

THE ALCHEMY LECTURE

# Borders, Human Itineraries, and All Our Relation

DELE ADEYEMO

NATALIE DIAZ

NADIA YALA KISUKIDI

RINALDO WALCOTT

With an Introduction by

CHRISTINA SHARPE

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## **CONTENTS**

Introduction by Christina Sharpe 1

### **"Wey Dey Move"**

**DELE ADEYEMO**

7

### **"Fusings"**

**NATALIE DIAZ**

43

### **"Walking Barefoot"**

**NADIA YALA KISUKIDI**

TRANSLATION BY PABLO STRAUSS

69

### **"Towards Another Shape of This World"**

**RINALDO WALCOTT**

103

Notes and References 133

About the Alchemists 147

Acknowledgements 151

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## INTRODUCTION

In times like ours, times of great crises—climate catastrophe, human catastrophe, ecofascism, all kinds of fascism, authoritarianism, the complete breakdown of so-called liberal democracies, and more—great thinkers/writers/makers and organizers across fields, disciplines, and geographies are thinking about, and moving on, bringing another world into view. They are imagining from and into the possibilities of living in other ways. And they are thinking together, sometimes in public, about the times we live in, the legacies of anticolonial struggle, the futures of the planet, the textures and futures of precarious life.

The first Alchemy Lecture happened live in Toronto in November 2022. We cannot help but notice that this coincided with the timing of the 27th UN conference on climate in Egypt, where the deep hypocrisies of those who hasten the catastrophe with rapacious extraction were on display—even as the movement of people fleeing climate and economic degradation is called “an invasion,” even as people are threatened with deportation, and even as they are condemned to situations made unlivable by these capital practices. There is much

work to be done—and there is much work *being* done—to make the relations, human and more than human, in which we might be able to really live. Each of this year’s Alchemy lecturers knows this—molecularly.

We could not imagine a more engaged and urgent set of thinkers and makers to address this year’s theme: “Borders, Human Itineraries, and All Our Relation.” They are all public intellectuals, writers who are deeply engaged in their time and world; and as polymaths, they all work across genre. Their thinking is a source of newness, of brilliance, and of deep engagements.

We did not want intellectuals who spoke from the position of defending or ameliorating the status quo. Rather, we invited these four thinkers because, as their work and practices make clear, they know that this current world is made from the catastrophes of colonialism and genocide and slavery. These intellectuals were formed in the crucible of *that* brutal world-ing, and they also know that there is another way, that there are multiple other ways—other means by which we might approach or encounter the world.

What resonates most profoundly from the words of architect, artist, and critical urban theorist **Dele Adeyemo** (UK/Nigeria) is his attention to Black infrastructures. He is telling us that “*Way dey move* calls forth the way we must all learn to move, on increasingly uncertain and shifting grounds.”

And he offers this coruscating sentence: “They dared to block their infrastructure for profit with the infrastructure for another world.”

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The poet **Natalie Diaz** (US/Mojave/Akimel O’otham) tells us that “like story, migration is a sensual movement of knowledge. . . . Both story and migration are an alchemy. They catalyze change and transformation.” And she asks us, “What is the language we need to live right now?” And, “Where is the future located?”

Language, she asserts, is for living in—it is constitutive of how we imagine and structure past, present, and future relation. She says, “Our relationality has to exist outside Settler State borders of meaning. We require a language beyond the English language of citizenship. I don’t seek our future *We* and *Us* or dream our relational practices from inside the vocabulary of the English language. Like Sixo, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, like our ancestors before us, I don’t believe there is a future seeded in the English language.”

Philosopher **Nadia Yala Kisukidi** (France) writes us into a poetics of Diaspora. She asks: How to tell the story of this spatial concatenation of diaspora? What is its language? What type of writing does it require us into? Seeking an answer, she arrives at the marvelous, saying: “Such is the purview of the marvelous: narrate life, in its insolence, and fly in the face of negation.”

And then she offers this: “For diasporic lives, when we refuse to consider them as ambassadors or figures of national loyalty or betrayal, repopulate the world with wonderful fables”—ones that tell the continuous stubbornness, in other lands, in other countries, of men and women who walked barefoot, making the places of human future more fertile.

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Cultural theorist **Rinaldo Walcott** (Canada/US) asks us to consider inheritances in excess of white supremacist logics—an “inheritance of feeling, which is something more than a feeling.” He tells us: “Invention, then, is our inheritance too.”

He goes on to say: “Present migrations, and coming migrations produced in the vortex of climate catastrophe—which is to say produced in the context of the last five-hundred-plus years—makes thinking about borders more urgent.” And, “Climate change and climate unpredictability, and the migrations that flow from these, will have people moving to where the resources for living a life are being hoarded. They will be moving . . . towards the resources that have been extracted from their lands and turned into all manner of consumable and financialized products of our late-modern lives. At the heart of present and coming migrations lies a reckoning with global theft, the maldistribution of the earth’s resources.”

He leaves us with a question around and from which to imagine all our relation: “What might it mean to live a life, if we can’t risk desiring and working towards utopia?”

As those of us who were present at the live lecture thrillingly witnessed in November 2022—and as all of us can see in the pages that follow—by asking these questions, and by creating these conversations between and among disciplines and geographies, these four vital contemporary thinkers have come together and created alchemy.

—CHRISTINA SHARPE, Toronto, 2023

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## "Wey Dey Move"

DELE ADEYEMO

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