



Centre for Diaspora & Transnational Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



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Message from the Interim Director



Dear Colleagues and students,

It has been my pleasure to serve as Interim Director for the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies for 2024-25. As we began the year I thought about the University as a place where people have the opportunity to find themselves, to recreate themselves, to confront and overcome challenges, and mostly to immerse themselves in the privilege of learning. And I thought of the generation upon generation of students who have been doing this in different ideological and material contexts since the founding of the University in 1849. Entering, learning, befriending, being befriended and moving on to the rest of their lives.

What prompted those thoughts is a photo that hangs in my home office of the University of Toronto graduating class of 1913, A friend gifted me when I graduated. It reflects, in many ways, a distant past and while visible diversity exists in the picture it is markedly different from the campus and the graduating photo we see today. And as we witness a commitment to equity and inclusion under threat in different parts of the world today, my experience in CDTS and as Director this year has deepened my appreciation of the Centre as a place in the University that pushes back against those pressures and continues to express and defend core values of academic freedom and justice.

This doesn't occur without encountering challenges, but it happens through the continued commitment of our students who bring their curiosity, intellect, desire to learn and share into the classroom. We are all the better for it. It also springs from a group of faculty who bring a diversity of insight, experience and knowledge to the CDTS experience and seek to create the classroom not as an architectural space but a place in which we can all learn together and from each other. The staff at CDTS are the hinge that opens this gate to this experience. I have learned this year that CDTS is a special place in the university only because of the intersections among us all. This was confirmed to us this year when an analysis of past course evaluations by The Varsity found that DTS was ranked the third highest program in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

Of course, as with years past, we have new accomplishments this year. We welcomed new faculty. Thanks to the generosity of Deans Woodin and Wright we opened a new student common room. We invited new vibrant scholars to present their research in our speakers' series. We hosted events that highlighted the amazing accomplishments of CDTS alumni. And we have initiated social events to build on the sense of community around CDTS. Our faculty have continued to engage in important research, to use it as a platform for engaging with a broad range of public and academic audiences, and to help integrate the important work of the Centre into a network of international scholars.

For those of you graduating this year I wish you all the best in charting the path of your life, I hope we have helped you in this part of your journey and please do stay in touch. For those of you continuing your journey with us, have a wonderful summer.

Thank you all for your support this year and for making CDTS such a special place.

Kenneth Iain MacDonald, Ph.D.
Interim Director, Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies

About CDTs

The Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies is an incubator for interdisciplinary transnational and diasporic research across the humanities and social sciences. Located in the world's most diverse city, the Centre is ideally situated for its innovative and urgent research on the experiences of migration.

The Centre serves as a connective tissue between departments and schools while also supporting original research and engaged teaching. In addition to the Centre's comparative, qualitative and historically-driven work, it provides policy insights on pertinent issues in the world today.



Founded by University Professor Ato Quayson, the Centre continues its remarkable growth under the leadership of Professor Ken MacDonald, Interim Director and Dr. Antonela Arhin, Associate Director.

**Founded
in
2005**

**11
Appointed
Faculty**

**190+
Undergraduate
Students**

**30+
Graduate
Students**

**Monthly lectures,
conferences,
seminars, panels,
networking
opportunities and
social events**

CDTS Faculty & Staff

Faculty



Alejandra González Jiménez is an anthropologist of labour and global capitalism. She holds a joint position between the Centre of Diaspora for Transnational Studies and the Centre for Industrial Relations & Human Resources. Her research is centered around the domains of labour, capitalism, and free trade.



Andrea S. Allen is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto. Her research has addressed matters of race, sexuality, gender, violence, and religion in Brazil and the African Diaspora.



Angelica Pesarini is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies and Italian Studies at the University of Toronto. Her work seeks to expand the field of Black Italia focusing on dynamics of race, gender, identity, and citizenship.



Kamari Maxine Clarke is a Distinguished Professor at the University of Toronto. For more than twenty years, she has conducted research on issues related to legal institutions, human rights and international law, religious nationalism and the politics of race and globalization.



Kenneth MacDonald is currently the Interim Director at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies (CDTS) and an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto. He is also a core faculty member in two interdisciplinary programs: CDTS and the Centre for Critical Development Studies. Most of his research is ethnographically grounded and seek to understand the role of transnational processes in the reproduction of cultural formations.



Kevin Lewis O'Neill is a Professor at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies and the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. A cultural anthropologist, his work focuses on the moral dimensions of contemporary political practice in Latin America.



