**Tamara Surani Fernando**

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**EMPLOYMENT**

2023-present Assistant Professor in the History of the Global South, History Faculty, Stony Brook University, New York.   
Associated Faculty, Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, SBU.   
Affiliated Faculty, Africana Studies, SBU.

**EDUCATION**

2022 University of Cambridge, Ph.D., History.  
Dissertation: “Molluscs and Men: Pearling Labour and Environments in the Indian Ocean 1880-1925.” Awards: Prince Consort & Thirwall Prize and Seeley Medal (joint winner, 2023) for best PhD dissertation involving original historical research.

2017 University of Cambridge, MPhil., Early Modern History, First Class.  
 John Eliot Scholarship, Harvard-Cambridge Fellow.

2016 Harvard University, B.A., History and Literature, *magna cum laude* with highest honors. Awards: Reuben A. Brower Memorial Prize in the Humanities, Harvard University (2016); Oliver Dabney Junior Award for Excellence in History and Literature, Harvard University (2015).

**TEACHING**

*University of SUNY Stony Brook*

2023-2025 History 340/Asian Studies 340 “Animals & Imperialism in Asia”

History 301, ““How did Science become Western?”   
 History 301, “Science at Sea.”

History 340, “Flows of History: Rivers in South Asian & Middle Eastern History”

History 516 Graduate Theme Seminar, “Global Labour History.”

**PUBLICATIONS**

BOOKS

*Shallow Blue Empire: A History of Pearl Diving in the Indian Ocean, 1850-1930*. Harvard University Press, 2026 (forthcoming).

ARTICLES

“Environments” in Sujit Sivasundaram and Nira Wickramasinghe eds. *Handbook of Modern Sri Lankan History* (Tambapanni Academic Press, Sri Lanka: forthcoming 2025)

[with Brooke Penaloza-Patzak], “Making Science of Things” Special Issue, *History of Science* (forthcoming), Guest Editors Introduction.”

[with Sarah Qidwai], “Debating Evolution and Religion in Nineteenth-Century South Asia” in *Evolutionary Theories and Religious Traditions: National, Transnational, and Global Perspectives, 1800-1920,* edited by Bernard Lightman and Sarah Qidwai (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2023)

[with Alexis Rider and Felice Physioc] “Flows of History: Water in the Past and Present Archive”, *Past & Present* 261:1 (August 2023): 1-31.

“Mapping Oysters and Making Oceans Across the Northern Indian Ocean 1880-1925”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65:1 (January 2023): 53-80.

“Seeing like the Sea: A Multispecies History of the Ceylon Pearl Fishery”, *Past & Present* 254:1 (February 2022): 127-160. Awards: Alexander Prize for Best Article, Royal Historical Society (RHS), UK (2022); Alice Hamilton Prize, best article published outside of *Environmental History*, American Society for Environmental History (ASEH).

“පර්සියානු බොක්කෙහි සිට ලංකාව වෙත මුතු කිමිදෙන්නන්ගේ සංක්‍රමණ, 1881-1925” [The Migration of Persian Gulf Pearl Divers to Ceylon, 1881-1925], *ප්‍රවාද* 35 [*Pravada*, Journal of the Social Scientists Association, Sri Lanka](August 2020).

ROUNDTABLES

Fahad Bishara and Ahmed Al Maazmi eds., “Oceanic Arabia Roundtable,” in *Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim* with Christopher Low, Nancy Um, and Mandana Limbert(forthcoming).

Prakash Kumar ed. “New Directions in the History of Science in South Asia,” *Isis,* Open Conversations with Amanda Lanzillo, Eric Gurevitch, Shireen Hamza, Tara Suri, Sayori Ghoshal and Uponita Mukherjee (*in progress*).

**REVIEWS** *Comparative Studies in Society and History (CSSH); Journal of Asian Studies; Animal History; H-net; Historical Sciences in the Natural Sciences*. *Journal of Early Modern History*. *History: Journal of the Historical Association. South Asian History and Culture; History Australia; History of the Family.*

**FELLOWSHIPS**

2025-2026 American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Fellowship.

2025 (Spring) Humanities Institute at Stony Brook Faculty Fellowship (*declined*).

2025 (Fall) Visiting Research Scholar, Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies, Princeton University.

2022-2023 Landhaus Fellow, Rachel Carson Center, Munich, Germany.

