

Conférence Internationale de l'OSOI

Océan Indien et océan mondial : quelle mondialisation ?

Référente : Bénédicte Letellier

Ce panel portera sur le processus de mondialisation et ses conséquences sur la vie quotidienne des sociétés de l'océan Indien. Aujourd'hui, si nous admettons avec Bruno Latour (2017) qu'il n'y a plus d'idéal d'un monde partagé par ce que nous avons appelé jusqu'ici l'Occident, peut-on néanmoins déclarer comme l'a fait Harold James en 2002 la fin de la mondialisation ? De la phase prémoderne à la phase contemporaine de la mondialisation, le prétendu « berceau de la mondialisation » qu'est l'océan Indien reste l'un des exemples les plus intéressants de la mondialisation à étudier pour tenter d'y répondre. Les trois communications de ce panel proposent une réflexion sur les perspectives d'évolution de l'océan Indien, d'une part, entre les pays bordiers et, d'autre part, entre ces pays et le reste du monde. Dans quelle mesure l'océan Indien constitue-t-il un enjeu géopolitique et socio-culturel fondamental pour repenser l'interdépendance des pays ?

Programme du panel :

- **Amaury Lorin**, professeur d'histoire-géographie (Lycée Angellier, Dunkerque) :

Amaury Lorin, docteur en histoire de l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Prix de thèse du Sénat 2012), ancien boursier de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, est actuellement professeur d'histoire-géographie en section européenne au Lycée Angellier à Dunkerque (académie de Lille). Il a notamment codirigé Nouvelle histoire des colonisations européennes (XIXe-XXe siècles) : sociétés, cultures, politiques (Paris,

presses universitaires de France, 2013). Il a enseigné l'histoire contemporaine à l'Université de Rangoun (Birmanie) (2013-2015) et contribue depuis 2010 à la revue *Questions internationales* (La Documentation française).

« La crise des Rohingyas en Birmanie (2017 à aujourd'hui) : un risque de déséquilibre pour l'Océan Indien ? »

Pays bordier de l'Océan Indien avec 1930 km de côte sur la rive septentrionale de cet océan, la Birmanie s'est soudainement ouverte en 2011 après cinquante ans d'isolement international, en engageant de courageuses réformes économiques et une incertaine « transition démocratique ». Parmi les mouvements et les risques transformant l'Océan Indien au XXI^e siècle (espaces maritimes et terrestres), la crise majeure des Rohingyas musulmans, une minorité musulmane persécutée dans l'État côtier de Rakhine par la majorité bouddhiste de Birmanie, qui a éclaté en 2017, comporte un risque important de déséquilibre pour toute la partie orientale de l'océan. À l'origine d'un des plus grands désastres humanitaires de notre époque, l'exode forcé de près de 720 000 Rohingyas vers le Bangladesh voisin afin d'échapper aux exactions perpétrées par l'armée birmane (Tatmadaw), d'une ampleur sans précédent, bouleverse en effet tout à la fois les flux migratoires et les données géopolitiques internes de l'Océan Indien de manière dramatique.

- **Farhad A.K.S. Khoyratty**, Associate Professor in Cultural Studies (University of Mauritius):

Farhad A.K. S. Khoyratty is co-Coordinator of the Research Group for Indian Oceanic Studies in the Humanities (REGIOSH) at the University of Mauritius. He has been the recipient of a number of research fellowships, especially at Cambridge University (UK), and also an Honorary Fellowship at the University of Iowa. He has been a member (since 2008) of Ratnakara Indian Ocean Literatures and Cultures in Barcelona, an active member of five funded projects. Further, he is an Associate of the Mellon-funded Oceanic Humanities for the Global South project and coordinated the Literary Ecologies of the Indian Ocean World project, both at the University of the Witwatersrand. Further, he has given Keynotes at two international conferences on the Indian Ocean. In 2015, he completed a Research Project entitled "Mapping Mauritius: a Reading of the Representation of Mauritius in Hindi Cinema".

"The world is now "an Indian Ocean": searching for new epistemes for power exchanges in the Indian Ocean."

