



Centre for **C**ultures
of **R**eproduction, **T**echnologies and **H**ealth

NEWSLETTER

The CORTH Team



Maya Unnithan,
Professor of Social and
Medical Anthropology
and Director of CORTH



Maria Moscati, Reader
in Law and Society and
co-Director at CORTH



Chi Eziefula, Senior
Lecturer in Infectious
Diseases and co-
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Beth Mills, Senior
Lecturer in International
Development and co-
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Hayley Macgregor,
Professor of Medical
Anthropology and
Global Health and co-
Director at CORTH

Welcome to CORTH

Established in 2014, our centre provides an intellectual space for intensive research, critical thinking and the development of an interdisciplinary body of scholarship on reproductive and health cultures. Framed by a specific interest in the processes of power and addressing health inequities, we promote research on the social, medical, public health, legal, and moral lenses through which reproductive health is perceived, produced, concretised and articulated (for instance, through new policies, engagement with new technologies, or new forms of social relations in reproduction). With our unique focus on cultural ethnographic perspectives, our centre facilitates knowledge transfer partnerships between anthropologists, social and human scientists, health researchers, medical professionals, practitioners, legal activists and policy makers working internationally on critical issues in global maternal, sexual reproductive health (SRH), emerging technologies and health and human rights. A specific aim is to facilitate international dialogue on 'Southern' analytic models and practices. CORTH fosters a strong research environment for its international and home doctoral or postdoctoral students and through hosting visiting researchers and fellows, we seek to develop collaborative projects, produce quality research outputs and connect Sussex faculty and graduate students to key thinkers and policy makers in the field of SRH research.



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Welcome to New Members

Lara Owen (University of St. Andrews), **Camila Cuevas Bravo** (University van Amsterdam), **Rachel Simon-Kumar** (The University of Auckland/Waipapa Taumata Rau, New Zealand), **Camille Escudero** (Lily of the Valley, FemTech Association Asia), **Janice Lazarus** (Birkbeck, University of London), **Madeleine Reeves** (University of Oxford), **Merissa Hickman** (University of Leicester), **Claire Collins** (Reading University), **Anna Wight** (Consultant), **Meredith Evans** (University of Toronto Scarborough), **Arushi Sahay** (Geneva Graduate Institute), **Sandra Bärnreuther** (University of Lucerne), **Isabel Davis** (Natural History Museum), **Fiona Ross** (University of Cape Town), **Aishwarya Chandran** (Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi), **Oshin Siao Bhatt** (Chalmers University of Technology), **Ritu Ghosh** (University of Illinois Chicago), **Ruby Spencer** (University of Edinburgh), **Dharashree Das** (University of Lethbridge), **Bo Ran Lee** (University of Sussex), **ChuChun Yu** (University of Sussex), **Cristina Mackerron** (University of Sussex), **Heather Williams** (Institute of Development Studies), **Dipti Nagpaul** (University of Sussex), **Shree Sakthi** (University of Sussex), **Claire Bass** (University of Sussex), **Ane Gussiaas** (University of Sussex), **Sophie Zadeh** (University of Sussex), **Hans Ludwig**, **Joanna Callaghan** (University of Sussex), **Derya Ozdemir Kaya** (University of Sussex)

A huge CORTH welcome to all the above, who join us to become part of the 276 members network!

CORTH News

Visitor and Project Highlights

Welcome to **Professor Anna Robinson-Pant** and **Dr. Laura Burke** who recently joined Sussex and CORTH from the University of East Anglia. Anna and Laura are working on a project that spans the Philippines and Nepal and looks at new ways of engaging with communities in public health. The project, called **Empowering communities through University partnerships in public health: a pilot project in Nepal and the Philippines**, grew out of two earlier research studies on intergenerational and indigenous learning implemented by the University of East Anglia UNESCO Chair (see <https://healthliteracy.ust.edu.ph>). Funded by the UK Medical Research Council PHIND (Public Health Intervention Development), the project is a collaboration between the University of Sussex (CORTH), the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines and Tribhuvan University in Nepal. The aim is to pilot a more democratic model of partnership in public health between medical institutions and local communities. Recognising that public health initiatives often take a 'top-down' approach, ignoring everyday realities and using 'schooled literacy' to educate communities on health and training students in biomedical, western knowledge, the project seeks to create a more democratic community partnership. By engaging with and validating local health knowledge and beliefs, the project aims to build on the existing community health assessments conducted by medical students and faculty within their courses. PAR and ethnographic methods have been key factors for success: Introducing students and



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Visitor and Project Highlights

faculty to these methodological approaches offers the opportunity to sit and listen and pay attention to what's going on around them in the communities where they work. For more information on the project, its partners, and research team, you can visit <https://empcommunitiespublichealth.wordpress.com/>



Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant is the PI on the Empowering Communities project in CORTH at the University of Sussex. She holds the UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation at the University of East Anglia, a collaborative research, training and policy-focused partnership with partners in Nepal, Ethiopia, Malawi and the Philippines. Her ethnographic research in Nepal - *Why eat green cucumber at the time of dying? Exploring the link between women's literacy and development* - received the UNESCO International Award for Literacy Research in 2001 and marked the start of her ongoing collaboration with UNESCO on adult literacy

Dr. Laura Burke is a Post-doctoral Research Assistant with CORTH, University of Sussex and Lecturer in Global Public Health Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary University London. Laura is a medical anthropologist with special interest in reproduction, environment, and conflict. As the postdoctoral research assistant on the Empowering Communities project in CORTH, Laura brings a strong background in ethnography, PAR methods as well as anthropology and global health. She also currently lectures in anthropology and global health at Queen Mary University London



Dr. Ma. Teresa Tricia Guison-Bautista is Chairperson, Department of Preventive, Family and Community Medicine at the University of Santo Tomas of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. Tricia is Co-Investigator in the Philippines on the Empowering Communities project. In the realm of community engagements, Tricia is a hands-on planner and implementer of national and local primary care projects for more than 20 years. She is capped with several publications, presentations, and key accomplishments in clinical and community medicine

Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education & Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID), Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Kamal is Co-I in Nepal on the Empowering Communities project. In the realm of community engagement, Kamal is engaged in several research projects including family literacy and intergenerational learning, which was conducted in collaboration with UEA UNESCO Chair in Nepal, Malawi, Ethiopia and the Philippines. He has published in the area of (school/tertiary) education, language policies and practices and indigenous knowledge systems





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Visitor Reflection: Marte E. S. Haaland

I had the opportunity to visit CORTH and take part in their activities in April and May 2019. During this period, I was a PhD-candidate working on my research on Zambian abortion politics and the gap between law and access to abortion care. CORTH was an excellent space for me to present my ongoing research and get feedback, both from fellow PhD-candidates, and from the multidisciplinary team of senior researchers.

During my stay I also participated in a series of events that CORTH organised. Through participation in events about topics such as surrogacy or menstruation, I got input and perspectives that sparked new fields of interest within the field of reproductive health. In relation to my visit, I also had the opportunity to write for the CORTH blog. I found it very interesting to write about abortion politics from a Norwegian context to an international audience. This experience motivated me to explore Norway's abortion politics further, which I have done in a recent project about Norway's legal and bureaucratic system for handling second-trimester abortions. I am currently working on developing this interest further in a project about the politics of second trimester abortions in a Scandinavian context. An added value of visiting CORTH was getting to know and explore the city of Brighton. I enjoyed biking along the beach, exploring the shops and cafes in the lanes, and particularly the Bright Fringe festival with pop-up concerts in May.

CORTH News

Visitor and Project Highlights

In September 2023, **Giulia Zanini**, Ca' Foscari University of Venice began the **PregDaT** project. The project aims at exploring the sociotechnical and political components of pregnancy and reproductive time by focusing on the investigation of the process of gestational age assessment in four different European countries. Research will be carried out through ethnography and other qualitative and cooperative methods and will invite the participation of women, pregnant people, professionals, and advocates in the field of reproductive and maternal health. It will shed light on the consequences of gestational age assessment protocols, practices and discourses on abortion and childbirth care and map the subjectivities that emerge during the process. The analysis of different case studies will expose the contextual features of gestational age assessment and the perceptions and experiences by pregnant people in different locations, and allow the research team to elaborate a new theoretical approach to reproductive time and some recommendations for care.

Giulia Zanini is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and has a special interest and expertise in the fields of reproduction, health and gender.



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Visitor Reflection: Marte E. S. Haaland

My research group in Bergen, Norway, had recently initiated collaboration with Professor Maya Unnithan in 2019. My visit came about after Unnithan's visit to Bergen the year before. I am pleased that my stay at CORTH was just the first of my colleagues in Bergen's research stays at CORTH the following years.

Marte Haaland, Postdoktor

Department of Global Public Health and
Primary Care

University of Bergen



CORTH News

Impact and Engagement

On 23 November 2023, CORTH co-Director **Dr. Chi Eziefula** attended **A View on Women's Health: The Sussex Perspective** - a regional Women's Health event where she gave a talk on CORTH's menstrual health work. The event was organised by Health Innovation Kent Surrey Sussex.

As part of **The Queer Judgments Project (QJP)**, CORTH co-Director **Dr. Maria Moscati** co-chaired a panel discussion with QJP colleague Nuno Ferreira at the **Socio-legal Studies Association** annual conference 2024, held at the University of Portsmouth on the 26 to the 28 March 2024 (<https://www.slsa2024.co.uk/>). The panel explored the work carried out so far in the project. Speakers covered examples from international, European and domestic (India, Kenya and UK) jurisdictions, relating to topics such as same-sex marriage, air traffic noise pollution, asylum on grounds of sexual orientation, and the criminalization of sexual acts between consenting adult queer persons.

