They enabled spontaneous encounters and contributed to the rhythm of urban life. However, during the pandemic, many of these spaces either closed or underwent significant transformation. Small-scale businesses were particularly affected, while surviving establishments adapted through contactless ordering, digital menus, open-air arrangements, and delivery-based models. This reflects a broader reconfiguration of space in both technological and economic terms.

A major behavioral shift has been the reduction of time spent in public spaces due to increased anxiety and risk perception. The culture of prolonged sitting has been replaced by quick consumption and rapid departure. Socialization has become more planned, limited, and often necessity-driven rather than leisure-oriented, indicating a move toward controlled interaction patterns.

In this context, the "home" has emerged as a safe, controllable, and central social space. The turn toward the home represents not only a physical withdrawal but also a psychological coping mechanism. Digital platforms have expanded in-home socialization, while the appeal of public spaces has diminished.

In conclusion, post-pandemic socialization has been reshaped through the relationship between physical space and psychological security. Restaurants and cafés continue to exist but in transformed ways. Social interaction is now shorter, more selective, and more controlled, signaling a lasting shift in how individuals experience urban life.

Bio: Sultan Serter is a multidisciplinary researcher and filmmaker whose work bridges cinema, urban culture, and gender studies. Born in Alanya, Turkey, in 1992, she has developed an educational and artistic path that combines social science, art, and cultural analysis. She is currently pursuing a degree in History at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, where she explores the relationship between modernity, identity, and collective memory.

Sultan earned her B.A. in Cinema and Television from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University and previously completed a B.A. in Nursing at Ege University. She also holds graduate-level studies in Local Governments and Urban Policies (Marmara University), History of the Republic of Turkey (Sakarya University), Women's Studies (Mersin University), and Maritime Tourism (Dokuz Eylül University). Her broad education allows her to merge the precision of academic research with the creativity of visual storytelling.

Birte Spreckelsen (Freie Universität Berlin) - The Intimate on Full Display: İfşa under Covid in Turkey

Under Covid restrictions, the boundaries of the private and the public were renegotiated. Simultaneously, the digital display of intimate relationships escalated in Turkey. Already popular online revelations of intimate abuse and pornographic content started taking shape in an unprecedented form. The umbrella term which has come to serve as a hashtag and slogan for various – and seemingly contradicting – forms of scandalous publications is: ifşa (exposure, disclosure). I am examining two specific orchestrations of ifşa – each initiated in the early stages of the pandemic: one dedicated to revenge porn (the non-consensual sharing of intimate images), the other one to feminist practice of exposing male violence in personal relationships. Having surged during the Covid pandemic, online practices of ifşa need to be viewed in relation to this moment of crisis and its implications for interpersonal life.

Bio: Birte Spreckelsen is a doctoral researcher of Islamic Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and a PhD fellow at Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies. Her research focuses on ifşa in Turkish pornography, tabloid news and feminist activism. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Area Studies and Gender Studies from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and a Master's degree in Islamic Studies from Freie Universität Berlin. Among her languages of expertise are Arabic, Turkish and Pashto. She contributed a chapter on female jinn possession and sexual trauma to "Islam, Migration and Jinn: Spiritual Medicine in Muslim Health Management" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

16.00-16.45

5.Work and Labour

Chair: Jasmine Erdener (Koç University)

Arzu Wasti (Sabancı University) - Metaphors of Remote Working: Contemporaneous Records of Pandemic Sense-Making

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an unprecedented reconfiguration of work, compelling millions of employees worldwide to transition abruptly to remote working. This paper draws on data collected during the pandemic, in which 202 Turkish employees described remote working through metaphors. Metaphor analysis offered a distinctive lens for examining the emotions and cultural meanings attached to this disruptive shift in working life.

The findings show that remote working was constructed through contradictory and ambivalent metaphors. For some, it was confinement and relentless continuity, captured in images of a "prison" or a "hamster," conveying blurred work-life boundaries and an "always on" culture. Others framed it positively, likening it to "playing computer games during summer break" or "a ship in the ocean," suggesting autonomy and self-direction. A third cluster expressed disconnection from organizational life, comparing remote work to "watching a match on TV" or a "long-distance relationship," signaling diminished trust. Several metaphors captured a paradoxical nature—liberating and constraining at once—as in "being a member of the royal family" or "holidaying in a mediocre hotel." Notably, female employees described themselves as "a boxer and a ballerina at the same time" or "an octopus," conveying the collision of professional and domestic demands, even as remote work also afforded freedom from embodied workplace expectations like make-up.

By reading these metaphors as expressions of lived experience, the paper argues they constitute a cultural archive of pandemic sense-making, illuminating how employees interpreted one of the pandemic's most enduring transformations: the reorganization of work and everyday life.

Bio: S. Arzu Wasti is a faculty member at Sabancı University Business School. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in Business Administration from Middle East Technical University, followed by a master's degree in Human Resource Management from Purdue University and a doctorate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on organizational commitment, workplace trust, sexual harassment, and workplace incivility. Dr. Wasti's work has been supported by organizations including the National Science Foundation and TÜBİTAK. She received the TÜBİTAK Science Award in 2019 and the METU Mustafa Parlar Foundation Science Award in 2020.

Rümeysa Çamdereli (Kadir Has University) - Precarity of Musicianship and the Pandemic: An Unavoidable Tragic Scenario

The disruptive experience of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the deep-seated social reproduction crisis of capitalist regimes, prompting critical discussions on how lifemaking processes are valued and financed. Grounded in Social Reproduction Theory, this paper approaches musicianship not merely as an economic sector but as an essential component of life-making, survival motivation, and collective well-being. By utilizing immaterial and affective labor frameworks, the study examines how the global division of labor into "essential" and "non-essential" work systematically excluded and devalued cultural workers.

Through a comparative analysis of post-pandemic experiences across the USA, the UK, Greece, and socialist Yugoslavia, this paper contextualizes the structural fragility inherent in artistic work. It highlights a rare counterexample in Argentina, where positioning culture within a framework of care and solidarity economy led to robust, institutionalized state support.

