

# TEACHERS AS SCHOLARS

2023-2024



## SEMINAR 1:

### ACCOUNTING FOR INJUSTICE: HUMAN RIGHTS IN LITERATURE, LAW AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Wednesday, October 25, 2023

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

9:00 am - 3:00 pm  
Swarthmore College

## SESSIONS 1 AND 2:

In these sessions, we will examine how twentieth- and twenty-first-century narratives imagine “the human.” Shortly after the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the political scientist Hannah Arendt argued that the “right to have rights” is not, in fact, universal: in practice, rights are secured by the state. But how do we begin to imagine a person’s rights in an age of mass migrations, privatized militaries, global flows of capital, climate crises, and artificial intelligence?

Human rights advocacy and practice have traditionally depended upon the narrative practices of testimony, witnessing, reporting in order to raise awareness of atrocity. Such attempts to narrate the human, however, face new obstacles in the twenty-first century. Poets, fiction writers, critics, and historical archives chronicle these challenges, attempting (and occasionally failing) to redefine what it means to imagine ourselves as citizens of this interconnected world.

We will take up contemporary calls for reparations as a case study for exploring these tensions. Reparations, seen by international human rights and domestic social justice movements as a way to redress human wrongs, demand economic and institutional reforms that address the injuries of the past. But, as the authors we read will ask, what does it mean to account for loss? And who gets to do the accounting?

Over the course of our sessions, we will also delve together into methodological questions: what analytical skills do we develop as we read? How does the act of reading equip us with tools to investigate sticky concepts like identity, privilege, and otherness? Why do we turn to fiction to help us make sense of the wrongs of the world? And how can (or should) literary works direct us towards political and social change?

## SANGINA PATNAIK

Sangina Patnaik is Associate Professor of English Literature at Swarthmore College. Her research and teaching focus on twentieth-century literatures in English, critical legal studies, human rights, and gender and sexuality studies. She chairs the Sanctuary Committee at Swarthmore, which advocates for undocumented students on campus.