Dr. Maria Moscati attended another conference as the keynote speaker on the 9 and 10 April 2024. The conference, **Queer Kinship: Affects, Families, Bonds**, took place at the University for Foreigners of Siena. For her speech '*Dancing Queer Kinship and the Law*,' Maria queered her keynote by mixing dance and speech, and by involving the audience in interpretative dancing.



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Publication Highlights

'Gendered struggles in urban transit'

In March 2024, Anushka Zafar (PhD student of International Development and Anthropology and CORTH graduate) wrote an article based on her research, titled “**Gendered struggles in urban transit**” that was published in the Daily Star. You can read the article at <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/gendered-struggles-urban-transit-3561006>



Photo: Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo

'Are India's fertility policies in the right direction? India has ignored infertility for too long'

In November 2023, Professor Maya Unnithan wrote an insightful article for 360info (based at Monash University) exploring India's history of coercive family planning, which ignores infertility - Would a shift in focus will help women's health?



CORTH News

Impact and Engagement

On 21 March 2024 CORTH's co-Director **Dr. Beth Mills** gave a keynote address at a **MENA Gender Learning** event held at the World Bank. Her keynote was entitled '*Impact through Innovation - Avenues to advance gender equality using qualitative and visual research.*'

Back in February 2024 CORTH's **Dr. Maria Moscati** came up with an exciting teaching initiative that was aimed at supporting the well-being of students and launched the Dance in Law, Politics and Sociology pilot: “*We are a diverse group of women, students and teachers. We dance to learn about law, politics and sociology. We dance to empower, include, and unite. We dance to navigate social justice. We dance to learn. We dance to respect and celebrate all bodies. We dance to smile, to cry, to feel. We dance to resist!*”





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Publication Highlights



Photo: iStock

Maya's article can be read in full at <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/health/india-has-ignored-infertility-for-too-long-92606>

'HIV, Gender and the Politics of Medicine'

April 2024, Dr. Beth Mill's celebrated the publication of her book "**HIV, Gender and the Politics of Medicine: Embodied Democracy in the Global South**" (Bristol University Press).

CORTH News

Impact and Engagement

On 25 January 2024 **Dr. Maria Moscati** joined colleague **Dr. Juliana Cesario Alvim** (Central European University) to hold a workshop at the Central European University sharing their experiences and expertise on reproductive rights litigation in Italy and Brazil. During the workshop, titled '*Exploring Strategic Litigation and Reproductive Health: A Comparison of Italy and Brazil*,' they discussed the similarities, differences, and challenges in litigation and reproduction between both legal systems and their legal cultures. The event saw the lively participation of Juliana's students, who, with their comments and questions, offered a broader comparative dimensions to the conversation.