Building on these international paradigms, the study focuses on the specific crisis in Türkiye. A comprehensive media scan reveals that ubiquitous informal labor and a lack of social security networks led to an immediate collapse of livelihoods, an acute mental health crisis resulting in over 100 reported musician suicides, and deepened gender inequalities for invisible female artists. While local government initiatives, such as the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's alternative stages, provided temporary relief, structural exclusion persisted. Ultimately, this paper argues that dismantling the structural precarity of cultural workers in Türkiye requires a fundamental shift in perspective: formalizing musicianship as a recognized profession and integrating artistic production into the core fabric of essential life-making processes.

Bio: Rümeysa Çamdereli was born in 1989 in Diyarbakir. She graduated from the Computer Engineering Department at Boğaziçi University in 2013. She has been working as a project specialist at the YADA Foundation since 2015 and as the organization's research director since 2020. During her time at YADA, in addition to her general expertise in civil society, she has also held positions as an expert researcher, research coordinator on various research projects. She graduated from Istanbul University's Master's Program in Gender Studies in 2019. In 2025, she began her PhD studies at Kadir Has University, again in the Gender Studies Program.

Sunday 11 October
09.30 – 10.45

1. More-than-human Perspectives

Chair: İsmail Yaşayanlar (Düzce University)

Zeynep Akçakaya (Kadir Has University) - Spatiality of disease: dead animals, human-animal relationships, and an Animal Cemetery in 1937 İzmit

COVID-19 pandemic reshaped how we think about bodily boundaries. Early narratives about the pandemic focused on human proximity to bats, wet markets, and cross-species contact; yet the crisis soon expanded into a broader reconsideration of human-to-human relations, bodily porosity, and the spatial organization of everyday life. Governments sought to manage contagion by redefining proximity: between bodies, between households, between humans and animals, and between spaces deemed safe or dangerous. We acquired new meanings of spaces.

As historians, we do not simply learn from the past. We also interpret the past through the questions and sensitivities of the present. Building on this idea and taking COVID-19 as a lens through which to revisit earlier histories of contagion, this paper examines the spatiality of disease through a proposal for an animal cemetery in İzmit in 1937.

On 8 March 1937, Cumhuriyet reported that Ziya Tan, Director of the İzmit Veterinary Office, had submitted a proposal to the Provincial General Assembly for the construction of an animal cemetery where the carcasses of animals who died of contagious diseases would be buried. Tan justified the proposal by referring specifically to anthrax: while anthrax bacilli could survive on the surface of the soil for more than thirty years, he argued, they would perish within seven to eight months if buried deeply.

Through this case, the paper asks how new bacteriological knowledge on anthrax and other contagious diseases produced contested spatial regimes: carcasses had to be removed from everyday rural landscapes, burial had to be supervised, and animal death had to be relocated to regulated sanitary spaces. Yet this transformation was never automatic. It depended on negotiations between governmental public-health concerns and long-established human-animal-landscape relationships, including the economic, practical, and affective meanings attached to dead animal bodies.

Bio: Zeynep Akçakaya is an Instructor at Kadir Has University, Istanbul, and a member of SHIFA-ANA, a history initiative dedicated to the history of death and disease in Anatolia. She is an Ottoman historian whose research have been published on the agricultural, environmental, and animal history of the 19th-century Ottoman Empire. Her current research explores the history of anthrax in Anatolia through the lens of human-animal relationships.

Cristina Douglas (University of Edinburgh) - Learning with dogs about crises-to-come: Later life in a more-than-human world of the (post) COVID-19 pandemic

In the UK, the COVID-19 pandemic carries a tragic legacy of high numbers of deaths of older people, in particular those living in institutional care. This legacy is likely to be replicated in the future, unless there's something to be learned from it (Douglas, 2021). As medical anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly (2010) argued, hope is often born on the brink of despair. In Scotland, where I conducted my fieldwork, animal-assisted therapy started in palliative care for terminally ill, at the margins of life where despair overshadows hope. Yet, as I witnessed during my encounters with people living with advanced dementia and their interactions with a therapy-dog before and after COVID-19 lockdowns, hope is crafted as a social enterprise (Douglas, 2025) and as a moral laboratory (Mattingly, 2014) for creating better lives with and despite physical and cognitive limitations.

Therapy-dogs are part of wider caring assemblages in care homes (Douglas, 2025) that can address loneliness in later life. But dogs can be not only agents of individual care, but also agents of social and political transformation, of futures that can build on structurally supported hope rather than the urgencies dictated by crisis (Douglas, 2021). In this presentation, I argue that we can learn with dogs how COVID-19 pandemic is a lesson for crises-to-come, and how an economy of care-fully crafted hope needs to be structurally embedded in any future ageing social care reform.

The presentation is based on 15 months fieldwork carried in a Scottish care home before and after COVID-19 pandemic.

Bio: Dr Cristina Douglas is a medical anthropologist with an interest in more-than-human approaches to later life. In her PhD project, Cristina used the method of participant sensation to learn from a more-than-human perspective what it means to live with dementia within the confinement of a care home. Cristina co-edited the volume More-than-human aging: animals, robots, and care in later life (Rutgers University Press), which expands the understanding of ageing in social sciences beyond humans. Currently, Cristina works as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Edinburgh in a project that explores the futures of pharmacogenetic treatment of depression.

Gül Bilge Han (Mälardalen University) - Pandemic Scales: Rethinking Distance and Intimacy in Bernadette Mayers and A.C. Conrad's Poetry

This paper presents a comparative reading of two lockdown poetry collections written during Covid-19: Bernadette Mayer's Milkweed Smithereens and A.C. Conrad's Amanda Paradise: Resurrect Extinct Vibration. It argues that both poets reconfigure familiar notions of distance and intimacy by presenting the pandemic as a disruption of the boundaries between past and present, individual and collective as well as human and non-human worlds. Conrad's epic poetic sequence explores themes of grief and exclusion by drawing parallels between the distinct temporalities of the AIDS epidemic and COVID-19. Moving from individual mourning to collective memory and planetary devastation, the poem connects the extinction of species with human loss. Rather than presenting the pandemic as a state of exception, it situates experiences of "illness" within the broader histories of ecological and social destruction. Mayers, in a similar vein, pursues experiences of confinement but with an explicit turn toward the world of botany. Through its diary-like prose form, the collection stages the slowing down of pandemic time, which in turn enables sustained attention to micro scales of botanical and animal life as a way of negotiating isolation. Mayers' diary poems, as in Conrad's pandemic sequence, extend from the private to collectivizing notions of care and mutual aid. Although formally distinct (the epic sequence and private diary), both collections trace a trajectory from the enclosed vantage point of lockdown to broader reflection on planetary loss and connectivity, with a desire to imagine community anew, echoing Mayers claim that "in a catastrophe the best & most mutual-aidish is brought".