2022 Visiting Fellow, Doha Institute, Qatar.

2022 Scholar-in-Residence, Georgetown University, Qatar.

2021-2023 *Past & Present* fellow, Institute of Historical Research, London, UK.

2018-2021 Cambridge Commonwealth, European and International Trust

Scholarship.

2019 University of Cambridge: Smuts Memorial Fund; Faculty Fieldwork Fund;

Mary Euphrasia Mosley, Sir Bartle Frere and Worts Travelling

Scholars Funds. Ira Unamboowe Graduate Student Travel Grant, American Institute for Lankan Studies (AISLS).

**TALKS**

2025 October 24, “Shallow Blue Empire: The History of Pearl Diving in the Indian Ocean,” Davis Centre Weekly Seminar, Princeton University.

2025 July 14-15, “Islam, Race, Caste and Blackness in Ceylon 1900-1910”, “Authenticity in History and Historiography in Sri Lanka”, workshop organized by the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

2025 June 30, “Gems and the Science of Place,” Symposium 66, International Congress of History of Science and Technology, New Zealand (*online*).

2025 June 11, “Extracting Value from Afro-Asia: Nature, Land, People and Politics,” Africa-Asia 3: A New Axis of Knowledge (AA3), Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD), Dakar, Senegal.

2025 February 5, “Beyond Commodity History? Pearling Knowledge, Labor and Environments, 1880-1925,” Harvard International & Global History Seminar (HIGHS), Cambridge, MA.

2024 October 31, “Institutional, Intellectual, and Ethical Issues in the Study of Sri Lanka from the West,” The Annual Conference on South Asia, UW-Madison.

2024 October 31, “Mapping the Hydrosphere: Geopolitics, Technology and Infrastructure in South Asian Waters,” Discussant.

2024 November 21, [with Fahad Bishara, Nancy Um, Mandana Limbert, Chris Low] “Oceanic Arabia: Promises and Pitfalls in a New Paradigm” Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA).

2024 October 7, Comments, Kalyani Ramnath book talk, *Boats in a Storm*, American Institute for Sri Lanka Studies (AISLS), New Books series.

2024 April 26, “Reading *Ilm al-Bahr* in the Twentieth Century,” University of Minnesota, History of Science, Technology and Medicine colloquium series, Minnesota.

2024 April 3-7, “Changing Climates: Environmental Histories of Extraction and Speculation” Panel, ASEH, Denver, USA.

2024 March 14, “Shallow Blue Empire,” Annual Howell Lecture, Department of History, University of Virginia.

2024 February 12, “Fishing for the Past: Histories of Maritime Archaeology and Anthropology in the Indian Ocean,” Indian Ocean Seminar Series, Oxford University.

2024 January 18, “From Ilm al-bahr to Oceanography: Reading Scientific Practice in the Indian Ocean World in the early twentieth century”, World History Seminar, University of Cambridge, UK

2024 January 10, “Commodity History and the History of Science: Reading Mathematical Practice, Navigation and Astronomy in the Natural Pearl Trade,” Global History and Culture Centre seminar, University of Warwick, UK

2023 December 08-09, “New Ocean Literacies: Histories below the Water Line,” BITS Goa, India.

2023 November 3, “Globalizing Pearling Labor: Race and Migration across the Indian Ocean’s Pearl Fisheries”, “Extraction, Industry, and Labor in the Global Nineteenth Century,” Nineteenth Century Group, Rutgers University.

2023 September 29, “Vernacular Seascapes: Theory from below the Waves of the Indian Ocean”, Keynote Lecture, Annual Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Stonybrook University, New York.

2023 July 13-14, “New Ocean Literacies: Historicizing Biodiversity in Indian Ocean History,” Histories of Biodiversity in Asia, National University of Singapore, Singapore.

2023 June 28, “Mollusks between Resource, Specimen, and Race, 1860-1920,”, *“*Making Science of Things: Objects and Knowledge between the Natural and Human Sciences” workshop, University of Vienna, Austrian Science Foundation, Vienna, Austria.

2023 June 20, “History below the Water Line: writing history across the Indian Ocean,” Sijaal Institute, Amman, Jordan.

2023 March 31, “The Pearl Bearing Reef in International Law and Territoriality at Sea,” Program in Agrarian Studies, Yale University, NH, USA.