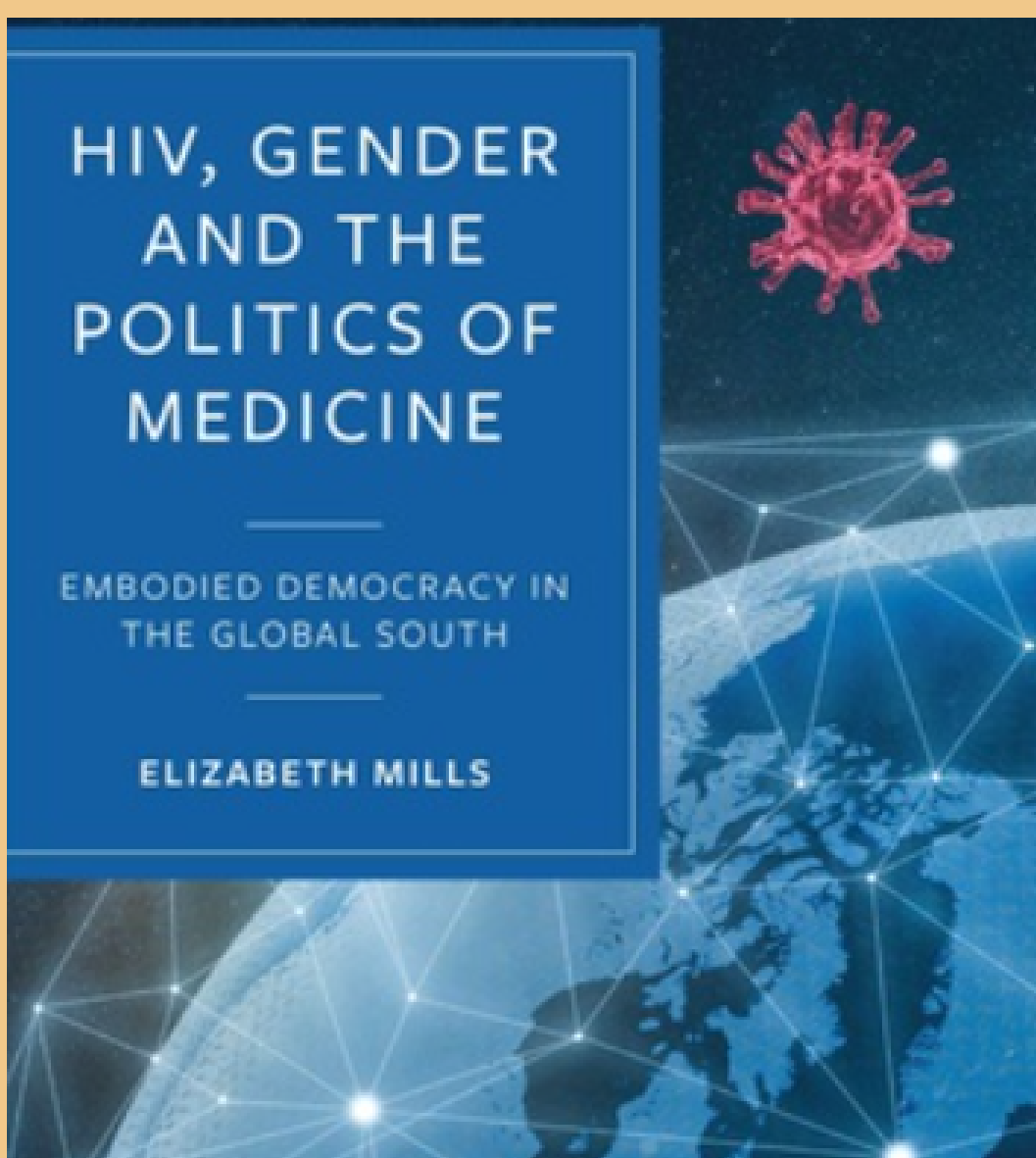




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Publication Highlights



“In this tour de force, Mills shows how biopolitical precarity has shifted as new generation struggles emerge over HIV treatment and the conditions of inequality in which women live.”

Susan Reynolds Whyte

Amicus Curiae Special Section

In March, The Journal of the Society for Advanced Legal Studies (IALS) **Amicus Curiae**, published Part 1 of a special section on *Children’s Rights*, edited by **Dr. Maria Moscati**. Part 2 was published in July and also features an article by **Dr. Beth Mills** titled *“Which Children Have Rights? The Child’s Right to Bodily Integrity and Protection Gaps for Children with Intersex Traits under International and National Laws.”*

CORTH News

Impact and Engagement

CORTH researchers **Professor Anna Robinson-Pant** and **Dr. Laura Burke** held an international (hybrid) conference on **Community Partnerships in Public Health** at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. The conference took place on the 25 to 26 April and was a part of the 3rd International Conference on Gender, Adult Literacy, and Active Citizenship for Social Transformation (GALACST 3).

The conference brought together researchers, educators, policy makers and community activists from public health, medicine and community development to share research insights and develop interdisciplinary collaboration. A key theme at the conference was around decolonising and indigenising medical education



Centre for **C**ultures of **R**eproduction, **T**echnologies and **H**ealth

Publication Highlights

"How Did You Get in There and Make the Law Work?" Feminist Activism, Doctors and Abortion Law: The Occupation of an Hospital'

In May, CORTH member **Dr Elena Caruso** had an article published by **Sage Journals**. The article examines the aftermath of Italy's 1978 abortion law (Law 194/1978) and the following feminist occupation of a Rome hospital, revealing a little-known chapter in feminist history. Drawing on overlooked archival materials and original interviews with feminist abortion campaigners, Elena uncovers unique dynamics between feminist activists, medical professionals, and abortion law.

'Its manifestations may vary, but menstrual stigma is universal'

In June, another CORTH member, **Dr. Inga Winkler**, co-wrote an article on menstrual stigma that was also published in **Sage Journals**. The article explores the prevalence and complexities of menstrual stigma, its impact on menstruating individuals and the ways it (re)produces unequal power relations through social dynamics.

Congratulations to Elena and Inga on their publication success!

Sage Journals



CORTH News

Impact and Engagement

within the Philippines and Nepal, including exploring the potential contribution of ethnographic and participatory research methodology within undergraduate and postgraduate community placements. Medical faculty and students were introduced to ethnography and PAR through hands-on workshops, and a World Café was facilitated to develop ideas on how to strengthen community-university partnerships.

Seven members of the Nepal research team travelled to the Philippines for the conference, which was combined with visits to public health facilities and programmes in a barangay near the university. The project team also organised a workshop with stakeholders in community health in Calasiao in Pangasinan.