Naomi Seidman is the Jackman Humanities Professor at the University of Toronto, in the Department for the Study of Religion and the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies. Her work focuses on Jewish Cultures, Translation Studies, Languages, and Literatures.

CDTS Faculty & Staff

Faculty



Padraic X. Scanlan is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies and the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources at the University of Toronto. He is also a Research Associate at the Centre for History and Economics at the University of Cambridge and Harvard University. He is an historian of labour, enslaved and free, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



Sumayya Kassamali is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. Professor Kassamali's research addresses migrant domestic work in Lebanon, and the broader transformation of social relations that accompanied the large-scale reliance on temporary African and Asian migrant labour in the Middle East.



Ted Sammons is an Assistant Professor (CLTA) at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on everyday intersections of racial formation, national sovereignty, and capitalist globalization, with particular attention to perspectives on related topics that resonate in the contemporary Caribbean.



Tracy M. Lemos is a historian of violence and a religion scholar. Originally trained in biblical studies and the ancient history of Israel/Palestine, her research has turned in the past decade to the comparative history of violence and genocide studies. She has published on dehumanization, rituals of violence, gender and violence--focusing especially on masculinity--and how violence relates to and produces social hierarchies of various kinds.

Staff



Dr. Antonela Arhin is the Associate Director and a Sessional Lecturer at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto where she teaches courses on human trafficking, diaspora and transnationalism. She brings over 20 years of experience in higher education, government, NGOs and consulting.



Katharine Bell is the Communications and Program Officer at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. She brings over five years of experience in academic administration, logistics, events, and developing communications strategies.

2024-25 Courses

Undergraduate

DTS200Y1 - Introduction to Diaspora and Transnational Studies

What is the relationship between place and belonging, between territory and memory? How have the experiences of migration and dislocation challenged the modern assumption that the nation-state should be the limit of identification? What effect has the emergence of new media of communication had upon the coherence of cultural and political boundaries? All of these questions and many more form part of the subject matter of Diaspora and Transnational Studies. This introductory course examines the historical and contemporary movements of peoples and the complex issues of identity and experience to which these processes give rise as well as the creative possibilities that flow from movement and being moved. The area of study is comparative and interdisciplinary, drawing from the social sciences, history, the arts and humanities.

DTS300H1 - Qualitative & Quantitative Reasoning

Focuses on research design and training in methods from history, geography, anthropology, literary and cultural studies, and other disciplines appropriate to Diaspora and Transnational Studies. Prepares students to undertake primary research required in senior seminars.

DTS305H1 - Special Topics in DTS: Filth: Transnational Perspectives on Dirt, Garbage, and Impurity

This class will draw on research from anthropology, religious studies, environmental studies, and other fields to examine transnational, cross-cultural, and diasporic perspectives on filth and dirt and how these concepts are deployed to create and reinforce social hierarchies in a multitude of global contexts. Discussions will address such topics as colonial encounters and otherization through ideas of cleanliness; the weaponization of filth in transnational practices of violence; the commercialization and exportation of trash from wealthy nations to the global south; migrants, cleaning/cleanliness, and dehumanization; and impurity, gender, and sexuality in diaspora communities.

DTS311H1 - Fun in Diaspora

From parkour to “Baby Shark” remixes, concepts and practices surrounding fun, entertainment, and pleasure transcend cultural boundaries, reveal the reach of globalization, and help facilitate the maintenance of transnational communities through shared activities. This course will examine these relationships with fun, and we will also assess cases where concepts of fun diverge and clash in intercultural contexts. Additionally, the class will consider the relationship between entertainment practices and politics, marketing, and social movements. Cases examined will include K-pop fandom, bucket challenges, social media memes, and global YouTube phenomena.

DTS390H1/Y1 - Independent Study

A scholarly project chosen by the student, approved by the Department, and supervised by one of its instructors. Consult with the Diaspora and Transnational Studies Program Office for more information. Not eligible for CR/NCR option.

2024-25 Courses

Undergraduate

DTS401H1 - Advanced Topics in DTS: Diaspora and Liberation

This senior seminar offers the opportunity to read some of the key texts of anti-colonial and liberation theory in the context of Diaspora Studies. The class begins with an overview of the social movements both inside and beyond the university that led to the formation of “Diaspora Studies” as a discipline. How might the loose genealogy of what we now call Diaspora Studies contribute to contemporary discussions of decolonization and anti-racism? When read in the context of our current political and historic moment, how might we (re)theorize the foundational commitments of diaspora theory? Specifically, how has the concept of diaspora been articulated in relation to diverse liberatory social and cultural commitments, particularly in the wake of histories of immigration and European colonization?