2023 March 24, “Resisting Nature: Imperial Projects and the Limits of Environmental Knowledge,” [panel discussion], American Society for Environmental History, Boston, USA.

2023 March 3, “Seeing like the Sea,” discussion, SSRC Group, “Archiving Environmental Change,” Online.

2023 February 27, “Placing the *Khaliji* context in World History,” Sijal Institute, Amman, Jordan.

2023 January 5, “Submarine History as Method,” [Program Committee panel] American Historical Association, Philadelphia, USA.

2022, September 20, “Embodied Knowledge(s) in Ocean Science,” Science and Technology in Asia seminar series, Harvard University, USA.

2022 June 2-4, “Science at Sea: Place-making and Scientific Research,” at “Let’s Get to Work,” Gordon Cain Conference, Philadelphia, USA.

2022 May 5-6, “The Persistence of the Archaic? Diving for Pearls in the 20th Century,” at “The Labour of Globalisation: Maritime Work and Technology, 1750-1950 Conference,” University of Exeter, UK.

2022 March 21 [with Trish Kahle], “Energy In/Across Place: Thinking the Coal Mine and Pearl Reef together,” Georgetown University, Doha, Qatar.

2022 March 16, “Reading *Tarikh al-Ghaus al-lu’lu’ from elsewhere?*” Graduate Seminar, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies and Arab Center for Policy Research, Doha, Qatar.

2021 October 15, “Of Molluscs and Men: Pearl Diving Labour in the Indian Ocean” at Cambridge-Columbia Oceanic Histories Workshop, Cambridge, UK.

2021 October 1, “Historicizing Marine Science in Ceylon 1800-1925” at American Institute of Sri Lankan Studies New Research in History Series.

2021 June 18 “Venturing Underwater: Racialised Regimes of Labour in Indian Ocean Pearl Diving 1880-1925”, at The Sixth European Congress on World and Global History, Turku, Finland.

2021 June 17 [with Sarah Qidwai] “South Asia’s Place in the History of Science, Religion and Evolutionary in the Nineteenth Century,” at Global History of Evolution workshop, York University, Toronto, Canada.

2021 January 28-30 “Indian Ocean Mobilities: Labour, Animals and Science” and “Environmental Approaches to the Oceans” at The Indian Ocean World Conference: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead.

2020 November 17 “Marine Biology at the Pearl Fishery of Ceylon 1880-1925”, at History of Ocean Science Working Group, Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine.

2020 February 27-28 “Cultivating the Seafloor: Colonial and Indigenous Knowledge-Making at the Pearl Fisheries in the Indian Ocean”, at Colonial Knowledges: Environment and Logistics in the Creation of Knowledge in the British Colonies, University of Manchester, UK

2020 February16-18**, “Reading Two Pearl Fisheries Together: *Mahar* Oysters and Migrant Divers in the Indian Ocean 1887-1925”, at Oceanic Circularities: The Indian Ocean in the Modern World,** Georgetown University, Qatar

2020 January 27 “The Pearl Fishery of Ceylon as a Maritime Assemblage 1799-1925”, at Cabinet of Natural History Seminar, Cambridge, UK

2019 November 14 “Embodied Labour? Reading maritime work underwater”, Newnham History Society, Cambridge, UK

2019 November 09 “Pearl Fisheries as Alternative Oceanic Sites?”, Oxford Colonial Ports and Global History Network, Oxford University, UK

2019 October “The Deep Dive: The Labouring Body Underwater at the Pearl Fishery of Ceylon 1856-1925”, and “Mannar as a Labour Frontier: Recalibrating Island Space through an Environmental Approach to the Pearl Fishery”, Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

2019 August 05-06 “Re-Considering Sri Lankan Collective Identities in the Context of Labour Migration: Situating Pearl Divers from the Persian Gulf in Ceylon 1881-1925”, ILS Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka

2019 April “Globalizing Labour? The Migration of Pearl Divers from Kuwait to the Gulf of Mannar, 1880-1925”, Radboud University, Netherlands

2019 January “Terrains of Labour: Pearl Divers at the Pearl Fishery in the Gulf of Mannar 1880-1900”, Sri Lanka Day, Cambridge University, UK

**PANELS AND WORKSHOPS**

2023 June 24- 01 July, Panel Co-organizer [with Brooke Penaloza-Patzak], “Making Science of Things: Objects and Knowledge in and between the Natural and Human Sciences,” University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.