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Publication Highlights

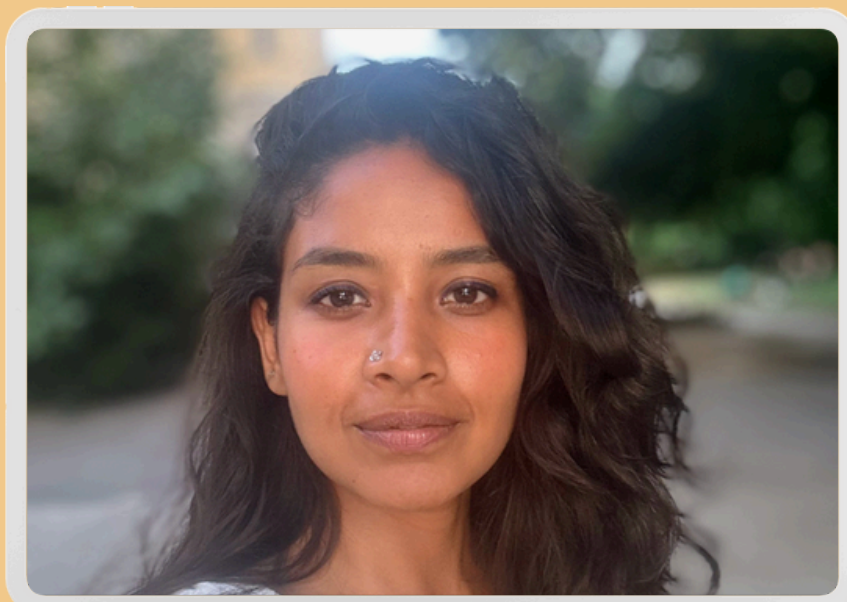
"Extended childcare"? Reflections on the science of the Zika virus'

Further congratulations to CORTH member **Soraya Fleischer** who co-wrote an article published by **SciFLO** in May. The article centres around interviews conducted with scientists who were involved in the response to the Zika virus epidemic in Brazil in 2015, which impacted fetal development.

Visiting PhD Student

Meet CORTH's visiting PhD student - Aishwarya Chandran

Aishwarya is a PhD candidate at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, India. Aishwarya is a Commonwealth Split-Site Doctoral Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex, from 2023-2024. Aishwarya's research looks at questions of reproductive governance and reproductive politics in India.



CORTH News

Impact and Engagement

Congratulations to **Dr. Beth Mills** for the publication of her book "**HIV, Gender and the Politics of Medicine: Embodied Democracy in the Global South**" (Bristol University Press). To celebrate the launch of Beth's book, an event with a panel discussion is being held on the 16 October at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). If you would like to attend the event, please see the IDS website for details of where to register at <https://www.ids.ac.uk/events/hiv-gender-and-the-politics-of-medicine-embodied-democracy-in-the-global-south/> Beth will be speaking with a panel of academics and activists from South Africa and the UK, to discuss the lessons from the global struggle for equitable access to life-saving HIV treatment. This will include the value of art, resistance and transnational activism when holding global and national institutions accountable to the embodied wellbeing of citizens.

The Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (IALS)'s journal **Amicus Curiae** recently uploaded a selection of poetry readings to its YouTube channel intended to compliment a special section on *Children's Rights* that the journal published, for which CORTH's **Dr. Maria Moscati** was the guest editor. The playlist of the poems can be viewed on the IALS Amicus Curiae channel, at <https://www.youtube.com/@IALSAmicusCuriae/videos>



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Member Blog by Raquel Drovetta

Obstetric Violence and Epistemic Violence: A Proposal to Start the Debate

The debate on obstetric violence has gained momentum over the past decade, underscoring the urgent need to address abusive and dehumanizing practices in childbirth from a human rights perspective. Obstetric violence refers to the mistreatment, neglect, and abuse of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period within healthcare facilities. The CLACSO (Latin American Council of Social Sciences) Working Group on Feminisms, Resistances, and Emancipation supports this debate, promoting research and gathering data that reveals the extent and impact of obstetric violence in Latin America. Our [Drovetta, Flores Sequera and Villegas Rodríguez] recent publication highlights the efforts of the Obstetric Violence Observatories (OVOs) to raise awareness and combat this issue in Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, and Colombia.

Obstetric violence has been recognized as a human rights violation by international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and it is codified in the laws of several countries, including Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela. This form of violence not only generates negative

CORTH News

Funding Success

Many congratulations to CORTH co-Director **Professor Hayley MacGregor** who has been awarded a British Academy ODA Challenge-Oriented Research Grant to investigate **Strengthening community resilience for pandemic preparedness in the Western Cape, South Africa**. The grant programme supports researchers in the humanities and social sciences, across a range of countries, to develop and/or deepen international research collaborations on internationally focused ODA-eligible research projects on specific global challenges.