Representations are not just metaphors for power, but the sites for power struggles. A classic definition of globalisation from Anthony Giddens pertains to "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (1991). Such social relations specifically accommodate the transmission of ideologies that essentially support economic and political globalisation. These relations are unequal a priori, tending to reflect both a hierarchy of cultural dominance and ongoing power struggles. As part of debates (e.g Held et al. 1999, James & Steger 2014) about what truly constitutes globalisation, our contention here is that the Indian Ocean more or less contemporary with the Western Middle Ages is an early avatar of ongoing (?) globalisation. However, whereas the Indian Ocean global was driven by the immediate reality of geographical juxtaposition with the Ocean as road, the current global world tends to have sailed along the furrows of power relations inherited from Western colonialism. But this reality coexists with fast shifting stakes, which established epistemologies are not always able to fit. The Ocean as a road, now superimposed with arrestingly fast communication and air-travel offers shifting sands that distort or even overwrite established North/South and West/East hierarchies. Such transformations will typically offer the unprecedented epistemological potential to consider peoples or cultures as discrete events only when their intersection in space and time and therefore a shifting ontology. Meanwhile, however, alternative mythopoeic epistemes reflect a desire to outperform such posthuman, post-territory everydayness, anchoring its fluidity, for instance through postmodern

tribalisms. To explore these possibilities, we will focus on Hindustani cinema's representation of Mauritius as the site of a relation that is both old and new. We will also be applying works of African philosophy such as of Kaboha and Ukpokolo.

- **David Brewster**, Senior Research Fellow with the National Security College (Australian National University):

Dr David Brewster is a Senior Research Fellow with the National Security College where he works on Indian Ocean security and Indo Pacific issues. His books include *India as an Asia Pacific power*, about India's strategic role in the Asia Pacific and *India's Ocean: the story of India's bid for regional leadership* which examines India's strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean. His latest edited volume is *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean*. He is also the author of *The Red Flag Follows Trade: China's Future as an Indian Ocean Power in Strategic Asia* (2019) which examines scenarios for the development of China's future military presence in the Indian Ocean. In March 2019, Dr Brewster released a special report: *Australia's Second Sea: Facing our Multipolar Future in the Indian Ocean*.

"The New Great Game: Planning for a Multipolar Indian Ocean"

The geopolitical environment in the Indian Ocean is changing and becoming more contested than it has been for decades. This is the result of several geopolitical changes that are occurring more or less concurrently. The United States has been the predominant power in the Indian Ocean for at least 40 years and even though its relative lead is diminishing, it may remain the leading military power in the region for decades to come. But there are many uncertainties about the US role in the region. There may be circumstances in which US military predominance in the Indian Ocean is threatened much faster than many expect. If technological advances in the extraction of gas and oil continue to reduce US dependence on imported energy then the Persian Gulf could easily become much less important to the US, perhaps fundamentally altering the US commitment to the Indian Ocean. A reduced US presence in the Gulf could spark a period of intense strategic competition as China, India and other countries move to fill any perceived power vacuum. That would be likely to have a knock-on effect right across the Indian Ocean.

A second major change in the geopolitical environment is the emergence of India as the biggest economic and military power among Indian Ocean states. As India's power grows it will likely seek to assume a greater leadership role across the region beyond its traditional areas of interest in South Asia. Since 1947, India has shown a strong aversion to the presence of other major powers in the Indian Ocean, although previously it had little power to do anything about it. Those concerns are now very much directed at China. As a result, strategic competition between India and China is likely to become an increasingly important factor in the dynamics of the region.

Another big change in the geopolitical environment is caused by China. China has several important strategic interests in the Indian Ocean that are likely to drive an ever-greater military presence. Beijing's most crucial interest is the protection of its trading routes, over which around 82% of its imported oil needs are transported from the Middle East and Africa. These sea lanes are highly vulnerable, especially at the so-called maritime 'choke-points' such as the Strait of Hormuz and Malacca Strait. But China also has other important strategic interests in the region, including a growing number of Chinese nationals and investments related to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The imperative to protect people and assets is likely to become an increasingly important driver in China's military presence in the region.

The growing strategic roles of India and China in the Indian Ocean are being complemented by several middle powers. Australia and France have both long been active in the region. Japan and the United Kingdom have also been building their presence. Indonesia also has particular strategic significance. Since independence it largely turned its back on the Indian Ocean, giving its attention to Southeast Asia

and further north. But Indonesia may increasingly come to understand the influence it can wield across the Indian Ocean region, including through its relationships in Southeast Asia and the Islamic world.

Together these developments mean that the Indian Ocean will almost certainly become a much more multipolar and complex strategic environment than at any time in the modern era.