Bio: Gül Bilge Han is an associate professor in English Literature at Mälardalen University. Her research lies at the intersection of modernist poetry, world literature, and aesthetic theory. She is the author of Wallace Stevens and the Poetics of Modernist Autonomy, Cambridge UP, 2019) and co-edited the volume The New Wallace Stevens Studies (Cambridge UP, 2021). Gül is currently working on a project that investigates literary-political expressions of solidarity in modernist and Global South responses to anticolonial struggles from the mid 1930s to the Cold War. On this topic she coedited 2 special issues on Cultural Solidarities (Safundi 2018). Another special issue (Journal of Postcolonial Writing) and a book chapter, in Red World Literature (Routledge) are forthcoming (2026). She is strongly committed to teaching literary writing in a context of global justice.

Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim (Kadir Has University) - The Art of Vanishing Worlds: When the Pandemic Meets Extinction

The COVID-19 pandemic unfolded alongside another global emergency: the accelerating extinction of species and the degradation of ecological systems worldwide. While often treated as separate crises, this paper argues that both pandemic and extinction expose profound forms of interdependence, vulnerability, and loss that challenge anthropocentric understandings of life and survival. This paper argues that bringing pandemic studies into dialogue with extinction studies enables us to rethink witnessing, mourning, and solidarity in an era of planetary crisis. Focusing on Tasmanian artist Lucienne Rickard's Extinction Studies Project (2019-2022), this paper examines how artistic practice can create new forms of ecological witnessing and mourning during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Developed through Rickard's long-term practice of repeatedly drawing endangered and extinct species until the drawings themselves disappear, the project confronts viewers with the fragility, irreversibility, and material reality of extinction. Importantly, many exhibitions and performances associated with the project took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, a historical moment in which experiences of collective vulnerability, isolation, mortality, and uncertainty became globally shared conditions.

I argue that the convergence of pandemic and extinction generates what may be called "multidirectional ecological mourning," which moves across human and more-than-human losses, connecting pandemic deaths, species extinctions, environmental degradation, and threatened futures. In Rickard's work, extinction goes beyond a representation of a distant environmental issue and emerges as an intimate and ongoing process that demands ethical attention, emotional engagement, and acts of remembrance during the pandemic times.

At the same time, the Rickard's performative project offers more than a meditation on loss. Through its durational, repetitive, and participatory live practices, it cultivates forms of eco-solidarity grounded in shared precarity and relational responsibility. Witnessing becomes an ecological practice that links humans to animals, ecosystems, and planetary processes rather than positioning them as detached observers. Rickard's artistic intervention thus reveals how contemporary art can transform grief into an ethics of care and connection, encouraging audiences to imagine new forms of coexistence amid intertwined crises of pandemic, extinction, and ecological change. Ultimately, this paper proposes that COVID-19 and extinction are mutually illuminating conditions of the Anthropocene. Through Rickard's work, we can see how artistic practice creates spaces for ecological mourning, multispecies remembrance, and eco-solidarity at a time when both human and more-than-human worlds face unprecedented uncertainty.

Bio: Dr. Deniz Gündoğan İbrişim is a literary scholar specializing in cultural trauma and memory studies, postcolonial theory, twentieth- and twenty-first-century Anglophone and Middle Eastern literatures, ecofeminism, and the environmental humanities. A Fulbright Fellow, she earned her PhD in Comparative Literature from Washington University in St. Louis. From 2021 to 2023, she was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at Sabancı University, where she conducted a research project on artistic and literary representations of Anthropocene trauma in the Mediterranean.

She is currently Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Kadir Has University in Istanbul. She previously served as Grant Writing Coordinator and Management Committee Member for the COST Action "Slow Memory: Transformative Practices for Times of Uneven and Accelerating Change." Her research examines how Anglophone world literature engages questions of trauma, memory, and environmental justice across the Global South, with particular attention to relational, ecological, and decolonial forms of witnessing. Her work has appeared in journals including The Journal of World Literature, Memory Studies, Memory Studies Review, Safundi, and Scrutiny2, as well as in edited volumes such as The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma, Mapping World Anglophone Studies, and Subaltern World Studies and World Literature in and for Pandemic Times. She is currently completing her first monograph, Toward a Slow Trauma in World Literature, and was awarded the 2026 Young Scientist Award in Literature by the Science Academy (Bilim Akademisi). In addition to her academic work, Deniz hosts the weekly radio program Ecocosmopolitan on Açık Radyo, one of Istanbul's leading independent radio stations.

11.00 – 12.00

2.Temporalty and Life Stages

Chair: İlkan Can İpekçi (Sabancı University)

Demet Lüküslü (Yeditepe University) - From Life Stage to Political Subjectivity: Age-Based Identities in and beyond Pandemic Turkey

This paper examines how "life stages" emerged as a key classificatory framework during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this framing contributed to processes of identity formation, particularly among youth (students/pupils) and the elderly (65+). Drawing on a critical discourse analysis of pandemic regulations in Turkey alongside media representations of these groups, the paper demonstrates how age-based categories were constructed as simultaneously vulnerable and morally accountable and, at times, as "irresponsible" when perceived to resist public health measures.

Building on sociological approaches to the life course and life stage, the paper argues that these classifications did not simply reflect biological age but actively produced new forms of social differentiation. It traces how these representations extended beyond the immediate crisis, shaping post-pandemic forms of self-

perception and collective consciousness among both groups. The paper further suggests that the pandemic's age-based categorizations contributed to the emergence of political subjectivity, as youth and elderly individuals increasingly came to recognize themselves as groups sharing common experiences, grievances, and interests. This process became particularly visible in the post-pandemic political landscape, including electoral debates and mobilizations.