We also celebrate CORTH member **Dr. Jan Brunson's** success in securing a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award to conduct research on **cesarean sections in Nepal** in 2024-2025. Jan would love to connect with other CORTH scholars working on obstetric emergencies and c-sections, so please get in touch with the Centre if you would like to contact Jan about her work. <https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2024/05/23/fulbright-jan-brunson/>



Jan Brunson and a NICU team at Dhulikhel Hospital



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Member Blog by Raquel Drovetta

feelings but also causes significant physical and psychological harm to women and their families, further eroding trust in health institutions. Ignoring international standards and recommendations, as well as the vast scientific literature documenting this phenomenon, not only discredits women's suffering but also hinders the implementation of effective measures to eradicate it. It is imperative that the healthcare community takes a firm stance against obstetric violence by promoting comprehensive human rights education for all health professionals to ensure respectful and dignified care for all women.

We call on healthcare professionals, policymakers, and society at large to acknowledge the term "obstetric violence" and work collectively towards its eradication. This includes implementing evidence-based practices, improving communication between healthcare providers and patients, and fostering a culture of respect and dignity in maternal care. Only by confronting this issue head-on can we hope to create a healthcare system that truly serves and protects the rights of all women during one of the most vulnerable and important moments of their lives.

The above is an abridged version of a blog post written by CORTH member Raquel Drovetta, co-authored by Mitzy Flores Sequera and based on their research on obstetric violence.

CORTH News

CORTH News and Events

CORTH Research Forum

On the 3 October 2023, CORTH researchers and academics met to hear from a selection of doctoral researchers about their work.

CORTH Conversations: 'Human Rights in the Global Menstrual Movement' 30 October 2023

For the first CORTH Conversation of the Semester, we were joined by **Dr. Inga Winkler**, Associate Professor in International Human Rights Law at the Central European University in Vienna. Inga's talk on the stigma that menstruating individuals face and its place in the discussion about human rights was an insightful start to the Centre's Autumn programme of talks.

CORTH Conversations: 'Empowering communities through University partnerships in public health: a pilot project in Nepal and the Philippines' 21 November 2023

The Centre welcomed **Professor Anna Robinson-Pant** and **Dr. Laura Burke**, who both recently joined CORTH, as they spoke about their research - an MRC-funded project which is piloting a new approach to university and community partnership in public health.

CORTH Conversations: 'Precarity of Hope, Uncertainty and Risk: unsettling expert and experiential knowledge of novel treatments for genetic disorders' 11 December 2023



Centre for **C**ultures
of **R**eproduction, **T**echnologies and **H**ealth



CORTH News

CORTH News and Events

CORTH welcomed **Dr. Sangeeta Chattoo**, Senior Research Fellow in the department of Sociology at the University of York, who delivered a talk on the use of 'novel' therapies - a combination of thalidomide and hydroxyurea - in treating a potentially life-threatening genetic disorder (thalassemia).

CORTH Conversations: 'Conceptualising Reproductive Governance: Some notes from India' 12 February 2024

CORTH Visiting Doctoral student and Commonwealth scholar, **Aishwarya Chandran** (Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi), spoke about her current PhD research into surrogacy legislation in India and biases against the reproduction of migrant bodies.

CORTH Conversations: 'Womb / World' 18 March 2024

Professor Fiona Ross, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town, joined us online to talk on a new project that aims to understand how the womb and its labours figure in contemporary medical sciences and public policy, and takes the figure of the foetus as one site in which to begin inquiry and ask how we might understand the dense semiotic, political, symbolic life of 'the foetus.'

CORTH Research in Progress

23 May 2024

Doctoral students and PGRs presented their work as part of our Spring Semester Researcher Forum. It was an opportunity to present work to a friendly audience made up of Centre students and faculty.

Queering Global Health Symposium

4 June 2024

This summer **Svati Shah** (University of Massachusetts) and **Paul Boyce** (Sussex) co-convened three workshops on the themes of *Queer and Trans World Anthropologies and Queer and Trans Global Health*. The anthropology-focused workshops were held in two parts, at The University of Sussex and at Future Africa, Pretoria, in association with Vasu Reddy and colleagues at The University of the Free State. The meetings convened scholars working on queer and transgender socialities and becomings from Southern and Eastern Africa and South Asia. Participants explored new ways of supporting and developing queer and trans anthropologies outside of Euro-North American academic transfer zones. Bringing together innovative scholarship, they sought to reorient queer and trans perspectives and



Centre for **C**ultures
of **R**eproduction, **T**echnologies and **H**ealth



CORTH News

CORTH News and Events

research, opening out new ontologies and collaborative connections, based on a revisiting of 'World Anthropology' critiques from the Global South.

The third summer workshop, on Queer and Trans Global Health, focused on interdisciplinary scholarship in transnational health research, and was co-convened by Svati and Paul along with Beth Mills and Maria Moscati (Sussex). The workshop drew together scholars and activists working in China, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, South Africa, the U.K. and the U.S. We explored normative power structures in the making and unmaking of global health knowledge, creative praxis, and queer and trans archiving.

Funds were provided by The University of Massachusetts, The University of Bergen, The University of the Free State and The University of Sussex (Global Studies HEIF funding).

