



## The 4<sup>th</sup> CHL Graduate Symposium

### Immersia Research Journeys: Celebrating HDR Research in Asia and the Pacific Program

Date: 11 September 2024 | Time: 10am-1pm | Venue: LT 1.04, HC Coombs Extension, 8 Fellows Rd

10 am – Introduction session

10.15 am to 11 am – Session 1

Presenters: Jalene Nalbant; Wasia Arshad; Remeen Firoz

#### **Talk 1: *The Language of Research***

By Jalene Nalbant

Affiliation: Archaeology and Natural History (CHL)

Presentation format: 3-Minute-Thesis

Abstract: I am a 3rd Year PhD student at the Department of Archaeology and Natural History. My project uses lake sediments to identify when people first began living on Belau. Lately I have been reflecting on how I describe my data, particularly as someone who is of Mediterranean Heritage. I am taking the opportunity to use this Symposium to discuss some thoughts I've had while I navigate reconstructing Early Belauan History through a multi-disciplinary Western lens.

#### **Talk 2: *Winning a Lottery: fishing in tidal rivers of Sundarban***

By Remeen Firoz

Affiliation: Anthropology (CHL)

Presentation format: 10-Minute-Talk

Abstract: It is the Bangla month of Bhadra, one of the hottest and wettest times of the year. I am traveling with five Munda fishermen from Sundarban. We are on a fishing trip in the tidal rivers of the mangroves, with permits from the Forest Department in Bangladesh. Life in the tidal rivers of Sundarban is challenging for Munda (indigenous) fishermen, as they are exposed to the harsh elements of the environment. Babu Lal Munda and his group of fishermen agree that illegal fishing activities that continue during the ban period (June-August) have led to a decline in fish diversity and abundance. The sheer volume of boats and fishermen competing for fish seem



alarming – in sanctuaries demarcated by the Forest Department as well as the areas that are permitted for fishing. This intergenerational trait is dwindling because of population pressures, climate change and restrictive policies. As Gobindo Munda from Sripolkathi village told me, “Catching fish is like winning a lottery”. Fishing grounds are occupied on a first come first serve basis; those who arrive earlier set their nets and wait nearby. This fishing technique can simply be described as ‘trapping the fish’, by causing a physical barrier in the swimming paths. I will briefly describe fishing activities of Munda fishermen in tidal waters and how they navigate transmuting realities.

### **Talk 3: *Commodification of Medicinal Plants***

By Wasia Arshad

Affiliation: Anthropology (CHL)

Presentation format: 5-Minute-Thesis

Abstract: The issue of commodification of medicinal plants and its associated impact on the environment requires urgent attention, particularly when the Indigenous knowledge is unlawfully being used by pharmaceutical industries to manufacture commercial medicines and cosmetics products. In the context of Swat in Pakistan, there is a significant rise in the use of endangered medicinal plants in the patent pharmaceutical industry. This project aims to uncover the implications of the commodification and commercialization of medicinal plants on specific local communities who have been sharing their life with the flora for centuries and its potential impacts on human- plant relationships. As there is a heightened interest in the use of medicinal plants by pharmaceutical and herbal companies as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs), for example, Pinsars and Dawa Khana, the project asks what it means to commodify the environment in the Anthropocene.

11 am to 11.30 am - Tea Break

11.30 am to 12.30 pm - Session 2

Presenters: Mamta Sachan Kumar; Tarini Date; Joshua Willsher

### **Talk 1: *In the absence of Nothing***

By Mamta Sachan Kumar

Affiliation: Gender, Media and Cultural Studies (CHL)

Presentation format: 5-Minute-Thesis

Abstract: My PhD thesis probes a claim made by housewives that they do 'nothing' all day. As I've toiled in thought over how to make sense of 'nothing', it has occurred to me that the best way to flesh out 'nothing' could be literal – by imbibing its spirit as the personified Nothing and by



considering then, what would be if Nothing ceased to exist. Imagine now, just for a few minutes, a world in which there is no doing of 'nothing' – where Nothing, is cloaked and silent. Using poetry, I yank you through the course of such a day – one left wanting in the absence of Nothing, so that you might miss her and take notice, if not wholeheartedly have sunk, drunk – dunked, in the juice of her invisibility potion.

**Talk 2: *Maid With Care: Caring for Migrant Domestic Workers and the (Re)Production of Singapore(an-ness)***

By Tarini Date

Affiliation: Anthropology (CASS)

Presentation format: 10-Minute-Talk

Abstract: In Singapore, the vulnerabilities faced by migrant domestic workers (MDWs) has received considerable attention. Their susceptibility to abuse, overwork, and isolation as well as their deportability due to weak visa protections have all been discussed at length. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on MDWs in Singapore has also been covered. All scholars researching MDWs in Singapore acknowledge that Singapore's labour migration regime is highly restrictive and relies heavily on discipline and surveillance to manage MDWs. The vital role MDWs played in transforming Singapore into a metropolis has not gone unnoticed scholars note that research on MDWs is burgeoning. The care work that MDWs do for their employers (as well as their employers' families) and their own families has also been researched extensively. The care MDW's receive has received scant attention. This project seeks to: fill this gap in the literature, move beyond treating care as a one-way street, and broaden the focus from the care MDWs provide to others to include the care MDWs receive. Crucially, I will use caring for MDWs as an entry point from which explore conceptions of Singapore and Singaporean-ness. This has yet to be discussed in the Singaporean context.

**Talk 3: *Geochemical Studies in CHL***

By Joshua Willsher

Affiliation: Archaeology & Natural History (CHL)

Presentation format: 10-Minute-Talk

Abstract: In this presentation I will outline some of the scientific techniques we use to study archaeological stone. This includes a range of field and lab based techniques with which we can trace to origins of objects to answer questions about trade and human mobility in the past.

I will briefly discuss some of the cases in which I have used these techniques and how this analysis applies to broader archaeological questions and ultimately tells us about ancient people.

12.30 pm to 1 pm – Concluding remarks