DTS402H1 - Advanced Topics in DTS: Borders and Border Cities

Focuses on research design and training in methods from history, geography, anthropology, literary and cultural studies, and other disciplines appropriate to Diaspora and Transnational Studies. Prepares students to undertake primary research required in senior seminars.

DTS403H1 - Advanced Topics in DTS: Transnational Toronto

Toronto is a city increasingly configured through transnational connections and practices. It is a city defined by the scale at which its residents live their lives; a scale that is no longer (if it ever was) parochial, but extends across time and space to connect people and practice across a multitude of locales. Contemporary understandings of Toronto can only be reached through adopting a transnational lens. This course will examine the processes that have produced Toronto as a transnational city over time, including the dynamics of immigration and mobility, experiences of alienation, the global extension of capitalism, and the (re)formation of communities grounded in the complex dynamics of identities produced in a space that is both ‘home’ and away’. We will also explore the specific practices, and connections that produce “Toronto” as a space that transcends its physical geographic boundaries and is continually reproduced in and through the flows of people, capital, objects, ideas, - and the many forces that reproduce and reconfigure these flows.

DTS404H1 - Advanced Topics in DTS: History and Counterstories in the Black Mediterranean

This course explores colonial histories and counter- stories of resistance in the Black Mediterranean. Intended not only as a physical space but also as a symbolic site, the Black Mediterranean can be seen as a new theoretical approach useful to understand the racialized production of bodies and borders, and to highlight forms of resistance. The course will focus on Italy and its (post)colonial ties with Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Going from the Italian invasion of Eritrea in 1890 to the current so-called “refugee crisis”; the case of Italy illustrates the intersections and resignification of race, bodies and borders in the Mediterranean region, as well as the presence of important histories of resistance and alternative conceptualisations of belonging.

2024-25 Courses

Undergraduate

DTS405H1 - Advanced Topics in DTS: Human Trafficking and/in Diaspora

This course presents a thorough investigation into adult and child trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation. It introduces students to diverse conceptual frameworks shaping the discourse, including human security, national security, public health, radical and liberal feminist, and labor economics analytical approaches. Legal texts are examined alongside case studies, while an interdisciplinary lens explores human trafficking as it relates to diaspora, migration, economics, politics, and security. Through readings, guest lectures, and discussions, students engage in various topics including the operationalization of human trafficking definitions and the migration-trafficking nexus while focusing on human trafficking within diaspora networks.

DTS406H1 - Advanced Topics in DTS: Trauma, Memory & Literature: A Transnational Perspective

This course delves into the intricate interplay between trauma, memory, and literature from a transnational perspective. By exploring diverse literary works, students will examine how authors across different cultures and historical contexts depict and process various forms of trauma. The course will address critical themes such as the representation of war, genocide, exile, and the lasting impacts of (neo)imperial and postcolonial experiences. Students will engage with narratives that reveal the complex ways in which individual and collective memories of traumatic events are constructed, remembered, and articulated in literature to grasp its importance as a medium for expressing the unspeakable and mapping the diasporic and transnational landscapes of trauma.

Graduate

DTS1000H - Comparative Research Methods in DTS

This seminar will introduce students to a range of theories to do with diaspora and transnationalism from the humanities and the social sciences. Core questions will include the methodological differences between diaspora and its many synonyms, such as migrant communities, exile, refugee, etc. The different emphases and overlaps between Migration Studies, Urban Studies, and Diaspora and Transnational Studies will also be pursued.

DTS2001H - Grad Topics in DTS: (Post) Colonial Intimacies

This course aims to explore the (post)colonial discourse on race, gender and intimacy by using and expanding on the idea of the Archive. The course material will focus on a selected number of authors who have been pivotal in this field, and we'll explore how their theorizations help us to engage with the Archive considered both as a metaphysical location of power and a reservoir of counter-stories. In the course students will be invited to read archival colonial sources "against the grain" while focusing on the gaps, the silences, and the unwritten. In this regard, oral histories and personal narratives will be a central component of the course as these will be used to unveil hidden dynamics of power embedded within ideas of knowledge rooted in colonial paradigms. Students will also conduct visits to Toronto archives and conduct decolonial reflexive walks.