CORTH and the Department of Anthropology at Sussex have just signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Bergen University in Norway for collaborative research and knowledge exchange August 2024

This month we celebrate the approval of the MOU to 'undertake collaborative research, training and knowledge exchange' between our institutions over the next five years (2024-2029). The MOU has grown out of collaboration between the CORTH centre (Sussex) and CIH centre (UiB) focused on the ongoing Maternal Mortality monitoring and surveillance 'Matraset' project (2021-2026; Norwegian Council funded) with junior (PhD level) and senior researchers visiting Sussex. The project includes PhD scholars, post docs and senior researchers from Tanzania, Ethiopia, Norway and UK. Going forward, several institutions from UiB would take part in this exchange, including the Depts, of Global Public Health and Primary Care, Centre for International Health (CIH), the Dept. of Health promotion and Development (HEMIL), with units on gender and development, and the Centre for Law Transform.

Finally, **huge congratulations** to **Mulu Kindanemariam** and **Marte Haaland**, both of whom gave birth to baby girls. Mulu and Marte came to CORTH as research visitors. Mulu and partner Gunn had baby Delina on August 24. Marte and partner Espen had baby Tuva on September 5.



Centre for **C**ultures
of **R**eproduction, **T**echnologies and **H**ealth



CORTH News

CORTH News and Events

Beyond the Carceral: Culture, Law, and Lived Experience Workshop (written by Aishwarya Chandran)

CORTH recently collaborated with the Department of Liberal Arts, Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, to organise an international workshop on the 27 and 28 of June 2024. Titled '***Beyond the Carceral: Culture, Law, and Lived Experience***,' the workshop brought together scholars working on surrogacy to throw light on the various cultural and social ideas that underpin the concepts, language, and practice of surrogacy legislation.

The workshop programme was spread over four sessions, with each session focussing on different geographical regions and disciplinary locations. Researchers from the disciplines of law, sociology, anthropology, health and medicine, philosophy, among others, presented their work across the two days. The Director of CORTH, Maya Unnithan, introduced the workshop by commenting on the significance of speaking about surrogacy in a post-Roe world, where the implications of the law on people's everyday reproductive dilemmas have become more pronounced in the contemporary moment than ever before. Co-Director, Maria

Moscati, in her opening comments, remarked on the need to have more comprehensive and holistic approaches to studying gender, sexuality and reproduction through interdisciplinary approaches. Co-organiser Anindita Majumdar, from the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, noted that collaborations across universities and countries are imperative to produce knowledge that is critical, timely, and inclusive.

On the limitations of children's rights

Lottie Park-Morton, Senior Lecturer at the University of Gloucestershire, began her presentation by looking at how surrogacy law acts upon the regulation of parenthood in various contexts, specially through the rhetoric of the child's best interests. Through her analysis of case studies from England and Wales, Sweden, and California, in the US, she concluded that a robust, consistent engagement with Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) is essential in arbitrating cases over custody and parenthood in surrogacy. Professor **Rachel Thomson**, who chaired the session, was in agreement, opining that questions about the best interests of



Centre for **C**ultures
of **R**eproduction, **T**echnologies and **H**ealth



CORTH News

CORTH News and Events

children disproportionately focus on biological lineage and legal parentage; but in reality, there are so many factors that contribute to what a happy childhood or a content life is. **Marianna Iliadou**, Lecturer at the University of Sussex, asked if the discourse of reproductive rights can be used to adequately address people's everyday experiences with sexual and reproductive injustice, when their implementation remains wildly inconsistent.

Jayna Kothari, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, specifically addressed the law's prohibition of single women's rights to have children through surrogacy, contending that the state seeks to delegitimise forms of family formation that lie outside the heteronorm, pushing women into marriage in order to have children. **Maria Moscati** urged us to think about women's rights in this context without essentialising what the juridical or political category of 'woman' itself meant. Based on the arguments made by Jayna, audience members and other panellists engaged in debate about how the protection of children and discussions on responsible parenting, the right to parent, single women's right to parent, and queer couples' rights to parent must not reinforce the idea that parenting is private, and enclosed within the nuclear family.

We must think of long-term care of children that is communal, goes beyond the authority of just parental figures, and challenges the individualised, privatised notion of the family, while engaging in more communitarian, social models of childcare.