In this sense, youth and elderly populations came to be constituted not merely as demographic cohorts but as socially and politically salient identities marked by distinct expectations, moral judgments, and degrees of visibility. By foregrounding the life stage as an analytical lens, the paper contributes to debates on the cultural and political legacies of COVID-19, showing how the pandemic reconfigured age-based identities and fostered new forms of political subjectivity in contemporary Turkey.

Bio: Demet Lüküslü is a professor and chair in the Department of Sociology at Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey. She received her PhD in sociology from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, France, in 2005. She has expertise in qualitative research and is particularly interested in youth studies, social movements and sociology of everyday life and gender studies. She has research experience of EU funded projects on youth participation such as PARTISPACE (Horizon2020 2015-18), PARTIBRIDGES (Erasmus+ 2019-2021), OUYE (Erasmus+ 2021-2023) and BASICC (Alliances for Innovation 2023-2025). She worked on the book project (with Janet Batsleer and Harriet Rowley) Young People, Radical Democracy and Community Development (Policy Press, 2022). She has published various book chapters and journal articles in Journal of Youth Studies, Young, Youth & Society, New Perspectives on Turkey and Turkish Studies.

Gizem Silistre Çakıray (Ege University) - From "Innocents" to "Problems": Reconceptualising Childhoods after COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped not only how societies understood risk and care, but also whose experiences were rendered visible, valued or silenced. At the outset, children were largely framed as "innocent" and "in need of protection", yet this framing shifted rapidly, as children came to be reconceptualised as "pandemic problems", potential vectors of virus transmission whose bodies, presence and sociability posed a risk to be managed. This stigmatisation drove certain measures within society and educational institutions, while rendering children's views and experiences invisible in public life and decision-making. This paper draws on findings from my PhD research into early learning and childcare (ELC) in Scotland during the pandemic, based on practitioner interviews and analysis of Scottish Government guidance (2020-2022), to examine how childhoods were reconceptualised through crisis governance. Findings revealed how the pandemic reorganised the material, spatial and relational life of ELC settings, intensifying pre-existing tensions around children's participation, competencies and agency. Rather than treating childhood and care as separable from policy, this paper argues that children's lives were situated within policies and discourses that construct childhood and adulthood, revealing a web of interdependent relationships with the virus, regulations, spaces, materials and technologies. Six years on, I extend this analysis to current debates on the surveillance of children's bodies and behaviour, and to children's rights discourse contesting children's positioning as passive objects of control rather than active social agents. Tracing this legacy from the pandemic era to the present, this paper considers what pandemic-era discourse reveals about the ongoing contestation of children's place in society.

Bio: Dr. Gizem Silistre Çakıray is a faculty member in the Department of Early Childhood Education at Ege University, Türkiye. She completed her undergraduate degree at Boğaziçi University, her MA at University College London, and her PhD at the University of Edinburgh. Both her MA and PhD were funded by the 1416 scholarship. Her PhD explored the conceptualisations and experiences of early learning and childcare in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her research interests span childhood studies, early years education, and children's participation, with a particular focus on methodologies for conducting research with young children.

Fahime Serhatti (Middle East Technical University) - Reconfiguring Form in COVID-19 Fiction: Intrusions and Temporal Ruptures in Ali Smith's Companion Piece

While COVID-19 studies have often foregrounded the material realities of spatial lockdown, COVID-19 fiction also asks how such experiences (particularly epistemological ruptures) reshape narrative form and temporal experience. In investigating how COVID-19 fiction records the lived experiences of isolation and grief in proximity to death, this presentation maps how temporal structures in such narratives register individual grief and trauma. Ali Smith's Companion Piece (2022) offers a particularly rich case for this inquiry through its portrayal of Sandy Gray, whose locked-down life is marked by isolation, grief, and an increasingly unstable relation to the present.

Rather than treating the pandemic as a passive historical backdrop, this paper brings Gérard Genette's categories of narrative order into conversation with Jacqueline Rose's psychoanalytic concepts of "living death" and the "unavoidable intruder." I argue that Sandy initially inhabits a rigid, linear temporality that functions as a mechanism of denial, containing unacknowledged grief at the beginning of the pandemic. This apparent linearity, however, is repeatedly interrupted as medical (virus), familial (the Pelf family), and historical forces (the unknown girl from the past) intrude upon the present. Through persistent anachronistic loops that fold plague history into the twenty-first-century pandemic, Companion Piece stages a form of transgenerational haunting: the past does not simply return, but insists on rewriting the terms of the present. Ultimately, the presentation argues that Smith's novel reconfigures linear progression into "multiple, intersecting temporalities," using formal rupture to preserve the human psyche while also confronting the ethical demands of collective crisis.

Bio: Fahime Serhatti is an Assistant Professor at Yuksek Ihtisas University and a postdoctoral researcher at Middle East Technical University, Turkey. Her research explores moral injury in eighteenth-century British novels and the intersections of temporality, space, trauma, and illness in narrative fiction. Her recent publications include "Narrative Time and Moral Injury in Daniel Defoe's The Fortunate Mistress" (English Studies, 2024) and "Trauma and the Impossibility of Healing in Pat Barker's Another World" (2025). She is an Executive Board member of the Defoe Society and a committee member of the Sustainability Committee of ISSN.