Calendar of Events

CDTS Guest Lecture Series

Anti-Haitianism, Statelessness, and Religious Practice in the Bahamas

Professor Bertin M. Louis Jr.
University of Kentucky
November 7th, 2024

Shadows of Empire: Race, Bureaucracy, and the Making of American Diplomacy

Dr. Naa Koshie Mills
Howard University
November 28th, 2024



Office of Human Mobility: How North American Policy Collaborations Could facilitate Moving and Staying in a Post-NAFTA Era

Professor Alyshia Gálvez
Graduate Centre of the City University of New York
and Lehman College
January 30th, 2025



Against Neocolonial Conservation

Professor Ashley Dawson in conversation with Professors
Thembele Kepe and Ken MacDonald
Graduate Centre of the City University of New York and
the College of Staten Island
February 6th, 2025

Plantation Liberalism: A Genealogy of Personhood, Property, and Activism between Philippine Mindanao and the Black Atlantic

Professor Alyssa Paredes
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
March 6th, 2025



Calendar of Events

CDTS Social Events

CDTS Welcome Breakfast

September 19th, 2024

Graduate Student Breakfast

February 13th, 2025

CDTS Year End Celebration & Grand Opening of the Student Commons

April 7th, 2025



University of Toronto Events

Fall Campus Day

November 3rd, 2024

Program Exploration Fair

February 26th and 27th, 2025



CDTS Events

Methods Café

Professor Tracy Lemos

November 12th, 2024

Breakfast with your Professors

December 5th, 2024

Alumni Journeys: From Studies to Success

March 12th, 2025



2025 Annual Ato Quayson Lecture

No Human Being can Exist: Palestine and the Culture of Denial

Professor Saree Makdisi
University of California, Los Angeles
March 20th, 2025



This annual, year-end event is named after Professor Ato Quayson. University Professor and the Centre's founding director, Professor Quayson's bold research set the Centre's agenda for more than a decade. This lecture provides a special opportunity for both students and scholars to listen and engage with a scholar of great distinction in the field of diaspora and transnationalism.

This year, The Centre welcomed Saree Makdisi. Dr. Makdisi is Professor and Chair of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. His teaching and research reside at the intersection of several different fields, including British Romanticism, imperial culture, colonial and postcolonial theory and criticism, and the cultures of urban modernity, particularly the revision and contestation of charged urban spaces, including London, Beirut and Jerusalem. Dr. Makdisi is of Palestinian and Lebanese descent. He also writes on contemporary Arab politics and culture and is a co-host of the podcast "Makdisi Street".

CDTS News

CDTS Ranked Third Best Arts and Science Program at U of T Based on Student Course Evaluations

The Varsity wrote an article analyzing student course evaluations to discover which programs students found the best at U of T. In their reporting, they learned that small humanities centres were ranked the highest. The Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies was ranked the third best program in the Faculty of Arts & Science at U of T based on these student course evaluations.

The Grand Opening of the CDTS Student Commons

The Centre converted the boardroom into a Student Commons so DTS students have a space to study, relax, or meet with friends.

Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill's new Book *Unforgivable: An Abusive Priest and the Church That Sent Him Abroad* was published

Professor O'Neill's newest book was published in February 2025 by the University of California Press. This book exposes how the Catholic Church systematically covers up scandal by moving abusers across borders.

Professor Padraic X. Scanlan's new book *Rot: An Imperial History of the Irish Famine* was published

Professor Scanlan's latest book was published by Basic Books in March 2025. This book provides an account of the Great Famine, showing how Ireland's place in the United Kingdom and the British Empire made it uniquely vulnerable to starvation. It has been widely and positively reviewed by *The Globe and Mail*, *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Nation*, among other venues.

Appointment of Professor Naomi Seidman as Director of CDTS

Professor Naomi Seidman has been appointed Director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies effective July 1, 2025, until June 30, 2030.

Naomi Seidman is the Chancellor Jackman Professor of the Arts in the Department for the Study of Religion and the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. She is the author of five books including most recently, *The Marriage Plot, Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love*, and with Literature (2016, winner of the Borsch-Rast Prize and Fania Levant Prize in Yiddish Studies from the Modern Language Association), *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition* (2019, Winner of a National Jewish Book Award in Women's Studies), and *Translating the Jewish Freud: Psychoanalysis in Hebrew and Yiddish* (Stanford, 2024). She is the recipient of many major awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship (2016), an NEH Senior Scholar Fellowship at the Center for Jewish History (2016–2017), a SSHRC Insight Grant, two SSHRC Connections Grants, and a SSHRC Partnership Development Grant.

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