Governing intimate lives

Brian Tobin, Associate Professor in Law, University of Galway, looked at the impact of surrogacy law on culture and lived experience, and how they transform each other. Ireland has historically been reluctant to permit traditional surrogacy. This, he argues, is because Irish culture, historically, sees a very strong connection between the birth mother and the child. This is apparent in Ireland's long and difficult regulations on abortion. His presentation summarily argued that although the Irish law proposes to allow surrogacy, in practice, it seeks only to discourage it or make it very difficult to access, on account of the country's sanctification of normative maternal experiences. **Rachel Thomson** noted that the phrasing of *mater semper* in the Irish law signals how archaic and unchanging the idea of motherhood is supposed to be. In a similar vein,



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Elisa Baiocco, PhD scholar at the Sapienza University of Rome, looked at the Italian government's recent proposal to make surrogacy a universal crime. She argued how this disenfranchises queer individuals and their aspirations to family-making, subjecting their intimate lives to disproportionate surveillance as a consequence. **Skylab Sahu**, Assistant Professor, Miranda House, Delhi, whose research is anchored in India, also brought in the question of legal inadequacy, arguing that a punitive framework marginalises queer individuals.



Panellists at the 'Beyond the Carceral: Culture, Law, and Lived Experience' Workshop

Reproducing the nation-state

Anika Konig, Substitute Professor, Freie University, Berlin, traced contemporary German regulation on assisted reproduction to histories of Nazi eugenics and nation-building, arguing that the way the German state seeks to regulate surrogacy reproduces visions of an imperialist racial past. **Christina Weis**, Senior Lecturer, De Montfort University, Leicester, spoke about the recent Russian bill of 2022 which prohibits surrogacy for single mothers, unmarried couples and foreigners to access surrogacy. This, she argues, reinforces the Russian constitution's focus on the primacy of 'traditional family values', where only heterosexual nuclear families receive state and social legitimation. **Anindita Majumdar**, in her response to these presentations, urged us to think how the state continually keeps shifting the goalposts of eugenics, making questions of reproductive autonomy harder to navigate. States are invested heavily in the reproduction of the 'right' kind of citizenry, which results in the castigation of some women for wanting children, and some others for not wanting them. Authoritarian regimes therefore disproportionately scrutinise women's bodies.



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Heather Jacobson, Professor at the University of Austin, Texas, looked at how the state of Texas in the United States has emerged as a hub for surrogacy over the years. This, she argues, has been made possible as the state is well-known as being industry-friendly due to its lack of individual and corporate income tax, its large and diverse workforce, and a relatively thriving economy. Another contextualising factor which facilitates surrogacy in Texas is the historically strong Evangelical Christian base in the state and the historic lack of controversy among evangelicals around ART-use by heterosexually-married couples during the time that the surrogacy industry was establishing and growing in the state.

The session was chaired by **Maya Unnithan**, who noted how legal and national histories, alongside economic and cultural histories operate in complex, intersecting ways. On the one hand, if both legal prohibition and legal sanction of ARTs are meant to protect vulnerable individuals, then how do they simultaneously engender precarities of different kinds, mobilising varying strands of carcerality in the everyday lives and experiences of people.

On reproductive labour

Sunhye Kim, Assistant Professor, Ehwa Women's University, South Korea, who joined us online from Korea, focused on the meanings of reproductive labour in the transnational circuits of the ART industry in South Korea. By analysing the embodied experiences of both intended parents and gestational surrogates when they participate in the baby-making process together, her paper examined how paid mothers (Ukrainian gestational surrogates) and unpaid mothers (Korean infertile women) perform their reproductive labour in similar and different ways when they work together to make a baby in the transnational Korean ART industry.

In the final session, Professor **Prabha Kotiswaran** and **Madhushree Jana**, post-doctoral Research Associate, both from King's College London, argued that state protections must not impinge on personal freedoms, and instead of a punitive regulatory framework, we must demand more robust protections for surrogate mothers and egg donors from a labour rights position. **Aishwarya Chandran**, PhD scholar at the University of Sussex, argued that the carceral turn in surrogacy legislation in



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India seeks to reinforce the biases that exist against the reproduction of migrant, Muslim and Dalit bodies, by pushing their livelihoods further into precarity. **Priya Sharma**, post-doctoral Fellow, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, posed similar questions, where she argued that legal deliberations over altruism and exploitation failed to account for women's lived experiences of precarious waged work and familial obligation. The session was followed by animated discussions on the parallels between laws that regulate sex work and surrogacy, and how both of these forms of precarious, embodied work, essential to the processes of social reproduction, are implicated in the politics of governance through criminalisation.

The workshop helped all participants think through several questions about reproductive freedom and justice, the state's legitimisation and delegitimisation of specific processes of family formation, and the state's vested interests in curtailing the reproduction of specific bodies while permitting the reproductive autonomy of certain other bodies. The presentations also urged us to think about reproductive coercion and reproductive pleasures outside of the framework of rights, where the need to expand the categories of what

constitutes a family, what constitutes a woman, what constitutes individual liberty must be understood beyond legalistic frameworks, and through notions of interconnected, social living. The program was also helpful in thinking through feminist commitments towards reproductive and sexual freedoms, where the family, the neoliberal market, and the state all emerge as agents we must wrestle with and against to secure freedoms for all.



Participants of the surrogacy workshop

Coming Soon...

CORTH's 10 year Anniversary celebration - more details on our wonderful line-up will be released soon!