13.15 – 14.30

3.Cultures of Pandemic

Chair: Seda Yücekurt Ünlü (Boğaziçi University)

Abdullah Başaran (Hitit University) - Post-Pandemic Disembodiment: A Carnal Hermeneutics of the Intertwined Crises of Touch and Reading

Among the most persistent cultural and social outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic is a radical shift in how human bodies physically interface with their surroundings and one another. The survival-driven imperative to avoid contact reframed touch—traditionally recognized in Aristotelian philosophy as the foundational bedrock of biological existence—as a primary site of hazard, menace, and fragility. By restricting physical spaces while accelerating digital expansion, this epochal transition eroded the somatic anchors that bind us to reality and facilitate Mitsein (being-with-others), ultimately inaugurating an enduring era of excarnation (disembodiment) in the post-pandemic landscape. This paper contends that this contemporary tactile crisis is fundamentally intertwined with an escalating crisis of reading. The pandemic-driven migration of education, publishing, and interpersonal communication to screen-mediated platforms has reduced the act of reading to a disembodied, ocular-centric phenomenon, entirely severed from tactile engagement. Yet, drawing upon Richard Kearney's framework of "carnal hermeneutics," this paper argues that textual comprehension and appropriation are never merely abstract cognitive exercises; they rely inherently on the dynamic, physical interface between the flesh-and-blood body and the text. The digital screen introduces a sterile distance that disrupts this reciprocal somatic connection, inducing a profound decay in sensory perception. Consequently, the diminished capacity to decode

social cues, gestures, worldly contexts, and written literature is directly downstream from the erosion of the body's primordial tactile intelligence and earthly wisdom. Rather than yielding to a nostalgic repudiation of modern media, this paper investigates how we might navigate the twin crises of touch and reading by cultivating a disciplined, tactile relationship with digital text technologies, thereby resurrecting the body's innate interpretive faculties.

Bio: Assoc. Prof., Hitit University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. He studied divinity in Ankara, Turkey, before pursuing contemporary art and philosophy in New York. He earned his PhD in Philosophy from Stony Brook University in 2020 with a doctoral thesis titled "Touching the Text, the Touching Texts: The Carnal Hermeneutics of Reading," completed under the supervision of Edward S. Casey and Anne O'Byrne. Between 2024 and 2025, he served as a visiting scholar in the Philosophy Department at Boston College. His research explores the intersections of literary and philosophical hermeneutics, theories of reading, the phenomenology of body and place, narrative, and aesthetics.

Jasmine Erdener (Koç University) - Playing Spiritfarer in the Pandemic: a cozy game about dying

In August 2020, Thunder Lotus Games released Spiritfarer, a video game described as "a cozy management game about dying." By the end of 2021, Spiritfarer had sold one million copies and was nominated for several awards. Players take the perspective of Stella, a young girl who lives on a boat with her cat Daffodil. Together they grow crops, fish, cook, and explore neighboring islands and towns. Stella is also the Spiritfarer, helping spirits conduct their final wishes before ferrying them through the Everdoor, the gate of no return.

Spiritfarer was part of the boom in "cozy games," which usually feature farming, fishing, cooking, decorating, light adventure, and socializing in natural environments. Cozy games grew in popularity during the pandemic era for players who were themselves often unable to work, socialize, or even leave their homes. However, Spiritfarer is unique in this genre for its focus on death and dying as part of life. Although the game was in development before the pandemic began, its release during the height of the pandemic resituated the game as a mechanism for players to grapple with the fear, illness, and death that were spreading through society. Spiritfarer offered ritualized practices of grieving when normal rituals were disrupted, made death personal and intimate when deaths were listed as ever-increasing statistics, and highlighted the critical role of caring labor at a moment when healthcare workers were overwhelmed and often undervalued.

Bio: Jasmine Erdener is an assistant professor in the Department of Media and Visual Arts at Koç University. Her research examines the intersections between technology, media, and politics. Her current project examines thanatechnologies, an attempt to achieve technological immortality. Her research on thanatechnologies has been published in New Media and Society. Her work has also appeared in Communication and the Public, Communication, Culture, and Critique, Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience, Cultural Politics, and Surveillance & Society.

Eser Selen, A. İdil Akın and Aylin Sunam (Kadir Has University) - Resilience and Creativity: The Emotional and Structural Reconfiguration of Contemporary Art Worlds in Turkey During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This presentation explores the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Turkey's contemporary art scene, focusing on how artists navigated the dual crises of physical isolation and digital hyperconnectivity. The pandemic forced a re-evaluation of the artist's role in society and the function of art spaces amid restricted movement and heightened digital presence. Artists responded by creating works reflecting themes of confinement, loss and resilience, while experimenting with digital and hybrid exhibitions. This shift redefined the relationship between artists, audiences, and institutions. Drawing from a completed research project, we examine how the pandemic reshaped artistic practices, exhibition formats, and the emotional geographies of art worlds in Istanbul. Through semi-structured in-depth interviews (N=36) with artists, art professionals and audiences, we documented the psychological and aesthetic effects of the first six months of the pandemic on art production and reception. Grounded in theories and discourses around resilience (Bonnano, 2004; Rancière, 2004) and digital inequality alongside "art worlds" (Becker 1982), the study demonstrates that the creation of contemporary art, along with its financial and emotional value, cannot exist independently of the cultural, social, and psychological benefits audiences derive from experiencing artworks, whether virtually or in physical venues.

References

- Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after adversity? *American Psychologist*, 59(1), 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20>
- Katz, J. E., Rice, R. E., & Aspden, P. (2001). The Internet, 1995–2000: Access, civic involvement, and social interaction. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3), 405–419. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027640121957248>
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Columbia University Press.
- Throsby, D. (2001). *Economics and culture*. Cambridge University Press.
- Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art worlds*. University of California Press.
- Rancière, J. (2004). *The politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible*. Continuum.

Bio:

Eser Selen, PhD is a scholar, artist, and educator whose work bridges contemporary art and design, queer feminist theory and performance studies. Her forthcoming monograph, Contesting Gender and Sexuality through Performance: Sacrifice, Modernity, and Islam in Contemporary Turkey (University of Edinburgh Press), analyzes minoritarian inequality through contemporary art and political discourse. Her work appears in journals like Sexuality Research and Social Policy, Gender, Place & Culture and International Journal of Communication. She is an Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Design, Özyeğin University, Istanbul, and her multimedia art has been exhibited globally.

A. İdil Akın, PhD is an Assistant Professor in the New Media and Communication department at Kadir Has University. She earned her PhD in Sociology at Stony Brook University. Her recent work focuses on political opportunities in social movements, the reciprocal relationship between traditional and new media, platform economies, and AI use in educational settings. Her work appears in journals like Social Movement Studies and Cultural Trends.