2023 January, Panel Organiser [with Lisa Han], “Histories below the Water Line”, American Historical Association, Philadelphia, USA

2021 Panel Co-Organiser [with Taushif Kara], “Ideas and peoples across the waters of the Western Indian Ocean”, The Sixth European Congress on World and Global History, Turku, Finland

2020 Co-Convenor, November 11 [with Michael Edwards], “Axes of Difference in the study of Burma/Myanmar”, Online Workshop, Cambridge University

2019 Panel Co-Organiser [with Mark Balmforth], “Caste, Commodity, and Migration: Reappraising the History of Northern Sri Lanka through Labor” at Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

2019 May 17-18 Conference Organiser, “Liminal Borders: Constructing and Deconstructing Borders in World History”, University of Cambridge

2019 January 30, Co-organiser, “Lanka: Anthropologies, Histories, Politics”, one-day interdisciplinary workshop, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge

2018-2019 Convener, World History Workshop Series, University of Cambridge

**INSTITUTIONAL SERVICES**

2024 Executive Committee Member, SUNY Stony Brook, History Department.

2023 – 2024 Steering Committee, Stony Brook Initiative for the Historical Social Studies (IHSS)

2023 Undergraduate Education Committee, SUNY Stony Brook, History Department

2020 (ongoing) Host on “The Indian Ocean World”, *New Books Network* podcast series

**PUBLIC HISTORY**

2024 November [with Praveen Tilakaratne], “[Settler Tourism](https://polity.lk/settler-tourism-and-the-threat-of-terror-praveen-tilakaratne-and-tamara-fernando/#:~:text=As%20a%20concept%2C%20settler%20tourism,both%20in%20the%20crosshairs%20of),” *Polity*.

2023 October, “[Mapping Oysters and Making Oceans](https://podcasts.apple.com/at/podcast/tamara-fernando-mapping-oysters-and-making-oceans-in/id1632477554?i=1000627001107)” Indian Ocean World Podcast, Indian Ocean World Center.

2021 April [with Kalyani Ramnath], “[Histories of the Enslaved in the Indian Ocean World](https://www.borderlines-cssaame.org/posts/2021/4/2/histories-of-the-enslaved-in-the-indian-ocean-world-in-conversation-with-nira-wickramasinghe): In Conversation with Nira Wickramasinghe,” on *Borderlines, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (CSSAME).*

2021 April, “[Ecology’s Ghosts](https://hypocritereader.com/97/ecologys-ghosts)” in Hypocrite Reader, Issue 97.

2021, “Urban and Littoral: [Reading Coastal Labour](https://www.lse.ac.uk/Geography-and-Environment/research/alainagaram)” on *Alainagaram* [wave city] *Podcast*, LSE, hosted by Niranjana Ramesh.

2020 November 9, Podcast host, “[Animal Trade Histories](https://newbooksnetwork.com/animal-trade-histories-in-the-indian-ocean-world) in the Indian Ocean World” for “New Books in Indian Ocean Studies” on *New Books Network.*

2020 July, radio interview, “[On disease, death and labour at the colonial pearl fishery](https://soundcloud.com/this-is-hell/tih20200730)” on *This is Hell!* Radio, Episode 1211.

2020 July, “[Death at the Pearl Fishery](https://hypocritereader.com/95/tamara-fernando-mannar-pearls-cholera)” in *Hypocrite Reader,* Issue 95.

2019 November, “[Liquid Power](https://www.himalmag.com/liquid-power/): On the feats and failings of Southasia’s attempts at regulating water” *Himal Southasian.*

2017 “[Lankanhistory](https://www.instagram.com/lankanhistory/?hl=en)”, Instagram account.

**LANGUAGES**

Sinhala (Fluent)

German (GCSE)

Mandarin Chinese (Intermediate OPIC)

Tamil (Beginner)

Arabic (Intermediate)

**PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies (AISLS), *Board Member*

International Council for the History of Oceanography (ICHO), *Council Member*

Association for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (AGAPS)

American Society for Environmental History (ASEH)

American Historical Association (AHA)

History of Science Society (HSS)

International Association for the Study of Arabia (IASA)