Aylin Sunam Audry, PhD is an Assistant Professor in the New Media and Communication department at Kadir Has University. She earned her joint PhD from Galatasaray University and Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, focusing on "Muslim Women's New Forms of Dating and Marriage" in Turkey. She coordinated the project "Mapping the Digital Diaspora" at Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle, exploring digital media practices among Turkish immigrants in France. Her interests span digital media, migration, digital art, and gender studies. Her work appears in journals like Cultural Trends and Sexuality & Culture.

Mehmet Kerem Çetrefli (Sabancı University) and Berkay Minkara (Charles University) - Interruption and Eventification: Rethinking Cinema-Going Theory After COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted cinema-going in a way nothing had before: a state-mandated, almost global shutdown. Earlier disruptions slowed cinema down, but the pandemic removed cinema-going as a social institution altogether, which makes it a kind of natural experiment for testing pre-pandemic theories of the cinematic experience. This paper takes four frameworks, ritual and threshold theory, the phenomenology of collective audiencehood, the relocation thesis, and the historiography of the death of cinema, and rebuilds them as theories that each carry an implicit expectation about what a total disruption should produce. I then compare those expectations with what actually happened in Europe after 2020: a partial and uneven recovery in attendance, a widening gap between admissions and box-office revenue, the rise of event-based exhibition, and a shift in what people think the cinema visit is worth, away from social interaction and toward affordability, hygiene, and the quality of the experience. None of the frameworks turns out to be simply

wrong, but none of them still works in its original form either. Ritual theory holds only if you understand cinema-going less as an everyday habit and more as a special event. Collective spectatorship explains the extra value that event-based exhibition turns into an economic asset. The relocation thesis needs a concept of re-marking the cinema as the original site of film experience. And crisis historiography has to separate interruptive crises, which suspend the practice, from competitive crises, which reshape it through substitution. These revisions point in the same direction, toward a bigger claim: a figure-ground reversal in cinema-going, where the marked event, rather than routine attendance, becomes the organizing logic of exhibition. I test this claim through supply-side indicators of eventification, keep it bounded to post-pandemic Europe, frame it so it can be falsified, and weigh it against the continuity thesis and the audience-centred view.

Bio:

Mehmet Kerem Çetrefli is an MA student in Cultural Studies at Sabancı University. He holds a BA in Film and Television from Istanbul Bilgi University. His research examines representation across film, television, video games, and digital media. His paper on narratology and mental illness in the video game Disco Elysium was presented at the Horror and Gaming Conference at Falmouth University, and his work on affective economies and youth precarity in contemporary Turkey has been selected for presentation at the XIV GECA Congress: Politics of Pop. His MA thesis will develop his research on Disco Elysium further. Alongside his academic work, he has worked as a research assistant and professionally as a video editor. He plans to pursue doctoral study in cinematic and media studies.

Berkay Minkara is a Cinema Studies graduate and an MA candidate in Media and Area Studies at Charles University in Prague. His research lies at the intersection of Film Studies, Media Studies, Celebrity Studies, postcolonial theory, and discourse theory, with a particular focus on representation, identity, cultural memory, and the political dimensions of audiovisual media. He is interested in how film, sound, and digital media shape narratives of belonging, visibility, and collective memory across different cultural contexts. Alongside his academic work, he has worked in podcast production and digital media organizations in Türkiye, gaining professional experience in audio production, video editing, scriptwriting, copywriting, and narrative development. His combination of theoretical inquiry and practical media experience informs his interdisciplinary approach to film, sound, and contemporary media cultures.

14.45 – 15.45

4.Identities, Struggles and Solidarities

Chair: Kenan Sharpe (Sabancı University)

Aydan Kartaltepe & İlkan Can İpekçi (Sabancı University) - Pacing Our Proud Steps: Everyday Struggles of LGBTQIA+ People Living with Long Covid in Turkey

As today's popular narratives go, the Covid-19 pandemic, despite all the damage it caused, is now behind us, and is a "legacy" of our viral histories. The experts, we are being told, have learned their lessons with their newly-developed technologies, and ushered us into a post-pandemic world. Yet the social realities look quite different once we turn away from the biomedical accounts to the socio-cultural and everyday sources. People are still living with so-called "post"-pandemic symptoms and contested diagnoses that continue to cause much suffering in people's ordinary lives. Long Covid is arguably one of the most striking examples of these "legacies" whose burden falls unevenly amongst different social groups, in that empirical surveys show that sexual and gender minorities (SGMs) report higher rates of Long Covid, and greater day-to-day activity limitation, compared to their cisgender heterosexual peers. In Turkey, this disparity is compounded with a hostile socio-political climate: LGBTQIA+ people routinely postpone necessary medical care and conceal their identities from the care providers, considering the way queer public sphere has been targeted with ever-increasing political homophobia (especially since 2015, the first Pride ban, and the following events including the 2021 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention). In this paper, we will examine how LGBTQIA+ people in Turkey live with, narrate, and organize their lives around Long Covid. Through in-depth interviews with 5-6 interlocutors, we will trace everyday struggles, fatigue, brain fog, precarious work experiences, and possible strained intimacies. Engaging with the conference's Butlerian question of whose lives are rendered "grievable", we will also critically engage with official accounts that drastically undercount this marginalized group.

Bio:

İlkan Can İpekçi is a transdisciplinary post-doctoral research fellow at at Sabancı University. They completed their Ph.D. in gender studies at the same university with a dissertation on queer trauma and the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in Turkey in relation to their mental health struggles under the supervision of Prof. Sibel Irzık and Prof. Sibel Halfon. They hold dual BA degrees in Interpreting and Translation Studies (English-Spanish-Turkish), and Psychology from Yeditepe University where they also completed their M.A. in Social Anthropology. Their most recent work has been published in the Journal of Psychosocial Studies.*

Aydan Kartaltepe completed their BA in Anthropology with high honors at Yeditepe University. They wrote their bachelor's thesis on feminist anthropology of labor and rural, gendered social relations with women hazelnut workers during her fieldwork in Trabzon. Having been awarded full scholarship, they started their Master's in the department of Cultural Studies at İstanbul Şehir University. Their academic interests range from critical masculinities studies, anthropology of gender and sexuality, representations of masculinities in literature and media, and linguistic anthropology of gender and sexualities.

Bahar Genç (Sabancı University) - From Crisis to Routine: The Cultural Afterlife of Pandemic Fan Practices in BTS Fandom

The Covid-19 pandemic transformed artist-fan relations by making digital intimacy a necessity rather than a solely offline interaction. While practices such as online concerts, livestreams, behind the scenes content, and platform-based communication emerged as responses to social isolation, many have persisted well beyond the pandemic, becoming normalized expectations within contemporary fandom culture. This study asks how crisis-induced forms of participation became routine features of artist-fan interaction in the post-pandemic era.

Using global Korean boy band BTS and its fandom, ARMY, as a case study, the paper combines digital ethnography of ARMY communities on X (Twitter) with an analysis of BTS-produced content released between 2020 and 2023, including the BE album project, Weverse communication, and online concerts. Bringing together Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Sara Ahmed's affective economies, and Zizi Papacharissi's affective publics, the paper argues that the pandemic did not create a rupture in fandom but accelerated and normalized existing dynamics of affective participation. Practices initially developed to sustain connection during a global crisis have become embedded in the everyday routines of fandom, reshaping expectations of intimacy, accessibility, and participation. By examining the cultural afterlife of pandemic fan practices, this study argues that the enduring legacy of Covid-19 lies not only in what people remember about the pandemic, but in the everyday routines and expectations that continue to organize digital sociality. In this sense, Covid-19 cannot be understood solely as a biomedical event, but as a socio-cultural transformation whose effects remain embedded in contemporary artist-fan relations.

Bio: Bahar Genç is an M.A. student in Cultural Studies at Sabancı University. She holds a B.A. in Sociology from Marmara University. Her research focuses on digital culture, fandom studies, affect, and everyday practices of online communities, with particular attention to K-pop fandoms and participatory cultures. Using qualitative methods, including digital ethnography, she examines how digital platforms reshape collective identities, artist-fan relationships, and forms of cultural participation. Her broader academic interests lie in popular culture.

Ece Naz Hepgüler (Koç University) - Who Gets to Be Intellectual Online? Aestheticised Learning and the Reconfiguration of Cultural Authority after Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about not only a significant transformation in education but also a surge in misinformation. With educational institutions shutting down, there was an overwhelming reliance on digital platforms for information dissemination. This shift created an environment ripe for the spread of misinformation, as the rapid transition to online learning and communication often left individuals without the skills to critically evaluate the abundance of digital content. The temporal disruption of traditional mechanisms has enabled the emergence of young "digital intellectuals" who establish their own distinct authority and hierarchical structures. Individuals known as intellectual influencers, BookTokers, and newsfluencers have emerged, sharing knowledge rooted in their experiences and education. This trend fosters alternative canons and alternative forms of education. These traits are especially noticeable in online aesthetic communities related to creativity, art, and education, such as Dark Academia, Literary-It Girl, "Being Disgustingly Educated", personal curriculum, and so on. While Bourdieu characterises these creative fields with a weak degree of codification, the ephemeral and less formalised structures of online aesthetic circles place the fields' fragile boundaries in an even more precarious position. Drawing on information gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with emerging "digital intellectuals", this study examines how online communities that gained prominence during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to the reconfiguration of intellectual and cultural authority and of online cultural participation. Preliminary findings suggest that these substitute campus experiences embody a transformation away from traditional gatekeepers towards decentralised and community-based forms of cultural authority.

Bio: Ece Naz Hepgüler is a master's student in Sociology at Koç University. Her research focuses on the sociology of literature, particularly the online literary aesthetics, alternative ways of canon formation and the role of digital intellectuals. She is currently working on her thesis, which investigates how intellectuals are perceived and how the literary field has evolved, using Bourdieu's field theory in the context of the digital age.

5. Will There Be Songs About the Dark Times?

Chair: Burcu Alkan (Yeditepe University)

Cristina Franco-Rosillo (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) - COVID-19 Fiction and the Necropolitics of Infection: Triage and Conflict in Hari Kunzru's Blue Ruin (2024)

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an emotional, social, and temporal rupture, while also revealing how certain populations were framed as expendable through a logic of triage. Triage refers not only to the medical allocation of scarce resources, but also to the biopolitical categorisation of lives according to differential exposure to vulnerability, violence, injury, and death (Butler 2006; Mbembe 2003, 2019; Foucault 2003). As Zadie Smith observes in *Intimations* (2020), mortality rates in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic were not incidental but grounded in race and class inequalities that have long governed the nation. While the Trump administration repeatedly framed illness through the language of war, for "millions of Americans, it's always been a war" (Smith 2020, 14)—one of racialised and classed struggle.

This paper explores how Hari Kunzru's *Blue Ruin* (2024) represents the COVID-19 pandemic as a form of social conflict through the formal and thematic dimensions of triage. *Blue Ruin* juxtaposes Jay, a washed-up artist living as an undocumented immigrant and working as a delivery driver in New York, with Alice, a wealthy artist manager and Jay's former girlfriend. Through this contrast, the novel shows that pandemic vulnerability is structurally produced, dramatising who can retreat, who must remain exposed, and whose life becomes socially and narratively visible. Thus, I argue that *Blue Ruin* turns triage into a literary device through which COVID-19 is represented as a conflict that organises the narrative contrast between protected and exposed individuals, while directing narrative attention towards the unequal conditions that determine who can access care and safety and whose lives are publicly recognised as grievable.

Primary Source

Kunzru, Hari. 2024. *Blue Ruin*. Scribner UK.

Secondary Sources

Butler, Judith. 2006. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso.

Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. Edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. Translated by David Macey. Picador.

Mbembe, Achille. 2003. 'Necropolitics'. Translated by Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15: 11–40.

Mbembe, Achille. 2019. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steve Corcoran. Theory in Forms. Duke University Press.

Smith, Zadie. 2020. *Intimations: Six Essays*. Penguin Books.

Bio: Cristina Franco-Rosillo is a doctoral candidate at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the Department of English and German Studies. She holds a BA in English and Spanish Studies and an MA in Advanced English Studies from the same university. She is currently a member of the Beyond Postmemory Research Group (PID2023-147481NB-I00), where she also works as a research assistant. Her PhD examines COVID-19 novels set during the lockdown period in the United States, analysing how these narratives reconceptualise conflict through the pandemic's pervasive logic of triage, which shapes the texts both thematically and formally.

Julia Mollenthiel (University of Florida) - Langston Hughes and the Racial Contract in the 21st Century

In this article, I read Langston Hughes's poetry through the lens of Charles W. Mills's *The Racial Contract* (1997) to examine race relations in the twenty-first century and the catastrophes that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic as it relates to racialized violence and oppression. Langston Hughes's poetry captures the enduring legacy of slavery and its various reconfigurations over time, which allows us to recognize lynching and structural racism in all of its manifestations as directly tied to modern enforcers of the Racial Contract. The imagery and themes of Hughes's poetry, in combination with Mills's theory of the Racial Contract, provides a unique way of identifying the persistence of racial violence. Mills's idea of the Racial Contract clarifies why Hughes's "dream" is continually deferred in the United States as it was founded and is still constructed. Together, they form an elastic frame by which to examine the Covid-19 pandemic, its interconnections with race, and ongoing racial violence in America. By applying Hughes's poetry and Mills's philosophy to this historical moment, I extend and modernize these works showing how they are applicable to and constructive ways of understanding our contemporary world.

Bio: Dr. Julia Mollenthiel is an assistant professor in the English department/African American Studies Program at the University of Florida where she teaches interdisciplinary courses on Black Horror and Afro-Futurism.

Nesrin Koç (Bournemouth University) - Unequal Lockdown: Covid-19 and Structural Injustice in Ali Smith's Summer

In *British Covid Fictions: Reading Pandemic Politics* (2025), Hywel Dix argues that the UK's pandemic response should be understood not as an unprecedented rupture, but as a continuation of neoliberal governance and Brexit-era populist rhetoric. Building on this framework, this paper examines how Ali Smith's *Summer* (2020) represents the pandemic not as an isolated crisis, but as a catalyst that exposed and intensified deep-seated structural injustices.

Set during the initial 2020 outbreak, Summer captures the unsettling atmosphere of the first lockdown through images of panic buying, ghostly deserted streets, and people retrieving their lost connections on Zoom. Through characters like Sacha, who navigates her anxiety over the forest fires alongside a “too-late response from a useless and distracted government,” Smith extends the sharp political critiques of her earlier Seasonal Quartet novels. By portraying healthcare workers forced to use bin liners as makeshift protective equipment or buy their own masks on Amazon, the novel exposes the hollow promises of earlier Brexit propaganda that had suggested leaving the EU would strengthen the NHS.

Likewise, the novel reveals how pandemic-era policy choices actively weaponized vulnerabilities related to age, race, and legal status. This is achieved by juxtaposing the relative safety of middle-class domestic confinement with devastating fatalities in care homes and the plight of detainees abruptly released from immigration removal centers without state support. This systemic neglect is mirrored at the community level through the racism targeted at Mel’s Chinese mother, who is harassed at a supermarket for “spreading the virus.” By framing the contemporary crisis through these immediate injustices, Summer demonstrates that the deep social divisions shaping post-Brexit Britain were merely unmasked, rather than created, by the lockdown.

Bio: Dr. Nesrin Koç is an independent researcher and Visiting Fellow at Bournemouth University. She was a TÜBİTAK 2219 Postdoctoral Researcher at Bournemouth University and previously served as a faculty member at Mudanya University, Türkiye. She received her PhD in English Literature from Middle East Technical University in 2021 with a dissertation titled “Reconstruction of Authorial Identity in Contemporary Author Fictions: A.S Byatt’s Possession, David Lodge’s Author, Author and Maggie Gee’s Virginia Woolf in Manhattan”. Her research focuses on author fictions, contemporary British literature, and the reconstructive turn in literature. More recently, her interest in life writing, autofiction, memoir and particularly illness narratives has expanded into the field of medical humanities.

17.15 – 18.15

Round table – Closing remarks

Chisomo Kalinga is a Chancellor’s Fellow at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh. Her research interests are disease (specifically HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections), illness and wellbeing, biomedicine, traditional healing, indigenous beliefs and cosmologies and their narrative representation in African oral and print literatures. Her transdisciplinary work engages storytelling and literary traditions in Malawi focusing on the intersections between aesthetics, narrative, ethnography, representations of the body and the communities that produce stories about health and wellbeing. She founded the Malawi Medical Humanities Network in 2017 and is currently supporting the transition to project the Malawi University of Science and Technology.

F. Deniz Mardin is a medical doctor with a PhD in Public Health from Istanbul University. Her expertise includes migration, the right to health, primary healthcare, and maternal and reproductive health. She has worked with Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Syria, Sierra Leone, Greece, Italy, and other humanitarian settings, supporting migrants and survivors of torture. She has also collaborated with national and international NGOs, taught at Koç University Faculty of Medicine, and conducted research at the Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, NOVA University Lisbon. Her current work focuses on health equity, migration, humanitarian health responses, and community-based approaches.

Nükhet Varlık is Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University–Newark. Her research focuses on disease, death, medicine, and public health in the Ottoman Empire. Her first book, Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: The Ottoman Experience, 1347–1600, is the first systematic scholarly study of the Ottoman experience of plague during the Black Death pandemic and the centuries that followed. It was awarded Middle East Studies Association’s 2016 Albert Hourani Book Award, the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association’s 2016 M. Fuat Köprülü Book Prize, the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean’s 2017 Dionisius A. Agius Prize, and the American Association for the History of Medicine’s 2018 George Rosen Prize. She is the editor of Plague and Contagion in the Islamic Mediterranean, a collection of articles on the social, cultural, and political responses to epidemics in the post-Black Death Islamic Mediterranean. Together with Lori Jones, Varlık is co-editor of Death and Disease in the Medieval and Early Modern World: Perspectives From Across the Mediterranean and Beyond (forthcoming).